

RED FLAG  
SERIES

SHE MADE A DEAL  
WITH THE DEVIL.  
HE'S READY TO  
COLLECT HER DEBT.

THE  
DEBT OF  
LONDON



WSJ AND USAT BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
AMELIA HUTCHINS

# THE DEVIL OF LONDON

RED FLAG SERIES BOOK ONE

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AMELIA HUTCHINS

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Written by Amelia Hutchins

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# AMELIA HUTCHINS BOOKS

**Books by Amelia Hutchins along with reading order for series**

## **LEGACY OF THE NINE REALMS**

Flames of Chaos

Ashes of Chaos

Ruins of Chaos

Crown of Chaos

**Coming Soon**

**Queen of Chaos 2023**

**King of Chaos**

**Reign of Chaos**

## **THE FAE CHRONICLES**

Fighting Destiny

Taunting Destiny

Escaping Destiny

Seducing Destiny

Unraveling Destiny

3

Embracing Destiny

Crowning Destiny

**Finished Series**

**THE ELITE GUARDS**

A Demon's Dark Embrace

Claiming the Dragon King

The Winter Court

A Demon's Plaything

A Touch of Fae coming soon

Wickedly Fae coming soon.

25

**A GUARDIAN'S DIARY**

Darkest Before Dawn

Death before Dawn

Midnight Rising -TBA

**MONSTERS SERIES**

Playing with Monsters

Sleeping with Monsters

Becoming his Monster

Revealing the Monster

**Finished Series**

**WICKED KNIGHTS**

Oh, Holy Knight

If She's Wicked

If He's Wicked TBA



## **MIDNIGHT COVEN BOOKS**

Forever Immortal

Immortal Hexes

Midnight Coven

**Finished Series**

## **BULLETPROOF DAMSEL SERIES**

Bulletproof Damsel

**Coming Soon**

Silverproof Damsel

Fireproof Damsel

Alpha's Claim **Standalone**

**Within the Darkness**

Moon-Kissed

Night-Kissed TBA

## **THE DARKEST FAE**

King of the Shadow Fae

**Coming Soon**

King of the Night Fae

Queen of the Stars

**Fate Series**

Whispers of Fate (Intro to Kahleena's book)

## **RED FLAGS SERIES**

The Devil of London

## The Devil's Queen

***If you are following the Fae Chronicles, Elite Guards, and Mon series, the reading order is as follows.***

Fighting Destiny

Taunting Destiny

Escaping Destiny

Seducing Destiny

A Demon's Dark Embrace

Playing with Monsters

Unraveling Destiny

Sleeping with Monsters

Claiming the Dragon King

Oh, Holy Knight

Becoming his Monster

A Demon's Plaything

The Winter Court

If She's Wicked

Embracing Destiny

Crowning Destiny

Revealing the Monster

Whispers of Fate

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## The Devil's Queen

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Escaping Destiny

Seducing Destiny

A Demon's Dark Embrace

Playing with Monsters

Unraveling Destiny

Sleeping with Monsters

Claiming the Dragon King

Oh, Holy Knight

Becoming his Monster

A Demon's Plaything

The Winter Court

If She's Wicked

Embracing Destiny

Crowning Destiny

Revealing the Monster

Whispers of Fate

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# WARNING

**STOP AND READ BEFORE CONTINUING ANY FARTHER!**

**This series is named RED FLAGS for a damn good reason.**

A little warning before the warning. There is dubious consent in this. They are star-crossed lovers who have followed one another through hell to battle against opposing odds. This book is **DARK AS FUCK**. It is twisted and shouldn't be attempted at home. I don't even think it a love story, but rather a precautionary tale. Aderyn isn't a victim, she's been cursed because of something she **CHOSE** to do. The men in this series are all cursed because of her choice. There are severed limbs, multiple references to rape, and scenes from the past that depict rape and torture. If you are uncomfortable with that, please, don't read it. Khaos doesn't rape her or rape her. Aderyn isn't a damsel, and she's done some twisted thing which isn't revealed yet to the reader. This ends with one of them being murdered, but they'll be back in part two. The name of the series should be a huge **RED FLAG**. Just saying! I, as the author, do not condone **99.9%** of the shit happening in this tale of treachery, betrayal, and love that will out

ages. There is **MONSTER** fucking in here, but not full-on monster sex yet. They are both monsters, and before this tale ends, you'll get to see fucking as monsters. There is a monster at the end of this book. A very nice one, but you'll love him. No tentacles were harmed in the fucking done in this book. There are actually no tentacles, but there are other things that will come out to fuck-*ish*.

**Warning:** This book is **dark**. It's **sexy**, scorching hot, and very **intense**. The author is human, just as you are. I have human editors and proofreaders which means there might be minimal mistakes. There are words in this book that are not in the standard dictionary because they set the stage for a paranormal, urban-fantasy world. Words in this novel are common in other paranormal books and give better descriptions of the action in the story than other words found in standard dictionaries. They are intentional and do not mean s book.meaning they may not be found in a dictionary.

out time **About the hero:** Chances are you may **not** fall instantly in **love** with him. That's because **I don't write men you instantaneously love**. You may eventually love them, or not. I don't believe in **instant love**. I write about men who are **assholes**. She's a caveman-like **assholes** who eventually let you see their redemptive qualities. They are **aggressive assholes**, one step above a caveman who will rape you. You may **not** even like him by the time you finish this book. I promise you will **love** him by the end of this **series**. One thing a man who's never forgotten is a man who pissed them off.

ed shit, **About the heroine:** There's a chance you might think her naïve or over-the-top being the start. I've never met a woman who was born a badass, have you? Women are a product of pain and growth. I am going to put her through a lot. You get the **privilege** of watching **her** as she comes up **swinging** every day. I will knock her on her ass. That is just how I do things. How she reacts to

but . . .of circumstances she is put through may not be how you, as the reader, as the author, would react to that same situation. Everyone reacts differently to circumstances and how she responds to her challenges is how I see her inside character and as a person.

. . . that **I don't write love stories:** I write fast-paced, knock-you-on-your-ass, *make-you-sit-on-the-edge-of-your-seat-wondering-what-is-going-to-happen* **intense**. *next* books. If you're looking for cookie-cutter romance, this isn't for you. If you cannot handle the ride, **unbuckle your seat belt and get out of this bookcoaster car now. If not, you have been warned.** If nothing outlined here bothers you, carry on and **enjoy the ride!**

non in **FYI**, this is not a romance novel. They're going to **kick** the shit out of you, one way or another, and **if** they end up together, well, that's **their** choice. If you are not created into this blind, and you complain about abuse between two creatures

**NOT** human, well, that is on you. I have done my job and given a **war** with him. I write FICTION, not How-To Guides. Do I think you should run

You'll date a man like the ones I write? Hell no. But we, as readers, well, we are flawed, want what we shouldn't have in the real world. So, if you're looking for a seeming cookie cutter romance, there's enough books out there for you to find. If you want books are for those who like darker, more sinister tales.

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woman

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of circumstances she is put through may not be how you, as the reader, or I, as the author, would react to that same situation. Everyone reacts differently to circumstances and how she responds to her challenges is how I see her as a character and as a person.

**I don't write love stories:** I write fast-paced, knock-you-on-your-ass, *make-you-sit-on-the-edge-of-your-seat-wondering-what-is-going-to-happen-next* books. If you're looking for cookie-cutter romance, this isn't for you. If you cannot handle the ride, ***unbuckle your seat belt and get out of the roller coaster car now. If not, you have been warned.*** If nothing outlined above bothers you, carry on and **enjoy the ride!**

**FYI**, this is not a romance novel. They're going to **kick** the shit out of each other, and **if** they end up together, well, that's **their** choice. If you are going into this blind, and you complain about abuse between two creatures who are **NOT** human, well, that is on you. I have done my job and given a **warning**.

I write FICTION, not How-To Guides. Do I think you should run out and date a man like the ones I write? Hell no. But we, as readers, well, we tend to want what we shouldn't have in the real world. So, if you're looking for a cookie cutter romance, there's enough books out there for you to find. My books are for those who like darker, more sinister tales.

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# DEDICATION

This one is for the girls who decide not to be the damsel but survive under duress. The ones who refuse to sink when the world weights down at you. The darkest tales are oftentimes read by those who have been battered by flames but refused to be burned as they stepped from the fire. You are beautiful, chaotic badass. Do not ever hide your madness or magic, for that is true magic and uniquely yours.

For those who like things a little darker, a little rougher, and a lot more twisted. This series is for the broken ones, the misunderstood ones, and the ones who refuse to sink. Life is not lived in the light, for without the darkness, you'd never see the beauty it has to offer you. Like the Nocturnal Lights, you shine ever-so-brightly in a dull, dreary world. Never hide it or allow anyone else to dull it for anyone else to shine brighter than you.

Thank you, Mistresses of Darkness for helping me to get this one done. You're an amazing group of ladies.



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# CHAPTER ONE

## THE PAST

BLOOD COVERED MY WEDDING gown, staining it crimson, with a heavy, sharp scent of blood filled the air inside the church. The something soft and squishy in the crease of my breasts—brain matter—was likely. A violent tremor rushed through me as the muffled screams came from the church. It sounded as if my head were beneath water, or they were farther away than they really were. Movement in front of me forced my eyes to the devil himself, who was watching through the shattered windowpane of the house of worship's many windows.

A malicious, sinister smile curved his generous lips as he held me like a prisoner. The bouquet in my fingers shook, and blood dripped from the ruined petals as tears slipped down my cheeks. There was a jarring thought that made me want to flee, but running wouldn't help me now. Nothing could. The Devil of London wasn't someone you ran from. I'd tried before, and it had ended badly for me.

The sense of impending doom churned through me as the harpsichord played a crescendo. Admittedly, it offered a haunting backdrop to the morbid scene unfolding around me. The sickening crunch of bones being severed by

had synchronized with the harmony of the song. As I remained in place, my chin trembled, and my hands fisted at my sides until I was white-knuckled. I held the floral arrangement in one hand as my nails were digging into the wood of the other. The room became a blur as tears swam in my vision.

More blood splattered against the side of my face from someone being cut through by a sword. Beside me, a woman screamed hysterically, and a moment later, she rushed to lunge toward the broken pane of glass.

I swallowed past the confusion as she paused halfway over it, and when she turned back to me, the blood drained from my face. Strange things were happening: the woman exiting her sliced-open abdomen, even as she tried to prevent it. When I took a step toward me, my footing uprooted, and I shuffled backward in retreat, only to hit the solid, unmoving body of the man behind me, who haunted my every waking hour and my dreams. Panic ripped through me as I glanced toward the empty window, finding him gone from where he had been standing. The scent of dark smoke, whiskey, and bergamot drifted toward me as his feverish breath warmed my chilled flesh.

When I turned toward where Maxwell was huddled beneath the altar, a gasp of horror escaped my lips. On the floor where we had been kneeling, the vows of matrimony was the priest's unmoving body, minus half his torso. Part of which I was certain was now covering my chest and gown. The priest had gone to shit quickly.

The man behind me slipped one arm around my waist as his other hand slid up my ruined wedding gown. His thumb trailed over my jawline, and the strength of his body pressed against mine like manacles.

"You've been rather naughty, love." The smooth, rich tenor of Nasir's voice wafted over me like a summer breeze. "Did you really think you should let you marry him?"

ace, my “Nasir, please,” I whispered around the violent tremor shaking me. ucklingdo this.” The woman was slowly tripping toward us, holding what I a flesh ofwere her bowels in her hands. Pain covered her pasty skin in a fine s perspiration as bloody footprints trailed in her wake. Behind her, still s ing cutthe glass that had sliced her open, was a portion of the strange, purpli secondstrand she carried. Terror was consuming my mind as she be incoherent things while staring directly at me.

d when “I didn’t do this. You did,” he murmured as his mouth lowered s began trailed his lips over my shoulder. “I warned you not to seek attachr aen shemen. Yet, here I find you, standing in a house of worship with your p ward ingroom hiding beneath the altar. I believe he’s pissed his trousers and l /ho hadto fend for yourself against the devil.”

me as I “Don’t hurt him. I’ll do whatever you want. Please, he’s not a part e’d justbattle between us,” I pleaded through the tears welling in my throat. ed over Merikh stepped up behind the woman, leveled his blade with her then pulled it back before swinging forward. Her head left her r, a softbouncing over the floor oddly as her legs continued for one more step recitingshe crumpled to the ground, still twitching. Merikh’s emerald-color s skull.held mine for a moment before they dipped over the ruined gown I wo his daydisgust on his handsome features turned to something murderous attention slid to Maxwell, who remained huddled in a ball, rocki er handstaring blindly at the woman’s head, which had come to a rest in fron e as thehiding spot.

“I warned you there would be consequences if you persisted in disc Khaosme,” Nasir growled against my ear before his hands slid to my wrist, t ink I’dit painfully as he spun me around to face him. “Now, you’ll reap what sewn, love.”

“Don’t I’d always assumed the devil would come in the guise of a horned creature with a forked tongue. That he’d have hooves and be a ghastly thing to be seen upon. Nasir wasn’t anything close to that. He was the devil who’d stuck to the plucked from my darkest, most sinful fantasy. Inky dark hair as soft as ash-gray dusted his broad, powerful shoulders. Dense, long black lashes framed alluring eyes, and a strong, aristocratic nose sat between the exquisitely chiseled cheekbones, giving him a devastatingly appealing appearance.

“Why don’t you join us, Lord Herne? I’m sure your gorgeous bride would be pathetic like to say goodbye before I end your miserable life.” Fresh tears rolled down my cheeks because I’d known not to tempt the devil or raise his ire. I still rebelled against Khaos with reckless abandon because I was unwilling to give up what I truly wanted. Him. “You can either crawl out yourself or let the fine lords will assist you. The choice is yours.” Lord Nasir’s eyes didn’t blink, his throat, mine as he spoke, and when Maxwell remained where he was, pleading for mercy as he prayed to his God, Nasir ordered, “Bring him.”

When Maxwell had gotten down on his knee and asked me to marry him, I’d warned him this might be the outcome, but he’d refused to hear the warning. The stupid boy had been so sweet that he’d made it impossible for me to decline his offer. And now he’d die because of it. It was unfair. The gods had cursed me to be his plaything, so love was not something I could obtain from him. “Khaos,” I whispered, my voice cracking over those two syllables. As I spoke, my lips, I stepped closer to him. “I’ll be good. I promise.”

“I no longer care to hear your pretty pleas or promises, Aderyn. I’ve grown weary of your wistful glances with you because of your age and tender heart. Yet, you continue to challenge me and flaunt your blatant disregard for the rules in my father’s name. You are not the one who repeatedly snuck into my establishment. You are. I’m

d beastone who sought employment at Saffron Manor and then burned it down to stare you were rejected. I sent you away because you and I both knew you'd been a fucking whore. What was it you did when you were told to go home as silk burnt it down without a care of those within it. You sought me out. I framed invite you into my world because you weren't ready to be a part of sharp, you'd listened to me, you and I wouldn't be here right now. We'd have peeling under very different circumstances because, you and me. We were destined to cross paths, whether either of us wanted it or not. It wasn't *my* decision that would see the chamber where I rejected you up in flames. That was a choice you made down. It was also stupid to think you would get away with it. You knew very well. Yet, I fuck I was when you determined to cross me."

able to "I didn't do it on purpose." And I hadn't. I had not even known of these magic until that moment, and by the time I'd figured out I was the cause, it wasn't leave the flames, it had been too late to prevent them from spreading. I hadn't been using the kind of magic before, nor had I known that strong emotions would cause magic to become uncontrollable.

ry him, "It changes nothing."

eed the As Maxwell struggled against the men who yanked him out from under me, possible to the altar, panic swept through me, my stomach twisting with fear for the devil. Then fire ignited in my veins as I leveled Nasir with an angry glare.

n. "I am not yours!" I'd never admit to being his property to him or to the world. I'd fight him until my last breath to keep from admitting it out loud.

"Yes, you fucking are!" he snarled, the mask of civility slipping as I had never before been seethed with the rage he housed.

in to It had me inching away from him. I'd only seen him release his fury a few times, and while his anger was dreadfully beautiful, it was also terrifying. Beneath the masculine, handsome exterior was a monster he kept under control.

n when restraints. He was the type of monster who you knew could either protect or destroy you, and which one he offered? Well, that depended on you, didn't it? You've been my savior, but also my perdition.

I didn't. Unlike the others who crossed him, the devil had not offered me a choice of it. He forced me into service in one of his many lucrative businesses. He's given me a meta choice to become his slave, or pay the price for what I'd done with my hands. Khaos had enjoyed every moment of my punishment until some sick, twisted bond formed between us. He protected me from those who preyed on the girls serving out their sentences by working on their backs. I'd neither peddled within his establishments, nor offered to another lord to use.

Khaos himself was the only male allowed to torment me, but it was a choice he offered. He tortured me with pleasure. Aside from the single time he struck me to prove that he could harm me should he wish to, he'd never laid a hand on me in violence—not even when he'd come for me after I'd seen to it that this largest, most prestigious bawdy house. He'd ensured I knew that he owned me, but had chosen not to physically harm me when he'd claimed ownership of me.

Beneath Khaos had come after me for my part in his establishment burning down on him. He'd walked into my parents' home as if he'd owned the place. Once he had explained the severity of what I'd done, as well as the repercussions for anyone it. He'd offered to conceal my crimes and hide me from the lords seeking my death, but only if they signed a parchment stating I was his property. My mother, the cold-hearted woman she was, agreed so long as he also paid for me. Three shillings was the price of ownership for my soul.

By a few He had not needed to barter with her, but he'd done so to enjoy my suffering. She'd accepted each coin being placed into her palm. He had wanted her tight

ect you see how much my life was worth to those who were supposed to love u. He'd most. It had cut deeply, which had been exactly what he'd wanted it to

Maxwell's renewed screams seemed to echo off the walls. Nasir leath or watching as he continued to struggle against the men, he had ord ven mer retrieve him. No, they weren't men. They were all monsters who wen ny life. only to Nasir. No matter how much I pleaded or begged them, they'd c twisted help. Maxwell's soft, chocolate-colored eyes sought me out as they on the his knees, forcing him down to the floor in front of them.

er been "If you do this, you might as well kill me too," I whispered so wasn't certain Nasir heard me.

n't pain "I didn't do this. I warned you the last time you thought to bet ne he'd when you attempted to escape me, that if you ever tried again, I'd sl or laid a mercy," he murmured back, his darkening eyes held mine with no er t fire to "You promised to behave if I freed the boy you'd hired to spirit you a e could Scotland. He lives because you promised to be a good girl. Yet, here ship of again."

"You broke me, Khaos. I swallowed each of your lies because I wa g down. enough to believe you. So, go ahead and murder him. But know this inside, do this, I'll never stop fighting you. I'll always run from you. And wh sions of gone, there'll be no one left who truly loved you. I am the only o ing my could love the monster you are." His eyes narrowed as he exhaled a ty. My laughed coldly at my vehemently whispered promise.

aid her "I've never lied to you. Never." Stepping closer to me, he sneered. never asked for, nor wanted your love, Aderyn. You are nothing more pain as possession to me. I never expected more, or wanted anything else fro l me to Stop breaking your own heart by believing in fairytales when the onl around you, is nightmares."



me the “You are my nightmare,” I whirred as Maxwell made a strangled do. Sliding my eyes to Merikh, I silently pleaded with him to spare Ma turned, life. “He does not have to die. Maxwell is innocent. His only crime ered to love me. I forced him here. He didn’t even want to marry me,” I lied re loyal voice broke, wavering as the words escaped. At Nasir’s and Merikh’s offer no I continued, “You have me, which is what you want, Nasir. I will be a kicked you desire. Your whore. Your slave. Anything. Just please, let him go.

“It seems as if you misunderstand this situation and are trying to softly I with something that is already mine. I’ve had you from the first me met you, love.” Nasir slowly walked toward me, smiling as sor ay me, dangerous flickered in his stare. “What am I cutting off poor M how not tonight? His fingers or his cock? You get to choose which one you ar npathy. to fuck for your deception and disregard of the rules.”

away to “I choose neither!” I spat out past the clattering of my teeth.

we are “One or the other. If you refuse to decide, I’ll decide for you. If le me, you’ll be accommodating his entire fist up your tight, needy c is naïve violent tremor shot through me.

: if you “You’re insane!”

ien I’m “All the best people are, love. Choose. I won’t ask you again.” T ne who churning in his turbulent depths sent horror washing over me.

nd then “F-f-fingers.”

“And here I thought you’d choose his cock,” Nasir growled as he w “I also his blade, setting it down as he held my gaze prisoner. Slowly, he strip e than a of his doublet, and a soft whisper of sound expelled from my lungs. m you built Khaos for war. Every inch of his body was hard, deliciously y thing lines of muscle that the gods themselves had chiseled. Turning back where the men held Maxwell up by his arms, I released a soft, plaintiv

l noise. "Save your pathetic pleas for someone stupid enough to believe Maxwell's Aderyn."

was to Maxwell struggled with renewed energy as Nasir strolled toward him as my complexion went ashen with panic as Khaos knelt before him and used grunts, of his sword to force Maxwell's chin up until wide, horror-filled eyes nothing with his. A fine sheen of sweat bathed his face as panic forced his pupils to dilate until they swallowed the irises of his eyes.

bargain "Did you think I'd let you have her? I warned you to stay away from me but you ignored the warnings. Now, you will pay for trespassing against me, boy." "Nothing devil."

Maxwell "No!" Maxwell shouted.

he going "No? You touched something that belongs to me, boy," Nasir accused. His lip curled, and then he made a noise of disgust deep in his chest. "You sought to take what's mine, and now you'll understand why you should not have attempted to do so. Was she worth it?" Baring his teeth, he snarled. "Maxwell's reply, and when it didn't come, he snarled. "I asked you a question. I expect an answer."

Maxwell cried out as the blade pierced his chin, cutting it open.

he look "No, she wasn't worth any of this. I was unaware she belonged to the Devil!" Maxwell lied, which caused pain to pierce my heart with his betrayal of what we had shared. "She misled me to think she was an untouched daughter of a peasant. Aderyn told me she was untouched by man and upheld virtue. She lied to raise her position in society. I give you my vow that they'd see her again if you allow me to live." Maxwell shook with fear as he looked wicked. "I am a man of my word."

toward "Ah, but you see, I know you received my letters of warning, boy." "I never received them. I swear! If I had known she was yours, I'd have plea."

... them, have even looked at her.”

Nasir laughed coldly as he rose, then aimed a merciless gaze toward me. HisI stood with tears streaming down my cheeks.

l the tip “Is that so?” Nasir asked without looking away from me. “You see, locked around about you after my warnings went unheeded, Lord Herne.

upils to more about you than you think I do. You’re much like your father.

youngest son of Oran Herne, isn’t it? Puritans who think themselves enemies of heretics. Your family has been a thorn in my side for a very long time.

inst they may not have known who you are, but I do. Just as I know you have

known exactly who she is,” Nasir seethed. He spun with purpose, and the whistle of his blade sliced through the air, which was followed by the

used as of steel cutting through flesh. The crunching of bone met my ears a heartbeat before Maxwell’s scream filled the church. “Cauterize the wound. I

couldn’t have the bastard bleeding out before he sees who she belongs to.” Maxwell

awaited passed out from shock as blood gushed from his severed arm, and the

fucking holding him dropped him unceremoniously to the floor.

The sight of his detached arm had the room spinning around me. I stepped

forward—to do what, I didn’t know, only for Khaos to block my path. His

to you, hand curled around my throat as warm lips brushed against my forehead.

betrayal held me as if I were precious, as one hand pressed against my chest

wanted supporting my weight. “You don’t want to see that,” he whispered as my body shook with

no never Pulling away from him, I gasped as black dots danced in my vision. I

begged, “I hate you!” I lifted my hand to remove the smug smile from his face

Emotionless eyes slowly settled on my face. “Once you’ve finished wherecauterizing his wound, leave us. Do not re-enter the church, no matter what you hear coming from within.”

I asked Teetering on my feet, I struggled to control the panic consuming me. I know Greedily sucking air into my lungs, I fought the need to throw up, as he smirked. He lifted to test the material of my gown, smiling devilishly before he stepped above. “You truly are ravishing in red. The blood of the dead suits you. It brings out the green in your lovely eyes. I’ll have to order you red dresses on my next visit. Always finished punishing you.”

and the “You’re mad,” I whispered through numb lips while attempting to move as far as I could away from the palpable anger radiating from his pores. Nasir didn’t allow me to evade him. His smile dropped as he grabbed my wrist, marching me out of the room to the altar. Once there, he lifted me and forced me to sit on the cold, waxwellblood-soaked stone surface.

He men “The state of my mental facilities is irrelevant,” he mused as he fastened the lace bodice of my gown. “Such a pretty gown you wore to betray me. It started Then he ripped it wide open. It forced me to shield my naked breasts from their eyes. His men who remained stoic. Merikh watched me with regret in his eyes. He pushed a sword into the fire burning beside the pews.

My spine, “Pay them no mind. I promise they’re not interested in you right now. Remove your hands, or I’ll bind you to the altar and then do as I please with your body. Hell, I may even invite one or two of them to use you. I’ll enjoy listening to your cries. You are always so willing to betray me for me. Would that please you? To be fucked by all of them until this need for me abates?”

fear. “I don’t want them, Nasir. Please don’t do that to me,” I murmured, fighting to drop my hands and hide the way they trembled. A

inished possession burned in his eyes as his lips curled into a smile.

er what Dropping my chin to my chest, my posture sagged in defeat. As my  
thudded dully in my chest, Khaos continued ripping my dress until my  
y mind. my naked flesh was exposed to his ravenous stare. His fingers le  
is hand danced up my thighs, sending tiny bumps spreading over my fles  
spoke. tenderness of his touch had shaky pants falling from my lips.

ngs out “Eyes on me and don’t make a sound, pretty slut,” he murmured  
ce I’ve Lowering his mouth, he kissed a fiery trail over my collarbone and  
nipped at the pulse thundering wildly at the base of my throat. My hand  
to back to his wide shoulders to wrap around the back of his neck, which earned  
low me a growl of approval. “Do you honestly think that boy could give you  
e across do?” he rumbled against my throat, kissing his way up to the curve  
on the jawline.

“Why won’t you just let me go?” I whispered, which had his  
ingered narrowing to angry slits. “You hate me. I know you do.” The malice  
y me.” from him drifted over my nakedness while his head tipped, and his  
rom the landed on my lips.

is as he “Because you’re mine. I was content to let you blossom into the  
you’d eventually become, but then you sought me out. I warned you  
it now. death would be much kinder than what I would be to you.”

ease to “Death wasn’t offered to me, not by you.”

while I “No, it wasn’t because, believe it or not, I enjoy having you near my  
or dick. stated before pushing my thighs apart until I was spread and exposed  
to defy His fingers continued tracing the delicate flesh while I battled the  
bubbling in my chest. “Did you fuck him?” At the shake of my head  
mured, chuckled coldly. “Poor bastard.” Tenderly, Khaos’s fingers forced my  
look of to open to him, offering him farther depth into my body. “You never

taste this pretty cunt, either?” The moment my pussy was open and every hearth then began trailing his thumbs through the arousal coating my more of asked you a question, love. I expect an answer.”

surely “You can’t tell me to be silent and then expect me to answer questions. The hissed before a whimper burst from my lips as he forced three fingers

into my pussy. My walls clenched around them and the burning acid sternly caused. The moment my pussy stopped fighting his invasion, he had then fucking me ruthlessly. His anger drifted in the air between us as the sounds rose in the indecent sound of my body being fucked filled the holy grounds. Heat had me in my abdomen, blossoming as pleasure replaced the fear.

what I “He said it was sinful to be together without vows of marriage of my beforehand.” His fingers slowed, and a smile played on his wicked lips

“And you didn’t inform the poor lad that you’d both sucked my cock in his eyes ridden my fingers enough times to be considered my whore?” As I shook my head slowly, my cheeks stinging with shame. “You didn’t even offer him his eyes his cock? I taught you how to entertain a lord better than that, slut.”

He curled his fingers, which had my hand slapping against my lips to stop the woman’s sounds of pleasure seeking to escape. “Did you kiss him?”

“Khaos, please,” I panted. His fingers began moving faster when I didn’t reply quickly enough.

“Answer me.”

“Yes. Twice on the lips,” I admitted, with fresh tears running down my cheeks. Khaos’s nostrils flared as the tic in his jaw hammered, and the moan from his mouth crushed against mine. My eyes widened in shock, which he read as horrified confusion because he hadn’t ever kissed me before.

Pulling back from my mouth, he slid his fingers into my hair, forcing my head back before his lips brushed against mine softly. This time, it was

exposed, he was asking for permission, which had mine parting for him to  
sex. “Deeper. The kiss turned feverish and sent heat pooling in my core, w  
continued fucking with his skilled fingers, coaxing me to open farther  
ions,” In a moment his tongue caressed mine, the last of my trepidation shattered  
as deep man was brutal against my senses, battering them down until he’d control  
he they me entirely. A whimper left my lungs at the ravenous hunger his kiss  
began. The way he kissed me caused a fluttering in my chest as tingling began  
the wet, nipples and pussy.

surged Pulling away, he stared at me as I panted, uncertain of what had  
happened. Then Khaos claimed my mouth once more, kissing me roughly  
marriage his fingers pulled painfully into my hair, twisting me as he took possession  
of me, just as he had taken everything else from me. Brutally.

rock and As he pulled back, I gasped breathlessly. “Not like that.”  
look my “What?” Nasir’s eyes simmered with unsated lust, and the fingers  
to suck me slowed as he waited for my reply.

Khaos “He didn’t kiss me like that. Maxwell didn’t do that to me. His lips  
softly touched against mine,” I supplied, noting his face darkening as a smile  
played on his mouth. A scream ripped through the chapel, and I shifted  
I didn’t to Khaos for protection. The naked heat of his chest sent a lusty fever  
warmth over me.

Nasir peered over his shoulder at the men, then made a disgruntled  
groan my deep in his chest. “Leave us.”

When his A second later, the chapel doors closed, and I was alone with Nasir  
bled to Maxwell, who was no longer conscious. Khaos stepped back, slowly pulling  
his finger between my breasts, drawing it in a line to where the ruined  
opening my concealed my ravenous core. Grabbing my hand, he pulled me from the  
floor as if so I was standing before him, and I tried to ignore how my ruined world

o delvedress pooled on the floor around my feet. Next, he reached for the st  
hich hemy chemise, undoing the delicate bows that held it up.

er. The “You’re so lovely everywhere,” he murmured, while slowly twirl  
ed. Thearound to face him. “Is your pussy wet to ride your lord’s slender fing  
iqueredme?”

created. “You’re insane.”

n in my “Of course I fucking am! My girl thought of betraying me with  
man. Aderyn, I’ve given you everything you ever wanted. I’ve been  
iad justand lenient with you. You’ve made me go to war for your honor. I  
ghly asinto the Spanish King’s court and murdered his heir for you. I’ve neve  
ssion ofyou for anything in return, have I? You, you are a pampered fucking p  
and this is what you do to repay me? Fuck you.”

“A pampered princess? I didn’t ask the Prince of Spain to rape me,  
fuckingI lead him to believe I was willing to be hurt for his pleasure. I’ve  
asked for fine gowns, food, or anything else from you anymore th  
merelyexpected you to provide me with it. The only thing I’ve asked you :  
g smileemployment, so I could prevent my siblings from starving to deat  
l closerpromised me heaven and you then you enjoyed forcing me to endu  
eling ofYou ripped my heart out and threw it in my face when I offered it to  
loved you, and you told me I wasn’t meant to be loved,” I whispered  
l soundface sharpened with hate.

“It matters little how we got here, love. Nothing can change the pas  
isir andcan it? We can sit here all night going over slights we’ve done to one a  
lantingIt changes nothing, love. If you’d stop seeking acceptance from oth  
d gownobey the rules, we wouldn’t be in this situation. I wouldn’t need to tea  
ie altar,why I’m called the devil.” The malice in his stare warned me he wo  
/edding



traps of relent. Fresh tears slipped freely down my face as my chin trembled.

be a good girl and present yourself to me.”

ing me “Fine,” I conceded. My head bowed in defeat as a sigh left my part

gers for Slowly lowering to sit upon the soft gown beneath me, I spread my

apart before placing my hands on them. Arching my back, I dropped n

to the blood splatter on the soft, white material I posed for him on.

another “Good girl. Don’t move.” Khaos walked around me, bathing

patientsubmission I offered him. He loved seeing me compliant to his deman

walkedknew that the moment I dropped to my knees, I was his. It was a pov

r askedmove. One which fed his oversized ego.

rincess, Defeat flooded through me, and my eyes closed, shutting out the bl

the lace and the sound of his slow footsteps as he moved around me.

nor didtouched my shoulder, and I jumped at the iciness of it. When I turned

e neverat where he’d knelt behind me, I saw Maxwell’s severed arm. I had

an I’ve the bile that burned against the back of my throat. Flipping onto m

for wasfrantically scooted away from him.

h. You “I thought you liked his touch, love?” Nasir asked as he rose to tow

re hell.me, glaring at the severed arm he held. “Did this asshole work a single

) you. I manual labor in his entire life? His hands are smoother than a babe’s a

l as his is the guy you wanted to marry?”

Still battling against the need to vomit, I could only shake my head

st, now, watched me for a moment before setting the arm on the altar and then

mother.walking toward me. When he reached me, he held out his hand expe

ers andand I placed my palm in his.

ach you “If you fight me, I promise you won’t like what happens. Come, the

uld notwe get this over with, the sooner we can be away from this place of

It’s starting to stink in here.”

“Now, As he began to pull me up, my other hand brushed against cold which caused my fingers to wrap around the leather-bound hand ed lips.dagger. I brought it up, intending to plant the blade in his chest.

y knees Khaos’s hand snatched my wrist, forcing it to bend until a scree ny eyesfrom my lips, and I knew that mistake might be my last. Icy terror ; my mind in its frozen embrace as dark spots bloomed across my vi in thestrangled scream burst from my lips as pain forced the room to spin nds andme.

verplay “Drop the fucking knife, Aderyn.” His tone was sharper than the s wielded against him, but I fought the urge to heed his demand. “You od andlittle bitch,” he snapped as the delicate bones in my wrist snapped. A handfroze as the blade dropped, but then he kicked it away. “Damn you.’ to lookburst from my lips as he pulled me against his chest, cradling me as hi to fightradiated inside the chamber. Pain shot through my arm as fear y ass, Ibackseat to the agony of my wrist.

As I held my wrist against my chest, tears of agony rushed from m ver overbut I clenched my jaw against the pain.

day of Stepping back, I shook my head as his nostrils flared and all sembl ss. Thishumanity vanished. The frantic terror pulsed like a living thing with urging me to run from the crazed fury he directed at me. Brutal h l. Nasirbloody ruin blazed in his eyes as he stepped forward and fisted my hai slowly “Is this what you want?” he snarled. Khaos slammed me down o ctantly,altar, pinning my broken wrist between the cold stone and my body, t so sharp, so intense, that it stole the breath from my lungs. My mouth : soonerand closed as I tried to scream or cry out or beg for him to stop, but no f death.came out.

The sound of his palm against my backside registered moments b

metal, new agony scorched my skin. “Murderous, little slut. Is this the only way to make you behave?” His hand continued landing against my ass and what he could do was sob and take each unremitting jolt his palm delivered. I’d been prepared for the pain, but not his lips against the sweltering skin he’d punished. Two fingers entered my pussy, forcing my cry of submission. I morphed into one tainted with pleasure, and Khaos’s large hand palm around my cheek, caressing the skin he’d reddened in anger.

“Why do you push me until I hurt you?” he whispered. Heated steel I’d fanned my apex before his fingers were gone and his tongue pushed into my pussy, sliding through the wetness he found there. The sound he made while tasting me caused pleasure to swirl in my abdomen until it throbbled. A sob from my clit. “You’re so fucking delicious, brat.”

Khaos lapped hungrily at my pussy with his tongue, as he held me like a prisoner, sending desire rushing through me. His tongue tantalized, and he opened me until I was moaning and writhing against his devilish eyes. The way he caressed my need while his fingers began fucking it made me whimper his name. His thumb ran over my clit in small circles until I came, shaking violently as I refused to come for him.

“It’s mine,” he whirred between my thighs. “You’ll come for me because I own you. Leave here.” His voice was hatred, malice, and desire as he added another finger, pistoning them in and out of me. The wet sounds of my body against his emboldened me, and I no longer cared if he knew I was as much in pain as he was. Together, we stroked one another to full, chaotic madness. Toxic words even began to describe what we were. “Always so fucking wet and wild. My good girl is such a naughty slut when her pussy’s stretched and stuffed until it aches. Isn’t that so? Your cunt’s so fucking greedy before a

way to milking my fingers like it wants my cock to empty in it until it drips until all I come. Is that what your needy cunt wants?”

“Yes!” I cried as pleasure took control of my emotions, consuming my flesh and mind.

In pain, I whimpered as he curved his fingers, stroking me deep and slow, and my head dropped forward to rest against my hands on the altar.

“Oh God!” I cried as my body trembled violently.

“Your God isn’t here. I am, and if you ever scream his name without making yourself come, I’ll make damn sure you know it’s the devil who made your deliciously tight cunt. Now, come for me, pretty slut. Make a mess for me. I can feast on your delicious pussy. That’s it, use me,” he praised me.

In reckless abandonment, I bucked against him until a bloodcurdling scream ripped free from my lips. The entire room spun around me as I whimpered and teased. Pleasure became a rainbow prism clouding my vision. “Pity he can’t watch you fuck his fingers,” he whirred as the severed arm was pressed against me on the altar and he gripped my hair. Realization of what fingers were in me caused my shame to burn and then spread over me.

Khaos yanked me up before forcing me to my knees before him. I tried not to look at the bent fingers of the severed hand on the altar, as I tried to ignore how visibly wet they were. Bile seared my throat as tears swam in my eyes, taking my vision. The dark, wicked laughter bubbling from Khaos’s chest forced my attention to where he’d perched against the altar, stroking his cock.

“You’re going to be a good girl and take my cock in that heavenly thing of yours. If you bite me, I’ll take poor Maxwell with us. I’ll keep him here and forever. His flesh will be the only thing you ever eat again. But you’re going to replace Rebecca at the post in the main room of Saffron Manor and I’ll be the free-use whore for the patrons. Now, crawl to me and don’t mess up.”

lips my force you.” Resigned to my fate, I didn’t fight his demand and  
forward on my hands and knees, ignoring the sting of shame as I pla  
ing my hands on his powerful thighs.

Slowly, I traced my tongue up the tender edge of his cock.  
and my Khaos shivered as he silently watched me lavishing his cock with  
needing to force me. My tongue slid over the tip, and I moaned  
saltiness of his precome hit my tongue. Wrapping my hand arou  
en I’m silkiness of his cock, I held it in my small hand the best I could. Kha  
in this the largest and thickest cock I’d ever seen before, which was  
r me so something since I’d seen many in the bawdy houses we’d frequ  
l. With together. Lifting, I slowly took the head into my mouth, enjoying h  
scream while he continued to regard me with darkening eyes.

ered his “I don’t have all day, pretty slut. Suck it like the whore you re  
missed beneath that sweet, naïve girl façade you show the world,” he uttered  
tossed gaze shifted to something behind me and a cruel smile played on his lip  
e within His hand landed on my head, fingers fisting into my hair, and h  
lowered to lock with mine. Inhaling deeply, I braced for him to fi  
ried not throat. He forced every single inch into my mouth as my jaw burr  
l not to screamed with agony. I loved the way he used my throat, always had,  
1 in my pussy grew wet as disdain burned feverishly in his storm-colored, tu  
ced my depths.

Nasir fucking hated that he loved exploiting my mouth and thro  
throat of knowing how much he despised me and craved me at the same time  
m alive worth the pain he created in my jaw. Like me, he was addicted to th  
I’ll also poison we sent coursing through one another’s systems. Khaos growl  
become fucked my throat until I was moaning and clenching my thighs tig  
ake me create friction.

moved “Finger your cunt for me, love.” His voice was sultry, lost in the pleasure he gave me. My mind was a red haze of desire as pain and pleasure became a slurry as my fingers pushed into my body. I moaned around him, which I knew I would do.

But I didn't think he'd honestly ever loved me as I'd loved him, but I was sure he'd at least cared for me a little. Khaos was a poison, which I would have taken into my system and allowed to ravish my mind and body.

Khaos had He was not the one who broke me. My parents had damaged me by saying before Khaos had shown up. My father had enjoyed teaching his daughters how to please their future husbands. Khaos had been the one to save me from that when he'd appeared to demand I pay for my crimes.

At first, I'd almost been thankful for his intervention, but soon I realized Khaos wasn't some knight in shining armor. He'd been the devil who'd come to collect his new, shiny plaything. And the devil always breaks his toys.

Pleasure blossomed in my belly as he bucked harder and farther into my throat. Khaos rose from the altar, turning us as he brutalized my throat and as I plundered my cunt. My thumb grazed my clit, and my noises were animalistic as they vibrated down his cock.

“Look at you. Such a good girl. So filthy when you are on your knees before me. You're so pretty, taking my cock down that greedy throat. Just yours,” he purred as tears ran freely down my cheeks. I erupted into a relentless orgasm as his come exploded down my throat. “Drink every drop better be swallowed.” I whimpered as his thumbs caressed my cheeks. “Isn't she beautiful in her maddening pleasure, Maxwell?”

My eyes widened as Khaos withdrew from my lips, and I turned to see Maxwell staring at me with revulsion. Shame singed my cheeks as I

measure away from him, fighting the horror at the realization that he had watched her come away with Khaos.

When he'd said, "You're a fucking whore, Aderyn. I thought you were pure, and you suck cock like a skilled courtesan. Fuck you to the depths of hell, I wanted to hope you burn right alongside your lover when you meet your maker willingly." Maxwell's words were weak, but the message was clear.

"I'd be fucking careful, Maxwell. No one calls my girl a whore because I've long since lowered to where I still knelt with my face hidden in shame. So many times I'd been with Nasir, I'd never cared what others thought of me. I'd done scandalous things with him as well as watched them unravel around us. But Maxwell's words struck something deep within me. For the first time, I'd actually liked him.

"Look at me, beautiful. Aderyn," Nasir snapped, jerking my chin up. He forced me to look up at him. The moment he saw the pain in my gaze, he pulled me to my feet and flush against his body. Pressing his forehead against mine, he breathed me in until he whispered. "Fuck him and his ideology. You're not a whore. You're my whore, and there is no difference between us. We're forever, you and me. Okay?" he asked before he pushed me backward and away from the sword that sliced through the space where my knees had been standing.

Maxwell wildly swung the blade at me for a second time. I rolled, but a hard, missing piece was cleaved in half as it cleaved into the wooden boards of the floor. Khaos rose, lunging for his blade as Maxwell continued to swing at my own wildly. I didn't move fast enough the third time. It allowed the blade to slice my cheek, which caused me to scream in agony as adrenaline-filled pain filled my mind.

Khaos bellowed as the blade sailed toward me yet again, but a silk

had moved against it, sending it flying out of Maxwell's hands. The moment of Khaos's swing never pausing as he pivoted, brought the blade back, once again, and carved it through Maxwell's throat. The air was painted with blood that rained onto my still-naked body, and a second later, Maxwell toppled over, landing on me.

I screamed again, his blood pumping out of him and over me as I tried to get up. "Failed to scramble backward, one-handed as I held my wounded cheek." In the "Fuck, what the fuck were you thinking?" Merikh demanded in his Middle Eastern accent.

"He had one fucking arm! How the fuck was I to know it was his right arm?" Khaos demanded as Maxwell's corpse was ripped from where it had sprawled over me, and two pairs of eyes peered down at my still terrified face as I continued to scream. "Damn it," Khaos whispered, he dropped to his knees and yanked me into his arms.

"What the fuck did you do to her?" Merikh asked. His eyes swung to the altar where the severed arm remained with the fingers oddly angled. "This sick motherfucker. Tell me you didn't do what I think you did to her." "It's none of your fucking business what I do with her." Nasir said as I pulled my hand away from where it still cupped my cheek. "Fuck!"

With me in his arms, he strolled to the altar and exhaled. "Grab my cloak, barely chemise and my cloak. I need to get her to Damaris so she can see to the wound."

"Here, take this. Place this on the wound to stop the bleeding." Merikh's eyes lowered to mine before they dropped to my bruised lips. Khaos ran a hand through his hair, muttering soft words that slowly coaxed my hysterics into control.

"Damaris will close the wounds and place a salve on it to reduce the pain." The world was a blur.



mentumThe sound of approaching footsteps had us turning toward the entrance aroundwhen Aaryn stepped through the doorway, Nasir and Merikh growled. and with “Riders are approaching,” Aaryn stated before his eyes lowered to Maxwell“You fucking cut her up?”

“No, asshole. I would not cut her,” Nasir growled.

ied and “Maxwell was left-handed apparently,” Merikh responded.

“Hand me her fucking clothes now,” Nasir demanded with a look of sharp, and something else I’d never seen in his eyes. Worry. “Aaryn, go see if the riders are friend or foe. Help me dress her, Merikh. She is going into slavery.”

Maxwell

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# CHAPTER TWO

## KHAOS

Merikh held Aderyn's naked body against his frame, and when I'd finished pulling her chemise on over her head, I met his cold, emerald-colored eyes. He didn't need the asshole to tell me I'd gone too far tonight. I knew I had. I never expected to enter the church and find my wife standing before a priest, declaring to love another man until death.

"Tonight, shouldn't have happened. You should've walked in and reconciled with her. It should've been that fucking easy."

"You ever walk in on your wife marrying another man, Merikh?" I asked, the question making my mouth taste sour.

"No, but I watched the love of my fucking existence walk off with my best friend, who was one of the few men I've ever respected enough to call my brother." Ouch, that one stung. "I can't say I wouldn't have done the same shit, but this reincarnation of her, it's not the same as the others. She's not some evil bitch who enjoys murdering humans. This girl isn't some whore who'd fuck her way to the top. She's soft curves and shy glances. She isn't the same woman we both loved."

“No, she isn’t, but it changes nothing. She’s the same soul who with the gods and got us all cursed to be denied the one thing we want a fucking incubus who can’t fuck the one woman I have loved since the moment I set my sights on her. Yet, if I don’t fuck, I’ll go mad and slaughter thousands of humans until the bloodlust wanes.”

They had cursed me to never have the one woman I craved. My wife, my soulmate. If I fucked her, she’d end up dying on me. The moment we had begun to learn one another or get close, the secondary curse came in, forcing hatred to burn like poison through our veins.

I wouldn’t chance it, no matter how badly I craved to feel the magic, the pleasure her body would give me. So, to prevent the bloodlust from rising, I found my release with nameless women who I forgot before my coming of age. I’d drip from their cunts. She hated me for it, but she didn’t know I hated her more than she could understand. No one would ever hold a candle to the passion she’d once given me. “It could be worse, asshole. At least you can get off. Me? I can only get off inside your wife.” He grunted when I turned my eyes on him. “Save it for your enemies. I haven’t asked you to let me have her again, have I?”

I hated that he’d been cursed to find release only with Aderyn, which I had completely ignored for the most part.

They cursed Aderyn to be reborn with no memories of our past. Even if she’d lived had been horrid and filled with pain. As if the gods chose the worst parents possible and then forced her to be raped, beaten, or ripped apart by their brutally savage hands. It was why I’d raced to every rebellion. The moment the fluttering started within me. I wanted to save her from the pain she would endure, but until this one, I’d never made it before she’d

fuckedbroken and had been turned cold and merciless. Often times, she'd  
ed. I'mbeen married with babes of her own as well.

nce the Eventually, I'd discerned a pattern, and for her last rebirth, we'd  
aughterthe right place at the right time. I wasn't sure if that was the reason,  
she was different in this life. Yes, she'd endured cruelty, but she didn't  
rife andher pain to touch others.

it we'd The men thought it an accident, but I wasn't certain it had been one  
to play,Aderyn had burned down the bawdy house on Drury Lane, I'd seen t  
in her eyes. I'd tasted her rejection when I'd refused to employ h  
ldeningwhore in my establishment. Then I had left her in my chamber, whi  
ising, Iwhere the blaze had started. Whether her magic had chosen that mo  
e couldrise in her veins, or she'd known how to wield it before then was a  
it moreguess. What mattered was that she'd burned it to the ground, and in de  
leasureshe'd ended the lives of those I'd sworn to protect. Innocent lives o  
get off.beings who had been hiding in the cellar.

d angry Tying the bows of her chemise, I wrapped my heavy cloak arou  
ne fuckbody before accepting her slight weight from Merikh, who begru  
allowed me to do so. Sitting with her in my arms, I watched as he pla  
ch he'dwhite cloth against the wound Maxwell had inflicted. My eyes slic  
corpse, which still held the blade.

ery life "He cut her with Damascus steel made for the Herne bloodline." I  
ose theshe'd carry the scar with her throughout her entire lifetime. Norma  
ed apartdidn't carry scars from one life to the next, but if the injury was inflict  
irth thea special blade, it would remain. Anger at myself shot through me lik  
he painfire. I'd been lost in the pleasure of her mouth and had let my guard o  
'd beenhad never let my guard down around an enemy.

The woman was sex incarnate, which she'd always been. She wa:

already the truest form, bathed in carnal depravity. If there was one being that  
represented the women who refused to cower or bow before petty gods,  
it had to be my girl.

or why “They’re here, Nasir. That was fast,” Merikh stated from where he  
stood beside the boy. He forced the sleeve up on the corpse’s left arm and  
his name and unit he fought within for the House of Herne was revealed.  
“When did I recognize this asshole. Why send his son to wed Aderyn?”  
The pain “Damn it. I missed the connection. I knew Maxwell was a hunter, but  
never as a descendant of the Herne line. He probably sent him to keep her away  
from me,” I hissed as I inhaled her sweet, enticing scent. “They’re trying to  
prevent me from protecting her as I always do. They meant to keep us separate  
for anyone’s reason. We need to figure it out. It could mean they’re intending to  
do something so, move for her tonight.”

if lesser “That is one way of looking at it, but we’re her swords. We’ve  
always protected our queen. The Herne’s know that. To go after her is suicide.  
And her “Which tells me they didn’t know we’d already made contact with her  
and they were trying to get to her first. Last time we clashed, I decimated  
their numbers so fucking hard it’s taken them three generations to rebuild  
themselves. They’ve learned from what we did to them last time, and thought to  
take us by taking her since they know we’re stronger when she’s with us. We  
just meant to get to Saffron Manor and get everyone out before those marching  
on, she reach it.”

ed with I nodded, and Malik, D’Arcy, Khair, Ryat, and Rue entered the  
hallway each wearing a dark expression. D’Arcy reached the end of the pews and  
knelt down. I up a severed head, which had the runic symbol for hunter scarred  
across his cheek.

s sin in “Found this fucker outside with twenty of his friends. James also

meant to with a message from Damaris. It seems there is a large force of puritans, it was soldiers marching through London, who are currently heading toward the East End under Herne's flag, as well as the king's colors."

she knelt "It's time to burn it all down, gentlemen." I slid my gaze to Aderyn until she remained oblivious to what was occurring.

healed. "I "That sounds like a horrible idea, Nasir." D'Arcy snorted.

"That's optimistic, D'Arcy," Merikh muttered. "If they're here, then we must either fight them or deal with the consequences of killing the king. I will not let any of my people from England for aiding them to rise against us." Merikh paused. "Again. We cannot leave with our wealth and family and begin anew. The New World has been created for growing, and it needs a king. I am done allowing others to pretend to rule over us. This is the second time a king has betrayed us. Let us not allow ourselves to be a third."

she always "Agreed. It is time we left London for the New World. I intend to build a new empire for her before the curses end. If we slaughter the entire country, and Aderyn might be a little upset about her friends and family. No, we must leave their London, and send a message to anyone who thinks to fuck with us, that we will not tolerate it. Merikh, take Aderyn and guard her with your life. I will go back to Saffron Manor and inform the women and men we are leaving. We must leave London tonight." Pausing, I eyed Merikh knowing he'd sense my intention and protect Aderyn with his life.

"Aaryn and Rue, you go with Merikh and protect your queen. Take her to the church, through the catacombs beneath the city to the Cardinal's Hat. Young Vind held will meet you outside and show you to the rowboats. Once you have boarded the boat, you'll go up the coastline until you see the ships, the Blackest Queen, and The Aderyn." Kissing her forehead, I exhaled slowly and arrived stood and then handed her off to Merikh, who cradled her protectively.

ans and “There’s a coach outside with a casket within it,” I stated as I reached for the cloak which she wore and withdrew the injection. “In it, you’ll find plague masks and robes for you to wear. If you are stopped and questioned, who you’re taking the body of Lady Elizabeth Cameron to the sick house for an autopsy. Tell them you’re verifying that it is the plague before reporting your findings to the king.”

When we “And you, Khaos?” Merikh asked.

“Once our people are safely onto the ships, Ryat’s going to help nuke London to the ground. Then, I am going to remind those assholes why we’ve been fucks with us or my girl.” Staring at her soft features pushed into Merikh’s chest, I frowned.

I hated that the moment we’d started bonding, the curses had ignited. She’d turned against me. No matter how hard I loved her, she pushed against me and I softened against her, everything inside me turned into harsh edges as I pushed her away.

The gods had ensured we’d never love one another again, all because we’d gone mad and flaunted their reach over them. Even before humans roared at Arcy, word, I’d promised to find her in every rebirth and work to remove the curse the gods had placed on us. Everything I did moved us closer to that goal because, if I failed, we’d end up killing one another as the gods wanted us to. Either way, Aderyn was the other half of my soul, and I would rather die than live without her. It was as simple, and complicated as that.

William

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# CHAPTER THREE

## ADERYN—PRESENT DAY

SITTING INSIDE MY VEHICLE, I watched the seemingly never-ending line of people seeking entrance into the exclusive, extravagant club I had built in the center of town. The line of cabs moved forward, more elegantly dressed girls spilled out of them, and they flirted with the bouncers who stood like silent sentinels blocking the door. Then they were sent to the back of the line.

The doors opened, spilling the bright rhythm of the flashing strobes onto the sidewalk and the reverberating bass of the music into the night.

My heartbeat was thundering a million beats per minute at just the thought of seeing Khaos again. It had been fifty years since we had parted ways, and he hadn't freed me, of course. No, he'd merely switched our meetings to text messages and then FaceTime check-ins over the last couple of years. He had become the kingpin who ran the entire population of otherworldly creatures with an iron fist. Khaos Nasir had all but taken over the world, which he had promised to do. Building his empire left him little time to deal with me, and he had let me leave.

I should've been happy he'd pushed me aside, but I'd missed the merciless bastard and those he kept around him. They'd been the only I'd ever had, even though we'd never be a normal family. I'd become them for a little while. The 1920s had been the best time of my entire life.

Khaos had stopped his antics, and we'd had somewhat of a relationship. Until he'd ruined it, and I'd tried to make him jealous. Shit had gone downhill quickly. That fight had ended with me buried in the bay alive, and him and the others fleeing the French Quarter under the cover of night.

I had never forgiven him after ending up locked away in a sanitarium for hysteria. The institution I was in specialized in pleasure from pain, and was run by demons and other beings who fed off pleasure. I wasn't a huge fan of the unwelcome, forced orgasms that didn't do a thing to cure us of stress and less hysteria.

Every morning, they would wake us and shuffle us into the largest room where the examination tables equipped with stirrups awaited us. They placed the tables in a circular pattern so that each one faced a section of the room available to creatures who fed from humans. Those who could afford to be there thought they could either be the one to save us from our hysterics or observe us. He studied us during the 'fits' as they had called them back in those days.

They strapped us to the tables with our legs spread apart, vulnerable to the creatures revealed to the monsters. They would begin each session by massaging our breasts and stomachs. Then, our pussies were caressed, licked, and sucked until it stretched us enough to allow them to use the electromechanical vibrators. After the machines were used to force us to orgasm, they then allow the paying monsters to the theater to come down and rape and feed from our exhausted bodies.

ie cold, The vampires claimed our blood was sweeter after we'd found  
r familyIncubuses enjoyed inflicting intense pleasure when the clit was swo  
: one ofthey'd sucked, licked, and toyed with us until juices squirted onto th  
ife. The fae enjoyed kissing our lips and breasts, or whispering filthy shit i  
onship.ears about how unclean and disgusting we were. All of them fed from  
d goneone breed less gluttonous than the other.

ou half- They had found me in a less than desirable setting. A fae had been  
over ofmy mouth. A demon was sucking my clit as the machine fucked me  
highest, most intense setting. Two vampires had been feasting on my  
ium forand trickles of blood ran down my skin from their thirsty mouths.

l it was I had been mid-orgasm when Khaos and Merikh had burst into the r  
e fan ofsave me. The looks on their faces were a mixture of shock and cu  
s, muchwhich had swiftly changed to fury when they'd realized I'd been scr  
in agony and begging for death, even as the fae sucked on my tongue  
t room,our adventures, for a lack of a better description, I'd never begged K  
They'dend my life. After a few months in that place, I had gone insane. After  
of seatsI'd just wanted it to end.

it, well, I'd watched through heavy eyes as Merikh and Khaos slaughtered a  
rve andassembly of creatures without breaking a sweat, then Khaos had remo  
restraints and I'd sensed his uneasiness. After he had freed me, I had l  
ble andin their heads with my bare hands, one after another. Rivers of blood l  
ing ourthroughout the theater as I freed the others. I shook off the memor  
eked onswallowed past the pain they created.

hanical It felt like a lifetime ago.

r would Blowing the air from my lungs, I reminded myself why I was here a  
e us orI'd be in and out quickly. I grabbed the lip gloss from my purse, flippe  
the visor mirror, and applied a coat before rubbing my lips togeth

release. thick mascara and smokey kohl liner I wore caused the moss coloring  
llen, so eyes to pop against my darker complexion. Having Turkish ances  
e floor. blessed me with a warm, medium complexion with bronze undertone  
into our inherited my lighter hair color from my father, who had the same  
1 us, no caramel blonde with natural rose-gold highlights throughout it. Pushing  
strands behind my ears, I tried to make it look as if I hadn't half-as  
kissing appearance for the date tonight.

on the I hadn't dressed up for my stop at The Sinner's Den, but I'd agreed  
breasts, up with Cameron in person tonight, which I'd been refusing to do for a

That was why I'd applied cosmetics and taken time with my appearance  
room to least, that was what I kept telling myself. It had nothing to do with seri  
osity, here to see Khaos, right? This was stupid. I shouldn't have come here  
eaming Friday night in a tiny mini dress that barely covered my ass. Aunt  
e. In all convinced me to wear a short, crimson-colored, spaghetti strapped Car  
haos to dress. It was sure to be noticed I was dressed to draw an eye toward me  
a year? such an idiot.

Chiding myself for being worried about nothing, I forced myself to  
n entire the vehicle. As I pushed my door closed, I caught the sound of metal  
ved then nearby. After turning toward the sound, it took a second for me to  
bashed-what I was seeing, but then I felt color staining my cheeks. A man  
had run plowing into a woman on the hood of a luxury sports car not ten feet  
ies and from me and in full-view of everyone waiting in line. They'd appar  
given up on waiting until they reached one of the upper levels of the club  
before fucking.

and that Shrugging, I headed toward the club, crossing between the bumper  
d down fender of two cabs before stepping onto the sidewalk by the entrance.

er. The The overwhelming scent of cologne, hairspray, and bad ideas hovered

g of mythe breeze. I came to a stop at the front of the line, scrunching my nose at the annoying scents. The women, who were shamelessly flirting with me. I'd and Rue, finally moved to the back of the line and I stepped up to the dark stanchion rope that kept the crowd behind the barrier line.

g a few "I don't care how tight, delicious, or wet your pussy is for me to see you go to the back of the line, sweetheart," Rue muttered.

"Somehow, I don't think Nasir would like it if I allowed you to touch my pussy, Rue." Both men tensed before swinging their gazes toward me. "Hello, gentlemen. It's been a while."

nce—at "Aderyn," Rue whispered, drifting his gaze down my frame as he topped. "You clean up well, Miss Caine."

re on a "As do you." I gave him a smile, which dropped as I turned and saw the look of hurt simmering in Malik's indigo eyes. "Hey, Malik. Miss Caine didn't expect a warm reception. It wasn't as if I'd left on good terms with you. I was of them."

"You're not on the list, Aderyn. You know he doesn't like it when you show up without invitation," he said, with bitter anger hanging off each word. "I had an issue today at the Bad Witchery," I informed, fighting to keep my voice steady. "His cold, sharp dismissal caused, then turned back to Rue. "It seems that there is a group of men here who have been told they can do whatever they want, which happens to be awfully bad things to me and my girls. Nasir apparently informed me that if I took issue with any of the people he was bringing to the club was to report it to him directly." Sure, he had meant to call him, but I had tried calling several times, but he'd sent my calls to voicemail.

per and "You could call him," Malik offered as he crossed his arms over his massive chest, digging his heels in.

ered in "I've tried," I returned icily. "Do you honestly think I'd be here if

se up at another avenue to take?” He flinched, but I didn’t let up. “If I thought  
1 Malik handle it elsewhere, I’d have gone there instead. Nasir doesn’t take n  
the red unless it’s a scheduled meeting, Malik. They have already assaulted r  
they keep returning to the shop daily. My shop isn’t the only one  
fuck it. terrorizing either. Nasir’s job as head of the syndicate is to prot  
denizens from any who would harm them. Is it not?”

uch my I waited for him to send me away. Undoubtedly, I could have delive  
rd me. message to Malik and walked away, but I wasn’t being blocked be  
wasn’t on a damned list. I was being blocked because of their hurt fr  
a low and that wouldn’t do—not when they’d ignored mine and treated me a  
never existed.

saw the “Fine, but when he wants to know who let you in, tell him you snu  
me?” I Malik stated as he bent to undo the golden clasp on the rope. Lift  
with any swallowed loudly before stepping back to allow me through. “You  
A deryn. All of us. Not just Nasir.”

ien you I had known that, of course, yet him pointing it out had tears sting  
h word. eyes. “Not willingly, Malik. I asked for space and time to mend.  
he hurt asked to be severed from all of you. Only him. But with Nasir, if I  
ere is a beneath his boot, I’m not welcomed.” Passing Rue, I smiled tightly,  
’d like, his frown grew heavy with a worried look in his midnight-colored eyes  
plicitly “You’re not intending to murder anyone, right?” Rue asked, and

ng in, I winked, which caused a groan to leave his lips before he tapped the sc  
I had. His phone and lifted it to his ear. “Hey, get a dozen body bags read  
eyes slid down my frame as I waited for the doors to open and ad  
ver his “Add a few more. A deryn’s here. Yeah, I know that never ends well, a  
Alert Merikh and have them prepare for whatever ensues.” Ending t

if I had he gave me a lopsided grin before nodding at the man who waited in :

I could the doors. “Open the doors for the lady, asshole. You are not getting any call-sexy-fuck her, are you?”

me, and As the doors parted, the scent of alcohol, weed, and sweaty bodies they’re out. Rihanna’s “S&M” pounded from state-of-the-art speakers subject his around the large, open dancefloor with red velvet booths arranged around edges.

red my On a wall, several dancers’ silhouettes were visible through red cause I The entire wall mirrored stacks of boxes, each one with a dancer dancing at a different angle. Another wall had women in short skirts and as if I’d spinning slowly in cages for the entertainment of those watching.

flooded the entire room in red lights, with neon signs flashing “I fuck in,” “Sinners,” and “Fuckin’ Send It.”

ing, he The bar, which was a work of art, had girls on suspension ropes left us, retrieve top-shelf liquors. The shelving went to the ceiling of the first floor and there were lights behind the bottles, which allowed a peek at the girls dancing behind them, which were definitely more sexual if the nakedness I never discern through the openings was anything to go off. The entire club had a sexual energy, and I remained rooted in place at the staircase noting down to the main floor.

s. Scanning the farthest doors, I narrowed my eyes on the *VIP Only*. Next to it, one read: “I don’t do drugs. I am the drugs,” and yet another read: “Red-Light District”.

y.” His The club was ten stories of sin, each having a theme. The highest commitment was off limits to the public since it was where the dancers lived, or exclusive members of the club could stay. Beneath it was where Damaris Page had her call booth, which was by special invite only. The eighth floor was the main front of which housed an illegal fighting ring. The rules were simple. Either you



paid too or you died trying, and anyone wanting to bet, better come with cash in hand.

Rue and Ryat ran the seventh floor, which was where you could pick up any illicit substance you craved. They specialized in creating shit that even immortals could get high on. They'd mastered alchemy and taken a huge interest in getting fucked up. Often. The sixth club was where immortals dined on humans. It was Malik's thing. Of course, the mortals had to be willing, which most were. On the fifth floor, you would find Aaryn's club, and that was where you went after you'd gotten the drugs from Rue and Ryat. They were, if nothing else, responsible drug dealers. D'Arcy, who ran the fourth floor, which was referred to as the Salacious Club, dealt in anything that could be called "kinks." It was a total fuck-fest. Khair ran firearms and specialized in selling military equipment from the third floor.

The second floor, or main floor, was the night club. It was just the first level for Nasir's illicit activities, and it was the only one open to humans. You had to be heavily connected or invited on the arm of an immortal to make it to the other floors. Either that, or be dinner or entertainment for them. The first level, or the first circle of the nine realms of hell, was Nasir's personal haven of sin. If you took all the other floors and meshed them all together, you'd have the real Sinner's Den, which was where I was heading.

Starting down the stairs, I moved out of the way of an inebriated couple heavily groping one another as they made their way outside. Lizzo's

"Damn Time" began pumping through the speakers as I slid past the group of bodies blocking the way to the elevators. When I finally reached the elevator, I pushed the button, only the light didn't change. I frowned, pushing forward again. The door finally opened, and I ran hermore.

"You need a keycard to go to the lower level," a dark, smoky voice announced. Sliding my eyes toward Khair, I smirked. "It's been a

n hand. Aderyn. Thought you'd never return to the fold."

up any "I'm not returning," I replied. Khair originated from the Middle East, but he'd never actually disclosed which region he was from. "There was a fire at the Bad Witchery today. I'm merely here to get it resolved." His mortal-colored eyes crinkled with amusement before he slid them over my shoulder and then swiped his card for me.

opium "If that's what you're telling yourself to feel better about doing in Rue, murmured as he slid his card over the card reader. "You know he was overawfully happy you're here tonight. He's been in one of his moods lately." The elevator doors opened, and we stepped inside together. The moment it started to move, it shot down several floors, which told me the club was a lot larger than anyone knew. As it came to a stop, I stepped out into a subterranean hallway that looked like the Basilica Cistern in Istanbul.

You had The floors were glass and offered views of an underground river flowing beneath them. They'd placed lights beneath the glass to reveal the ley lines, but the magic pulsing with vibrant scarlet prisms. From where I stood, they looked like lightning bugs with fire in their bellies. Pillars lined the walls, and together, Hartley's "Bow (Slowed)" played from the room at the end of hallway.

"You're missed here, Aderyn," Khair called from behind me. I'd just wanted to tell him I'd missed him as well, but the elevator doors were already sealing me in the hallway.

Sighing, I turned back around and started forward. Something caught my eye to the left, and when I glanced toward it, I found Merikh leaning against a pillar, staring at me as if I were something he wanted to devour.

"Hello, little bird." His soothing, seductive tone brought back memories of him guarding me, among other ones.

While, Merikh was Nasir's enforcer and right-hand man, and he did not

wasting words. He'd barely spoken when we'd met, and throughout our stay, but stuck together, he'd said nothing he didn't mean. I'd known the moment I first peered into his emerald-jeweled gaze that he'd figured out every detail of my life if Nasir ordered it. He was a skilled killer who excelled at making unwanted people vanish.

"Hello, Shadow," I whispered, watching as he pushed from the pilot's seat, heslowlly sauntered toward me. "I've missed you." It wasn't a lie. Merikh hadn't always been gentle with me, and the first time Nasir brought me to the Manor, Merikh had stared at me with such emotion that it had terrified me. "Did you?" he asked with a tilt of his head as he stopped before me. "It's more than irrelevant. He forbade women from wandering the halls alone. There are ravenous beasts lurking in the shadows." Merikh kept pace with me as I started down the vacant hallway. His fingers brushed mine, which felt like a rushing flutter to stir in my abdomen. With Merikh, there was a familiarity I'd never understood. As if we'd known one another in a past life. I'd asked him to looked once, but he'd merely smiled and walked away. "He knows you're not a bird. Don't anger him, little bird. Nasir has been plagued with visitors, and he's en route to discuss the new arrangements he has put into place. The Gathering of the Lords is upon us once more. You know how he gets when they arrive."

"Is that what everyone thinks? That I'm so bitter that I've returned to piss the king off?" I asked with resentment filling my voice.

"You are bitter, but I can't say it's not warranted." Entering the main hall,

I peered around with curiosity as Lana Del Rey's "Gods and Monsters" began playing. "I asked him not to put the pictures up," Merikh whispered.

"He's waiting for you." Merikh left me standing in the entrance to the bathroom of hell.

ur time Paintings lined the walls of the large, crimson red room, and when I'd exposed the subject's face, I knew they were frozen moments of time with Nasir. The one of me at Nasir's feet was being ogled by a group of people who were discussing it as if it was the Mona Lisa.

Nasir had sexually tortured me for what felt like days, never letting me find release, and had then placed me on stage. Someone had fucked me from behind as Nasir sat in front of me and watched. Every gasp I'd expelled enraged him further, until he'd brutalized my throat and used a glass to choke me, making sure I knew I was still only his plaything. In the last few hundred years, this was the second and last time he had allowed someone here to fuck me.

As I dragged my attention from the paintings, I stepped farther into the club. Like the main club, this one had neon signs that read: "If I can't have that, I'd want power," "Pain, pleasure, and sins are some of my favorite things," "When you've lost the one who's everything to you, you've nothing left to lose," and "Will you rot with me, Love?"

Beneath the last one, which read: "Fuck it, why not?" sat a large bar with cages on top of it. In the cages hanging above the bar, naked women danced to the sultry song playing. Others danced on top of the bar while being watched from stools. Throughout the room, there were rounded stainless steel tables for dancers to perform on as well. Booths for privacy lined the walls, and a throne sat at the front of the room, which no one dared get close enough to. I felt the heavy weight of his stare before I found him, the man of my "monsters" fantasy I'd ever had or would ever have. When I did, the world stopped spinning and everything went silent around me. Khaos was dressed in a red and white dress shirt with the sleeves rolled up on his forearms. He'd gotten

le nonetattoos that began at his fingernails and moved up his arms to vanish l  
y timethe crisp sleeves.

of men Khaos was in a booth with a woman seated across from him. She  
her hair around her finger while speaking to a man who stood besi  
ing meKhaos wasn't listening as his thumb drifted over the condensation co  
ie fromon his glass. The rings he wore were forged from the black platinum  
led hadhunters used, and reminded him of the hunters he'd killed throughou  
phallusRising from his seat, he pulled on the suit jacket and said something  
st threecouple before heading toward me.

eone to My fingers tingled with the need to touch him, and I curled my har  
fists, fighting the urge. Khaos was both savior and villain in my tale.  
e room.protected me from the abuse of my father, but I'd traded one de  
love, Ianother. He'd shown me what love could be, then told me I'c  
hings,"experience true love. When I became restless to explore the world  
; left tohim, he'd imprisoned me inside his bedroom. Now I'd sought him ou  
again, to ask for his help, which I'd known would be dangerous.

ar with I'd almost reached him in the middle of the room when a hand grab  
dancedarm, jerking me into a rubbery body. The stench of sweat, stale cigar  
re menand whiskey assaulted my senses as someone gripped my chin in a  
ges forhand. Wild, hazel eyes slid over my face before he spoke, sending  
a largechurning in my belly at the scent of garlic and unbrushed teeth.

h to. "Pretty little slut," he cooed in a heavily accented tone.

of every "Unhand me, now," I warned, knowing Khaos was right behind him  
stopped "Shut the fuck up. If I wanted you to speak, I would tell you to do s

a crisp,man gripped my jaw harder, which caused a gasp to slip from my thro:  
en dark "Unless you wish to discover the fastest way to hell, I'd listen t

Khaos's tone was low, lethal, and filled with promise. The asshole

beneath appear to recognize the owner of the voice speaking, because if he wouldn't have continued.

twirled “Find your own whore, asshole. This one is going to cry so prettily de her. Aren't you—” Blood exploded from his lips as the sharp end of a llectingedged dagger pushed from them. His scream of agony came out as m swordswet gurgle, but it was loud enough to draw attention. The mome t years. noticed Khaos, they shuffled backward to a safe distance.

g to the “I don't recall sending you an invitation to enter my club,” Khaos g and his eyes promised to punish me for the slight.

ids into “There was an issue today inside my store.”

He had “Did you cause it?” he asked pointedly. Before I could reply, he pla evil for fingers under my chin, lifting my face to the red lights. “Who was l never enough to put their hands on you, Aderyn?” Khaos's touch sent lust without through my brain and shut down all coherent thought. The raw, anir it, once pull of his powerful presence caused warmth to rush through n remained silent, staring into the cyan-colored depths that threatened to bed my soul. “I asked you a question. I expect an answer.” The man n smoke, even as two men grabbed him and removed him from the room.

chubby “Besides the asshole you just stabbed?” I smarted off, which had l nauseanarrowing to angry slits.

“That wasn't an answer,” he warned.

Shaking free from the spell he held over me, I pulled back from h l. and told myself I'd been so naïve to think he'd ever miss me as much o.” The missed him.

at. “No, I didn't cause it. I'm uncertain of who he was, but he seemed o her.” town. Tall, tattooed, and spoke fluent Norwegian. I was hoping w : didn't

had, he speak without so many eyes on us?" I asked as butterflies waged war on my stomach.

for me. "Take him to the other room. I'll deal with him in a moment," he double-ordered before pulling a white cloth from his pocket and using it to dab at the blood splatter on my cheek and chest. My breathing grew labored as they cleaned away the crimson stain from my cleavage. "Have a seat at the bar. I will join you there in a moment."

rowled, Then he left me standing in the middle of the floor alone, and I stared at myself for being dumbstruck by the sight of my eternal tormentor.

ridiculous, I made my way toward the bar, only to startle and duck as I noticed his at the thunderous sound of a gunshot. Not one other person appeared to be stupidly concerned, and I decided this really was hell. I slid into a chair at the bar, rushing to pull out my phone to shoot off a message to Cameron, letting him know that I'd been delayed, but I'd be there tonight.

ie as I typed: Cameron: I'd wait forever for you. I like you. You're funny and make me devour your laugh, Aderyn.

roaned, His brief reply caused my lips to curve up at the corners, and I sent him a smiley face emoji. When Cameron sent a photo of him pouting, my heart rate in my chest as his eyes grew wider. Before I could reply, though, my phone was snatched from my hand. When I twisted to yell at the asshole who stole my phone, I saw Khaos frowning at the screen as he read the messages.

his hold "Give me my phone." At his dark, threatening look, I swallowed.

h as I'd "Who the fuck is Cameron, and why are you dressed like you're trying to get fucked?"

new to "He's just a guy I met online. I am dressed up because I am meeting someone who could after I finish up here. We have a date," I admitted as his features softened with anger.

r in my “I must’ve heard you wrong because it sounded like you said you date?” he returned in an acerbic tone.

Khaos My heartbeat began thundering against my ribcage as he sat beside me, awaythumbing through my messages. “Not that type of date, Nasir.” He stood as he lifted, and his stare hardened as he waited for my reply. “I’m not here for companionship.” Heat burned my cheeks as shame replaced the warmth I felt from his touch.

chided “Companionship?” he asked before he returned to looking through my messages. “Why the fuck would you need him for companionship when you have me?” My lips parted before closing as I battled my shock.

appeared The bartender stopped in front of us, poured two fingers of tequila and bourbon into a glass of ice, and then set it in front of Nasir.

don’t know “The lady will have a Witch’s Brew. Use the Empress Gin and the lemon but hold the wedge. Add the basil, but don’t push it into the drink. She doesn’t enjoy digging it out to finish the cocktail,” Nasir rattled off the preferred drink without even looking at me, which surprised me. “That’s your drink of choice, correct?”

my smile “Yes,” I admitted.

from my “Who the fuck is Charlie, and why the hell is he calling you pet name?”

I found “He’s a wholesaler of herbs and botanicals,” I explained carefully.

“It doesn’t explain why he’s fucking obsessed with you.”

“He isn’t obsessed with me, Khaos. He’s thirty-five years old and married to a lovely man named Sean. They have five rescue dogs and cats, most of which are special-need animals. Their son is Tate, who was born with a tooth came in last week. Charlie is a Libra, but he leans more toward earth signs, and Sean is a Taurus, so they balance one another out.” Turning to accept my drink, I thanked the bartender as the clicking of heels over



I had forced my eyes up to a leggy blonde. Returning my attention to Khaos, I found him studying my face.

Hide me, “Cancel the date,” he stated firmly.

His head “No, I’m not canceling it again. I’ve canceled it five times this month already,” I shot back until his eyes burned into mine with dark pupils shimmering in them. “It’s not like I was intending to do anything with you. I have not been on a date in seventy years, Khaos.”

Through my teeth “You’ll cancel it, or you’ll wake up to his head shoved up the ass of your neglected cunt of yours, love.” The dancer laughed, which had my ire rising. She turned to where she was swaying with a come-hither look planted firmly on her face. Lowering before him, she reached out to grab his hands, pulling them toward her tits, but he jerked them back and cut a withering glare at her. She turned back to me. “You do not need companionship when you have a drink. Aderyn. All you need is me.”

Off my back “I don’t have you, Khaos.”

It is still Khaos’s hand shot forward, gripped my throat, and yanked me toward his face.

“I guess we’ll have to fucking fix that then, won’t we? Grab your drink and follow me, love. Let’s find somewhere quieter to continue this conversation.”

The blood drained from my face as he let go of me and stood. Panic set in, my lips parting as I peered around for an exit, knowing I’d never find one before Khaos caught me. Damaris’s eyes locked with mine from across the room, and she offered me a small smile of encouragement as Khaos spoke first. “Don’t keep me waiting, love. You know I do not enjoy it when you demand my attention.” Rising from my seat, I grabbed the drink and sent Damaris a quick nod and a smile, which Khaos noted. His eyes slid to where she stood, and she smiled back at the barsounded in reply. Elizabeth, Rose, and Natalie came to a stop behind me.

chaos, I waving at me. I quickly waved back, but tears pricked my eyes. Khaos  
a low growl, and I hurried to catch up with him, trying not to not  
nervous glances the girls shot between me and him.

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romiseswell for those he shepherded.

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waving at me. I quickly waved back, but tears pricked my eyes. Khaos issued a low growl, and I hurried to catch up with him, trying not to notice the nervous glances the girls shot between me and him.

Following the devil farther into the depths of a hell he created never ended well for those he shepherded.

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# CHAPTER FOUR

NASIR WALKED ME DOWN a dimly lit hallway. He'd positioned lamps, which appeared to burn oil, beside more pictures of my body in various positions. But there were also others who obviously were not me, since the skin tone was wrong. These were more risqué. The one I recall from my time of myself had my hands bound, forced under my belly. Nasir had spread my knees apart, and they'd displayed me like that for hours while many women alike viewed me. No one could touch me, but they had wanted to. Hell, I'd been so turned-on listening to them speaking about how beautiful my body was, that I'd been saturated with arousal.

"It's one of my favorite pieces of you," Nasir whispered against my ear. "Do you remember how much you'd fought me that day? I'd eaten that until it was swollen from coming on my tongue, and then I'd put it on display. You were the patrons' favorite as well. All innocence and grace there watching you squirm as they openly gazed at your needy cunt that day, I almost killed one of them for attempting to touch you."

"I remember," I whispered thickly as heat throbbed in my pussy, swelling in my abdomen. "I bawled because I couldn't take any more orga-

I'd experienced nothing like it before, and Nasir had been brutal . savaged my delicate flesh. Pressing my thighs together, I struggled to the way my clit ached at the memory.

“The next one is my favorite.” He sounded amused as I moved to t portrait. It was of Paris spread out on the bed, bleeding from several v Khaos had inflicted, and I had to swallow the sob.

Paris had been one of many men I had been enamored with during c in the French Quarter. I'd begun dancing in Damaris's show, which v of the biggest draws to New Orleans. It was a mix of Moulin Rouge first BDSM club. We would dance in sheer skirts and tops we ha ourselves. Then Nasir or one of his men would announce those wi golden ticket needed to vacate the *Le Repaire des Pécheurs* or The S Den. Men would kill to get the exclusive golden tickets, which were out to only nobility, artists, and the filthy rich patrons.

Then they had begun the actual show. It basically consisted of women being bound in sinful positions, sus in the air, and offered up to the patrons to use in any way they wanted beautiful would bring friends and run trains on those willing to be used in manner. He tied me up, suspended me, and left me untouched.

It was how I'd met Paris, who'd been smitten with me. It had beer it pussy day they had suspended me in the air, left untouched. I'd watched you on taking their pleasure. Afterward, I had been handed a poem Paris had ce. I sat as he had watched me. He'd left before I'd been able to locate him it. That after weeks of looking for him, he'd sent flowers to the mansion Na only to built for us while Nasir was away on business. It had intrigued me . gasms.” someone other than Nasir send me such a gift, and it led to us sending

as he'd letters to one another. Months had passed, and Paris had invited me to his room in the apartments above the theaters.

Nasir had discovered my digression, which I had thought I'd be the next careful to cover. In the French Opera House, where he'd accommodations for being a writer of various plays, we'd intended to meet together. Only, it never happened.

Instead, Nasir and Merikh had kicked in the door just as Paris had finished disrobing me. They'd beaten him to a bloody pulp, stabbed him several times, and then bound him to the bed. Nasir had forced me to ride his mouth and Paris—God love him—begged me to do. I'd agreed only because he threatened to slowly cut Paris up if I didn't. As I had climbed onto his bed, she'd kissed my naked flesh with reverence. His tongue had slipped into my pussy, and I'd come for him several times while Nasir sat in the dark watching me. I had been oblivious in my pleasure, which meant I'd forgotten to notice Paris had ceased participating. When I finally did, he'd succumbed to his injuries.

"You're an unfeeling bastard," I whispered.

"One would think your lesson learned with Maxwell would've stopped your fanciful thoughts of love. I had warned you from seeking relations with men, love. I'd told you not to stray from me. You ruined what we both kept that time peaceful. I had merely wished to continue it. I'd written were not content with what I offered and craved more. I'd also told him that his were mine and if he continued to write his love letters, it would come to a violent end. I believe Shakespeare said it best when he said, 'These things that have delights have violent ends.' In all honesty, your lad went out in a disgusting way. I am certain his last thought was of how delicious you tasted his lips."

Paris had been soft, sweet, and so damn nice. He'd been a gentle soul in a dark, merciless world. I'd been his muse, which had ended his life before it should've had the curtain pulled on it. On the way out of the chamber, Merikh had poured gasoline on the remains and Nasir had had to be there to stand in the shadows as the French Quarter came alive to put the House fire out. By the time they had, little more than charred ruins remained and it had stayed that way until the sixties. The person who bought the property built a hotel over the ashes.

"William was sweet, wasn't he?" I asked, moving farther down the hallway until he stopped once more in front of another painting. Khaos's lips, my obsession, and the one thing I'd never been able to escape. Without my answering me, he started moving down the corridor. Khaos had a corner, William Shakespeare, and we'd both mourned his loss when news arrived in the Americas.

Khaos stopped before a doorway and punched a code into the keypad. The door slid open to reveal another room. The atmosphere in this room was saturated with sexual tension.

Khaos's fingers wrapped around my wrist, pulling me with him to a booth in the back of the room. Along the farthest wall, they'd positioned booths with velvet curtains to conceal them from view of the room. But you back into the farthest wall. Releasing my arm, Khaos held his hand to show I should sit, and I slid into the booth, dropped my purse next to me, and then took a sip of my drink. Khaos sat beside me, his nearness causing a violent squirm.

The lights dimmed even more as Damaris strolled out onto the stage, his focus sliding around the audience as she learned them.

"It's nice to see old *friends* and new ones tonight." Damaris tipped

oul in ahead to me and then returned her attention to the audience. “I hope  
fe longenjoying your time in the Devil’s Chamber. From the sounds coming  
of thesome tables, I’d say some were impatient to find pleasure?” Murr  
forcedagreement whirred around the room. “My girls are preparing to give  
Operaenticing show with patrons they’ve hand selected from the audience  
ained,If they’ve chosen your partner, please refrain from joining them o  
ght theunless you’re invited to do so—that is rule number one. Rule number  
that anything goes kink-wise so long as your partner is willing. If you  
wn thesomeone to fuck, again, they must be willing. If you overstep, the ger  
ios wasmonitoring the room will happily remove you from the grounds. Th  
Withoutopen in the lounge, but be warned, it’s a fuck-fest within it and the  
adoredregulation on which form you can fuck in. Knots, double-h  
rs of itbloodletting, and much more occur in the Devil’s Lounge. If you  
interested in joining them, be certain to wait for our highly trained  
ad. Theassist you in any need you may have. Enjoy your night, Sinners. I  
ne wasintend to.” Her platinum-blonde hair was up in a pinup-girl style,  
matched the style of the blood-red dress she wore. Damaris was other  
ward abeautiful, but she was also one of the kindest souls I’d ever encount  
sitionedmy two hundred and ninety-nine years on this earth.

sitioned A hand touched my thigh, and I glanced at it before dragging my  
l out toto Khaos’s face, which had darkened with something akin to  
ne, andUncertain how to respond, I reached for my drink and downed it  
g me toquick swig. He chuckled as his hand crept farther up my thigh.

“What are you doing, Khaos?” I asked. My nipples had hardened in  
ge. Herpoints from the single touch, and I struggled not to shift my legs a  
invitation.

ped her “Whatever the fuck I want,” he returned sharply. “Why would yo



you are companionship, Aderyn?" His eyes bore into mine as my pulse began to hammer against my throat. The pounding of it echoed in my ears, rebounding inside my skull as I tried to find the words to reply. "It's not that you've grown more difficult in your time alone."

tonight. "I run a shop, which you are aware of, obviously. Day after day, I am in a stage where they're looking for and then have to tell them that their work is not what they need. The girls I employ are amazing, but employees are hard to come by. I have a few friends, but they all have their own families while I remain single. I go home to an empty house alone, bathe, then read before bed. That is why I need companionship. I am tired of always being alone." How I had been able to even speak with his fingers slowly rubbing against the inside of my ear, was beyond me.

"You have me, brat. Some asshole from the internet isn't going to be a part of you. I've been neglectful of you, but I intend to rectify that immediately." My stomach flip-flopped as I waited for him to elaborate. "You'll spend your weekends with me from now on. At my estate, of course."

"I'll do no such thing." I hadn't thought before spewing the words. At the menacing demeanor sharpening his features, I blanch. I came here to let you know about the harassment I've been dealing with at the shop and to see if you knew anything about it. I didn't come here for pity. You and I are like oil and water. We both know it, don't we?

*fuck, fuckity, fuck! I'd acted rashly. I'd end up tied to his bed if I didn't get out of this now.* "I have my store, and I'm launching a new collection for the Bad Witchery this summer during the Founder's Day celebration held in your honor. Besides, you have an empire to rule."

"I do, which is why you'll be coming to my estate, where I can

the jack-handle you and the pressing matters of my empire.” A topless server  
years, toward us with a cocky smile on her lips. Her perky tits bounced with  
t seems step she took toward us, and then she knelt before Khaos and slid her

between her thighs, leaving no question where her fingers were vanishing  
ask men “Hello, Khaos. I wasn’t expecting you to join us tonight,” she purr  
ives oras her lips parted with a sultry, lusty moan. “My cunt’s missed you wo  
es. I’ve over, baby.”

1 alone. Anger burned my ears, but I fought to appear unfazed by the w  
s why I blatant disrespect. I’d never let Khaos know how much his relationshi  
en able the girls affected me. If I acted as if I could not care less, then he w  
7 thighs know how much it broke my heart that he fucked them, but hadn’t ev  
more than his mouth or fingers on me.

fill any “Is that so, Gigi?” Khaos murmured, squeezing my thigh hard eno  
edy ithurt. “This is Aderyn. She’s drinking Witch’s Brew tonight with E  
aborate. Gin. Refill her drink and bring me another three fingers of to  
tate, of bourbon.”

“Are you sure I can’t offer you more? I’m so wet for you,” she  
rds out before showing him her wet fingers before loudly sucking them clean.  
shed. “I “If I wanted more, I’d have asked. Do as I tell you to do.” H  
h in the dismissal of her should’ve appeased me, but it didn’t. “Have Beatrix s  
or your the juice into the glass and place the basil above the ice.” Sliding his  
” Fuck, to the stage where couples were slowly making their way to the  
t figure couches that faced the audience, he forgot she existed.

nothing “As you wish,” she stated while awarding me with a vicious look.

bration “Don’t look at me as if it’s my fault, darling. I viscerally know w  
dismissal feels like, and have been subjected to it more times than y  
1 easily probably count. The devil is fickle in his needs, and by the time

started learned how cruel he can be, you're six feet deep in a hole he buried each alive in. It's then when you finally understand you're disposable, replaceable, and undesirable to the cold-hearted, unfeeling monster you sold your soul to. "If you're smart, you'll run now." I smiled tightly at her as Khaos' head even floated in the air between us.

Working it "Just because you can't satisfy the devil doesn't mean I can't, bitch." Khaos snapped before tossing her hair over her shoulder as she rose and walked toward the Devil's Lounge.

Steps with "Stand up, now," Khaos growled. I rose from the bench, then I faced him with my shoulders back and my chin up. I wasn't the same pathetic creature I used to be when I'd pulled out of the sanatorium. Time away from him and the only thing that had hardened me.

I'd had to fight for what I wanted, and I'd built my store from the ground up by myself. "Come to me." Stepping forward, I'd been prepared for him to berate me, but he gripped my hips and forced me to step forward onto his lap.

"What are you doing?"

Whined "You're not disposable, replaceable, or undesirable, Aderyn. We both know you were dead. Yes, I fucking buried you. I also murdered everyone else. He refused to bring you back." His hands slid to my ass, lifting my dress. Cool air fanned my cheeks. "But I didn't replace you, nor did it change my desire to have you near me."

A small "Khaos, I am two hundred and ninety-nine years old. That's almost a thousand, six hundred, and four months, but I can go into weeks, days, hours, minutes, and seconds if you need me to do so. I've been yours since I was that hisseventeen years old, and not once have I felt true love or had someone who came home to who couldn't wait for me to arrive. I've never created life. You've never slept in the arms of a man who actually loved me. When you

ied you let me go to live some semblance of a life? One without you hiding  
iceable, shadows to monitor my every move?"

soul to. "Never," he stated as he ground the hardness of his cock again  
's rage "You've been on your own too long, darling. I've been too lenient w

again, haven't I? It shows in your lack of self-preservation when yo  
h," scheme or repeatedly ask for your freedom. You forget why you're mine."

moved "Because in a moment of lunacy, I used magic I hadn't even kno  
had. Finding out I had magic wasn't nearly as terrifying as realizing I

ed him idea how to stop it from burning down your establishment. You've pu  
reature me enough for something out of my control." The tremor in my

family belayed the pain I felt at asking him to free me.

and I'd Why did the thought of him freeing me send me into a downward s  
; closer, panic? I'd wanted my freedom for as long as I could remember. It

ced me what scared me. No, losing him and those I'd considered my family t  
me. I'd tasted what it felt like to be cut off from them and alone, I

hated every moment.

thought "Your freedom isn't up for discussion. I've told you my remedy  
ne whole loneliness." He lifted me by my ass, sending me careening forwa

ss until hands planted on his broad shoulders as he buried his nose in m  
ool my "Pastèque, limonade et lavande. Après tout ce temps, tu es toujou

parfum préféré. Tu es mon âme, Aderyn. J'ai envie du goût de tes  
s three douces. La sensation de ton corps magnifiquement souple contre le r

, hours, ton essence flottant dans l'air alors que tu murmures mon nom alors  
e I was trouves du plaisir." He said in French, knowing I could not speak

ie to go under stand a word he said.

Hell, I "English or any other language but French, Khaos."

will you "Your inability to understand French is concerning. You've mast

g in the other languages, and yet, French eludes you?” His fiery lips dragged across my skin, sending a thundering pulse as he nuzzled my throat. “I find the language beautiful. You should learn it, love. I think you would enjoy cursing me to the pits of Hell with it.”

You taunt “I’m sure I would. Unfortunately, I cannot master it,” I admitted. I tried again and failed several times, and still, I was hopeless. It didn’t stop Nathaniel from speaking to me in French though.

He had no choice. “Tell me about the issue today,” he ordered. Sitting up, he forced me to hold on to him as he shuffled out of his suit jacket.

My voice “A tall Nordic prick and his friends came in today as I was closing. When he asked them to go, he was rather enraged over it.” He set his jacket aside and leaned back in a relaxed pose, staring at my hardened tips pressing against the bodice of my dress. A cocky smile flittered over his lips before he darkened his eyes to clash with mine. “Their tattoos were ancient runes, and I’d rather than the ones on the men who fucked with us in Salem, when you told me you were a witch after I’d tried to have you burned at the stake. You remember that, right? Anyway, the wards around my shop alerted me to the danger. My wards didn’t work past warning me of it. He was either immune, or under my hair protection, but tonight was not the first time he’d been inside the shop causing issues. This time he promised to return and ensure I know my place, which is serving him like a good whore should. You warned never to let anyone beneath your protection. He told me he’d been given your blessing as he wanted to do anything to anyone in your town. So, no. I did not wield my magic against him since it could’ve been seen as a slight against you if I had so.”

“You forgot the part where he put his hands on you,” he murmured against my neck, nipping at my collarbone, which sent pulses of lust shooting to my clit.

ver my “When I told him to leave, he shoved me back against the counter. ul. You fought him, he backhanded me, which knocked me down, and I ended up hitting my head on the counter. I wasn’t out for more than a few seconds when I opened my eyes, I was on the floor, and he was trying to get me off. I’d tried to get off. Something outside caused his friend to stop him.”

Nasir and “What was outside?” he countered raspily.

“I don’t know.” I’d peeked outside briefly before calming the other two down. “Do you know who he is?”

“No.” Khaos grabbed my ass, palming my cheeks as I tried to keep a safe distance between my lips and his.

Nasir and “No? Then I am done here. I’ll handle it myself,” I snapped.

against “Who the fuck do you think you are, love?” he hissed before he grabbed my bound hair and jerked my head down as his mouth pressed against my ear. “You’ve forgotten your place. I assure you, I have not.”

Then I “Looks like Nasir found a whore to warm his bed tonight, fellas,” a member accented voice stated behind me. Nasir released my hair, which allowed me to turn toward the owner of the voice. The moment my eyes clashed with his arctic ones, I stiffened, and an uneasiness rushed through me, which I stored. “Well, look at what we have here, boys? Looks like the little vixen is in her place, being taught her rightful place without my help. You’ll make a pretentious mistake, cunt. Once you’ve finished with her, send her my way. She and I have some unfinished business, and I don’t mind sloppy seconds.” Then he laughed at himself as if he found his statement funny. Slapping his forehead, they started toward the Devil’s Lounge.

Dropping my head forward as my eyes closed, I exhaled a calming breath before noticing the weight of Nasir’s hand had lessened. Peeking

When I direction, I found his focus on my face. Shrugging off his touch, I pulled up my skirt down as embarrassment flooded through me.

“Him?”

“Yes,” I whispered through the embarrassment slicing through my pants. “I guess you should’ve told him I wasn’t good enough to warm your cold sleeve, huh?” I teased through the humiliation stinging my cheeks.

Khaos pushed me aside, then began to slowly roll up his sleeve.

Frowning, I rose with him as his disconcerting calmness sent an uneasiness rushing through me. I’d only ever seen him like this once before, and

when he’d gone abroad, returning with the head of the Spanish Prince

Tonguing my cheek, I crossed my arms over my chest until he sagged and grabbed toward the doors of the lounge.

“Nasir?” I called to his back.

“Sit down, brat. I’ll be back shortly.”

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direction, I found his focus on my face. Shrugging off his touch, I pulled my skirt down as embarrassment flooded through me.

“Him?”

“Yes,” I whispered through the embarrassment slicing through me. “I guess you should’ve told him I wasn’t good enough to warm your cock as a sleeve, huh?” I teased through the humiliation stinging my cheeks.

Khaos pushed me aside, then began to slowly roll up his sleeves. Frowning, I rose with him as his disconcerting calmness sent an uneasiness rushing through me. I’d only ever seen him like this once before, and it was when he’d gone abroad, returning with the head of the Spanish Prince in tow. Tonguing my cheek, I crossed my arms over my chest until he sauntered toward the doors of the lounge.

“Nasir?” I called to his back.

“Sit down, brat. I’ll be back shortly.”



# CHAPTER FIVE

STARING AT THE ENTRYWAY Nasir vanished into, I fretted over what to do. If I was right, which I normally was, the asshole was part of a larger crew. Biting my lip, I grabbed Nasir's jacket and pulled out his phone to message Merikh and warn him of the bloodshed about to unfold. The situation was rather messy, and if his boys didn't step in to end it, there'd be a lot of bodies to add to the pile tonight.

The moment I did, a message flashed over the screen and the phone vibrated in my palm. After entering the code, which was the same as the one always used for his safe, it brought up the home screen. On it was the picture of a beautiful blonde with startling blue eyes. Then, before I could even react better of it, I opened the message.

Vanessa: I haven't heard from you in hours, lover.

Creasing my brow, I felt my stomach twisting.

Vanessa: What do you think about the pink dress I modeled for you? Daddy says everything looks perfect on me, but I need it to be better. Perfect when we announce we are to be wed and join families. You

pick out the perfect dresses for me to wear. I know! How about you one for me to wear and surprise me?

Tears burned my eyes as my heart shattered. The twisting ins stomach became painful as I fought the vast array of emotions cl inside me. Nasir was getting married. Who would be stupid enough that? Did she not know he was Satan reincarnated?

Vanessa: Hey, I've forwarded my things, so they'll be there when next week. I hope you don't mind, but I figured we'd be married at the summer, and it was time I began settling in. Love you, K-bear. I can't start our life together.

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Nasir: I look forward to seeing you, darling. I've missed you since been home packing and planning for the wedding with your mama. T couple of weeks have been hard to endure without you beside m families will settle in together without issue, of that you can be certa boys have already begun asking when you're returning. All your wor for nothing. Us finding one another and joining families was destiny, once told me.

Vanessa: I'm anxious about the Gathering of Lords. I know promised to keep the peace, but our families have a tenacious history, What if this doesn't happen and we're forced apart? I don't think I cou being away from you much longer. If my papa does not agree to this then our plotting has been for naught. I assured you that through m

or you?  
er than  
always

you'd get the Italian mafia with me, but what if papa doesn't go for thi Pain ripped through me with the knowledge of his upcoming marita Why should I care? He had made my life hell for as long as I'd kno prick, but it felt as if my still-beating heart were being ripped from m The bastard hadn't mentioned it, which he damn well should

choose Swallowing past the lump forming in my throat, I shoved the pain do  
fought to regain control of my emotions.

ide my Wiping away the tears from my eyes, I blew the air from my lungs  
urningclosing the messages and searching for Merikh's number. Once I fou  
h to doshot off a quick message.

Nasir: Um, Khaos is about to murder some Norwegian guy in his  
I arriveMight need help? Good chat, Shadow. Let's do it again soon, yeah?  
: end of Pushing the phone back into the suit jacket, I stood and headed tow  
wait tolounge. The moment I entered, the scent of sweat, sex, and murdero  
slammed into my senses. Khaos wasn't holding his anger in. It char  
you'veair with his earthy scent of virility, bergamot, and whiskey, and he  
The lastlike an angry god, both beautiful and terrifying. It was alarming, b  
ie. Ourcaused everything inside me to fire up with the need to match it perfec  
in. The I could sense the murderous rage rolling off Khaos in threatening  
rying isPlus, the slight tilt of his head meant blood was about to be spilled. Ev  
as youwas watching the interaction between Khaos and a large group of hug  
men. Holy fucking *Vikings* episode! Then my eyes landed on Aric  
you'veWolf of the North. He was the tallest and broadest of all of them, an  
K-bear.was very much a reason he held the title he did. I was still staring  
ild bearwhen his eyes slid from Khaos to me and did a double take. Unders  
merger,flashed in the Baltic Sea-colored eyes, and I had to force myself  
arriage,remember the time I'd ended up in bed naked with the lethal Viking lo  
s? Magic pulsed somewhere in the room, and I turned until I spotted v  
al bliss.was coming from. The warlock was slowly creeping closer, and the m  
own thehis essence alerted me to his intentions even before he'd decided his fa  
y chest. "You touched something that you shouldn't have today," Khaos  
l have.out calmly, which he was anything but at the moment. The asshole

and been harassing me swallowed nervously, which caused my lips to twitch in enjoyment. “Explain to me why you ignored her warning.”

“If you’re referring to the easy slut you were just with, then she found it, fucking coming, Nasir. I was merely browsing her wares when the bitch tried to get my attention. I was just offering to ease her ache as she’d requested. He looked at me with a cocky smile spreading over his mouth.

“Keep your fucking eyes off my girl, asshole.” As Khaos’s stare hardened, the color drained from the guy’s face. “You lie to me again, you’re a fucking dead man. Try again.”

“I didn’t know she belonged to you,” he stated with uneasiness, peering at his features tightly. “Look, I didn’t hurt her much. I thought she was just a cunt and playing hard to get. It wasn’t like the bitch had your name on anything.”

The silence turned uncomfortable, then Khaos laughed softly, but there was no humor in the sound. The skin around his eyes crinkled, but he held no emotion whatsoever. Worse yet, the golden coloring was invader, the cyan blue of them, right along with the pupils.

When Khaos spoke again, his words came out soft and unerringly at him. “Do you see the necklace around her throat?” The man’s eyes slid to the necklace standing behind Khaos, narrowing on the compass, and without having to know it pointed toward where Khaos stood. It was an ownership tag. “When you arrived, what did I tell you my rules were?”

“I did nothing wrong. This is bullshit, man. Furthermore, I do not have an answer to you, Nasir—” The sharp snap of Khaos’s fist connecting with the asshole’s face cut his words short.

When the guy’s head snapped back up from the blow, his eyes were wide and his hands rose in surrender as he looked to Aric for help. V

ch with didn't look like the Viking lord was inclined step in, he said, "What th  
Aricin?"

had it Khaos shut him up with a right hook. The prick stumbled this time,  
ch tried could not right himself before Khaos swung again. Something crun  
ested." probably the guy's jaw, but blood splattered the people closest to th  
uppercut sent the guy flying backward, but Malik appeared, shovi  
atement back toward Khaos.

in, and The guy continued to plead for mercy in a string of incoherently m  
words, knowing full well what was coming. Rue thrust a chair forwa  
inching his foot as Khaos shoved the guy backward so when he fell, he landed  
being a seat. The guy moved to get back up, but Malik held him there.

her or Khaos produced a blade and sauntered closer. My blood turned col  
slashed through the man's cheek, cutting his jawline open. I knew th  
it there and the terror of a blade kissing your flesh. The screams turned t  
his eyes pitched, agonizing wails as Khaos hooked his fingers around his jawb  
ling the then ripped it out. Several shocked gasps and cries erupted from the  
but not a single person moved to stop him.

y calm. I had learned long ago, how to endure what arose when someone  
where I Khaos Nasir, and while my blood turned colder than the Arctic, I ha  
o look, I much as flinched when the darkness started to slither through me. It  
"When until the sharp taste of magic blossomed behind me that I turned, fully  
into the darkness.

fucking "Are you feeling froggy, motherfucker? I dare you to leap," I hiss  
with the thickly layered voice. The surrounding magic shot into my fingertips  
one feeling or sensing it as I drained every bit of it from the room. All  
e wide, asshole's magic, since I wanted to see if he had the balls to follow t  
When it with the attack. From his fingers, fiery sparks began glowing.

ie fuck, “Out of the way, witch,” the warlock snarled as magic began  
toward Khaos’s unprotected back. When I saw it, I almost snorted in d  
and he The warlock’s magic was a gentle, feeble show, which was cute. M  
ched—terrifying and beautiful. The entire club would feel the raw, unfiltered  
em. Anif I were forced to combat this idiot. Instead of retreating, the warlock  
ng himthe spell toward Khaos faster.

Without thought, I sent mine against his, swallowing it entirely bel  
umbledwispy tendrils of my magic found the warlock’s flesh. Then I jerl  
rd withribbons taut, smiling as he became a thousand tiny morsels to fe  
l on therodents. A hand touched my shoulder, and I spun toward it, lifting my  
lifeless eyes to startling green ones.

d as he “That’s some big-witch energy, little bird. How about you reel in  
iat painme?”

o high- I would’ve, but then a fist was swinging toward my face. Merikh c  
one andlifted a hand, catching the fist in his palm and squeezing it. “You  
crowd,touch her, you die. I’d stop acting a fool and back away before I  
consume your fucking soul.” The lethal warning in his tone had my  
crossedslowly returning to the source. “You’ve gotten more powerful.”

idn’t so “I’ve had a lot of time to hone my craft.” I shrugged and turned  
wasn’tKhaos, who was busy literally shoving the guy’s jaw down his thro  
givinglow, whimpered sounds coming from the man, as Khaos pulled his arm  
the man’s esophagus, were far too loud in the silent lounge.

ed in a “Now, thank Aricin for your pathetic fucking life, asshole. Had it n  
with nofor my respect for him, you’d be fucking food for the wildlife tonight.  
but thethe man made a gargled whimper, Khaos ripped him up by his h  
throughAricin’s men stepped nearer to where I stood, Merikh moved closer,

inching their path. It was why I had named him Shadow. He'd always stood before me and anyone he perceived a threat. "I said thank him, motherfucker!" The guy made a suffocated attempt to thank Aricin, who glared at his disfigured, ruined face in utter contempt. After a beat, he focused on Khaos, nodding his dark, sandy-colored head in respect.

"Now, as for my girl? You do not look at her, talk to her, or put her before her ever again. If I so much as catch your scent within a mile of her, you're dead." The guy turned his head to look at me, which caused Khaos to go on edge. He shoved the guy back and then began landing blow after blow. "Black, said don't fucking look at her!" The asshole went down hard, and Khaos was too busy glaring at everyone watching. "That goes for the rest of you. You stay the fuck away from her and her shop."

Aricin nodded before he spoke in a heavily accented voice. "I was casually aware Bjorn had trespassed against your woman, Nasir. Had I known he was fucking assaulted her, I'd have handled him myself." Warmth spread through her which Nasir quickly doused with ice water.

"She's not my woman. Aderyn Caine is mine. *Period*. No one touches her but me. This entire town knows she belongs to me. Make sure you all know it as well. You and I have been friends for eons, which is what makes you special. The man lives. If it had been anyone other than you, he'd be dead and lying out front of my club, as a warning to anyone else thinking of touching anything belonging to me."

"I will ensure all coming in are made aware of her status and of my warning. I vow to you, it shall be done."

"See that you do that, Aricin. I'd hate to end our plans of uniting the people to create a new syndicate."

"Sorry, dear girl," Aricin stated, slowly studying my face. "Forgi

between my lady. I'll inform my men to steer clear of you and your shop."

"Thank you, Aricin." Admittedly, Aricin was the ideal fantasy of a lowland lord in every historical romance ever told of them. His dark blond hair was unbraided as if he were about to pillage and plunder while on a raid.

It covered the sides of his head, flowing down his neck and vanishing into his hands on the expensive designer suit he wore. Smaller tattoos outlined the corners of his face, making him look like a Viking from the legends told of the North. They had once hailed him as a Norse legend, the Wolf of the North, but he was not a lycan or a shifter. Either way, he was hot, and I knew he could fuck a god and fight even better. Aricin didn't care that his partner's screams were heard beyond the master's chambers. Shit, half the time, I was convinced

he had known it and liked others hearing his prowess in the bedchamber. "You done?" Nasir hissed between clenched teeth, jerking my focus back to him. I shivered at my foolishness because I knew better than any man in front of Nasir.

His irises had been swallowed by inky darkness, and delicate black lines flowed from his eyes, stretching throughout his face. His palms were warm, but the wispy tendrils of ink-colored smoke were actually coating my hands, not in them. A shiver rushed down my frame as he threatened to run his fingers through mine and lifted my knuckles to his lips, tenderly kissing them. Swallowing the urge to rip my hand free and bolt from the room,

I remained perfectly still, waiting for the punishment he'd deliver. "Merikh, deliver fresh drinks to my office for me and Aderyn. After that, notify the staff we are not to be disturbed until I've finished with her tonight. Ryat, please guide Aricin to the medical facility so his man is treated. If you'll excuse us," Khaos susurrated before he turned and walked out of the lounge, dragging me along behind him.



As we passed the booth where we had previously been sitting, he slipped his Viking suit jacket up and kept walking. He didn't speak or slow as he walked down a long, winding hallway. Three doors away from the lounge, Tattoos punched a code into the panel on the wall, which slid open. Through the opening were several doors with names above them. Khaos stopped in front of the door labeled as his, punched in another code, and then pushed me inside the moment it slid open.

"What the hell is your problem?" I snapped as my foot tweaked from the kick like I pushed a little too roughly. When I righted myself, I pushed out a heavy breath. "I'm sorry, Khaos. It has been a long day." When he still had not spoken, he slowly turned toward him.

Khaos was perfectly posed with his normal mask firmly in place, but his face was violence drifting from him in waves. My heartbeat began thumping against my chest, echoing in my ears as he slowly adjusted the sleeve of his bloodied, ruined dress shirt. Stepping back, I winced as my ankle scraped against the floor lines with pain. A wolfish smile played on his lips as he prowled closer, and I tried to continue inching back from him.

"Did all the blood make your pussy wet?" he asked softly. I backed up, and he kissed me hard, which caused a cry of surprise to escape my lips as he slammed down on the desk, hard. "You've always been such a blood room, bitch, Aderyn."

He ran his nose over the curvature of my collarbone before biting it hard, and a squeal of pain and pleasure broke from my lips. His feverish breath came for the first time to my ear, forcing my eyes to close as need and want clashed in a dangerous combination of longing. Nasir adjusted his lengthy fringe, and I strode away, body lifted off mine far enough for his fingers to reach the hemline of my dress, forcing it up to my hips.

natched “Nasir?” I whispered past the swelling of lust in my throat.

turned “Shut the fuck up, slut. If I wanted you to speak, I would have asked  
age, hedo so.” When he stepped back, I stayed where I was, squirming un  
it weremerciless gaze. “Turn around and arch that pretty ass for me.” Strugg  
he onethe ability to think beyond the emotions rolling through me like  
ide thechurning in a vast sea, I spun around.

After I placed my hands on his desk, I arched my back and spread r  
n beingapart. Then I closed my eyes and waited for the punishment to begin. V  
y sigh.didn’t come, worry churned in my abdomen. His fingers slowly rove  
oken, I my hips, then ran over the outline of the tattoo I’d gotten. A snake  
body covered in moons, stars, and runes. Around the snake were flo  
ut therevarious colors, and in the snake’s mouth, was the sun. The official te  
nderingSerpent Spell, but the runes I had placed in the ink offered my soul pro  
s of hisfrom any who sought to take it. Even Khaos.

reamed “You didn’t ask for permission to get a tattoo, brat.”

forcing “I didn’t think I’d need permission to get a tattoo,” I admitte  
quivering hum of words. His hand slid to the middle of my back, and  
ed intowarning, he pushed me down onto the solid wooden surface of his des  
s hands “We had this conversation long ago. You need permission to  
-thirstyanything on your body. You once tried to dye this beautiful dark hair c  
blonde, which earned you quite the spanking, if I recall.”

: until a His palm landed against my backside without warning, extracting a  
ntinueddistress to leave my lips. The second punishing slap had tears burn  
l into aeyes as I whimpered against the severe, piercing burn his large palm c  
ne. HisBy the fifth one, I was mewling in the agony combined with p  
: of mygathering between my thighs.

“Fucking hell. Your ass looks so pretty with my handprint marring

growled huskily as his palm soothed the heated skin. A knock sounded at the door, which caused me to lift from the desk. Khaos forced me back down and he laughed cruelly. “Do not move. Do you understand me?”

“Yes,” I whispered as heat singed my cheeks.

“Enter,” Nasir called out. The door creaked as the sound of Merikh’s footsteps thundered in my eardrums. I heard Merikh pause at the sight of my legsexposed backside. “Isn’t she lovely, Merikh?”

A hiss of breath sounded before he replied, “Very. Your drinks.” From the corner of my eye, I saw the drinks being placed on the desk. “If that is all, I will take my leave.”

“Stay.” Nasir chuckled as the hair on my nape rose. “Settle an arm around me. Does Aderyn’s dress scream ‘fuck me’ or ‘I’d like your protection/companionship’?”

There was a naked pause between the question and Merikh’s reply. “It screams ‘fuck me’,” he dutifully supplied the response. “Would she need companionship? She could simply return to the family without having it.”

Tears pricked my eyes to slide down my cheeks at his statement. I would never change that easily with any of them.

“I told her the same. She doesn’t need male companionship when I’m around,” Nasir rasped as he slapped my sore, aching ass cheek hard enough to cause a cry from my lungs. “She makes the loveliest sounds when I’m making her vulnerable. But you already knew that, right, *Shadow*?” Another quiet gasp had my skin burning hotter. “Should we trust Aderyn with our secret? I don’t want to think our lovely girl would still consider you a fucking savior once she finds out that it was you who fucked her dick-deprived pussy every time you were with her, right?” he asked, close to madness? Or how you could not stop fucking her raw until he

d at thebled on your cock? I may be her monster, but you are too. She just  
wn andknow it.” My ears pricked at Nasir’s use of the ancient dialect the  
when they were talking about something they did not want me to know  
I’d never been able to figure out what language it was, other than old  
Merikh’s the books depicted.

t of my “I did not ask to be cursed any more than you did. She fucked u  
didn’t she? She is the love of my life, and the worst part is, that she  
rom the true mate. Anyone else, and I’d have fought to keep her. But it was yo  
all, I’ll only person I’d gladly slit my throat to protect.”

Nasir exhaled a shuddered puff of air. “Fuck you, Merikh. I hate  
gument being able to fuck her when, for me to do so, would mean the death  
e your woman we’ve both loved since the dawn of humanity,” he whisper  
softly, that I wasn’t sure he’d even spoken. I’d have killed to know w  
hesitant hell they were saying, but no amount of magic had ever given me the  
“Why to discern what dialect they spoke in.

ily and “And yet she loves you. You are everything to her. Me? I am just  
shadow in her world that protects her. Even after everything you’ve  
It was she’d still choose you over me. I loved her, Nasir. I still love her. Ye  
fuck her, but she doesn’t know it’s me or that, once upon a time, sh  
she has were madly in love with one another. So, what the fuck does it matte  
ough to want her to know who she is, tell her. Don’t ruin what you and I bot  
she is has to happen. I have to have her to maintain sanity, and you can’t  
ck slapgo.”

Do you “I know,” Khaos muttered. “You can go.”

e found Merikh chanced a look at me before exhaling slowly. As he headed  
u came door, Khaos stopped him. “Damaris had a few new ladies start this w  
r pussysend them up to Aricin’s suite. Let’s make sure he’s satisfied.”

doesn't "You do know they'll probably quit once he's fucked them, right?"  
My usedasked with his eyes on my face, which had tears currently rolling down  
about. "No doubt, but I prefer him to remain faithful. With the influx  
of enemies and the La Cosa Nostra assuming they are untouchable thanks  
to our engagement, I'd rather make sure Aricin's with us than against us. I  
is both, enough that I have to put up with the little whining whore they sacrific  
is your the devil. Seriously, I cannot stand the narcissistic simple-minded cunt  
you. The more worried about the color of her fucking nails and what dress to wear  
at dinner than who could plan to murder us while we eat. My wife could  
burn you for world on fire while sucking my cock if she wanted to. The egocentr  
ism of the they've offered me would know nothing about family or loyalty  
isn't so insulting, really."

What the "Do you think it wise to bring your fiancée here, where your current  
residence resides? Or do you hope they don't cross paths, Nasir?" Merikh  
asked carefully. "I do get that one does not know she's your wife, but so  
on a dark later, she will. She's remembered everything that's happened since  
she was done, became immortal. Aderyn will remember that you tried to marry a  
woman, I can even if it is for this alliance to be sealed." My ears strained to understand  
and I what they were saying, but it was fruitless to even try.

Merikh? You Heat singed my cheeks as they continued the conversation while  
my hand know was still on display, but I did not dare move or try to cover myself.

Let her "I hope they will. We will sign the agreement in blood, but my little  
girl is glorious in her jealousy. She pretends she doesn't mind, but she  
knows that I know her soul as well as I know my own. I have no interest  
in them marrying Vanessa. I would rather cut my dick off than use it on the bitch  
for a week, so Merikh laughed cruelly. "Good luck with that, asshole. Enjoy your ride."  
"Lock the panel on your way out."

Merikh “You got it, brother.”

1 it. The moment the door closed, Nasir’s hand landed on my ass again, of our than he had ever spanked me before. I cried out in pain, and not e s to my fingers trailing over my flesh soothed me.

It’s bad “That’s for staring at Aricin while I was the one defending you ficed to Khaos hauled me up from the desk and yanked my hand down until t. She’s pressed against his large, wide cock. His other hand gripped my jaw ear for yanked my face close enough that our noses touched. “Is this what you l set the Don’t think I didn’t notice the way you looked at Aricin tonight ic bitch remember, he is a murderous prick just like me, but I could end him y. It is breaking a fucking sweat if I wanted to do so. If you ever disrespect : that again when I am defending you, I’ll tie you up and use you nt wife personal fuck toy until the end of days.”

1 asked “You’d have to actually fuck me for that threat to work, asshole oner or watched, his emotions closed down as the monster came out to play.

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my ass

hellcat  
doesn’t  
tion of  
ch.”  
ight.”

“You got it, brother.”

The moment the door closed, Nasir’s hand landed on my ass again, harder than he had ever spanked me before. I cried out in pain, and not even his fingers trailing over my flesh soothed me.

“That’s for staring at Aricin while I was the one defending you, slut.” Khaos hauled me up from the desk and yanked my hand down until it was pressed against his large, wide cock. His other hand gripped my jaw as he yanked my face close enough that our noses touched. “Is this what you need? Don’t think I didn’t notice the way you looked at Aricin tonight. Just remember, he is a murderous prick just like me, but I could end him without breaking a fucking sweat if I wanted to do so. If you ever disrespect me like that again when I am defending you, I’ll tie you up and use you as my personal fuck toy until the end of days.”

“You’d have to actually fuck me for that threat to work, asshole.” As I watched, his emotions closed down as the monster came out to play.

# CHAPTER SIX

IF I HAD BEEN smarter, I would not have baited the beast. I never could have had common sense, though. My fingers twitched with the need to wrap around his magnificent cock, but thoughts of his messages ran through my mind. This sadistic bastard was getting married. His charm, his gentlemanly ways had utterly blinded me again. It had been a cold awakening when I had realized my mistake.

“Go into the bathroom and clean yourself up, Aderyn. There’s been a mess on your hair and on your lovely face.” Releasing his hold on me, he walked toward a closet behind the desk. “Now. I do not have all night to wait for you.”

I walked toward the only other doorway in the room, yanking the door down. The door led into a spacious bathroom filled with cabinets. As I stepped inside, I covered my mouth with my hands, bent at the waist, and batted my eyes. I needed to scream in frustration. Of everything I had expected tonight, to be spanked in front of the Shadow, or to discover Nasir planned to wed me, had not been on the list. My chin quivered as my hands slid to my stomach.



hugging myself tightly. I stayed like that for a long moment before I let the air slowly from my lungs and straightened.

I opened the door beneath the sink and glared at the photo of a couple. Vanessa was what every man wanted. Her hair was blonde with occasional dark highlight, and her body was long and lusciously curvy. Her Azure eyes, framed by fake eyelashes, sparkled with laughter as he whispered something in her ear as they snapped the photo. Pushing it back into the cupboard, I ignored the stack of washcloths and grabbed a roll of toilet paper. I flicked on the faucet.

Mascara had run down my cheeks. I had smeared my lip gloss, and my hair was a mess. After removing the hairpins and tie, I shook my hair free from the updo. It wasn't great, but it was better than it had been. I ran the paper under the water, then removed my makeup altogether. The door opened as I was cleaning away the last of the blood, and Khaos stood in the doorway, swallowing up the space. Ignoring him, I moved to clean the tacky residue from my lashes.

"You look good with mascara smeared all over your gorgeous face," he strolled in, "Don't call me that," I snapped icily. Khaos squinted at me as he stepped on the blood, a hard smile thinning his lips.

"I'll call you whatever the fuck I want to, Miss Caine." "I'm sure you will." Arguing with him was the last thing I wanted right now. Really, I just wanted to run home, throw on my pajamas, devour the entire pint of mint chocolate chip ice cream in my freezer, being another day, that I had almost canceled on Cameron watch, playing tonight. At the moment, I wished I had stayed home.

I had barely noted his movement before he'd gripped my hair and pulled me into the other room by it. A scream burst from my lips as he showed

forced onto the couch and then followed me down.

“You forget yourself,” he snarled as his fingers curled around my throat, happily choking off my air supply.

With the I gripped his wrists, struggling to remove them as my body began to curve. Oxygen. The harder I fought against his hold, the faster I lost my consciousness. I couldn't even manage to slip a scream through his iron board, my throat, and then his mouth lowered, brushing against my lips. Next, then exploded in my vision as my hands dropped, heavy and useless.

“No fight left in you, pretty brat?” His hand loosened as his tongue licked my hairy lips, and I sucked in air greedily. I coughed violently as he watched me go from smiling when he saw the terror in my eyes. “Maybe that'll jog your memory of who the fuck I am when those lips of yours move.”

I opened my eyes. “Get off me,” I whispered through the humiliation that stung my cheeks. “Pissy because that cunt of yours almost came while I choked you on my nascar amused with laughter dancing in his bottomless depths.

“I need to get home to feed Satan,” I croaked, uncaring if he knew my name. “Satan?” named my familiar after him.

“Satan? You got a kitty and named him after me?”

“No, I got a big ass dog that is obnoxiously smug when he pisses on things. Things that he's deemed his property. It reminded me of you. Did you know everyone assumes a witch familiar is a cat? It's a stereotype that needs to die a horrid death.” His eyebrows shot up while a smile twitched his lips. “There are things.”

“Why didn't I think of that in the last two hundred and ninety-nine years?” I only need to piss on your leg to claim you?” I shoved against his chest with all the strength I had left, but Khaos was immovable. “Stop being stupid. You are making this much harder on yourself.”

“You need to let me go, Khaos,” I blurted as hurt and betrayal  
throat, through me, cutting me to the quick. Tears pricked my eyes as he  
while pulling away from me.

ged for “Never going to happen. Shall we revisit the contract?” he asked  
grip on from the couch. I followed him up, hoping to place distance between u  
hold on was always his way of reminding me I had little autonomy. “Nothing s  
Light say?”

“Why can’t you even entertain it? You have barely even noticed I’ve  
licked gone from your life for the past fifty years!”

ied me, “You left us,” he said in a soft, lethal whirl of words. “We did not l  
g some abandon you. You left us. You are the one who wanted to be on you  
Do not throw that shit in my face.”

æks. “And why was it that I wanted to be left alone? Oh, yeah, becau  
ut?” he fucking buried me in a swamp and abandoned me! Then, because  
myself out of a grave was not enough, I ended up in a sanatorium whe  
that I’d was the daily menu! Breakfast, lunch and dinner was filled with  
shocked while fucked until I begged for death. Creatures fucking fed fi  
like I was a never-ending blood bag.”

all over “I didn’t know you had survived!” he snarled as he turned, m  
u. Why toward me. I backed up until I collided with the wall. I squeezed n  
eeds to closed against the horror-filled memories. Hands slid around my back  
enticing he jerked me into the heat of his body, brushing a kiss against my tem

didn’t know you lived, Aderyn. I’d have never left you behind if I’d kr  
years? I “It doesn’t matter what you did or didn’t intend! What matters  
est with happened. You left me to be tortured by monsters. Every time you leav  
ubborn, suffer because of it, Khaos.” I’d left him in the seventies after spendin  
chained in his cellar.

knifed Bitterness at his denial slithered through me as he, once again, derided the truth. Tears swam in my eyes as I considered what he'd said once more from another perspective. If Khaos had buried me alive, he would enjoy reaping the fruits of it because he was just that kind of monster. So, why was I clinging to the lie? Unless it wasn't a lie. Unless he hadn't known I was still alive when he'd left me in the swamp.

Khaos exhaled softly as he kissed my forehead once more, and I raised my hands as if to push him away. The moment my palms landed on his forehead, a burning of magic burned through my veins.

My breath caught in my lungs as my hands pulled away, shocked at my own connection. It was the same as it had been on the docks of London. His touch sent everything within me into a dark, bottomless abyss that felt like I was falling. The moment we touched, the world stopped spinning and only we remained. Khaos's hands slid up my spine as his feverish lips were pressed against my neck as he kissed his way to my ear.

"Why do you feel like home?" I whispered without thinking.

Khaos jerked away as if I'd slapped him. Shoving his tattooed hand through his hair, he spun on his heel, heading toward the wall. I marched away, kicking myself for ruining the moment. I excelled at ruining things. Very far from him in an attempt to think coherently, I noted the portrait on the farthest wall.

"It was a large mural of Saffron Manor, and the artist had captured it in such vivid detail of it, creating a perfect image with the strokes of their brushes. That lofty manor had been deemed the largest bawdy bitch establishment in London. The monarchy had forced most bawdy houses to remain on the outskirts of London, or the red-light district, but that didn't stop royalty and nobles from visiting.

ied the “It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” Nasir whispered in my ear. My breathing s  
e, fromas his fingers brushed against mine before he chuckled. “Laney painted  
nindingme.”

he still “Nude?” I muttered before leaving him at the painting. “Can we  
I’d stillover with? I need to be home and away from you. I’d say we should  
again, but I don’t enjoy lying. So, let’s agree to not meet again for  
sed myfifty years.” Sitting on the plush, chesterfield couch, I scooted to the a  
chest aas far away from him as I could get.

“No, actually. She wasn’t nude,” he surprised me by admitting  
l at thealmost sound jealous?”

s touch “Hardly,” I fibbed. “It’s not like I have a claim on you, now d  
e home.fidgeted with my hands, forcing my attention to remain fixed on the p  
existedof me. I was in a flapper dress, smiling, and my eyes were full of love.

l breath I could still smell the cigar smoke from the lounge we’d been drink

Khaos and I had settled into the roles I’d always dreamed of us in. It ha  
the happiest time of my life that had ended when I had caught him  
fingersone of the girl’s rooms with his cock barely tucked in his trousers.

ientally “Do you remember when that was taken?” he asked. Turning to  
Valkinghim, I let the pain flood my eyes to be certain he got the message.

: on theThat is why you ended up with young Paris, after all. You undo  
couldn’t wait to make me feel what I’d caused you to feel that night.

d every “No,” I stated through clenched teeth. “I actually cared for Pari  
sh. Thewanted to remind me I was unworthy of your cock. We’re not the  
: withinKhaos.” Closing my emotions off, I spoke in an uncaring, indifferen  
the east“Get on with it. Satan needs his dinner. If he doesn’t get it on tim  
id lordswake the neighbors.”

Nasir snorted before he rolled out the ancient leather parchment

stopped contract. I'd been a naïve child when I'd first signed it, and even now I couldn't believe my own stupidity.

"Every weekend you'll report to my manor. Let's say Friday at five, and you'll be free to return to your house Monday morning," he said offhandedly, not bothering to ask if it was okay.

"Not happening. I have a business to run. I've built a life outside the manor and world, which means I can't just disappear every weekend so you can treat me like an object." I leaned back and crossed my arms, studying him. "You're beneath my lashes."

"You have five employees, one of which has been with you for five years. Mabel Witherspoon can handle the shop. Next excuse?" he asked, maintaining a smug grin on his face.

"Mabel cannot do incantations, cast spells, or create the tonics that you've demanded be made for your celebrations this year. I must have had been of my yearly income during the summer festivals and can't be away from the shop. On top of that, I have to be available for the designers of my clothing line at all hours of the day."

"Bring the ingredients you need for the shit, and you'll have access to the phone when I approve it," he countered as if he'd settled the matter. "You'd also come every night you're with me. Either by your own hand, or by mine. You'd be scandalized by the shit they've created in the last fifty years."

"No," I stated firmly. "I've taken a vow of chastity."

"I thought you didn't enjoy being a liar?"

"I've not had anything inside me since I left the sanitarium, Khaos." He gave an admission, his eyebrows lifted as his lips parted.

"I thought you said you'd healed from it?"

"I have, mostly," I confirmed. "But I've not yet tried . . . *that*." She

now, Ithe painting again, I ignored his shock at my mostly genuine statem  
gotten off a few times, but those had been because of magical  
e? Thenmisfiring. That, or my use of Lilith’s erotic magic forcing my body  
statedbeneath the salaciousness of sex mana.

“We’ll rectify it together,” he offered as he cut his thumb and ope  
of yourinkwell, holding it over it until the ink within glowed blue.

reat me “Who the hell says I want you to help me rectify anything?” I den  
n fromwhich caused the tic in his jaw to hammer wildly.

“Counter my offer, brat.”

r thirty “If you wed, you release me.”

ed with “No.”

“If you take a wife, you’ll release me from the contract,” I stated ag

hat you “No.”

xe most “If you wed, I can take lovers to my bed.”

rom the “No, it only creates issues for the poor bastard in the long run.”

ny new I ground my teeth.

“If you find someone to love, then I should be allowed to do so as  
to yourKhaos sat back, frowning as he tried to figure out my play.

“You’ll “If I wed, you’ll still be mine. It wouldn’t change anything between

r mine. “You’d make me your whore? Oh, no. That’s right, whores get fuck  
” we both know you won’t fuck me.”

“I have not touched you in such a manner in fifty years. Other than  
I have not bothered you once. I agreed to the terms you placed on me  
, At mywas to move our visits to whichever technology offered the least i  
check in option available.”

“If that were true, you wouldn’t FaceTime me,” I retorted.

tudying “Find something else to counter me with. Your freedom isn’t ever

ent. I'd table to negotiate for."

l spells "I choose the right to return to the table at a later time with new terms to bow "So be it," he grumbled as he held his hand out for mine. I stood, my hand next to where he sat behind his desk, and extended it to him. He pressed my thumb with the same blade he'd nicked his own with, and then squeezed several drops of my blood into the inkwell. As our blood mingled, it turned a vibrant crimson color before glowing. Dipping the pen into the inkwell, he began writing in an ancient language, which scrambled over the parchment before becoming legible. Khaos lifted my hand, sucking my thumb into his fiery mouth.

"Ouch," I whispered huskily, even though it hadn't hurt. He smirked. The darkness slowly slid from his ink-colored pupils, spreading through his entire socket. Once it swallowed all the color, it shot through his face and moved down his throat. I'd seen him in his true form a few times before, but I still hadn't ever been able to decipher what he truly was.

Again, he sucked, and I was too lost in his ink-colored stare to fight back. "Well," growing sense of relaxation. His cocky laughter made my lips curve into a smile as he pulled my body against his. The thin tendrils caressed my lips. "I love you." he held me, kissing my forehead.

He smirked and said, "*Je ne te quitterai plus. Avec toi, je suis moi. Sans toi, je brûlerais ce monde et attendrais que la mort me trouve. Tu es en sécurité avec moi ce soir, âme.*" Light flashed in my vision as the room spun around me. I had never seen, which blood magic he wielded, every time he used it, I ended up unconscious. Strong arms caught me as the darkness fought to swallow me whole. "I'm fighting me, my love. You're safe with me."



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iscious.

. “Stop

# CHAPTER SEVEN

A SUDDEN OVERWHELMING SENSE of dread rushed through me as I inhaled the odor of disinfectants. My body jackknifed against the restraints holding me down and preventing me from escaping. An earsplitting scream burst from my lips, but was cut off by my scared sob of dread. The cold air ghosted down my throat, in my pussy, and through my innards as my awareness of being electrocuted from within sharpened. Through my tears, I begged for mercy, for them to stop, for them to just kill me already.

“Bloody hell,” Nasir whispered sleepily as I fought to escape the dream.

The nightmare, however, refused to release me from its icy claws. I felt a phallus-shaped metal spreading me apart as teeth sliced through my skin. Dark, cruelly whispered comments filled my ears as it began punching through my body at a harshly brutal pace. My insides, unprepared for penetration, burned with the agony of being forced to accommodate too much, too fast. They had offered no prep because one girl had acted out early this morning. In the event one misbehaved, we’d all suffer the consequences.

“Stop! It hurts. You’re ripping me apart!” I howled through the pain and swelling in my throat. I arched up from the bed, fisting the bedsheet.

something else was shoved into my ass. “Just kill me! Please, finish it.

My body shook violently as tears seared paths down my temples, my hair and pooling in my ears. The vampire feasting from my throat chuckled as he continued pulling from my vein. My jaw was forced open by a metal contraption, and a demon stepped up to fuck my throat. The sensation of being fucked, shocked, and fed on by monsters caused something inside me to snap. Going slack against the restraints holding me in place, I succumbed to the insanity of the room.

“Ah, the dirty little slut is beginning to understand her only use is to be used at our leisure. I say we remove the metal cock and both stretch that nasty little cunt wide open until she bleeds. Then Lenny can feast from her nasty little cunt. What do you say, gentlemen? Shall we teach the thrall her rightful place? The onlookers cheered their approval. “Remove the phalluses for us, gentlemen. This one will feed us as we want for the rest of the day.”

“She’s unlike the others in the room, my lords. No matter how badly you break her, she heals overnight. It’s unique. Her blood feeds you like a vampire. Vellalar, as surely as if she were mortal. Her emotions allow the fae to feast on her as the others fuck her until she’s on the cusp of death, but she won’t die. You may do as you wish with her. We only ask that you don’t mutilate or disfigure her body. Miss Caine is a crowd favorite, after all. The lords wouldn’t take too kindly to you doing permanent damage to her. Keep her in mind when you’re alone with her throughout the day. Bon appétit.”

“Aderyn!” Nasir snarled, which had my eyes snapping open in horror. I stared at the ceiling, sucking in air as if they had deprived me of it for a long time. Arms held me, preventing me from escaping the bed.

“Let me go,” I urged thickly, battling the demons I’d do anything to escape. “Release me, Nasir!” I screamed through a sob, and this time, he

” shot up from the bed, sliding my gaze around the room frantically. “Bathroom?” Nasir pointed, and I darted toward it. I’d barely gotten there when I was throwing up everything in my stomach. For a moment, I tried to focus on the cold bite of tile on my knees, the sensation of pulling air into my lungs and pushing it out. Then, when I was sure I wouldn’t get sick again, I pushed myself to standing and stumbled into the sink.

I grabbed the only toothbrush available, squeezed toothpaste onto it, and scrubbed my teeth. Once the taste of bile was replaced by the sharp, minty scent, I moved to the opulent shower and entered it fully dressed. The water was icy cold, sending pinpricks of pain everywhere it hit, but I embraced the feeling as I slid down the wall. Tears rolled down my cheeks uncontrolled, obscured by the spray, I curled into the fetal position and rocked myself and forth.

Sucking in air, I fought against the claws tearing into my mind, the remnants of the nightmare clinging to me. The scrape of the shower door forced my eyes to shut tightly.

“Bloody hell, Aderyn,” Khaos murmured as he slid down the wall. He placed his hand on my thigh. I jerked away from his touch, unable to show any pity from the bastard. “Fuck that,” he snapped before yanking me into his arms.

I attacked the moment he forced me from the fetal position. My forehead cracked over his cheeks as I sobbed, breaking apart at the seams with tears far too fresh in my mind.

“You left me!” I screamed through the body-shaking sobs. “I hate you. I fucking hate you all. All of you left me in that hole to rot. Monsters raised me. You did. I

atically every single day for almost an entire year! Where the fuck were you  
re toilet needed you the most?" I sobbed brokenly.

or long "Je me déteste aussi, Aderyn." He spoke softly, excluding m  
or the understanding him. Catching my hands, he forced them above my head  
n I was wrapped his arm around me, holding me tightly. "Si j'avais pu échan  
bled to place avec toi, j'aurais." Nasir's lips brushed my forehead tender  
fingers clasped onto his hair, yanking at the raven-colored tendrils  
it, and released my wrists to hold me tightly. "Sans toi, je ne suis que le mons  
taste of tu as créé. Celui qui t'a aimé aveuglément sans te décevoir." The way  
e water me, as if he regretted what he'd done, pissed me off. "Sans toi, mon  
ced the incomplète. Je suis désolé, mon âme." He continued, which irked m  
hecked, more.

elf back The asshole refused to release me, refused to free me from the embr  
crumbled in his arms. "You're safe now. I have you. If you need to  
with they are safe to do so with me. I failed you once, but I won't do it again  
er doorknown you hadn't died, I'd never have left without you."

"You left me to them," I whispered as the fight in me waned.  
all and rubbed my spine as his other hand pushed the wet hair away from m  
endure His turbulent depths held regret in them, and I was almost fool eno  
up into believe it to be genuine. "Where the fuck am I?"

The entire bathroom was blood-red except for the white floor  
palms accessories. Jets sprayed from the walls, floor, and ceiling of the s  
he pain Antique oil lamps, which had scarlet lampshades, fed soft lighting thro  
the room. It looked like something out of the past but with the curr  
e you. Amenities.

ped me "You're in the bathroom of my personal suite in the club," he sta  
didn't expect you to pass out for more than a few moments, and wh

when I didn't wake up, I carried you here." Slowly releasing me, he frowned. His eyes slid over the delicious display of ink covering his chest.

"Did I stay the night? What time is it?" I asked, shivering. "The time is as he freezing."

He chuckled before looking up toward the showerhead. "Water is hot. My hundred and one degrees, now," he called out, and the water warms as he something bearable. Leaning his head back against the wall, he said, "Admittedly, white probably wasn't the best thing to dress you in, brat." "I asked you to stop calling me that," I retorted as his endearment stirred memories of another time and place cutting through me. After the night even it was the last thing I wanted to hear on his irritatingly perfect lips. "I'll stop calling you your brat anymore. The former prince of Spain destroyed her, Khaos. I'll make sure you never see her again. Three hundred years ago, remember? Oh, that's right. You left me to die. If I'd had a choice, death would have been best for you while he brutalized me freely."

"Which is why his skull sits on my mantle for all to see," he murmured. He leaned against the wall beside him and laughed without emotion. "If Khaos brings him back and kills him again, I will kill him for what he did to you. For every face they all did to you, Aderyn. Throughout our entire time together, no one has hurt you have been allowed to live. I've made sure of it."

Leaning my head against his shoulder, I wiped away the tears and nodded in acknowledgement. Savior and tormentor. Protector and destroyer. From those who'd tried to feast on my innocence so long ago. Monsters who had fed on and from my innocence. We were complicated.

"You told me you were better, Aderyn," he said, lifting his arm and pulling me closer.

"I lied," I admitted through the swelling in my throat. "At night, when you come. Something as simple as the scent of bleach or the sound of

l as myscraping against the window can allow them to bypass my wards to re

When I moved into the house alone, I didn't sleep for almost a month. When the water's I'd begun hallucinating, I knew I couldn't continue foregoing sleep, so I set up banishing wards. They didn't work, and I had to weave a stronger ward to at once cover the deeper pain and memories. To remove the more painful memories, I cut my wrist and offered my blood for the incantation spell. I think he said, during the spell, but no one noticed because I was alone."

"I noticed," he admitted. "Through the link, I felt it, and I came out to see you. You were on the kitchen floor in a protected circle of powerful magic. I didn't think you'd enjoy me slaughtering the few witches in town to bring you back. I'm not a barrier. Therefore, I did the only thing within my power that I could do. I almost stood outside your tiny kitchen window and held vigil until you woke up. I'm still there when you won against death."

"I didn't know that," I stated, but then my brow furrowed. "You're wearing pajama bottoms, inside your shower?" Peering down, I noted the nightgown he'd dressed me in for the first time. "I swear to the unholy gods that if you dressed me in some bitch's nightgown, I'll tie you to a stake and burn you on fire myself."

"As if I have ever dressed you in anyone else's clothing. They're gone, before which I bought in case you ever returned." There was an emotion in his voice that tugged on my heartstrings. It was not enough to make me believe that he regretted any of the coldly calculated shit he'd done to me, though. "Stand up and remove it. I'll wash the sweat from the terrors away."

pulling "I can wash myself, Khaos."

"I didn't ask if you could, did I? No. I said stand the fuck up so that I can wash the memories of them from your flesh. It wasn't a suggestion."

of wind "Ah, there he is," I whispered through the embarrassment paint

ach me.cheeks red. How many times had I longed for him to come to my ho  
1. Afterdo just that? To wash away the feel of the monsters that haunted  
so I setthousand times? No, much, much more than that. I rose but didn't und  
spell tohim.

ories, I Khaos followed me up from the floor. His fingers slid to the hemlin  
: I diednightgown, which barely covered my ass cheeks. It was white, la  
doing little to hide my body from his ravenous gaze.

to you. "Lift your arms, love," he murmured. A sexy, arrogant smile tugged  
magic. llips, even as his eyes smoldered as I yielded and obeyed. The wet r  
reak theclung to my skin as he inched it up and over my head. The momen  
ld do. Inaked, he made an animalistic sound from deep in his throat. My  
a. I waspressed together as a throbbing began in my clitoris. "Damn, you're b  
everywhere."

in your I brought my hands down, intending to cover myself from his pr  
slinkygaze, but he didn't allow it. Instead, he caught them and placed my ha  
y gods,his hips.

and set "Remove my pants," he ordered.

Swallowing past the familiarity of him, I bit my bottom lip. I wa  
: yours,scream and slap him, but I'd end up chained to a wall as his pet ag  
is tonetried to fight him enough times throughout our long history to know  
ieve hewas absolute. I'd run away, he'd find me. I'd stabbed him, shot him, a  
tand upto use magic against him, and each and every time, I was the only o  
suffered. There was no escaping him or murdering him. If there had  
way to do so, I'd have found it by now. That was why I'd play alo  
at I canhim until his entire empire toppled on his head.

My fingers slid beneath the waistband and as I dropped to remove t  
ing myplastered cotton from his skin, I feasted on the ink decorating his



use and Masculine scrawl covered the flesh beneath his ribcage, and more was me. Abeneath his heart. On the other side, more script covered his ribs downress forabs.

“What does this say?” I asked softly as my fingers skimmed the se e of the writing.

cy, and “You can’t read it?” he asked with a smugness that chaffed.

“If I could, do you honestly think I’d ask you what it said?” I d at hissharply.

material “It says ‘For you, I would burn the entire city down to make cert t I wasremained in the light, my soul,’” he murmured. My fingers slid to th thighsside, and he chuckled softly. “I am her sword, her protector, and she eautifulentire world. But, for now, the true queen of darkness bows before her

“Who is the ‘she’ it refers to?” I asked as a lump formed in my throo edatory “The only woman I’d willingly burn a city down for in order to pro andsonfrom the darkness that reaches for her. She’s the other half of my se doesn’t realize it because the gods made her forget who she truly w and I will remain pawns in their game until she remembers who the f nted towas and returns to save us all.”

ain. I’d “That wasn’t my question,” I muttered before going back to lower Khaospajamas. I forced the wet material down his hips, too distracted by tr nd triedfigure out who he’d been talking about, I hadn’t noticed his cock had ne whofree, until after it smacked me in the face. Startled, I fell backward, been abellowed out a loud clap of laughter. “You just dick-slapped me?”

ng with His entire body shook with the force of his laughter. It gentled th edges of his face, which made him look younger and less hardened. It he wet,often he allowed me to see this side of him, but I hated that I wanted s chest.

placed more of it. So, I climbed back to my feet and sucked my lips between my teeth.

“He’s just happy to see you, brat.”

I snickered softly, which turned into actual laughter a second later. Khaos stared at me, making me self-conscious of my current clothing.

“What?” I asked.

“It’s just been a very long time since I’ve seen you unguarded and laughing.” My hackles rose, but he just shook his wet hair, spraying me with the droplets. “Turn around and place your hands on the wall.” I did, if for no other reason, than I did not want to hear him tell me that he didn’t enjoy waiting. Khaos kicked off his pajama pants around his ankles, then nudged my legs apart. The sensation of being erect next to him was both terrifying and exhilarating. The moment he pressed his fingers against mine and threaded our fingers together, my breathing paused.

“Did you miss me?”

“No.” Yes. Every moment of every day we’d been apart, I’d felt a hole where he’d once been. Where my family should’ve been. I’d spent my nights crying into my pillow as I’d fought the need to crawl back to him on hands and knees. Only pride had kept me in my bed. That, and the memory of the horrid shit he’d done to me. Knowing that, if I went back, I’d have to hate him beyond what I’d be able to forgive, was what kept me alone.

Witches were not solitary creatures by nature. We longed for connection and the familiarity of people. I’d chosen to leave Khaos, but I’d never thought the others would cut me off too. Sure, he’d warned me of that, but they’d been my family. The only people who ever cared about my wellbeing, for the most part.

een my I had needed space to heal, which none of them understood. Trau  
scarred me deeper than any blade or punishment Khaos could inflict  
Khaos thought by smothering me with kindness, I'd come around. In  
er. Thehad become angrier, toxic to be around, and I'd hated myself for likin  
lack ofof the things done to me in that hellish place. No amount of kindne  
going to heal the self-loathing I felt after coming for those monsters.

Eventually, I'd begun to understand it hadn't been me who'd liked  
r heardit. My body had responded to stimuli, which Khaos had once tried to  
ring meto me, albeit awkwardly. As the world progressed, I had sent le  
scholars to learn why I'd responded the way I had. Of course, I'd ref  
me, yetthem as men instead of the fiends they'd been. Not that it would've m  
ts fromsince they'd merely assumed I'd meant something else by the title  
xposedtimes I'd slipped up.

is body For years, I'd isolated myself until the first real witch entered our te  
I'd been excited, but then she'd snubbed me as if I were nothing  
entered my shop and declared it plain and unquestionably unfit to m  
a giantapothecary needs. For months after, no one dared shop there. No  
d spentMerikh had strolled in and bought a ton of items without nary a word  
on myIt had been as if he hadn't even remembered who I was. It had hurt  
emoriesthat he'd treated me like a stranger. He'd been my Shadow for so lo  
end upmissed his silent, brooding face the most.

2. "You are inside that pretty head of yours, brat. I didn't offer to w  
iectionsbeautiful body of yours so you could return to the past. Stay with r  
l neverordered in a raspy tone, which scraped over my naked flesh. Lips l  
what itagainst my shoulder before slowly moving toward my neck. My eyes  
familyas pleasure tingled down my spine, pausing in my abdomen to form  
ball of frenzied need. A softly whispered moan fell from my lips

ma had reached my neck, and his hands left mine to grip my throat. He jerked me back against his body before he turned me to face him and pushed me against the wall. “Hands up above your head. Don’t move them until I give you permission to do so.”

His ass was “Fine,” I stated in a bored tone, pretending I wasn’t about to explode. He did as he demanded. Khaos’s finger found a droplet of water, then trailed it down the path it took toward my abdomen, his touch teasingly luring me. I explained “They tried to break you, but only you decide who breaks you, right?” He asked “Do you remember telling me that? Because I do, and I was damn proud of you when you spit them at me.”

I muttered, “My lips trembled as tears pricked my eyes. “Go to hell.”

He said the few “Hell would seem pleasant compared to what I found inside that prison they held you in. The pain of your sobs tore at my flesh until I felt my territory flayed alive. I ensured they felt my wrath, even as you slaughtered me. She’d dressed only in your madness. You were beautiful and terrifying in the face of my bloodlust.”

He asked “I don’t recall the events after you released me,” I lied. I lied because I remembered the popping sound their heads made against the concrete walls. The gurgling noise the nurse made as I’d shoved the electrical phallus down my throat before turning it on to the highest setting.

He said “She’d done it to Cora, who’d been my cellmate. I could still smell the rivers of blood that had run through the hallways as, one by one, they slaughtered every creature who’d been present on the day they’d crushed me. But eventually, I had turned on them too.”

He asked “Tell me what they did to you,” he whispered so softly I had to strain to hear the words. “I need to know where to kiss the terrors away.”

He said “Unless you can fix my soul, you’ll not remove their insufferable

ked memy memories,” I replied in a shaky tone.

ed back “Fucking watch me,” he growled as his mouth closed the distance b  
I grantmine.

The moment our lips touched, it forced electricity to fire down my  
ode as Iand into the fissures they’d created. Khaos’s tongue slipped against r  
iled hisand I knew that opening to him was dangerously irresponsible, but I  
ight. anyway. His hands slid around the small of my back, and he jerked n  
ght? Doagainst his body as my head tilted, offering him deeper access to plur  
of youmouth. Khaos slid his tongue against mine, coaxing it into the fray. I

against his, I moaned as my arms abandoned the wall, slipping aro  
neck to force him closer against my kiss. He tasted like every darl  
hellishfantasy I’d ever had, but even more terrifying was that he was the st  
il I feltplayed in them as well.

l them, By the time he pulled from the kiss, I was panting for air. My enti  
in yourwas feverish with need, sensitive against his hands, which slowly

between my thighs, roving small circles against my swollen cl  
cause Iexpertise. Khaos knew exactly what made my body sing with pleasur  
: floors.mastered every part of me like the finest artist and poet. A fing  
s downteasingly through my slit. Every stroke sinful enough to tempt a sa

sinning. He groaned as he thrust his finger into my cunt and it clenche  
nell thearound him.

3, we’d “Fucking hell, brat. This is mine. Tell me it’s mine.”

ome for “Fuck you,” I moaned, and he forced another finger into my o  
pushing deeper yet.

train to “I can stop if you prefer?” he taunted, knowing I’d cave. Bre  
celibacy of the last fifty years, or take a ding to my pride? It was both  
grip onI’d starved myself of pleasure because it reminded me of him. But no

was here, with him, like this? I was willing to take the ding to my p  
etweenfeel him.

“It’s yours, bastard,” I whirred before I gasped as his hand crad  
y framethroat.

ny lips, “You’ll look me in the eye as this pussy makes a mess all o  
did so fingers,” he demanded, and his thumb began vigorously rubbing circl  
ie flushmy clit. He gave me just the right amount of pressure to force my l  
ider mybow to his touch. Lowering my hand, I fisted his cock, reveling in the  
Lickinglook that tightened his features.

und his “You’re coming with me, asshole.”

κ sinful “Keep calling me filthy names, and this’ll get darker than eithe  
tar whointends it to, Miss Caine.” The smile that had been playing on my l

away as he began pistoning his hips, fucking my fist. “Want to race?”  
re body “Hell no,” I whimpered as the first spasms began rushing through  
dippedmy knees gave out. “Oh, fuck!”

it with Khaos caught me, pushing me against the wall where he pinned r  
e. He’dhand on my throat pressed hard enough to have light bursting into my  
ger slidblinding me. The violent shake of my body was terrifying because it a  
int intofelt as if I were having a seizure or enduring an exorcism. The sound  
d downsmug, masculine laughter danced in my ears as euphoria erupted t

every nerve ending. My muscles locked under the convulsive wav  
gripped me, rippling never-ending pleasure through every part of my  
pening,The soul-shattering orgasm robbed me of coherency, save for the fee  
hard, silken cock spewing hot come onto my belly.

æk the “Good girl,” he murmured. “For fuck’s sake, you almost made m  
, really.before you, pretty slut.” Blinking away the kaleidoscope of prisms bur  
w that lmy eyes, I whimpered. Khaos reached for the soap, but as his mouth

pride to he placed a soft kiss against my forehead. “Now hold still so I can be properly. Afterward, you’re crawling your ass back to my bed. It’s led my the fucking morning, woman.”

“Fine,” I whispered blissfully, ignorant of anything else. I’d need never my more than I’d realized. Tomorrow was soon enough to return to es over enemies. Tonight, I’d play his unwilling guest as long as his powerful body to massaged the tension from my body.

pained

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r of us  
lips fell

me and

ne. His  
vision,  
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d of his  
through  
res that  
y body.  
l of the

e come  
sting in  
neared,

he placed a soft kiss against my forehead. “Now hold still so I can bathe you properly. Afterward, you’re crawling your ass back to my bed. It’s three in the fucking morning, woman.”

“Fine,” I whispered blissfully, ignorant of anything else. I’d needed that more than I’d realized. Tomorrow was soon enough to return to being enemies. Tonight, I’d play his unwilling guest as long as his powerful hands massaged the tension from my body.

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# CHAPTER EIGHT

## KHAOS

THE DELICIOUS SCENT OF watermelons, sugar, and lemonade from the woman slumbering in my bed. Aderyn was my drug of choice. Her heroin, she hummed through my veins, filling me with adrenaline, hope, and ecstasy. She fought me so hard, but it mattered little. The Fates fought together time and time again.

I hated that her dreams were filled with horrors from when I'd failed to protect her. We had thought she had perished, as she'd done many times before. Both Merikh and I had sat beside her unmoving corpse for an entire month while hunters had fought to steal her from me. Only when she had begun decomposing had we agreed to bury her corpse in a hidden place deep within the bayou of Louisiana. I'd been prepared to uproot everything I had and rush to whichever continent she'd be born on next.

Whatever the hunters had done to Aderyn when they'd captured her had altered her, and when she died that time, she hadn't stayed dead. It was as if they had forced her into a strange, new stage of existing. She'd awakened from that wooden box and clawed her way out of the earthen tomb I'd placed her in.

And when she emerged?

She'd changed.

Aderyn hadn't lost her memory, but it had been altered. I had become an enemy once more, which I'd been fine playing. It kept our curse igniting and us seeking to end one another. From what we had learned, her broken, disjointed retelling before she'd abandoned us, she'd walk the French Quarter, and there, they'd detained her for hysterics. But had she been arrested, I would have known. I'd personally placed eyes on every fucking corner of the Quarter to know when the hunters who'd captured her drifted

slithered out of the shadows. I'd discovered the hunters' encampment, which had been nothing but skeletal remains. It looked as if a wild animal had torn the hunters to shreds and scattered them throughout the bayou. But I'd scented the cold, mangled tang of magic drifting on the breeze and in the swamps. Aderyn's magic failed to

Watermelons, lemonade, and sugar. Uniquely hers and addicting as

We'd followed it to the asylum, which she'd been held in. The room we'd entered, I'd heard her heartbreaking screams echoing down the hallway. Upon entering the rows of "doctrine" students, I'd gazed at her broken body as she'd begged them for death. Whatever control I'd had over the reins snapped. I'd watched an incubus staring down at her sad, abused cunt being fucked by the machine he controlled.

Aderyn had not agreed to be experimented on, nor had the other girls there. If there was one thing I couldn't stand, it was a rapist who preyed on those weaker than them. The entire asylum was filled with women brutalized for their entertainment. It had not been humans, either. Im had set up an intricate network for feeding their needs. One that went

the covenant created to safeguard humans. But they hadn't been feeding only humans. They'd captured immortals who wouldn't die from some the endless brutality.

As from I'd stood there in shocked horror as the machine raping her punched and from her red, swollen cunt. Her pain fed the daimones. Her blood fed the vamped into who'd opened veins until blood ran in rivers onto the floor beneath her. But if she orgasm they'd forced her to feel fed the male incubus demons until now every been too drugged to sense our presence. None of them realized who she was. Aderyn was the cause of their unending lust.

She had held them prisoner to her as surely as they had held her prisoner. But Aderyn's scent was an aphrodisiac to all immortals. It lured them to pieces altering their minds until the only thought they held was to own, control, and taste from the endless well of pleasure between her thighs. Unlike mortal men, they weren't immune to the temptation she created. There was magic in her lips, and her kiss invited obsession.

fuck. We'd slaughtered the entire assembly of immortals without thought or care. There'd been no mercy granted for those who'd trespassed against my wife. I'd ripped them apart, limb by bloody fucking limb, until their pale, cries turned to pleasure. We'd stood there, unable to look away and held on unraveled into madness. Once I'd carefully removed the metal from her swollen, pumping into her cunt, she'd opened her startling mossy-green eyes and whispered my name as if I'd been some sort of savior instead of the man who'd failed her.

My eyes stayed on the sound of the door leading into the apartment tore my attention away from the beauty sleeping soundlessly beside me. Lifting from the bed carefully not to disturb her, I left it. Slipping on a robe, I exited the bedroom to find Rue leaning against the door, and Aderyn seated on the couches, all of them looking haggard.

ding on “Report,” I ordered, heading for the sidebar. Grabbing four glasses, I brought them and the decanter of bourbon to the chesterfield chairs, pouring two fingers of liquid amber into each before sitting beside Merik. I leaned into her to hear what they’d discovered.

“You will not like what we discovered at Cameron’s house,” Merik declared in a tired, rough breath of air. “He’s obsessed with her.”

“That’s sugar coating it, asshole,” Merikh muttered. “Cameron’s a bitch, he was, He’s been stalking her for a while now. He has images of her plastered over his walls.”

“Fucking hell. She’s got the worst taste in men,” I uttered, which earned me a grunt from the men grunting in agreement until I eyed them coldly. “Assholes.”

“Hey, we’re agreeing with you, Khaos. Her track record with men normally leads us to the fucks wanting to end her. Merikh, you, Magic, Paris Herne, Carter Herne, and now Cameron Herne? Aderic is a thing for hunters. Her taste in men sucks.”

“Careful, asshole,” Merikh growled in warning.

“I wasn’t talking about you two assholes. But the other men she sees her soft—they’re all fucking related to the bastards who’ve been tracking her since she’d moment she was reborn as a mortal.” Rue lifted his glass, tossing a phallus before he turned toward me. “That sick fuck has a magic-nullifying charm, and it intends to put her in.” Reaching into his pocket, he withdrew a thumb drive and handed it to me. “I hacked his computer and downloaded several files on her. Thought you would want to see what the sick prick has learned from watching her do.”

“Do we have eyes on him now?” I asked as I felt the weight of the thumb drive in my hand.

“I put a team of our best operators on him.” Merikh leaned forward

asses, Ifeminine whimper sounded from the bedroom. “Is she still having nig  
ouches,of the asylum?” he asked softly.

erikh to “Yes,” I admitted as I rose, moving to the laptop I kept in the suite  
reclaiming my seat. Aderyn had fallen in love with the first chesterfiel  
Aarynbought, which ended up with me adding one to every fucking room I  
imagined her lounging in beside me.

Herne. Firing up the laptop, I pushed the thumb drive into the side and clic  
ered allwindow. Thousands of images of her began appearing on the screen.

of her at her shop, home, and some of her outside of them. One w  
had thenaked on her bed forced my eyebrows to push together until a line  
between them.

h men “This asshole has cameras inside her home,” I growled as my visior  
faxwellred.

n has a “Yeah. He’s got a spank bank of her undressed plastered all o  
bedroom walls,” Merikh hissed through clenched teeth. “Ryat is curr  
her house to remove the cameras Cameron planted inside of it. I am g  
ks out?she didn’t let him inside, which means he had someone else do it for h  
nce the “Last year, one of her employees was date raped by some sick fu  
it backwas held for days before being released with no memory of where she  
cage heheld or who’d raped her. The Herne’s have their own immortals on j  
b drivewhich would make it easy enough to have the mortals Aderyn trusted  
files hethat trust. They wouldn’t even know they’d done so either.”

as been I frowned before studying an image of Aderyn with her thighs part  
her fingers between the silky folds of her cunt.

: thumb She had lied to me when she’d claimed it’d been fifty years sinc  
gotten off. Not that I would punish her for it. I loved that she was sex  
urd as atook care of her needs when they arose. How many times had I watc

atmarescoming undone for me? Enough to know she had not been privy  
cameras he'd had planted in her bedroom.

before “Tell Ryat to remove the camera from her neighbor’s house as w  
ld I hadupstairs angled into the bedroom.” Once I’d given the order, I clo  
’d everlaptop and stared at Merikh. “The Gathering of Lords might draw the  
to us. But she’ll know if we’re watching her too closely. I don’t w  
ked thetrying to run when we’re so close to removing the fucking curses. W  
Imagesafford any distractions, not even from her. We’ve worked too damn h  
with herlong to stop now. I’ve amended the contract to ensure she’ll be arc  
creasedmore. That will allow the men time to monitor the creatures descendin  
for the gathering. I need to know who is trustworthy, and who’d betray  
turnedmy spot at the top.”

“That’s easy enough to answer.” Aaryn snorted. “Everyone wants  
ver hisKhaos. Everyone wants to be the kingpin. And we all know hungri  
ently ataren’t loyal and can’t be trusted.”

uessing “No, not really. I don’t want the crown. I merely want it long en  
im.” force those who cursed us to face me. Once I’ve carried that out, I do  
ck. Shewho is crowned king. The moment I have Aderyn back as my wi  
’d beenstepping down to make up for the hell I’ve put her through.”

payroll, “You can’t do that, Khaos. We’re building an empire, and we bot  
, betrayshe’ll expect nothing less when she houses her memories.”

“Then I’ll crown her queen and serve at her leisure. But I promise y  
ed, andshe isn’t leaving my bed for at least a fucking year unless it’s to show  
or fuck on every surface of our home.” At my roughly uttered words,  
e she’dof her spread out on the table as I devoured her deliciously sugary c  
ual andmy mouth watering to taste her.

hed her Aderyn thought I was violent, malicious, and mean. I wasn’t, though

of the result of having her within grasp but never being able to have her  
one way I wanted her. If I lowered my guard with her, she'd turn  
hell. It's Having her hate me made it easier to feed on faceless women. Not  
sed the wasn't a possibility as the king of incubus demons. If I didn't fuck, the  
hunters would flow red with endless rivers of blood. Still, every woman I to  
want her lacking compared to Aderyn. I didn't care about them before or a  
/e can't slaked my eternal hunger on their soft bodies. Only one woman would  
ard and be enough for me, and she hated me.

ound us Aderyn had a damn good reason to hate me. I'd ensured she knew  
g on us faithless, uncaring prick because it fortified her hatred of me. If she knew  
y us fulfilled my mind from dusk until dawn, she'd want more than I could give.

Aderyn was the one thing I couldn't live without. She'd thought I'd give her  
power, the freedom she'd asked for, but I hadn't.

ry dogs I'd simply erected a much larger prison for her. The idea of not seeing  
her hadn't sat well with me, and not a day passed that I hadn't tracked her  
ough to and watched from the shadows. I'd seen her pain when she thought I  
n't care was looking. I had seen the tears flowing down her cheeks when she  
fe, I'm alone. In the forest, when she had gone mad. I had been there, standing  
outside the cave she'd chosen to slumber in, protecting her.

h know "I need to get back to her," I said as I rose from the couch. "I want to  
to stay on Cameron. If they sent him in after her, then more are  
ou this: behind."

ver, eat, "Isn't Vanessa showing up here in the next week?" Merikh asked  
images look of loathing. Neither of us liked the vindictive mafia princess who  
unt had been courting. Of course, she was a necessary means to an end.

"Fuck," I whispered. "Yeah, I'm sure she'll find an excuse to be here  
1. I waste to her father appearing. That's going to be a problem."

r in the “Make her jealous,” Merikh muttered. “Use it to your advantage on me. Vanessa to make Aderyn jealous, which will force her to remain near feeding to push the gold-digging princess away from you. We can’t have her e worldshit up, either. Vanessa wants your cock so goddamn bad she’d crawl t ok wasglass if you asked her to do so. So, use that shit to get Aderyn closer.”

fter I’d “It might end up pushing her farther away, which would evercounterproductive.” Turning over Merikh’s idea in my head, I consid

the ways it could go wrong. But there was nothing sexier than a I was aAderyn, either. Fuck, she was absolutely stunning in a jealous rage.

iew she “Considering she was shopping for companionship, not sure therive her.farther away you could push her, asshole. She’s been gone from the ven herfor fifty fucking years. We miss her too, Khaos. All of us,” Rue admitt

A soft, breathy whisper of sound escaped from the bedroom. It l ing hercock jerking with awareness of whom was in my bed as I moved r downdoorway. I gazed in at her lithe, womanly frame covered in only t no onesheet. Aderyn wasn’t just someone I wanted to fuck, she was the wor e’d feltmated with. The other half of my soul, which meant I’d burn down th g guardworld for her.

“We’re done for tonight,” I whispered, shedding the robe. Strolling he mento where she slumbered, I peered down at her delicate, womanly fi en’t far“Après tout ce temps, Aderyn, c’est toujours toi. Ce sera toujours t amour.”

. with a who I’d

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re prior



“Make her jealous,” Merikh muttered. “Use it to your advantage. Use Vanessa to make Aderyn jealous, which will force her to remain near enough to push the gold-digging princess away from you. We can’t have her fucking shit up, either. Vanessa wants your cock so goddamn bad she’d crawl through glass if you asked her to do so. So, use that shit to get Aderyn closer.”

“It might end up pushing her farther away, which would be counterproductive.” Turning over Merikh’s idea in my head, I considered all the ways it could go wrong. But there was nothing sexier than a jealous Aderyn, either. Fuck, she was absolutely stunning in a jealous rage.

“Considering she was shopping for companionship, not sure there’s any farther away you could push her, asshole. She’s been gone from the family for fifty fucking years. We miss her too, Khaos. All of us,” Rue admitted.

A soft, breathy whisper of sound escaped from the bedroom. It had my cock jerking with awareness of whom was in my bed as I moved to the doorway. I gazed in at her lithe, womanly frame covered in only the thin sheet. Aderyn wasn’t just someone I wanted to fuck, she was the woman I’d mated with. The other half of my soul, which meant I’d burn down the entire world for her.

“We’re done for tonight,” I whispered, shedding the robe. Strolling closer to where she slumbered, I peered down at her delicate, womanly features. “Après tout ce temps, Aderyn, c’est toujours toi. Ce sera toujours toi, mon amour.”

# CHAPTER NINE

## ADERYN

THE WEIGHT HOLDING ME down caused a cold sweat to trickle down my spine. Prying one eye open, I searched the strange room I'd woken in. Wallpaper covered the walls in a calming shade of slate gray. Crown molding lined the ceiling around the walls, which were covered in portraits of me. In each one, I was in a risqué pose with lace petticoats. Unlike the ones at the club, these didn't shield my face. The artist had captured another side of me, apparently. Because in each image, I looked smitten by the person capturing it.

One in particular was from New Orleans, where I'd brazenly worn a corset and top. I'd finished the look off with underskirts of varying shades of rainbow. I had done my hair in an intricate updo, but instead of pins holding them in place, we'd used thin slices of material to hold the dark locks in place. Damaris had applied kohl to my eyes, and then rouge to my full, plump lips. I'd felt beautiful in the crazy, very risqué outfit. For that time, it was scandalizing to wear underclothes in sight of anyone else.

My boldness didn't impress Khaos. He'd told me to sit down in a chair, and then summoned an artist to paint my image. He'd damn near thr

canvas at me, and told me how pathetically desperate I'd looked once the artist had finished painting my image. I'd taken the portrait and fled the hall, choosing to hide within my chamber for days sulking. But he'd come back. Why? To remind himself how pathetic I'd been back then?

Dismissing the memory, I examined the opulent chandeliers, which glittered with rainbow prisms all over the room. Thousands of tiny sparkling crystals dangled from silver bars lining the ceiling. It almost made them look like droplets of rain from beneath them. While masculine, it held a few hints of a softer undertone with the white chesterfield lounge and settee against the wall.

Strong arms tightened around me, which caused my body to heat as if a fire had been played on my lips. It had been a very long time since I'd slept in his bed. His even breathing against my neck as he nuzzled it told me he was still slumbering. Closing my eyes, I remembered how it felt to be invited to his bed the few times he'd taken me there without needing to force me. He had always held me through the night on those occasions, as if he truly cared for me above all else.

I'd once snuck into his room naked, fully intending to beg him to fuck me. Sitting on his giant four-poster bed, I had waited for him in nothing more than the skin I'd been born with. The moment his footsteps approached, I had begun losing my confidence and had almost worked myself into a full-blown panic attack. It was the feminine laughter, which sent me flying from the room toward the small, hidden alcove which held a cage he'd often made me sleep in within.

For hours, I'd been forced to watch as he fucked Josephina senseless. When he had finished, they'd lain together laughing and talking about things that happened in Storyville, which was the red-light district of New Orleans. As Nasir

nce the hours ravishing every inch of her perfect, ivory-colored flesh, she'd  
ie main shit about me being a selfish child who craved his attention. The treat  
kept it. bitch had discussed how pathetically desperate I was to pine over a m  
loathed me as much as she did. Khaos hadn't corrected her, which I  
which more than anything he'd physically done to me. I'd cried, which was p  
arkling admittedly. But I'd considered her a friend even though I'd known bet  
m look to trust anyone.

eminine "You're adorable when you pretend to sleep," he murmured in a  
farthest rasp.

"As are you, Nasir."

a smile "You think I'm adorable?"

<Khaos's "As adorable as a hellhound can be, I guess," I returned in a sharp, i  
was still manner. Memories had a way of making me angry, but it was my drea  
into his he should've been worried about the most. Upon waking from one, I'  
Khaos contemplated executing him for what he'd done to me within th  
easured mattered little if it was real or not.

Without warning, Khaos rolled me onto my back, pressing his body  
ick me. mine to hold me in place. Staring down at me, he growled from deep  
g more chest, rubbing his erection against my belly. A soft whimper slid free l  
d, I had could prevent it from escaping. Nasir rubbed his thickening cock agai  
l-blown showing me how deeply within my body it would be if he fucked me.

the bed "You're rather vulnerable right now, pretty slut."

ie sleep "I am not your slut, brat, or anything anymore. How about you sti  
my name?"

s. After "How about we fight to determine who is in charge? Winner gets  
around the loser anything he wants to call her."

ir spent "It's rather presumptuous of you to assume you'd win, Nasir. I'm

I talked only one who is vulnerable right now,” I purred, knowing that if I lifted my knee, he’d be screaming like a bitch.

His hands gripped my wrists, and he rolled me on top of him before he actually agreed. It caused his dick to slide through the swollen, wet folds of my sex. A shudder of need rushed through me as I fought to free myself from his vise-like grip.

“Come on, fight me, slut,” he murmured without the normal sting he usually attached to the degrading term. Lowering my lips, I jutted my tongue out, sliding it along the seam of his mouth. He rumbled from the sly tactic but opened his mouth, allowing me entrance. I was uncertain what I’d been thinking, but my kiss turned ravenous as I rocked against his thick, hard length. The delectable kiss went on, the more feverish my body became against his. Fluttering butterflies danced in my abdomen as he moaned against my lips.

Khaos’s earthy scent of bergamot, whiskey, and smoke drugged my senses. His hands slid down my body to grip my hips, using them to force me harder against his magnificent cock. Our tongues dueled, licking, sucking, and devouring one another until I no longer knew whose air fed my lungs. He kissed me like I was his world, which confused and left me speechless above him. Breaking the kiss, I sucked air into my lungs greedily against me, battling to regain brain function. Before I could think better of it, I leaned closer for more.

He pushed me from his mouth with one hand gripping my throat while the other continued directing my hips. Rocking against his dick, I keened as his blistering mouth clamped down on one strawberry-colored tip. Pulling away, he blew warm air over my nipple teasingly. The scraping of his teeth against my tender flesh sent a pulse throbbing in my clitoris. A ball of liquid heat rolled in my abdomen as he ensured my clit had friction with each pass.

fted mysilken cock. Kissing his way through the valley between them, he l  
the other with the same attention. Sucking it deep in his mouth, he cl  
fore I'dwickedly as I cried out, so close to reaching for the peak of pleasu  
folds ofslippery center forced me up farther, which had his thick, rounded tip p  
y handsagainst my opening.

Khaos's hand pushed and pulled my hips, which had his tip thrusti  
e addedmy body. My eyes opened with wonder as I felt him stretchi  
lickingdeliciously. A gasp burst from my lips as he released my breast, swea  
ned hishe shoved me away from him with enough force that I ended up t  
but theover the end of the bed. Blinking up at the shimmering ceiling, I felt  
per theembarrassment and confusion scalding my eyes.

egan in Lifting, I stared at him as he peered back with wide, horrified eyes.

the fuck is your problem?" I demanded through the quivering of my  
senses.made my words come out soft and broken.

my body "I told you long ago, slut. You're not worth fucking." Khaos rolle  
tasting,edge of the bed and bowed his head briefly. Snorting loudly, he re  
oxygen.sauntered into the bathroom.

pinning The moment I made it to my feet, I ripped the sheet free from his l  
y whileentered the suite's large front room. I found my purse, but nothing el  
movedclothing, no shoes—and headed back to the bedroom. The closet

much help, either, because an assorted array of sex toys were hangir  
hile thethe hooks. So, I wrapped the sheet around me and used a length of ro  
l as hisbelt to secure it.

g back, I didn't wait around for him to remind me how worthless I was  
over theRushing toward the entrance, I yanked open the door and dashed do  
formedshort hallway to the elevators. Pushing the button, I heard the hu  
ver hiscamera turning and glared at it with silent warning. The elevator do

avished apart, which had me entering them before they'd even fully opened. S  
rucked the button for the main level, I exhaled a shaky whimper of relief  
ire. My closed, and it began moving.

pushing The ding sounded, and I bailed from the elevator, stepping off  
buzzing room filled with activity. What the fuck? Didn't these asshole  
ng into sleep? A man's shocked, rounded eyes slid over the sheet I had  
ng me wrapped around my body before he chuckled. The whistle left his lip  
ring as a woman beside him gripped his chin, forcing his attention back on her  
oppling burned my cheeks as others began noticing me while I made my way  
tears of the staircase leading outside.

Once I was clear of the unknown bouncers who'd laughed outright  
." What outfit, I released the sob I'd been fighting to keep in. Tears swam  
lips. It vision as I winced from the rocks and gravel that bit into the soles of  
in the parking lot. When I reached my vehicle, I opened the door and  
d to the inside. How the hell had I let this shit happen? I knew better than anyo  
ose and heartless the devil was. Yet, every fucking time, I fell for his charm.

I dug through my purse for the keys but discovered Khaos had taken  
ed and out. Screaming in frustration, I slapped the steering wheel repeat  
se—no knock sounded at my window, which caused me to jump as my eyes  
wasn't the asshole who'd thrown me from his bed like trash. Reaching  
ng from handle, I rolled down the window while offering him a withering  
pe as a Dangling in his fingers were my keys.

"Give me my keys."

again. "Get the fuck out of the car. What the fuck are you wearing—is t  
own the sheet?" Nasir asked softly. "Bloody hell."

m of a "I am not getting out of this car. I want my keys, Khaos. Give them  
ors slid now."

tabbing “Oh, you’re not, huh?” he asked with a dangerous look simmering as theyangry, cyan depths.

“No—what the hell?” I demanded, as he yanked the door open.

into a Once it was opened, he snatched my purse from my lap before haul  
les everout of the car and over his broad shoulder.

quickly “What the hell are you fucking doing?” I shrieked as people looked  
s as the “What am I doing? I’m doing whatever the fuck I want.” The sound  
er. Heatdoor slamming closed only drew more attention. It probably didn’t h  
towardhe was only in a pair of lounge pants. “You left my penthouse in a  
sheet?”

t at my “I wouldn’t have had to use your sheet if you’d not hidden my clo  
in mysulked.

my feet “I fucking burned the dress, Aderyn. Sprayed gasoline on it, then v  
nd slidit fucking burn,” he informed smugly.

ne how “Why the hell would you do that? It was just a dress!”

“Nothing is ever *just* anything when you wear it.” His words left me  
n themtrying to figure out if he’d just insulted me, or if it had been a comp  
edly. A “That tiny scrap of fabric was a dick-me-down-daddy dress. I get that  
flew todaddy issues, but I’m not your fucking daddy. I am your fucking kin  
for thegirl.”

glower. “You didn’t think I was little a few moments ago when I was grin  
your—hey, Merikh,” I chirped as he appeared in front of me, or tech  
behind me.

that my “Hey, little bird. Nice toga.”

“Isn’t it? I think it is like a four-hundred thread count?” I returned.

to me, “Six-hundred,” Nasir growled. At his comment, I rolled my eyes  
rope threatened to give and award all the onlookers an eyeful. Pausi



g in his he had some sixth sense about my plight, he chuckled. “Merikh, fucking rope.”

Merikh’s emerald-colored eyes held mine as he closed the c  
ling me between us. Reaching around to my back with his face near enough t  
that I could kiss him if I’d wanted to, he held the rope together.

at us. “It’s a hands-on deal, Nasir. She didn’t tighten the rope enough to  
l of my up in this position,” Merikh said with laughter filling his eyes.

elp that “Indeed,” he snapped as Rue and Ryat laughed outright. “Sor  
fucking funny, gentlemen?” At his harshly asked question, the laughte  
intensified.

thes,” I “Just watching the show, brother. It’s like old times this morning  
called out as we marched past him. Stabbing the button once he reac  
atched elevator, Nasir made an annoyed sound as we waited for it to open.

The moment the doors separated, Damaris’s confused voice spok  
within them. “What in the hell?”

e silent, “Lovely day, isn’t it?” Merikh asked before releasing his hold to st  
oliment and off the elevator. “Be a doll, Damaris. Don’t let anyone else c  
you got they’ve exited the car? Aderyn’s toga is experiencing a malfunction.”

g, little “Sure,” she muttered before hitting the button for the top floor. “Ei  
your time here, Aderyn?” she asked when the silence became smotheri

ding on “Not entirely. In fact, I was just leaving, but Khaos is being a pig-  
mically barbarian,” I admitted. “I hadn’t actually planned on staying, b  
Neanderthal amended the contract last night. It would seem I forg  
powerful the binding of it can be. It forced me to remain here w  
throughout the night, unfortunately for me.”

as the “Pesky thing that, hmm?”

ng as if “Aderyn had a date last night, Damaris,” Khaos informed offha

fix the “For companionship, or so she claimed. Tell me, when she arrived, do you think her wardrobe screamed ‘I’m lonely’, or ‘fuck me over the hood’?”

to mine “Oh, my,” she squeaked as she rubbed the back of her neck.

“It’s not rocket science, Miss Paige.”

keep it “Indeed, it isn’t. I think she looked lovely, but the dress was meant to ensnare the eye. She did, however, come to see *you* first, Nasir. I do nothing intended to make it to any date she may have told you about.” Damaris only gave me a pitying look before glaring at the numbers above the doors as if it would make the elevator move faster. As it came to a stop, she stepped in first, “Ryatus, blocking the entrance. The moment the doors opened, laughter spilled out onto the outside until they sought entrance. “Catch the next one, gentlemen.”

“I see you’ve finally taken possession of your property, Nasir,” Aric’s voice stated with amusement burning within it.

“She’s a mother fucking track star when she gets pissy, but I had to help her get backhanded. Enjoy your day at the spa, Aric,” he returned as the doors closed behind him until “Your property?” I snorted.

“Mine. Period. The sooner you get it through your stubborn, thick-headed skull, the easier our relationship would be on you.”

ng. “It isn’t a relationship. The sooner you get *that* through your thick-headed skull, the easier it’ll be for you to understand why I won’t ever bow to you.”

out this “You bowed for me in my shower, then in my bed three times before we were grinding on my cock this morning, *brat*.”

ith him “You see? He is insufferable!” I groaned. “Just because I like to ride your face doesn’t mean I intend to place my saddle there permanently! I’ve actually orgasmed in fifty fucking years, Nasir. You’re damn right I’m not kidding.”

did you taking every orgasm you were handing out. But once shit got too deep of you threw me from the bed!”

“Fifty years? You’ve not come in *fifty* years?” Damaris asked in which was filled with horrified shock. “Bloody hell. Did you taste cunt when you were tongue-deep in her honey-crypt? Because, darling, want to years? It’s a poor, dead pussy. Fuck, did you throw a proper funeral but she we neglected thing?” Her hand was on her bosom as she actually was Damaris sent a reply.

It would “No.” I snorted.

front of “Her pussy’s like fine wine, apparently. It’s merely gotten sweet and rounded. Though, I’m rather certain I felt a new hymen as I fingered and her tight, needy cunt.”

Aricin’s Heat singed my cheeks as Damaris snickered. “Don’t blush, dear, only encouraging the iniquitous, rakish knob. Besides, I’d have ridden her than just his tongue if it had been I who’d forgone orgasms for such a long time.” As the elevators announced our arrival, Damaris patted my “You have been missed, sweetest one. By all of us.”

fucking “Speak for yourself,” Khaos muttered as he exited the elevator and sauntered down the hallway. Lifting my head, I smiled sadly at Damaris as she watched us with an uneasy look in her soft, kind blue eyes. Her lifted hand in a small wave was the last glimpse I got of her before Khaos opened the penthouse door closed behind us. “Now, are you going to behave, or do I need to bend you over my knee and remind you why it’s unheeding of you to disrespect me as you just did?”

I hadn’t “Disrespect you? I was not the one who threw you off me and then I was you that you weren’t good enough for my dick! I was just doing us solid and beating feet before shit got more awkward.” It was a lie, of course.

ep, you “You ran through my fine establishment in a fucking sheet!”

“Fine establishment? This establishment is merely the nine rings a tone, Nasir. Drugs, guns, money laundering, sex, whatever the king would peddle, it’s all here at his fingertips. I wouldn’t call your castle at fifty establishment,” I muttered, holding up the sheet.

for the “How the fuck do you know what I have here?” he asked as his door chirped from the other room. “I asked you a fucking question. I expect an answer.” Another cell phone began ringing from the kitchen. Then one from a basket on the small shelf in the entry. “Fucking hell,” he said with “Don’t move.”

I licked Sauntering into the other room, he answered one of the many phones. The moment he did, the others ceased their endless ring. As you’re tiptoeing deeper into the suite, I made my way to the large sitting area and sat in the chase lounge, drawing my feet up beneath me. The sound of a lengthy shattering in the other room a moment before Nasir’s growl reverberated throughout the suite, caused me to jerk toward the door he’d vanished through.

“What the fuck do you mean? It didn’t just vanish. It’s an entire room and a wheeler, Merikh. They don’t just fucking vanish into thin air. It is Nasir, whom many shipments that has gone missing this week. That’s a fucking problem for me. My lips curled into a victorious grin as I listened. The sound of his feet kicked near the doorway drained all emotion from my face. “No, get people out of there and have them fucking find my shit. Call the sheriff and state patrol to remind them I’m not paying them to sit around on their thumbs. No, I’ll be down stairs once I’ve showered and dealt with Aderyn.” Hanging his head, he stepped out of the other room and leaned against it, folding his arms across both his chest.

course. “Problems?” I asked softly, with curiosity burning in my stare.

“Nothing I can’t handle,” he informed carefully. “Conrad has called me nineteen times this morning.”

“Cameron?” At my question, his lips jerked up at the corners.

“Whatever the asshole’s name is, it’s irrelevant. I sent him photos of my naked body beside mine this morning when he continued phoning me. Obviously, he didn’t get the message to stop calling, so I answered it as if I expected you were sleeping beside me. He had the audacity to call me a liar. Do you *believe* that? He told me you’d been talking to him for months and that you’d sent him many pictures of yourself.”

The hair on my nape rose as I shrugged. “I sent him pictures of my naked body. I didn’t lie to you about Cameron or my intentions with him.”

“No? Isn’t this your lovely body?” he held up my phone, which showed a picture of me sleeping on the screen. Silently, I rose, grasping the shoulder of my robe and moved toward him. My eyes rounded as my lips parted in horror. I was in bed naked, sleeping.

“What the actual fuck?” I whispered, horrified Cameron would have a photo inside my house. “He was inside my house. The wards would’ve kept him out if he’d been inside my house.” My forehead wrinkled as my confusion turned into panic. Peering up into murderous eyes, I blanched. “I will not allow him inside my home, Khaos. I swear it to you. No men have ever entered my domain since I’ve lived there. Not even to fix shit if it broke. You control the house, Khaos. I will agree to the rules yourself.”

“Yet this asshole has a picture of you naked in your fucking bed. It’s not like he photoshopped the picture either. So, you want to tell me how the fuck he got in?” he snarled as he set the phone down and crossed his heavily tattooed arm over his chest.

“I-I-I don’t have an explanation for you.” I didn’t. I hadn’t even

and your Cameron many personal things about me. He shouldn't have had my address. I'd never given him my home address, and I tied my number to the Witchery, not my home. "Why would he be inside my house as I sleep? The fine sheen of sweat broke out over my flesh as the chill ran down my spine. "I put clothes for you to wear in the bathroom. Change, go to your room and return here once you've finished work for the night. Tomorrow, I'll have the guys over to check the locks, protection barriers, and add some state-of-the-art equipment to monitor your house."

"I don't need you to protect me. I've been doing a fine job of it myself." "Yeah, sure. That's why some fucking creep off the internet has posted your naked body, right? Stop being stupid, Aderyn. I wasn't asking for permission. I'll see you tonight. If you're not here when I return, I'll meet you as I'm being carried in on my fucking shoulder again. I liked how you felt in my bed, anyway. You can use my shower if you wish. I sent Rue with you to grab Satan. He'll transport him to my estate in the country. Since you'll be there Wednesday, you'll be there soon enough that he won't miss you've gone long." Boiling with his pompous, arrogant smile playing on his delinquent lips, I hissed. "It isn't up for argument. I have shit to handle. My house is not safe right now, which means you're staying here with me." Leaning forward, he kissed me soundly on the lips before pulling away. "I'll see you tonight, darling."

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# CHAPTER TEN

THE BAD WITCHERY WAS my baby. I'd put in sweat, tears, and blood to get the store up and running, and I'd done it without any help. From the street, you could see the crimson neon sign, which had the name and symbols of hexagrams. Fresh paint covered the window frame and the storefront relaunch I had been planning to do once summer arrived.

The moment I entered, the fresh scent of sage, lemonade, and lavender drifted to my nose, enticingly fresh, and I smiled at the jingle of bells above the door. On the right, there was a bevy of herbs in twine, hanging from their stems to dry. To the left, crystals were sitting in a bed of sea salt to cleanse and recharge. And books lined the shelves along the back wall: Grimoires, occultism, voodoo. You name it. We had it.

The heels Khaos had left out for me to wear, clicked as I made my way deeper into the main room. It had been a long time since Khaos had laid out my clothing, but I wasn't opposed to his expensive taste in wardrobe. He had laid out a crimson push-up bustier top, which made my less-than-perfect cleavage appear enticing, and paired it with the striped, slate-gray suit



and high-waisted slacks. Honestly, I looked like I should be in a meeting with a *Fortune 500* company instead of an apothecary shop.

“You’re late,” Mabel called as she wiped her hands on the apron she had worn since she was a child. “You’ve never been late before.” Her soft hazel eyes slid over my shoulder before settling on my face. “How did it go with Cameron?”

“It didn’t,” I muttered while sliding my keycard into the hidden slot behind the bookshelves. “Come, Mabel.”

“This can’t be good,” she worried. “Did I do something wrong?”

“Of course you didn’t. I am not firing you, Mabel. I am promoting you,” I stated as we began climbing the stairs to the chamber above. “Nasir has amended the contract.”

“Oh no,” she whispered with concern sparkling in her eyes. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine, actually. It was weird. Really weird. Unlike his normal frosty demeanor, Nasir was kind and tender for the most part. Of course, don’t assume he’ll remain that way for long.” Placing my hand on the wall where the altar was, I whispered the incantation for it to appear.

“What did he amend, *ma chérie*?”

“I’ll be spending the weekends with him until I can get him to change his terms. So, if you accept the promotion, you’ll be taking over my weekly duties. What do you say?” I asked, hating the anxiousness that soured my stomach. I had no idea what I’d do if she said no.

“I can’t do the spells, incantations, or make the tonics that need a powerful witch to create them. Honestly, you should’ve fired me eons ago when I discovered I held very little magic in my old, weary bones.”

“You didn’t get the job for being Harry Potter, Mabel. You got it because you didn’t shy away from the labels the town placed on me. Few were

board to ignore Nasir's warning to steer clear of me, but you did so." She  
before shrugging her delicate shoulders. Mabel was Creole and one  
of my oldest, dearest friends. Plus, I loved her bluntness.

My outfit I smiled as she fidgeted with her vibrant blue wrap-around dress,  
enhanced her ample cleavage. "While you think about it, tell me  
if you can do anything to get rid of that chicory I smell?"

"I figured that, if you were late, it would not be good news you brought  
So, I made your favorite to sweeten you up." Flipping her blackish-blond hair  
over her shoulder, she smiled as she adjusted the canary yellow headscarf.  
Nasir has "Besides, you're much more pleasant to deal with once you've had  
coffee."

Are you "This is why I love you, Mabel." Heading toward the closet, I opened  
the door and winced at the antique wedding gown, covered in blood that Khaos had  
proudly cold-ripped off me before he'd fucked my throat in front of Maxwell. I'd  
of course, I'd worn it for all these years as a reminder of what, and who, he was. As a promise  
to myself to topple his empire. "Seal the wards, Mabel."

Her chuckle touched my ears as she closed the door to the hidden underground  
and then activated the wards that would prevent anyone or anything from  
overhearing what we said. Studying her bronzed complexion in the mirror  
over the weekend, the runes, I noted she had gotten more sun than usual today. Aimed  
my golden-speckled hazel eyes toward me, she smirked and joined me  
at the doorway to the closet. Together, we walked through it into the lab. Computers  
and actual screens were lit up with images of Khaos's clubs, warehouses, and residences  
scattered throughout the states.

"The men you spelled to work for us seized two truckloads of drugs that  
we've delivered them to the Russian D'yavol in Las Vegas, as promised. They're  
willing not to enroute to the location to be stored. The trucks we're tracking are

wincereached the locations where the other spelled participants will see of myinventory and then ditch the rigs. None of the drivers or men will be recall what happened to them or what they've done."

, which I smiled wickedly at the report. There was still a lot more to do b e that'scould successfully topple Nasir's empire on his head.

"Khaos didn't seem happy about his shit going missing. That me ight in.will be upping security on the rigs. So, after this run, we'll pull bac lue hairthings cool down again. Plus, he apparently has the local sheriff and t adband.patrol in his pocket. The Gathering of Lords will bring in heads id yoursyndicate. They'll vie for his attention, and most will piss themselve chance to join him. He's got something big brewing, which can't be g oned itus. The Norwegians are here to back him and his men up. Not that aos hadneeds it. He is also intending to wed the daughter of the La Cosa Nostr . kept it "He is engaged? Aderyn, I'm so sorry."

nise I'd Tears pricked my eyes, but I blinked them away. "Don't be. I'd ne up with him. He and I were always a losing game, which was overp pstairs,Did it make it hurt less? No. I'd always thought he'd eventually ig fromworth, but he hadn't. Khaos hadn't ever fucked me, nor would h light ofmornning had been the closest I'd ever come to having him, and he'd ing herthrown me off his magnificent cock like trash.

e at the "You've been in love with him since the moment you met the ba mputerknow you and have held you through the nightmares and pain he's idencesyou. Knowing he's willingly chosen to wed another is hurting yo won't convince me otherwise."

gs, then Her skinny arms wrapped around me as I awkwardly hugged her b They'relove you, Mabel. But right now, I need to focus on bringing his empir haven'taround his head. He can marry the blonde bombshell, but she isn't get

ize the empire I helped him build. I may have been out of the fold for the last  
able to years, but I have been a part of it since the 1600s. Khaos thinks I'm we

I've spent the past fifty years working to put holes in his world. It is  
before I time to watch it topple."

"And he will not be any wiser about who destroyed it, either. You  
means he with him last night when they seized all three trucks."

ck until "Indeed, I was," I concurred as a smug smile played on my lips.

he state I'd planned on being in his domain when the first truck was stolen

of the removed the entire crew and sent them walking back toward Tophe

as for as we'd finished emptying the truck of guns, drugs, and state-of

ood for recording equipment, the men were spelled to deliver it to the stora

: Khaos facility I'd purchased using a shell company, owned by a differen

a." company, that was owned by yet another shell company that

wonderful gentleman who died thirty years ago had owned.

ver end "He intends for me to return to the club tonight. I've no intention o

played." so, but on Friday evening at five, I will be at his estate. I intend t

see my supplies to brew everything I'd have brewed here, there. Can you prep

e. This bottles, herbs, crystals, moon water, and other ingredients if I give

all but detailed list? I need to go home and see what they've done to my hous

Cameron has a picture of me naked in my bed. I've never told h

istard. I address, let alone invited him inside, so at some point today, I need to

caused out how that happened."

u. You Arabella had been using a dating site, which I had joined after her

I'd spent countless weeks trying to find her assailant, but the nun

ack. "Isleazy men on the app made it difficult. I'd actually met Cameron on t

e down which had blindsided me with how much we'd actually had in comm

ting the hunt for Arabella's date rapist had gone awry from there. No one t

ast fiftybait I'd laid out for them, but I'd come away with Cameron. He'd so  
ak, butmatched me one hundred percent for likes, dislikes, and had seemed  
almostgenuinely good guy. Huge mistake, obviously. But then, most people  
see only the good in people. I wasn't any different.

ou were Cameron had fooled me since I'd been on edge about the site to sta  
I hadn't expected him to be some peeping Tom, or pervert. You'c  
since I'd actually been looking for one, I'd have noticed the red flags.

1. They "How the fuck did he accomplish that?" she demanded in outrage.  
t. Oncehouse is a veritable safe house."

h-the-art "I'm aware," I stated as I leaned forward and typed in the route  
ge unittrucks leaving the countryside. "Khaos mentioned more shipments cou  
nt shellfor the gathering. I need to know what supplies he is bringing in to ge  
a veryof him. Plus, we need to ensure they do not reach Tophet." Firin  
message on the computer to the D'yavol of Vegas, I waited for his repl

f doing A: Report, D'yavol.

to pack D'yavol: You know, A, this would be much easier if I knew who t  
oare theyou were. I might not take offense to your orders if I knew I could trust  
e you a A: Do you honestly think I care if you trust me? You either want t  
e. Plus,with me, or you don't. I've made you a fuck ton of money and haven't  
iim myfor dick in return. Have I?

o figure D'yavol: I have more money than I can spend in one lifetime.  
friends? Those I value much more than mysterious benefactors.

attack. A: I'm not your benefactor. I am your employer. You work for me  
nber ofyou want me to tell Daddy how naughty you've been? I'm sure he'd  
he app,learn how you've been lining your pockets with his cash.

on. The D'yavol: If it helps you sleep at night to think you're in control  
ook thedevil, who am I to say otherwise?

mehow A: Keep fucking around, and you will find out I'm worse than any I like you've encountered before. Where the fuck is the information, that I tried to you for?

D'yavol: The trucks were intercepted before they hit the interstate with, promised. I'm heading there now. My men are already there guarding I think, trucks. I am a very busy man, A. You're not the only one issuing orders this week. My father is in town for some event up north.

. "Your Biting my lip, I scanned the screen with Khaos's shipment logs. Something wasn't right because there was definitely a large shipment en route to the from Las Vegas. Two trucks had left Vegas heading up Interstate 15 coming in Nevada to the Rocky Mountains. Three had vanished into the desert, but ahead had made it past D'yavol's men. That was a problem. If they did not hang off a third truck, then who did?

ly. A: You're sure they didn't intercept three trucks?

D'yavol: Positive. I can send you the picture of the trucks if you need the fuck to once I've reached their location. I'm about to head north with my car to you. for some Gathering of Lords or some shit, which means my time working for you ends after this job. I am done.

't asked A: Fine. Send me the coordinates for the trucks, then send confirmation of possession once you get there.

. Loyal D'yavol: As you wish. It has been pleasure doing business with you.

Once D'yavol sent me the coordinates, I forwarded them to MS-13. I was unless pitted both warring factions against one another, intending to have them love to each other out for me. If they stuck to the plan, they'd assume the other was me double-crossing them. Honestly, they were all cold-blooded murderers who made most of their money trafficking children in the States. I would not miss them. Neither would anyone else.

my devil MS-13: You're late.

I asked C: I'm never late, gentlemen. I told you I'd be tracking shipments for

All three deliveries will be at the meeting place in the Mohave. I expect to arrive at this time. Don't be late. You know I hate it when you fuck around with things. MS-13: Careful, gringo. We outnumber you, remember? You must remember that you can be trusted. Though, the cargo you've offered for this deal intrigued me. The heads-up about the mafia intending to sabotage our operation was welcomed. We've come ready for their treachery and theft of our shipments.

C: I promised to prove my loyalty, didn't I? The mafia is trying to take over the desert but one everyone else out of the area. Make sure you teach them the desert belongs to no one but us.

MS-13: I'll send them your best right after we blow their heads off and feed them to the vultures.

"You're having them fight in the desert?" Mabel asked softly, chuckling as I clicked out of the messaging system on the dark view of the desert. "You're one cold-blooded bitch, *ma chérie*."

I winked at her. "I've already alerted the Feds to a potential brother-in-law of exploiting children that MS-13 stole from Mexico on their way north. There is an agent waiting for me to contact him."

A. "You can't be a saint and become the Queen of Kings, Aderyn. You can't have it both ways." Her warning caused my lips to thin as I considered her words.

"I'm a sinner and a saint, baby girl. I sold my halo long ago for money, power, blooded heels, and liquor. It's too late to get it back now."

I punched a button on the timer that sat next to the computer, then I typed the address of the brothel to my contact in the FBI. Thankfully, I didn't

wait long for a reply.

for you. Agent Brodie: I still don't understand why you're helping us if you expect cash want credit for this takedown. Just give me a name, C.

me. C: I don't care for fame. Plus, you think I'm involved and want to let it prove along with the others, and I have no interest in visiting your field office. Deal has not stupid, Agent Brodie. Now, be a good boy and go save the babies. My venture will be busy with the Russians who've taken over Vegas later today. Our Mohave is about to be a cemetery for both. Good luck, Brodie. Wear a mask and don't be a fucking hero.

to push As soon as the message read as delivered, I glanced at the timer, pushing the buttons to record to the computer, and frowned. Mabel wore a similar look of concern.

"I used a VPN to ping our location all over Europe. I'm not worried about the Feds or mafias. Khaos, on the other hand, he doesn't trust me.

A slight distrust against him since the moment he took possession of me, he's been on me." I had taken precautions to set up other drug dealers, and my website reaching for Khaos's position in the syndicate to cover my tracks, but they still look at me for it, which meant I had to be very careful.

That is "They won't be able to track us with the VPN on, Mabel," I confirmed. There ease her fears before I started pulling the hard drives from the computers.

Then I set them in the EMP box, made sure everything else was prepared, and you can't and hit the button that would scrub the drives completely. Mabel carried them from the box and slid them into the hidden folds of her skirts as I

worked installing new ones into the computers. I fired up the front windows, the horns, the event Khaos ever got his hands on them. Rare artifacts, rituals, talismans, and a dark magic spell filled the hardware.

sent the The bells jingling below had us both pausing in place. I sent my fingers have to drifting through the store until Merikh's cold, merciless magic hit



against mine, then I pulled it back. It only took a look to let Mabel know you don't need to head downstairs, and quietly, we stepped back through the door and into the altar room. I pulled the closet door closed before running my fingers over the outside, knowing it would appear nothing more than an empty closet if he were to look into it. Once I'd returned to the altar room, Mabel had gone downstairs, I set down the bag and began grabbing the herbs for the weekend.

I'd just added a handful of quartz when Merikh appeared in the doorway without making a sound.

"Little bird," he purred as his eyes slid over me. "I was sent to remember where you'd be spending tonight." Leaning against the doorframe, he snorted at my appearance since I hadn't seen him after the toga incident. "Everybody needs a ride?"

"I can drive myself, but thank you for checking," I replied. "Would you take these to his manor for me once I've finished packing them? I need what I need to finish the orders while under house arrest." A beeping sound from behind the wall, which almost caused my eyes to flicker toward it. Instead, I walked over to the large dehydrator oven and pushed a button for the tray to open. The vertical, thirty-two-tray commercial dehydrator saved me time if a spell called for peels or citrus slices.

"If it will make this easier on you," he purred as he crossed his arms. I got to scanning the machines I kept upstairs. Mostly, I used them to interfere with the equipment I knew Khaos used to keep tabs on me. At any given time, Khaos had three men watching me. One on my house, a second on my car, and then a third who followed me through town as I moved between locations. The sound of footsteps pricked my ears as Mabel reentered the room.

"See, that's why he's my favorite, Miss Caine," Mabel said. "The

now welikes you more than he cares to, *ma chérie.*” Merikh’s face didn’t resp  
e closetthe claim. “Lie all you like, Shadow, but you love her. It’s in your eye  
ing myyou gaze at her.” She grabbed her skirts before brushing past him to  
a junkbasket with freshly picked herbs on the table beside the altar. Once sh  
om andit down, she left as quickly as she’d appeared.

bags of “Is that true?” I asked boldly as I slowly inched closer. “Are you  
with me, Shadow?” I teased until those haunting emerald-green eyes  
hadowsto my lips, then rolled back up to collide with mine.

“If I was, what then, little bird?” He shoved off the doorframe and  
ind youdeeper into the room. My heartbeat began thundering against my ribs:  
me, hedrew in a deep breath of the spicy cologne he wore. Stopping before  
nt. “Dotilted his dark head as his palm cupped my cheek. “In another li  
right?”

u could Fuck it. If Nasir was getting married, why was I remaining faithfu  
They’rebloody bastard? Pushing up on my toes, I brushed my lips against his.  
startedjerked back as if I’d offended him.

vard it. “What the fuck are you doing, Aderyn?”

button “Kissing you, Merikh.” A war waged over his face as I leaned in  
hydratorforcing him to step back or kiss me. “Afraid you might like kissing me

“I’m not afraid of anything,” he snorted as my confidence crumbled  
s arms, Then he held his hand out for the bag I’d filled, and I gave it to him  
re withdrive myself to the club. Don’t bother acting like a gentleman. We bot  
n time,you’re not. There’s nothing gentle about you.” Though I’d never a  
y shop,seen him fucking anyone, I’d seen enough to know he was callus v  
n them.partners. Honestly, I didn’t know why I thought he’d be any differe  
me. “You can go, Merikh,” I whispered as shame drifted down n

his oneheating my neck. Moving to the crystals sealed on the shelves, I p

pond to some off them and then turned, only to stop abruptly when I found  
him standing directly behind me.

I dropped a “Close your fucking eyes,” he demanded in a raspy tone. I bit my  
tongue as curiosity churned through me. Really, I wanted to know what  
he intended to do, so I closed my eyes. His hand drifted over my cheek,  
brushing through the hair, which had come unbound, behind my ear. Heated breath fanned  
my lips as a shiver of wanton need sliced through me. Nasir scared me with  
his murderous rage. Merikh? Merikh actually terrified me because he exuded  
a sense of carnage. Where the others fucked their aggression out on whomever  
they came across, he bottled it up for his enemies. His lips drifted over mine  
without touching them, and I tilted my head back, hoping he’d give me  
something for my lifetime. “Kiss me, Merikh,” I pleaded with my lust on full display.

“He’d kill me, little bird,” he rasped before his lips connected with  
mine. The moment my tongue flicked against the seam of his lips, he stepped  
back. Merikh’s hand then left the room without looking back. Blinking in confusion, I held  
up my fingers to my lips, still tingling with the electrical pulses his tongue  
generated.

“What the fuck?” I whispered as images of him, and I played out inside  
my brain, images that suggested I’d once been with him instead of  
him. Impossible.

“I can’t,” Mabel asked from the doorway.

“No,” I lied, not wanting to explain myself. “He grabbed the bag and  
left me high and dry.”

“That one loves you, *ma chérie*. Mark my words. He is in love with  
you more deeply than you are in love with Nasir.”

“I don’t love Nasir,” I argued weakly.

“You don’t or you don’t want to? They are vastly different things.”

nd he doesn't ask us before pricking us with its spell. You should head out

Nasir arrives to determine why you're not at his feet, waiting for his  
bottom Wash the smell of the Shadow from your flesh before you go though  
what hereek of it now."

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doesn't ask us before pricking us with its spell. You should head out before Nasir arrives to determine why you're not at his feet, waiting for his orders. Wash the smell of the Shadow from your flesh before you go though. You reek of it now."

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# CHAPTER ELEVEN

SOMETHING WOKE ME FROM a dead sleep. Pushing up from the I'd faceplanted into earlier, after being unable to put down the newest *'Boneyard Tides'* from Amo Jones, I listened for the disturbance. A of thunder sounded overhead, before violet light lit up the blinds covering window inside my room. Dropping back down to the pillow, I groaned flipping onto my back, staring up at the colorful light display from Turkish lamp on my nightstand.

The last twenty-four hours had sucked, mostly. Admittedly, I'd felt emotions during them that I had in the last decade. It had been nice those I'd come to think of as family, but I couldn't go back. It would be the same as it had been before. Plus, I was currently planning to bring Khaos's kingdom.

Thunder clapped loudly, and I kicked off the comforter and stretched on the bed, whispering the spell for the oil burner to ignite as a dim spread around the room. Lifting my knees, I felt the cool air drifting through the thinly laced midnight-blue pajama shorts I'd thrown on after showing

Shutting out the sounds of the storm rolling through the valley, I discarded the memory of what had occurred today. Khaos had never been closer to fucking me than he'd been this morning. He'd fucking stretched me, almost come from the warmth of his cock pushing against my opening. It had been glorious until he'd ruined it all by tossing me away like trash that I couldn't discard fast enough.

Tears pricked my eyes when I remembered what he'd uttered before leaving the bedroom. To him, I'd never been good enough to fuck. He'd made me feel wanted and then told me I wasn't. It broke me down, it destroyed me, which was part of why staying away had been easier for me.

"You are a masochist, Aderyn. You never learn." My whisper echoed inside my head as another clap of thunder shook my room. Sitting up, I slid my legs over the side of the bed and then jerked as something fell toward me on my bed. I reached for whatever it was, but I paused when my fingers brushed over what felt like . . . *hair*?

Whispering a bevy of curses, I rose from the bed, staring at whatever had ended up in bed with me. The moment the lights turned on, the blood splattered from my face and a scream tore from my lungs. I was staring down at a severed head. Backing up from the grisly skull, I bumped into something hard and solid, which caused yet another shriek to tear from my lungs. My palm covered my mouth, forcing me to struggle in the arms of the assailant.

"You don't like my present?" Khaos whispered darkly against my ear. My fight died within me as anger replaced it. His grip on my wrist was immovable as he forced me back down on the bed. I twisted to try and get away from him, but he held me still with one hand and reached for the severed head with the other. The stench of death and the tang of blood assaulted my nostrils as panic rushed through me.

blew up “I thought you’d be more appreciative to finally meet your lover  
oser to flesh, per se?” His taunt caused my hackles to rise. “Don’t play co  
and I’d Conner was *dying* to meet you. You are being rude. Give him a kiss at  
s. It had he demanded, forcing my head to remain in place as he pushed the  
rash helips against mine. “What? No tongue? You are such a boring slut who  
cunt is not dripping to be plowed by cock.” Lifting off me, he laughed  
before Wiping my mouth to rid my lips of the blood he’d smeared on  
c. He’d released an angry cry. “You sick motherfucker!” My hand lashed out  
until it loud, jarring crack from my palm assaulting his cheek filled the room.  
me. The blood drained from my face as I realized what I’d done. Khaos  
l wordsturned back slowly, murder simmering in the endless cyan depths as fl  
ting up, gold burned within them. Stepping back, I looked for a way to escape l  
g rolled “You wouldn’t make it past me, Aderyn,” he warned in a cold,  
hen my tone.

“I wasn’t thinking.” My heart pounded against my ribcage. It th  
ver had harder than the thunder outside, which boomed as if fueled by Khaos  
drained Stepping back from him, I grew dizzy with the memories of the last  
vn at a had assaulted him.

nothing I’d slapped him repeatedly, and he’d let me. Right up until he’d  
ings. Amy wrists in one of his viselike hands, and then pushed me into the i  
ilant. bathwater within my chamber. He’d continually forced me bene  
ar. watery surface. He had done so until I’d damn near drowned. On  
ne was would he pull me from the water, and then repeated it once more until  
7 to get freed me to spew up endless amounts of dirty water.

for the My back hit the wall, forcing a cry of shock from my parted lips.  
f blood prowled forward with angry strides. As I moved from the wall, hi  
gripped my throat, forcing me back against it.



in the “Who the fuck do you think you are?” he demanded.  
y, slut. “Not your bitch,” I growled as I brought my knee up, landing a solid  
at least,” his balls. As he went down, I leaped over his prone body. A hand s  
lifeless wrapping around my ankle which caused me to land on the floor. I ba  
en your my hands up before faceplanting the plush carpet of my bedroom floor  
coldly. “That was foolish,” he hissed through clenched teeth. Fingers th  
them. I through my unbound hair, then wrenched my head back as he forced  
t as the with him. Tears stung my eyes as he twisted it to the side pa

“Obviously, I’ve been neglectful of you, or you wouldn’t think yo  
’s head capable of fighting me, you stupid bitch.”

ecks of Releasing my hair, he picked me up and slammed me onto the bed.  
him. rushed from my lungs as he pressed a knee against my lower back,  
lifeless me to cry out as he held me in place. His other hand yanked my shorts  
and his palm landed against my cheek with a deafening slap. I scream  
undered as pain shot up my spine. The other hand ripped the thin straps of r  
’s rage then forced it up until it sat around my throat. Fear shot through me  
t time I thought of being strangled with my pajama top.

Khaos forced it up farther, then as it covered my mouth, he yanked  
gripped using it as a gag to quiet my screams as he pummeled my ass. He c  
cy-coldspanking my ass, since he was convinced it was the only way I ever  
ath the anything. By the time he stopped spanking me, my ass cheeks burned  
ly then fires of hell had scorched them.

he had Khaos still held my cries at bay with the material covering my mou  
fingers danced over the sore, abused flesh before one slid against the c  
Khaos between my cheeks. Stilling as he spit on it, I winced as one pushed de  
is palm my ass. The intrusion caused pain to rip through me as a new fear r

the last. It felt foreign and wrong as he pumped his finger to his knuc  
d hit tochuckled darkly.

hot up, “I should fuck this ass of yours until you’re begging for mercy, slut.  
rely got “Ahh,” I cried as I tried to argue against it.

“What was that? We couldn’t hear you, Aderyn. It sounded  
readedinvitation,” he stated hoarsely. “I bet you’d love being fucked in thi  
l me upass. Wouldn’t you?” I shook my head, even as he snorted with derisic  
infully.pushed his finger deeper until I was gasping as it stretched my ass  
u werepainful burning.

“I won’t ever beg you for anything again!” I snarled in a shaky, we  
The airreply.

forcing “If I wanted you to beg, you’d fucking beg.” I hadn’t asked for  
s down,since the day he’d murdered Maxwell inside the church we’d been sp  
ned outour vows in. There was no point in asking for mercy from Khaos. Th  
ny top,sociopath held none in his cold, apathetic heart.

e at the “I won’t,” I whirred through the swelling in my throat.

“No? You see, Conrad said the same thing. In the end? He begged  
it back,mercy. He did everything I wanted him to do before I cut his fucking h  
enjoyedwith a dull blade. And he didn’t dare put hands on me, Adery  
learnedmurmured as another finger pushed into my ass. “Fucking hell, this  
like the delightfully tight. Beg me to fuck it, slut.”

“Go fuck yourself, Khaos,” I cried as he forced them in deeper. It  
ith. Hispainful anymore, which bothered me more than I wanted to admit.  
openinghurt me, but I loved the pain, and he knew it. I enjoyed his harsh touc  
æp intoforced pleasure. I loved when he tossed me around . . . and broke me  
eplacedthen degraded me.

“Pain slut,” he growled as I pushed against his fingers. “Such a go

like and when you're forced to feel me invading your tight, needy asshole. I  
fuck this ass until it is screaming in agony around my dick. You  
"fucking bleed all over my dick, wouldn't you?"

"Fuck you," I parroted, unable to think beyond the pleasure I  
like an creating. I'd stopped pushing against the invading appendages, but  
s pretty noticed, he didn't indicate otherwise. "You'd have to fucking ram  
on, then asshole. It's the only way you'd get to have me." Without warn  
with a withdrew and stepped back.

I slid over the edge of the bed with my legs parted and my breasts  
akened sob built in my chest, but I refused to release it. Swallowing repea  
fought to gain control over my emotions. I'd worked too damn hard to  
mercy break me again. I had built myself up from the broken girl who'd wal  
peaking of the sanatorium on the day they'd rescued me. I wasn't about to  
e sadist destroy me again.

"Get dressed. Now," he demanded as he left the bedroom. "Now, A  
he shouted as he moved down the hallway. After a second, I pushed fi  
me for floor, wincing as my ass screamed in agony at his cruel touch.

read off Entering my closet, I let the sob escape as a whimper of sound, as I  
n," he down a pair of jeans and matched it with a dark tank top with *Big*  
ass so *Energy* across the front of it. At my dresser, I pulled out panties and  
which I threw on quickly. Then I shoved on some Chucks and pause  
wasn't enough to throw my hair into a messy bun before heading after him.

Khaos In my front room, he and his men lounged on my couches. Frow  
hes and finding them all seated, relaxed, and drinking my expensive wh  
e down, glowered. Khaos watched me as he leaned forward, then rose  
impressive six-foot-seven height.

ood girl "You're riding with me."

want to “I’m not leaving my house,” I whispered as I hugged my arms around my middle, hating the fact that they’d heard us fighting in my bedroom.

“I wasn’t asking you, Miss Caine. I was telling you.” Khaos stared at me with a warning burning in his chaotic eyes. Swallowing any argument if he might have had, I dutifully followed him outside to the white Land Rover where he opened the passenger door for me. His lips tugged into a smug grin when I winced as my ass met the seat. “Stop acting like you don’t like fighting me, brat. We both know you enjoy pain and being manhandled. If you weren’t such a pain slut, I wouldn’t use it against you.”

“Used to be, Khaos.”

“A wolf doesn’t lose his instinct to kill simply because he’s been kept caged. Once he is released back into his natural habitat, his instincts return.”

“What the fuck does that have to do with anything?” I demanded coldly.

“You’re a pain slut, Aderyn Caine. You get off on it, and just because you’ve been roughly thrown down and forced to come in a long time doesn’t mean you stopped liking it.”

“Go to hell.”

“Je suis en enfer tous les jours j’existe sans toi, mon amour,” he growled in French, forcing me to turn and eye him angrily.

“Where are we going?”

“There’s something I want to show you.”

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“Used to be, Khaos.”

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“What the fuck does that have to do with anything?” I demanded coldly.

“You’re a pain slut, Aderyn Caine. You get off on it, and just because you have not been roughly thrown down and forced to come in a long time, it does not mean you stopped liking it.”

“Go to hell.”

“Je suis en enfer tous les jours j’existe sans toi, mon amour,” he growled in French, forcing me to turn and eye him angrily.

“Where are we going?”

“There’s something I want to show you.”

# CHAPTER TWELVE

I REFUSED TO ENGAGE in conversation with Khaos as he drove toward town. On the outskirts, he pulled up to an old cabin which had a forest surrounding it. My blood pumped through my veins as apprehension coursed through me. Staying seated in the vehicle as he exited, I gazed at the forest outside, then jerked as he opened my door. Piling out of the seat, I felt my legs shaking as he grabbed my hand, threading our fingers together.

“Are you going to punish me?” I whispered through quivering lips. A low grunt was the only reply as he nodded to the men we passed. At the cabin, he forcefully pulled me through when my feet refused to budge.

Inside the cabin, my heart stopped beating. The walls were plastered with pictures of me. Every wall held different locations I had frequented. The scent of blood drifted through the room, but considering the other men, Cameron was slumped over in the corner, laying on images of my body, stood to reason why it would.

“Don’t worry, Caden can’t hurt you now,” Khaos whispered in my ear. His warm breath fanned my chilled skin beneath it, which caused a shiver

through me. “I think he wanted more than companionship. What do you think?”

I didn't reply because there were no words. Moving toward the wall, I pulled down a picture of myself sitting inside the shop. It was a year old, if not older. My hair was in a fishtail braid, which I'd been wearing after seeing Khaos out with another girl wearing her hair in a similar fashion.

There were thousands of images covering every surface inside the shop. Khaos yanked me with him, forcing me toward a doorway. I heard him pulling on his hand as I felt the magical hum wafting from the stairwell that was intended for us to enter.

“You're safe with me, Aderyn. I'm a supercilious bastard, but I've got no one else to hurt you.” Staring at him through condemning eyes, I exhaled. “Not when I was with you.” He didn't need to elaborate. We both knew the truth of how I'd ended up harmed when he wasn't near. He had many enemies, and they'd learned years ago to use those who Khaos hated for as their targets.

“Little bird,” Merikh whispered behind me, forcing my lashes against my cheek as his presence offered a soothing calmness to my nerves. “I cleared it myself earlier.”

Khaos glared at Merikh over my head, but when he pulled me forward, I followed behind him. The dank scent of mildew offended my nostrils as we entered what appeared to be an unfinished basement. The space was dimly lit, but I could make out the earthen floor and silver cage, which was in the corner. It hummed with magic that slithered over my flesh, warping the oppressive spell that enhanced the cage.

I didn't need either man to explain the logistics of it to me.

do you enhanced to nullify whoever was within it. Nausea churned through bile burned against the back of my throat. Images of my naked body lit farthest walls outside of the intended prison. Wards buzzed even though they at least been unraveled.

stopped “What the fuck is this?” I whispered thickly at what I’d almost allowed similar happen to me. I was an idiot for thinking Cameron was anything other than a psychopath. I trembled with the reality of it all, forced to see his depravity in the cabin, a full scale.

hesitated, “I think he may have wanted companionship, after all. But on a level, he unwilling basis than you had likely expected,” Khaos said without hesitation. His words.

allowed “Oh, my God,” I said as an image of Arabella on a bed, spread wide with eyes, he with a crude gag over her mouth, caught my eye. Her body was brutal and veiled both tiny cuts. There was something protruding from her vagina, which looked like it had tiny spikes on the outside. Her thighs were coated in bloody scars and bruises. Wide, oak-colored eyes stared at the photographer, haunted by terror.

to dust “This is what we found on his computer,” Khaos stated as he handed me a frayed printed piece of paper he’d pulled from his jacket.

Silently, I read what looked like a detailed report of my likes and dislikes and how hard this things people outside my inner circle wouldn’t have known unless someone had infiltrated it through treachery.

ce was He’d targeted Arabella because of me. I wanted to throw up at the thought of him using her to get to me. Above each itemized report, he had included a brief description of what he’d done to her.

Torture method: Fucked with a studded phallus.

It was Aderyn loves chicory coffee and talking about the French Quarter.



me as an avid tea drinker, and excels at alchemy, witchcraft, and apothecary. She spends her weekends at home watching reruns of old shows or at work in her shop. Aderyn arrives at the shop every weekday at five in the morning and leaves at six in the evening.

Torture method: Fisted.

She has a familiar named Satan. He'll need to be put down to weaken her house is spelled with runes, which this poor girl has agreed to unblock enough for me to place cameras within it. The floor plan of the house is more than enough that it won't take more than a few minutes to infiltrate and steal from them.

Torture method: Beaten to death.

Unfortunately, the stupid slut tried to escape after I'd released her. Her usefulness expired. However, she gave enough for me to get close to her. I looked as Caine without needing her any longer. The cameras inside her home are still good and haven't been detected and are deliciously poised for what I desired.

Aderyn used a spell this morning, which caused her to gyrate until she ripped her clothing off and spread her lovely body out on her bed. It's a soft bed, too. I enjoyed watching her finger her slit, even though she doesn't appear to want to do so—

Dislikes. Handing the papers back to Khaos, I rushed toward a corner where their stomach tried to expel the little bit of food I'd consumed before crash night. My stomach heaved until I noted the rotting corpse covered in gore that I thought I was trying to throw up on. A scream ripped from my lungs as I backed away, including shoving my fingers through my hair as I stared into Arabella's lifeless eyes.

Arabella had stopped returning my calls two weeks ago. Had she died? She is dead this entire time? I'd made a note to go to her house and check in

ry. Shebut I'd never gotten around to doing so. Was she being tortured as I'd  
'king indown the note? From the look of her pale coloring, and the stench  
orning,from the corpse, she'd been dead a while, at least.

Strong arms wrapped around me, turning me from the wreckage  
disfigured corpse as I threw up my guts. Khaos collected my hair, kept  
ken her.out of my face to prevent my vomit from getting into the strands. His  
do longhand slid around my stomach, keeping me upright as my knees tried  
is basicout.

d place "Get a bottle of water from the Land Rover for her, Merikh,"  
ordered as he held me until nothing was left in my stomach to throw  
I'd told you what he'd done, you wouldn't have believed me. You ne  
er. Hersee it for yourself, Aderyn."

Aderyn "How did I miss it? I'm not a fucking child who runs blindly into the  
nd shopof my enemies?" I demanded to the room, not expecting an answer.

"Aren't you?"

ntil she "I've never run into the arms of a psychopath before!"

is such a "You've been in my arms plenty," he returned, which caused a hum  
e didn'tlaugh to leave my lungs.

"Point taken," I whispered through the sourness in my mouth.

as my "Here, drink this," Merikh said as he returned, offering me the col  
ing lastof water. Twisting the top off, he held it in his hand until I'd acce  
garbagetaking just enough to wash my mouth out before spitting it out. Then,  
ked up,it down until nothing was left. "I erased his computer, but the sick  
s, whitefilmed everything he did to her. He wasn't kind to her. I'd have remo  
corpse, but you needed to know who he was, little bird."

ie been "I should have looked for her. When she stopped responding to my  
on her,made a note to check in on her, but I didn't follow through on it. I

had jotted down have been there for her more, or at least gone and made sure she was safe and drifting never even crossed my mind that she might still be in danger from the bastard who had raped her.” Wiping the tears away from my cheeks, I snatched a tissue to prevent snot from running down my lips. “I’m such an idiot, Shadow, for posting it on Cameron online while looking for her rapist and he was the one who attacked her. But I missed the signs if there were any.” Admitting it out loud sounded like a blooming idiot. “I intended to find the bastard who assaulted her and bring her his heart. She was just a baby. Her twelfth birthday was three months ago. How the hell could anyone do that to her? How could anyone be so fucking cruel to someone as sweet and talented as she’d been?” It was a hypothetical question, which they’d understood. The world was filled with predators, most of them human.

“Do you really want to know how he got to you?” Khaos asked once I regained some semblance of composure.

“Yes.” I wanted to know if only so I would never let it happen again. Knowledge was power when employed to keep those you cared about safe. I needed to know how he got to her to prevent it from happening again. I whispered through trembling lips.

“He targeted her because she was young enough to use. Her age made her a bottleweaker than the other employees you trusted with access to your hospital’s business. Cameron met her at a bar, where he drugged her drink and I drank pretended to help her to her car. Then he brought her here and tied her up. Khaos stated as he nodded toward the stairs. “We’re leaving. I’ll take care of her about the rest on the way back to your house.”

I followed him toward the stairs, turning to watch as Merikha called, I removing the images of my naked body from the walls.

“He will bring them to the club, Aderyn. Until we know if there’s a

okay. It them around these woods, it isn't safe for you to be out in the open  
bastard now." Not bothering to argue with him, I followed him outside and  
ffled to him to help me into the passenger seat of his vehicle.

7. I met "I'm so stupid," I whispered, pressing my forehead against the  
who'd window to ease the warmth spreading through me.

ut loud, "You've been alone too long. It made it easy for you to crave  
ho had offered you. He knew everything about you. As he tortured her for  
ity-first time, she told him about your views on life, favorite shows, favorite  
to her? within the world, and it made it easy for him to lure you into his t  
imid as became the perfect man. Your ideal match."

od. The "I should've demanded she talk to me. It's my fault she ended up m  
and thrown away like trash, Khaos. If I'd have just made her talk abo  
nce I'd had happened, she wouldn't be dead."

"It wouldn't have changed anything. He told her he had her parents  
i again. a secondary location. She'd have done anything he wanted to spa  
safe. "I lives. Everything he did to her was aimed at getting him closer to bei  
gain," I ideal match. You were his target, and she was merely a bird he forced  
for him."

ade her "I doubt that very much," I whispered in a self-depreciating tone.  
me and was my ideal match, and we had very little in common.

nd then "Yet, he knew you inside and out, didn't he?"

ier up." "No, he knew the surface stuff," I admitted in a soft whisper. "He ki  
ell you parts of myself that I allowed the world to believe was me. I created ar  
for them to think I was like them. But I am not. I am nothing like them  
began fear the darkness, but I welcome it inside me. I've learned that  
darkness, no one would see the beauty of the night. They'd mis  
more of wonders await them inside it. Dark magic is the same. It coexists wi

en rightmagic because once you've mastered both, there's no limit to what y  
alloweddo."

"You've learned to harness both?" he asked, but I closed my eyes, s  
ie coldhim out. "I always knew you'd be powerful, but I'm starting to think  
been keeping secrets from me, brat."

vhat he "It isn't a secret if you've never asked the question before. It's be  
the lastyears since we've spent more than a few moments together. I've cl  
e thingswhich I'm certain you have as well."

rap. He "You think I've changed?"

"Haven't you?" I asked as he pulled into my driveway.  
urdered Staring out the windshield, I watched his men slinking out of the si  
ut whatto nod at Khaos. Once he'd opened my door and offered me a hand  
me from the seat, I hugged my waist.

held in "Can you get rid of him before we go inside?" I asked sheepishly.  
re their "I already had Ryat remove the head from your bedroom. You  
ng yourshower and then sleep because we have shit to do tomorrow. I nee  
to singassistance on something, then you are free to collect what you'll n  
your stay at my manor. You'll have tonight to do anything you r  
Khaosaccomplish before you're expected to be at my estate for the weekenc  
we murdered Camden, I'm confident they'll need to regroup before sli  
out of the shadows. It doesn't mean we let our guard down. Understa  
new thehave men stationed around your home and shop." As I started to ar  
1 imageheld up his hand. "The last time these assholes came for us, you er  
n. Theyburied in a swamp. I won't chance that happening again. For now, v  
withoutprecautions to safeguard against them. Now, let's get inside. You are  
s whatMy shivering had little to do with the chill and everything to do with  
th lightbeing in town.

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# CHAPTER THIRTEEN

KHAOS HAD LAID OUT a black and white pleated, high-waisted bodice, a black Queen Anne bustier top, and the anchor necklace I'd removed last night. There was also a pair of mid-thigh suede boots on the floor with a hefty price tag left on them. Rolling my eyes at the zeros attached to the boots, I considered complaining about him dressing me, but I also approved of the outfit, so I held my tongue.

I quickly dressed and pulled my hair into a French twist, so it looked like I'd tried to look presentable. Next, I applied a thin layer of eyeliner and mascara, then finished with Armani Ecstasy red lip stain and some lip gloss.

When I exited my bedroom, the silence of the house made my hackles rise as I strolled through it, peering outside through the blinds. Khaos was in his signature crisp, white dress shirt. A blood-red tie hung loosely around his neck, which matched the thin layer of fabric visible in his pocket. Apparently, he'd had his men retrieve clothes for him after his impromptu visit to the cabin last night. Blowing the air from my lungs, I exited the house and my gaze drift to my neighbor's house. I made a mental note to check on her when I returned home tonight.



Khaos's attention lifted from his phone to my face before rolling down the window, pausing at where I rubbed my hands up and down my arms to get rid of the morning chill. He gave me a cocky smile as he opened the car door and grabbed a long, single-breasted coat from the backseat. Then, like a stupid idiot, I allowed him to assist me in sliding it on.

"Your morning glow suits you, Aderyn," he murmured before stepping back to allow me to enter the vehicle. The men waiting in other Land Rovers waited for Khaos to take the lead of the motorcade.

"I'd say thank you, but I've yet to figure out what your game is, I think." He was being nice for a reason, which was unsettling. Khaos did not smile without reason, and he had stuck to me the moment I'd reappeared in the world for a reason. Was he being nice because I'd almost been murdered by a psychopath or because he'd forced me to go into that cabin last night?

"Why do you assume I'm playing a game?" The moment I was in the car, Khaos grabbed the safety belt and buckled me in before closing the door and moving to the driver's side.

"You are being nice to me. You've never been nice to me." It was the truth. Since I'd met him, there had only been two times in which he was nice to me. Once was before I had fucked him over and almost had him burned alive. Instead, I had been the one almost burned alive, and he'd intervened and prevented it. The other was when we'd all gathered in New Orleans and rebuilt our lives together. "Normally, it's a front, which ends with me chained to a bed for your entertainment."

"You like being chained to my bed."

"You assume I do, but you know what it means when people assure me I'm not? Right?"

"How is your ass this morning?" he countered with a smug grin tugging at the corners of his mouth.

own my his sensually, full lips.

to chase “You’re an asshole, Khaos.”

at the door “I fail to see what my being an asshole has to do with the current  
like any of your pretty, very red ass,” he mused in a huskily whispered tenor. “Ab  
night—”

stepping “I don’t want to talk about it,” I said in a rush of words. “I obviously  
Rover, shit taste in men.”

“You really do. Don’t you?”

“Khaos.” “Present company included, but we both already knew that.”

nothing The bark of laughter he released caused me to jump as he reversed  
in his flower-lined driveway.

led by a “I’ve got a lot of shit lined up, brat. Shit, that could go sideways c

The La Cosa Nostra has agreed to an alliance with us. Unfortunately  
he seat, sacrifice had to be made in order to gain their agreement.”

door and “What sacrifice?” I questioned, already knowing exactly what it was

“That’s not your fucking concern,” he snapped, shutting me down.

was they close to me through summer. My being nice depends on you, c  
as nice. The Russians will be here before the end of next week. I have been br  
l at the deals to extend my reach. The Bratva, Chinese triad, Columbian drug  
er vened ‘Ndrangheta, MS-13, the Mexican mafia, Japanese Yakuza, and the  
ans and mafia will all be here to negotiate deals that’ll lead them all as on  
chained organization. But I’ve also invited others from the Otherworld factions  
us this time.”

“Are you insane?” I asked, already picturing everything that could  
ne shit. wrong when combining mortals with the otherworld syndicates. “I

should just be happy you’ve not invited all of them?” When Khaos  
ging on

comment, I turned toward him. “You didn’t. Tell me you didn’t invite underlings to join them here, Khaos.”

state of “You know most of the heads of each branch are from the syndicate outlastimmortals, Aderyn. The leader of the Bratva is a leshy, for fuck’s sake. The leader of the La Costa Nostra is a demon, one who has been most helpful in arranging the Gathering of Lords this year. But between them and their underlings, I’ve decided to keep you close to me until it ends.”

The thought of so many creatures, monsters and beings in one city made my stomach churn. It made sense now why he’d agreed to marry the daughter of the La Costa Nostra. At the end of the day, Khaos was a businessman who he’d never pretended otherwise. He’d built an empire and was now looking to quickly expand it on a global scale.

ately, a “I don’t need your protection. I’m a big girl, and I’ve been taking care of myself for the last fifty years without your help, Khaos.”

s. “I wasn’t asking if you agreed. You’ll be at my club through the Gathering. I can either make this easy on you, or hard. The choice is yours, darling. As he turned off the highway and onto the logging road that twisted through the mountain, I stared at the trees. The higher we climbed, the smaller the trees looked outside my window.

Turkish “That wasn’t part of our agreement, Khaos.”

ie large “I’ll remedy it the moment we’re finished at the mill if you insist on it, or you can join warned.

ould go through the emotion choking my words.

guess I “I absolutely would, darling. I’ve spent over four hundred years doing this, and I didn’t teach of these organizations toward this moment. If this goes down right, I’ll be able to force some powerful beings to undo something they did long ago.

te theirwon't allow you or anyone else to interfere in this deal. Too much is on this for it to go south."

icate of "Okay," I muttered dismissively. Obviously, my needs or my b ke. Thecame last on his list. But I'd worked too damn hard to bring his entire lpful indown on his head to stop now.

id their "Okay?" His tone held surprise that I hadn't argued it further.

"That's what I said, wasn't it?"

y made "Indeed," he muttered. "One truth, and one lie, Miss Caine."

aughter Unease flooded my system, and I fidgeted while chewing on my bot an, andas I stared out the window. It was one of the ways he fished for info rking tofrom me. It also allowed me to be truthful without admitting it outright

"Fine."

care of "Tell me the real reason you burned my establishment down?" he softly.

out the My heart slowed before hammering against my ribs. Forcing my yours."the passing treetops, I closed my eyes. "I don't recall why I did it, K . up thewas too long ago to remember every detail of what occurred on that d . ne treeshad asked me the same question a million times before, and every replied the same. "Ask me something else. Anything else."

"Why did you murder Katherine?" his question caused my heart 1 it," hespike without warning.

"I didn't murder her," I lied as I tore my gaze from the t isperedcountryside to look at him. His knuckles on the steering wheel were

Khaos's body language screamed deadly rage, which meant I had irectingcareful with how I responded. "She had intended to kill you. So I m ght, I'llher before she could hurt you." *Truth.*

g ago. I "Keep your fucking secrets, Aderyn." His tone was bitter, which

s riding the air in the vehicle's cab to drop temperature, drastically. "Mud  
bitch," he seethed.

business I was, but not like he assumed. I'd lost control of magic I hadn't  
empire known I'd held. My mother, if you could even call her such, hadn't  
me of our ancestry. We'd derived from a powerful line of witches with  
Ottoman Empire. My father, who had purchased my mother for a  
silver Akçe, had never ceased complaining about her being far too much  
such a shrew. She had not been blessed with any of the magic that he  
tom had promised she'd held. It had also bypassed my sisters, choosing to  
information completely on me.

t. On the day I'd burned down the bawdy house I'd been within, I'd  
into my magic. Powerful emotions were a trigger for young witches  
e asked gathered every ounce of courage I'd had left and crawled to the bawdy

Once there, I had asked Nasir to hire me as a whore. He'd been especially  
eyes to cruel during the interview process. I'd been bent over, then fingered  
haos. It until the blood from my virginity painted my hand. Nasir had humiliat  
ay." He when he had demanded I get on my knees and suck him off. I had f  
time, I prove I would be a worthy whore for the clientele his establishment  
to. Once he'd finished telling me to go home and grow up, he'd left m  
rate to inside the room.

My emotions had unfurled into something dark and deadly. I  
blurring realized I'd set fire to his chamber until I'd woken on his bed, dripping  
white from the inferno raging around me. The ignition of magic had rende  
l to be unconscious. I'd sought to flee from the chamber, but fire surround  
ordered where I'd blacked out on the bed. It had forced me to wrap myself

blankets, then dash through the chamber toward the hallway. There  
caused

nderous had been outside the room with a woman, discussing something. His eyes zeroed on me before smoke began billowing out around me.

It even Naked save for the bedding I'd pulled around me, I'd rushed from a warned inferno I'd created. Less than a week later, as I'd been burying my sins, thin the he'd appeared like an angel of death to claim me for my crimes. No one singled didn't want him to know it had been an accident. Because it was, but much for broken something inside me that day. His rejection had fractured me, I'd been which left me clutching the broken remnants together.

To settle "Why won't you fuck me?" I countered with raw emotion sharpened question. "I've seen you take women to your bed who've been passed down and come until they're ruined. Yet, with me? I am filthy, unclean, the unwanted ones. I do of the bawdy house. But there were men who wanted to use me. You let another fuck me while you watched."

Especially "Enough."

myself "Why won't you tell me the truth? You've done everything but fucked me. Khaos. Or why don't you tell me which one of your men you allowed to fail to cater to me? I know it is one of them because it always feels the same when he catered to me. If you want the truth, let's get it all out there."

He alone "Drop it, now," he snarled as the car veered toward a cliff. He jerked back onto the road, but my chest was heaving with the panic. "When I hadn't there, you'll keep your fucking mouth shut unless I grant you permission to speak. There are other witches present, and you will play nice."

He red me "I cannot cast with a coven," I hissed. "*Non ducor, duco.*" I am needed me lead. "I'll be silent, of that you can be certain."

He f in his "Gods, you're infuriating sometimes, woman."

He, Nasir "I'll work on it," I affirmed. "I prefer to be infuriating all the time." A loud snort was the only reply he offered as he turned into the

yes had abandoned-looking sawmill. Only, it wasn't abandoned. It was where tortured those he didn't want inside his establishment.

om the He parked beside the door. The moment he'd turned the engine iblings, opened the center console and withdrew a holster, three guns, and at that I wicked-looking rings. He pulled the holster over his broad, powerful but he'd and then pushed the rings onto his fingers.

ly soul, "What's your fucking issue? After getting off several times in the last nights, I'd assumed you'd be more pleasant to be around."

ing my "You know what they say about assuming," I muttered. Nasir got around the SUV and closed his door, which told me it was time to exit the vehicle. I'd barely gotten my own door open before he slammed it closed. Glance I've let watched him brush off an invisible piece of lint before opening it.

"The devil is a gentleman, isn't he?"

I placed my hand into his waiting one, and the moment I was on my back he sought to break the hold. Nasir didn't allow it though. Instead, he jerked to fuck body against his before pressing me back against the side of the car. His hand reached into his suit jacket, then slowly withdrew a cigar tin. His overall demeanor gave me pause since I wasn't certain what his intentions were. He worked it until he opened it and withdrew a joint. Nasir flicked his Zippo, lit it, and we got to take a long draw, and exhaled the earthy aroma of pot.

ssion to "Open your pretty lips for me, love." The moment he put the tin away, he cradled my throat in his palm before inhaling from the joint. His lips pressed against mine, forcing the smoke into my lungs. They burned as he fed me a hit, then allowed me to exhale it back into his lungs. Lifting his chin, he exhaled the aromatic herbs before placing the joint against my lips. "Suck." Hison. Suck." Inhaling deeply, I closed my eyes as it made its way down my large throat smoothly.

Khaos The moment I exhaled, Khaos's lips crushed against mine. His tongue  
over the seam of my mouth slowly, erotically. Khaos's grip on my  
off, tightened until it threatened to prevent air flow, but the dark, husky l  
d somehe released vibrated over my senses. His enticing scent of bergamot,  
il chestand whiskey washed over me like a balm as I felt myself relaxing  
him.

ast two "That's my good girl," he purred before pulling away and turning  
men waiting on him. "What do we know so far, gentlemen?" Khaos  
out ofGlancing over his shoulder, I found Merikh watching me with a dan  
vehicle.look in his emerald stare.

aring, I "They're not talking," D'Arcy informed coolly before taking the jo  
for me.was being passed around. "The witches can't seem to crack the f  
either. Apparently, whatever shields they have in their minds are lik  
y feet, Iwalls."

ked my "Though watching them strip and ask Lilith and Hecate for their gr  
. Khaoswas fun to watch."

all calm "Indeed?" I asked as Khaos tightened his grip on my jaw.

re. Not "I believe I told you to keep your fucking mouth shut, love," he g  
he end,before blowing smoke in my face. My eyes watered, and I closed  
tightly as he held the joint closer for me to draw from. Shaking my h  
way, hehissed in warning. Parting my lips, I accepted it and inhaled. Before h  
closedpress his lips against mine, I blew the smoke in his face, which made  
me theplay on his generous lips.

hin, he "I thought you didn't want us inebriated before we questioned  
"ComeReyn asked.

own my "Are you questioning me, Reyn?"

"No, Nasir. I just worry about her losing her hold on her magic. La



gue slidAderyn assisted us, she slaughtered the entire coven. I'd hate to see a  
7 throathappen to the girls. I've grown rather fond of them."

aughter "Aderyn will play nice, or she'll be punished in a way she won't enj  
smoke,  
against

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1st time

Aderyn assisted us, she slaughtered the entire coven. I'd hate to see anything happen to the girls. I've grown rather fond of them."

"Aderyn will play nice, or she'll be punished in a way she won't enjoy."

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# CHAPTER FOURTEEN

KHAOS HELD THE DOOR open for me, and as soon as I stepped in I wanted to leave. The building reeked of death. The repulsive scent burned my nose. I didn't need to open the barrels along the farthest wall to know they held human remains. The sound of manacles clinking jerked my attention where several men were suspended above a raised stage. From where they looked young, but I was a horrible judge of age, since time passed with little meaning for me.

Relief washed through me when I realized they weren't the men employed to steal his shipments and that none of them would know what hell I was.

"Hazel, Celeste and Sylvia. Always a pleasure," Khaos cooed to the witches who were eying him like candy.

"Mmm, the pleasure's ours, Khaos," Sylvia purred.

"No luck, ladies?" he asked as we moved toward them unhurriedly.

"Not yet. I have a few other things I'd like to try on them," Sylvia said. Her ice-blue eyes slid to me and slowly roved over my face. "Is this her?" My stomach tensed.

Witches weren't solitary beings by nature, but Nasir had cut me off from the witches, which resulted in my being blacklisted. I would have anyway considering my immortality was unnatural and after three hundred years, someone would have noticed.

"Ladies, this is Aderyn Caine," he announced. All as one, they stepped back. Smiling at their reaction to a blacklisted witch, I scrunched my mouth to prevent the laughter from escaping.

"Aderyn Caine is unnatural," Sylvia hissed. "She's an abomination."

"Is she?" Khaos asked even as he turned, sliding his eyes over my shoulder. "I don't know, ladies. She serves at my leisure, so play nice with her for now."

"You understand all covens have shunned her." Sylvia crossed her arms over her chest, glaring at me.

"Ostracized because of her dark, ill-begotten immortality, among other reasons." Celeste turned up her nose, fluttering her lashes. Smirking, I ran my hand through my hair over my shoulder because I had given zero fucks about the witch community snubbing me just because they thought me unnatural.

"Blacklisted because of her inability to prove her bloodline," Haze said with a smile playing on her lips. "I hope you don't expect us to work for her, my love. You know how much we depend on the covens to replenish our magic. If they were to deny us, we'd be unable to assist you."

"No, of course not. Aderyn doesn't need, nor want, your help. She'll take care of her coven unto herself." Nasir chuckled as his eyes held mine. "A powerful indeed."

A phone rang beside me, and from the corner of my eye, I watched Nasir withdraw a phone from his pocket.

"What is it?" he asked into the receiver. "He's busy, Vanessa."

"Put her on speakerphone," Nasir stated, and jealousy ripped through me.

ff from because, with everything else going on, I'd all but forgotten about  
e been Merikh tapped the screen and held it out to Nasir. "Hello, love. I hope  
undred flight isn't too tedious."

"Oh, I have missed the sound of your voice, K-bear. I couldn't wait  
stepped you, so I had Papa fuel the jet for me. I will be there within the hour.  
nose to you don't mind?" Khaos twisted his wrist to glance at his watch  
continued. "With my things arriving this week, I wanted to be there to  
" arrange them as well. Plus, you still have to pick out something for  
face. "I wear to the gathering and our engagement party."  
now." Khaos's eyes slid to mine, but I'd shut down all emotions. From  
er arm outside, I looked bored, but inside? Inside, I was dying.

"I've picked out plenty of things for you to wear for me, darling. I  
g other Merikh arrange for a car to pick you up from the airstrip. In your suit  
flipped hotel, there's a dress I had delivered for tonight. It's crimson and w  
e entire perfect on you. I have a few things to deal with before I can meet  
.. dinner. The spa will assist you in relaxing after such a long flight."

I stated "You are so good to me, K-bear. What would you like me to wear  
rk with the dress?" Her voice was flirtatious, but I still stood as emotionless  
ish our stone. The fact that Nasir had got me stoned wasn't helping my inner  
any.

he is a "Nothing," he purred, which caused my fingers to curl into my  
deryn's biting into the flesh. "I look forward to tonight, Vanessa."

"As do I, my lover." The moment the call ended, I felt the weight  
Merikh Merikh's and Nasir's eyes on me.

"Shall we?" Nasir asked with his hand out for mine. I ignored  
stepped up beside him. "Issue?" Silently, I shook my head with a bored  
ugh me

out her plastered over my face. “Jealous, love?” Again, I shook my head as I pe your for his orders. “Is there a reason you’re not answering me?”

“You told me not to speak,” I answered in a demure, barely wh t to see whir of words.

I hope “I like how you’ve subdued the unnatural bitch,” Sylvia offere as she beside me. “Are you partial to her, Khaos? I wouldn’t mind draining here to the power she houses.” Smiling cruelly, I pegged her with a look th r me to ‘fucking try me’. “Don’t look at me like that. Everyone who’s ever h you thinks you’re not worth the magic in your veins. I’d be doing the om the service if I were to drain you.”

“Ah, well. I come from Witch-A-Bitch-Woods, and I’m not hard ’ll have You want to drain me, do it. We’ll see who comes out on top, baby g e at the my flash of obsidian eyes, she stepped back before crossing the r ill look protection over her chest. “Your gods aren’t here. I am, and I don’t c you for worship. Keep threatening me, and I’ll drain your fucking blood for r wear on my lips.” Khaos’s anger resonated in the air, and I waited beneath punishment he’d enact for my talking.

ss as a “I’d be very careful, Aderyn. It isn’t the night to fucking try my pat turmoil he whispered for my ears alone.

“As you wish, Master,” I hissed vehemently.

palms, “Say it again, it sounded good on your pretty lips.” Khaos reached hand, but I closed my fingers into a fist, preventing it. At his soft ch ight of shoved the last of my emotions into a box and shut the lid. I wouldn’t him to know just how badly that phone call had me spinning out of cor it and see you’ve forgotten who I am, darling.”

ed look “No. You’ve reminded me intimately of who you are. I won’t again.” At my cryptic reply, he stopped, turned to look at me, and wi

waited the cold, lifeless stare I offered him. “Shall we? I don’t have all r  
waste on you.”

ispered Khaos’s teeth ground together so hard that it was audible. Merik  
waited beside me, tensed almost imperceptibly, but then Khaos  
d from toward the men who dangled on chains attached to pulleys.

her for “Gentlemen, do you know who I am?” Khaos asked, loudly enc  
at said, have the men’s bloody, swollen faces turning toward him. “Who beat  
eard of he asked. That was my question as well.

world a “We did,” Celeste stated. “We needed their blood, and it was fun t  
them scream while we took it.” Disapproval wafted from Khaos.

to find. “So, which one of you wants to live?”

girl.” At “Fuck you, asshole. You can’t hold us here.”

une for The entire room exploded in smothering power as a thousand tiny  
care for lit the air and then rushed straight for the man who’d spoken. Invisibl  
ouge to forced his jaw wide, and the embers shot into his throat. His scree  
for the harrowing, and the chains he hung from jangled as his body convulsed  
veins started in his eyes, slowly spider-webbing over his face.

ience,” Khaos seldom used his magic, but when he did, it was a sight to  
The man’s eyes bulged, and his screaming became maddening when t  
on his face began to melt from his bones. The power in the room  
for my subside. It intensified as Khaos lifted his palm, causing black flecks to  
uckle, in a cyclone pattern. They slowly twisted and turned as it made the trek c  
’t allow floor.

ontrol. “I I watched in captivated silence as my breathing grew labored with t  
filling the space around us. The magic inside me sprang to the s  
: forget craving to play with him. It took effort to slam the box within me cl  
nced at prevent the magic from spilling free.

light to The black cyclone spun around the man, who opened his jaw to re  
bloodcurdling scream that made my ears bleed. It should not have eve  
h, who possible, but the ravens dove into his mouth. Blood poured from his e  
walked nose, dripping in soft, wet droplets to the floor. No sooner had the las  
disappeared into the man's throat than the first one tore from his tor  
ough to one after another, they punched through his flesh, leaving gaping wou  
them?" exposed organs, bones, and muscles.

The other men shrieked as they began grappling against their restu  
o make didn't blame them. The miserable bastard had a full flock of raven  
seeking to escape his corpse. The wet sound of flesh ripping diminish  
then the guy's body hunched forward. The ravens blasted from hi  
sending chunks and fragments of him sprinkling the floor. Khaos rai  
embers hand, and a flurry of cinders and ravens all smashed into it, as if i  
e hand portal.

am was "So, who wishes to talk to me now?" he inquired, examining the f  
l. Black the men. "No one? Shall I continue my way down the line, then?"

"No, sir. The thing is, we don't know why we were there. Hones  
behold. have no memory of being around your shipment." The voice sounded  
he skin which forced me to fight to keep my features cold and detached. He c  
i didn't be a day older than nineteen.

o rise in "That doesn't sound likely or believable. My men found you five  
over the truck, unloading the goods. Now, why would you be in my truck if yo  
not the one stealing my shipment?" At Khaos's words, my focus shift  
the fear to the men with an impassive eye. I silently scanned their clothing and  
surface, I'd set up many things, but this wasn't my doing. Unlike Khaos  
osed to boundaries I did not cross. Kids weren't allowed to be selected, no  
honest folks. It was composed of those who were dispensable. Crimina



please cared little about harming good folks or killing others. Pretty much, I  
en been those without a moral compass because the world became a better, safe  
yes and without their ilk within it. Once I had finished with them, the Feds I c  
st raven off picked them up for their crimes and put them away. Plus, my mov  
so, and ones that would hurt Khaos where it mattered most. In a matter of d  
nds that clubs would shut down. The assholes running his guns, drugs, and ot  
would become ill, leaving a trail of bodies that would lead back to him  
aints. I “I know it sounds crazy, sir. Trust me, I know. But I woke up the  
ms still felt compelled to unload the truck. Which we were doing when yo  
ed, and showed up. It’s all there, man. Check it, we didn’t even have another  
s flesh, to load the shipment up on. We’d merely placed everything beside it  
ised his road. Hell, your men couldn’t even get past the shit to park. I swear!”

t was a “Is that true?” Nasir asked. D’Arcy nodded his dark head at Khaos  
know one another? Which tells me that you’re feeding me a line of bul  
aces of think me fool enough to buy your half-assed tale.”

“No, sir. Well, I mean—”

stly, we “If you lie to me, you’ll die in a worse manner than your friend did,  
young, “I just meant I don’t know them personally. I’ve seen them in the s  
ouldn’t time or two.” At the young man’s statement, I scanned their clothi  
exhaled a soft puff of air.

e in the “Something to add?” Khaos hissed.

ou were “Look at their shoes and clothes. None of them look clean, Nasir. T  
ed back ragged and unshaven. They look homeless and underfed.”

faces. “So they are,” he acknowledged. “You said you felt compelled?”

; I had “I couldn’t stop. I wanted to because I didn’t want to die, but sor  
or were inside me didn’t allow it. Even after they’d shot one man, I kept mov  
als who my body wasn’t even mine anymore. Look, everyone in this town kno

'd usedare not one to cross. You're a fucking kingpin, for fuck's sake. We'd  
er placebe the biggest idiots to think stealing from you would be a good idea."

I tipped "Shut the fuck up, idiot," the man snarled. "Yapping your lips will r  
es werehim from murdering your ass, stupid fucking kid."

ays, his "Screw you! I didn't do this. I *wouldn't* do this to him."

her shit Tilting my head, I studied the man's mottled face. There was sor

. sinister inside of him, something dark and oily within him made me

re and IAs the man lunged toward the kid as if he'd be able to reach him in cl

ur mencruel smile played on his mouth when the kid didn't back down.

vehicle "You best hope he kills us, boy."

: on the Magic shot forward from Khaos without warning. The man's

echoed in my ears as something black and shimmering cut thro

s. "Youstomach, severing him in two. Blood splattered the kid's face, but he

llshit orflinch or recoil from the horror. Almost as if he'd grown accustomed t

around death every day of his young life.

"He's not entirely mortal," I stated for Khaos's ears alone.

boy." "I'm very aware of what he is." Biting my lip, I waited to see what

helter awould do. "Can you gain entrance into their subconscious?"

ing and "I can, but it isn't a simple thing to do. It'll leave me more drained

care to be."

"That sounds like a personal problem. Do it," he ordered.

They're "Your wish is my command, Master." I snorted as I turned, heading

the center of the room.

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# CHAPTER FIFTEEN

BAD OMENS “LIKE A Villain” pumped through the speakers around the room, and the moment I was out of range of Khaos, I held my hands out and the power rushed to them. Fibers of time and space weaved through my fingertips, until I found a thread I was looking for, pinching it between my thumb and forefinger.

Then, I ripped the space open.

The entire room went silent as the upper room of my shop appeared. The frayed edges dripped liquid fire, I stepped one foot through the opening. Straddling both places, I glanced toward Khaos, who was standing with his eyes roving over the shop he'd never stepped foot inside before. As my finger had my altar drifting through the opening and then came lowering to the wooden planks Khaos had placed over the ruined floor when he'd set this place up.

“Someone has become much, much stronger,” Khaos whispered with a smile curling his lips. “Interesting twist, love. Honestly, I didn't see that coming.” There were many things he wouldn't see coming, and my power increase was low on that list.

Ignoring him as he sat, I continued bringing the items I needed from the upstairs room over to the sawmill. Once everything was in place, I stepped back through and let the portal slowly close. I didn't need it open for things to pass through, but I'd wanted Khaos to see how much I'd grown on my own. I hadn't needed him to figure out who I was magically. In the past fifty years, I had excelled and come into my powers on my own. I turned and walked toward the altar I'd brought from my shop, which was made of human

I'd used human legs for, well, legs, and the workspace was comprised of skulls I'd fused together, flattened, and then strengthened. Rib cages on the sides served as racks for herbs and spell jars to protect my space, as did the candles lined the edges of it, blackening the bones of those who had trespassed against me in the last fifty years. Hands with skeletal fingers had been placed strategically around the edges to hold herbs or charms. I'd needed a morbid construction, but considering the darker magic I'd embraced, it was needed.

While the flames to shoot into the air approached them, they lowered and began releasing plumes of dragon sage into the room. Dragon sage was more potent than other types of sage and also offered better protection and scent. The herbs that hung from the bones sparked and ignited with embers trickling like sparklers on the 4th of July.

Blue Fountain's "Eyes on Fire" now played through the speakers, and my eyes to where Khaos had taken a seat on a chesterfield couch. I smirked roguishly, unafraid of the dark magic I'd wielded. The asshole was the king of darkness, so it stood to reason he'd be fine with it. I took a seat with his elbows resting on his knees, while his fingers slowly moved over the condensation on the glass. I dropped my eyes to the large, r

from my mortar and pestle to prevent eye-fucking him more. The sound of salt stepped over the floor told me the black salt was forming a barrier around the pull-circle I'd be stepping into with Khaos once the spell was ready. My own dark magic had put everyone on-edge, and their apprehension tasted bitter years, the back of my tongue.

I moved. "She's dangerous," Celeste whispered.

to bones. "Very," Sylvia agreed in a softly uttered tone.

was surprised of "Oh, ladies. My sweet Aderyn is extremely dangerous, but only on the cross her or me. If you don't wish to be on the wrong side of her, I'll be well as carefully."

who'd If he expected me to thank him for defending me, he would be surprised. I had another three hundred years.

It was a "You do not know what she does, Nasir. Her magic isn't from Hecate, it was from Lilith," Sylvia argued in a high-pitched tone. I summoned more circles.

from my personal stash. Each one sailed through the air with speed, vowing. As I hummed in the call. One by one, I caught them until I stepped back, only to catch the next and begin sifting through the sage on a peg Sylvia in the face, only to catch the next and begin sifting through the bottles on my altar. "You did that on purpose!"

the rib "It wasn't obvious that it was me?" I asked before laughing. Fourthbothering to look over at her.

I removed the top of the blue vervain and tapped my finger on the mortar, forcing three times to pour out what I needed. Forcing the cap back on, I tilted the bottle only over my shoulder and felt the rift open as it returned to my collection of herbs. Then I added hawthorn, sage, dragon sage, yarrow, and lemon balm into the mortar. Finally, I hoisted my palm, seizing the bottle of moonstone I'd had sitting out through several full moons to strengthen. Clinging to the rounded droplets, I turned at the sound of feet moving through the room.

hitting Khaos's harsh, contemplative stare was on me as he received a  
ne spellbourbon. Doing my best to ignore the delectable sight of him stretchin  
y using the chair with his forearms exposed. The bastard was irritably smug, a  
itter onknew the man had every reason to be so. He was the god of war, an  
merely one of his apostles.

Turning my finger, I applied magic to the pestle, making it gently cr  
herbs. While that worked, I lit a blue candle and held it over the edge  
if you mortar, again counting drops as they fizzled and strengthened the spell  
'd tread the bowl. My lips moved as I intoned the spell, but the words were s  
and so quietly delivered, no one would pick up the chant, except KH  
waiting course. Even now, I could feel his eyes on me, feel him attending to m  
step and whispered word. The prick made it near impossible to k  
ate. It's focus on my task.

crystals The thinner of the candles lifted, floating over without needing  
iolence prompted. Candles of varying hues dripped into the bowl and then retu  
, letting their respective spot on the spelled altar, as tendrils of smoke drifted  
through hair. The soothing scent of sage and mixed herbs was a balm over my  
soul.

without Footsteps jerked my concentration from the task at hand, and I notec  
kneeling before Khaos. It wasn't anyone I knew, which meant he'd  
the vial trusting outsiders since I'd departed.

ossed it "Vanessa arrived at the club. She's asking why there weren't  
of rare placed in her suite or a bath ran for her?" the man asked.

ongrass "Of course she is. Have the spa readied for her. Tell them to put ros  
n water throughout the room for her to walk on and lay on as they pam  
ounting Vanessa's favorite drink is chardonnay. Have some brought to her w

refill of relaxes. Ensure she knows I planned it as the prelude to our e  
g out into together.”

nd God I wavered as my grip slipped on the bowl, and my stomach surged i  
d I washthroat. After grabbing the lavender, I emptied a copious amount into

and began annihilating it with my fingers. I replayed Khaos’s reply ins  
ush the head and felt the magic around me reacting to my discontent. Wren  
e of the back, I unclenched my jaw and reached for the sugar to toss in a pinch.

l within I slapped my palms down on the altar, rapidly lifting them to captur  
o rapid obsidian and smokey quartz. After repeating that action several more

aos, of arranged the crystals in order of their potency before snatching the s  
y every quartz and smashing it in my grip, letting the fragmented pieces of  
eep my through my fingers and fall into the concoction. I did it with the oth

then attended the bowls, which were hovering in the air, gradually n  
; to being ingredients.

urned to “Pay attention to what you’re doing!” Sylvia snarled as she f  
into the connection growing lax, as I turned my face toward her. “My God, w  
/ weary hell *are* you?” she hissed.

I knew my eyes had turned the color of obsidian, and runes cover  
d a man face, outlining my features in the graceful calligraphy of inscriptions.

l begun throat, chest, and arms were delicate, feminine tinted, stripes that depic  
cracks in my soul that I’d been required to hold together with dark mag

flowers “Your God isn’t here. I am,” I hissed in a layered tone that seduc  
taunted with the skill of a succubus. “Do you want to taste the darkne

e petals let you touch mine if I can touch yours, Sylvia.”

er her. “That’s some big witch energy, little bird. Your darkness is bea  
nile she Merikh whispered as he stepped in front of Sylvia, intending to pro

from me.



evening “Thank you, Shadow. Do you want to taste me?” Lust dripped from my lips. “I’ll let you. Unless you’re afraid I’ll steal your soul?”

into my “Oh, pretty girl. I don’t have a fucking soul to steal.” Merikh’s eyes sparkled with amusement, and it wasn’t until the sound of glass splintering that we broke eye contact and turned, finding Khaos beside us.

“You two fucking done?”

“Not even close,” I offered as Merikh snickered. Anger was a heavy black ripple off Khaos, and I shrugged. “You asked. I told you I don’t do it often, Ilyia. Didn’t I?” I asked in a saucy tone.

“Finish the fucking spell. I don’t have all night to waste on you.”

Sylvia laughed in a high-pitched, nasally tenor. “I hear you’re about to tie the knot?”

“Is that what you heard?” His eyes didn’t leave my face. Closing my eyes, I offered him a bored look before grabbing the athame that felt like the skeletal fingers that held it. I’d taken it from a horrible witch, who’d used the pretty hands I’d wanted to use on my altar. After all, I’d needed someone to hold my athame for me.

Tipping my head back, I called my grimoire up from my soul. Black smoke billowed from my lungs before solidifying into my book in front of me. Nasir frowned at finally discovering where I’d been storing my darkest, filthiest secrets. He’d been after my grimoire for a very long time, but it was partial to me. It was a part of my soul, after all.

As I whispered the spell to unlock it, and the snake that adorned the cover slithered from the front to open the book. Another whisper of sound, “Beautiful,” flipping through the antiqued pages full of hand-drawn images and incantations until it reached the spell I needed.

Nicking my thumb, I spoke in ancient Latin, which caused the r

om mytense as they listened to the spell. Nasir stood beside me, examining tl  
that would bind all of our minds together. The moment he tried to t  
's eyesthe grimoire shot out of his reach. Lifting a dark brow at him, he of  
interingwolfish smile in reply.

“Someday I’ll get it, Aderyn.”

“When I die,” I stated with a smile on my lips, spinning to glare  
:atwave“Because that is the only way it would ever allow you to touch it, Nasi  
t enjoy “Is that so?” he countered softly. His attention shifted to the magic  
over my altar, despite my attention being on him. The grimoire floated  
me, and the candles spun slowly in a circular pattern, while he  
it to tieextinguished, and then drifted between the circle being erected and  
mortar crushed and stirred. My pestle continued grinding the ingred  
; off allclockwork patterns, each full rotation coordinated with the chime of th  
ie frombell. In the center of the altar, the chalice waited for my blood, pa  
o’d hadLifting my hand, I held it up, ready to offer it my blood. The chalice  
eone toto catch the droplets, wasting not a single drop.

Deciding I wasn’t inclined to answer, I turned, giving him my back.

. Black “You’ve grown much more powerful than I’d expected, brat.”

the air “I asked you politely not to call me that. Considering your imp  
ing mynuptials, one might assume you have impure intentions for your bric  
g time,meant it to end the subject. It didn’t.

“You’d still be mine in the end. No one can change that, ever.”

e cover “Which is why it should be you doing it,” I whispered as my g  
l had itmoved closer and the candle’s flames burned higher. “By air and ea  
es andwater and fire. So be you bound to me as I desire. By three and nin  
secrets become mine. By moon and sun, my will be done. Sky and s  
oom tome free of curses and harm while I am within me. Cord goes ‘round,

he spell be bound, light revealed. Once I end the spell all will then be revealed. Touch it, of mind is mine to control, show me who played with theirs and revealed a foe. By water be linked, by fire raise and bring me their link. By the channel, I wish to be led through the minds of those who've forgotten me the memories of those who wished to steal from Khaos as we join at him. minds to theirs." Then I held out my hand for Khaos's, and the morning touched me, sparks zinged up my arm to sizzle through me. "By this I am moving ask for you to protect him while I connect us through this knot." A level beside rope appeared as the athame sliced deep into Khaos's thumb. Once the orbs lit, offered his blood to the chalice, I pressed my thumb to his and wrapped the rope around our hands three times.

ients in "It's been a while since our blood has been mixed together." Memories witchlifted to his as memories of our bloodied bodies holding one another patiently through my mind. He'd risked certain death to free me from the hands of those who'd sought to burn me at the stake in Salem. I'd thought we were together. It was why I'd admitted that I'd always loved him. We hadn't known which was tragic, but mostly because I'd admitted I'd loved the man who'd told them I was a witch. Of course, I had been the one to whisper behind the ears of others that Khaos was a dark lord who served Satan. "Feels like." I'd "Feels like warm blood, Khaos. Nothing more," I whirred before breaking the connection.

"I like it when you're jealous, *brat*."

rimoire Snorting loudly, I shook my head. "Jealousy would imply I cared a little for you. I don't. You abandoned me to death, and anything you and I shared, your past was left in that swamp. Leave it there. I have." I returned to focus on the spell. Sure, I felt his hard, angry stare burning into my spine, but I'd powerdamned if I took back my words. He would not be allowed to break me.

d. State “Unless you wish for us both to end up as vegetable soup from the deal the going awry, you’ll be silent until I’m finished. I need space to work. I need you earthen you hovering, Nasir.”

1. Bring He didn’t argue as he normally did. Instead, he moved toward them and they huddled in the farthest corner of the old mill. When they began to argue, I tried to dissuade Khaos from going through with this, I smiled. None of them would, I meant not to fracture his mind. They had no idea that I couldn’t break his strength of without also breaking my own, which was not something I sought.

2. He’d The entire room was thick with my magic, which felt good. Really, I’d scented the Everything inside the place was scented with watermelon, lemonade, and sugar. I’d somehow stolen the scent for my own when an old priest had returned from Asia with a dried watermelon rind. Without being a bastard, I’d rejuvenated it with lemonade and lavender before activating my magic. The bastard priest had thought it held powers with virility, which it had. Not that I’d died, I’d known what that had meant back then. Either way, it had become mine, whether I’d wanted it.

3. Bastard Turning toward Nasir, who hadn’t stopped watching me, I said, “I’ll pierce you into their blood, and then I need to connect us. Once I do, then if I die, you’ll be good.” I admitted, sliding my eyes toward the men, who exhaled in relief. “He’s breaking I will need you to remain tied to me inside the memories. I am that which anchors you to the ground us to this world. Do you understand?”

4. “I understand,” he informed softly, but something dangerous simmered in his depths. “Remember what happens if you fuck me over, Miss Caine.” I had in mind. “I remember perfectly what happens when I seek to end you, Devil.” I’d lived through enough abuse at his hands. He’d ensured I’d never forget the lessons he’d taught me. But he was also about to learn why men should never be trusted again.

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withoutin the world.

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# CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE ROOM REMAINED ELECTRIFIED as the hypnotic spell h through my veins, forcing everything else to remain outside of my c moved toward the men with the chalice as well as the athame. Floating me on my left was the grimoire, to my right was Khaos, who stopped as I did in front of the first man hanging in chains.

“You fucking, evil bitch!” the man snarled before trying to lunge but Khaos’s tatted fingers wrapped around his throat. “She’s Satan’s w

“No one calls my girl filthy names except for me,” Khaos hissed. The dark tendrils of magic slithered off Khaos’s arm and cut thro man’s muscles and tissue. The sickening sound of ripping flesh, co with his pain-filled shriek, sent pain splitting through my ears. “If else thinks to touch her, insult her, or so much as look at her long necessary, I’d reconsider doing so.” His warning held the promise o. The man’s body contorted as Khaos’s magic rearranged his insides. ( my eyes, I exhaled the memories of how it felt inside me, fucking n within. “You moan one more time, brat? You and I are going to spending the rest of the evening making fresh memories together.”

“Sorry, Nasir,” I muttered before handing him the chalice. “If you this, I’ll get started.” The grotesque sound of the man’s bones crunch snapping continued as I grabbed the next man’s hand. “This wor much.”

His features tightened with fear, and even though he trembled, he move to pull free of my hold as I brought the athame down on his cutting it open. I carefully counted the droplets of blood before releas hand so I could slice my fingertip and trace the binding symbol forehead.

ummed “This is going to show you what happened?” the kid asked cautiously

circle. I “Something like that,” I admitted, not seeing why it mattered if I an  
; beside him. “How do you guys know one another?” I asked the man in front c

as soon “Homeless shelter on 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue,” he admitted with his eyes sc  
shut. “I know Thomas from there. He’s a good kid. Helps the nuns o  
the heavier shipments being delivered. I guess we all do.”

at me, “So, you’d have been around the shipping bay?”

shore!” “Yes, ma’am,” he uttered as soft, hazel eyes opened to look at me.  
l softly. to drive a rig before my wife got sick.”

ugh the “What happened to her?” At his pained look, I felt a pinch of regret.

mbined “Cancer. One month, we were planning to travel to the Caribbean  
anyone and the next, she was gone. My son killed himself two weeks after I

er than Cathy.” The anguish in his tone was genuine. “Thomas lost his momr

f death. His father murdered her. He fled, fearing he’d be next or that he’d enc  
Closing in the system.”

ie from “Is that true?” I asked while moving onto the next man.

end up “Yes. My stepdad was a drunk who enjoyed beating her. On the  
killed her, I was in school. I returned to find the cops there and kne



'll hold probably either hidden or fled the area," Thomas admitted. "I'd heard this place from my mom. She used to live here. My real father was sure it hurt to be from here, too."

"And you?" I asked the man whose finger was dripping blood in a way that didn't change.

thumb, "What the fuck does this have to do with anything?" Nasir interjected. "Answer the question, please," I continued on as if Nasir wasn't a man who had murdered us all.

"Drunk driver hit my car on Christmas Eve. Killed my children and I. I didn't get to go with them."

answered "A deryn," Nasir warned.

of me. "A wraith, Nasir." At my words, his eyes slid over my face before he squeezed over the men standing in front of us. "And how about the man who was out with a asshole just killed? What was his story?"

"His son was killed overseas. Ned drank himself into the ground and ended up at the shelter when his wife left him," Thomas replied. "And I used to be the first one killed. The cartel took and sold his daughter. He was here close to Nasir to find the connection he had to the cartel."

"So, we have—had five men from the same shelter. Each one was from the Islands, in the delivery bay. They've all lost loved ones. That means we're more likely lost my likely dealing with a wraith, or a couple of them. So, we need to find out who's controlling them." Frowning, I paused in front of Thomas. I had to put going to need to add protection before we bind ourselves together. I had pissed someone off, Khaos. Someone powerful enough to control wraiths.

"I don't keep a list of my enemies in my back pocket, love."

day he "That list wouldn't fit there, Nasir." Once I'd finished the last of the work he'd moved back to the altar.

d about “What the fuck was that about?” Nasir demanded.

pposed “You wanted answers. I needed somewhere to start with their me

Or did you want to leave your poor fiancée sitting around all night?” I  
nto the force the words out of my throat. It tasted vile to even whisper *fiancé*  
sentence concerning Khaos. Grabbing the mortar, I poured their mixture  
d. into the herbs. Then I used my still bleeding fingertip to draw the last  
about too on Khaos’s face.

As I lowered my hand, Khaos grabbed my wrist. It caused me to s  
id wife, audibly. I watched him dipping the cloth from his pocket into the moo  
to wet it before he cleaned my fingers of the others’ blood and some s  
of herbs that clung to my skin. Once they were clean, he brought my  
drifting up to his mouth, capturing it between his lips. A shiver rushed do  
ho this spine as his tongue wickedly caressed the cut.

“Wouldn’t want you leaving me still bleeding, would we?” he ask  
d, then husky tone.

idy, the “You realize this is blood magic, right?” Blood magic was closely  
e to get sex magic. You couldn’t really heed the call to one without feeling th

If I was binding myself to Khaos, we’d be inside one another’s minds  
helping as close as two souls could get. Well, other than being a bound mate  
ore than obviously we were not. In the two hundred and ninety-nine years we  
ook for stuck together, he had ignored the need to consummate shit with me. N  
“We’re could have done that.

er. You Khaos would not be able to see anything about what I’d been doing  
ths.” of course. I’d hidden it in a part of my mind that couldn’t be found  
spell or magic known, not even after my death.

men, I “Of course I do, brat.” He smirked.

Ignoring him, I walked toward the open area where a large carpet c

the floorboards. I flicked my wrist, causing the carpet to roll up before me and leaning against the wall. Next, I held my hand out for the spell. I had to. Afterward, I began sweeping the floor backward to intensify the spell in a protection. I created the pentagram using black salt and then added a blood circle around it.

I tiptoed back a couple steps, calmly imagining it with the six skulls by black agate at each point. They would have moldavite clamped between their teeth for grounding, and amethyst in their eye sockets to boost power in the third eye. Violet candles would be around the entire circle arranged in a peckles outline. They would boost influence, metaphysical energy, strength, and abilities to access suppressed knowledge. And dragon blood sage would surround us, grounding us while adding extra intensity to the spell. A single slap of my hands had the items appearing perfectly in place. A victorious smile played on my lips before I cleared the emotion.

“I thought you feared using dark magic, Aderyn?”

“I did, but I found that there is beauty in the strangest of places where no one else is. No longer controls your mind,” I murmured before striding back to the chest. It was “Remove your shirt. Please.” After dipping my fingers into the paste, which was the thick substance to finish the binding spell. I was the last one to be anointed, since I was the one who would hold all of their minds together. That done, I grabbed the length of rope and turned, only to pause when I met with the sight of Khaos’s powerful chest. Remembering our audience, I forced myself to walk into my circle, careful not to disturb anything. I exhaled as he waited for the invitation, when he and I both knew he would cross it without one.

A witch’s circle was her space, and we protected it from those who would cover harm her, which was why I’d never understood how he managed to cross

lifting and out of the ones I created. It should've sensed him as the threat he was. "Won't you join me, Khaos?" I asked, extending my hand.

The moment he entered the circle, the power hissed as flames erupted from the candles. Khaos stepped closer as the circle began spinning around me. The erotic humming in the circle's air caused my nipples to harden, and I circled my thighs to keep from shifting. Lust rushed through me—raw, heady, and unchecked. Goosebumps spread over my flesh as his thumb traced over my palm.

"You're going to need to release my hand," I whispered through clenched teeth, tightening my throat.

"What if I don't want to release it?" he countered huskily.

My stare lifted to his as I licked my dry lips. Khaos's hand slid to the small of my back, jerking me flush against his body. The feel of his thick cock against my belly had my lashes dusting against my cheeks. A wave of lust rushed through me as he lowered his heated mouth and whispered in my ear.

"I feel you within me, brat. Do you feel me inside you?" The raspy voice, I used to hear, had arousal rushing to my pussy.

"Yes," I admitted, fighting to hold back the moan.

The magic I pulled from came from both Hecate and Lilith. One day when I was had come so fucking hard I squirted. Of course, I'd thought I'd pissed myself, and was thankful I'd been alone, so the embarrassment was mine and Khaos's experience. I was praying I didn't have another sexual seizure, as I'd never been able to do it, here.

Khaos's soul was brushing against mine as our minds linked. It felt euphoric, magical, and right. His soul against mine felt right. Khaos had always been my quicksand. The one man I continually sank to my knees.

was. He was the only man I'd ever questioned my sanity for. With him, I felt  
I was home. This sadistic sociopath was the man I wanted, more than I  
could breathe.

us. The "How do I feel inside you?" he murmured, his words rushing through  
me as if he were fucking my soul and liked it!

dy, and "Euphoric and right," I admitted. I could not lie inside the circle. I  
never wanted to taint the magic of it. He knew it too. "How do I feel inside

Chancing a peek up at him, I found his eyes heavy with lust. The  
need pounding in his cheek caused my heart to clench. Obviously, he did  
not want me drifting through him.

"Like you've always been there."

My eyes widened, but then his fingers slipped from mine, which he  
knew, erect our palms connecting as the circle took control of us. The moment our  
skin shivered connected, the rope wrapped around our wrist, binding us together  
and into my inky shadows slithered over our bodies, forcing us even closer to

Vines ripped from my spine, twisted around my ankles, and then up to  
his behind his lower back. My eyes rounded as the magic began forcing us  
into a coupling position.

"That's new," he said, with mirth sparkling in his eyes.

time, I "Lilith chooses how we fit before blessing the spell," I offered  
myself an explanation.

alone to "I'm aware of what Lilith prefers. Any woman who isn't afraid of her  
termed sexuality or eroticism is worth studying, after all." My chest pressed

his until I was certain he could feel the tempestuous beating of my heart.

It was The wind howled around us as the circle began melding us in the moment  
as those who'd trespassed against him. Khaos's body heat drifted against  
my chilled flesh, sending warmth fluttering through me. His hard core

It like I forced against my lower lips until it felt as if they were wrapping around my next monstrous beast. The whole bun-for-the-hot-dog pun held a new meaning if he felt it as acutely as I did, his hand, which wasn't bound to mine, though my ass, moving me against him.

"That's not needed," I warned as my clit began to pulse. If I did, "No, it's not needed. It's wanted. You're soaked, brat. It's been a long time for you?" since we've been this close together inside your circle." The tic "It will be nice to wait another fifty years to do it again. Right?" I didn't like split second before the knowledge of him marrying another shot through my mind. The wind howled as it sensed my unease.

"It won't be fifty years. You'll be coming to my house tomorrow night and it's not negotiable, Aderyn."

Her palms It was then that the singing began inside the circle, but no one outside would hear the Irish traditional signing, melismatic, melodic Sean-nós together. It was a woman's voice singing *A ógánaigh an chúil chraobhaigh*. It was so crosshauntingly beautiful, but impractical and unneeded.

It was into a "Do you know the words?" Khaos asked.

"Quiet, I'm working on my big-witch energy." Closing my eyes again, a disarming smile spreading over his lips, I felt the world spinning around me. In "Heed my call, Lilith. Assist us in discovering who has betrayed Nasir." Lilith glyphs shot through my mind as an owl hooted in the distance. The vines holding us together became snakes, and I shiver in apprehension. Against pressing closer to the masculine form I was wrapped around.

Her. "Don't like snakes, love?"

Her mind of "No," I admitted. Meowing sounded all around us as the world slowly came to a stop, along with the music. "Do not step on the cats. Don't look at them or touch either. She doesn't like it," I warned. Sliding down his frame and getting

and the first good look around us. Peering at the street sign, I tried to recall what it said. Ashad built a homeless shelter in Tophet. “When did we get a homeless shelter?” I asked softly.

“It was built in the early 70s because it was needed. I required a place to hide people, and it worked to keep others from finding them. No one likes going to a homeless shelter. They’re uncomfortable in them, which means they tend to be distracted when they do enter them,” he replied as his fingers threaded through mine. It made sense why he’d built it. He’d used my brothels for a similar reason. People who were uncomfortable tended to leave and out quickly, while they missed things in their haste. “We need to get closer.” At his statement, we both turned at the sound of voices. “Thomas, Aderyn.”

“Are you going to kill the kid?”

“Are you fond of him?”

“Sorta,” I replied.

“Yes,” he said matter-of-factly. I paused, which caused him to dwell. Startling blue-gold eyes slid to mine, and his smile was almost teasing. Khaos’s eyes had only turned that dizzying shade when his magic was working, which meant he was trying to learn my secrets through the spell. “He’s just a kid, love. You know that I don’t enjoy the children.”

I allowed him to drag me with him as we walked toward the building. Once there, I felt eyes on my spine. I barely missed being hit with claws as I spun aside.

“Wraiths!” I cried out as Nasir forced me behind his body. “They should be able to see us through the wards in the spell. That means there’s something using dark magic to shield against the memories from being discovered.”

hen we “Can they hurt us here?”

omeless “Would I be screaming if they couldn’t?” I demanded. One of the  
looking, skeletal figures shot toward us, and Nasir’s hand shot f  
place togripping the creature’s throat. The moment he touched it, it froze. Wi  
ie likesmore than a flick of his wrist, he broke its neck.

. means I had spelled us to be protected from the fuckers. It meant the  
fingerspowerful opposing magic within the memories. They shouldn’t hav  
sed theable to sense our presence at all. Let alone come anywhere near u  
o get inprotected from harm. Apparently, they hadn’t been given the memo.

l to get “That will buy us a few moments. We cannot kill them.”

There’s “Most likely because they’re fucking dead already?” I snorted as  
rushed toward us. “Yeah, fuck you.” I sent my magic rushing into it  
shattered into a million particles. Nasir just narrowed his eyes before  
to glance over at me.

“They can die, apparently.”

o so as “They’re already dead.” I didn’t know what else to say. I’d neve  
ost . . .one before, nor had I heard of one being murdered either. “I don’t kno  
his ownI knew I could do that.” I shrugged.

through “There,” Nasir said as whispered voices drifted toward us. We roun  
killingtrailer that was being loaded and then pulled to a stop. The stran  
speaking in hushed tones turned, eyeing the darkness surrounding the  
ildings.men dressed in expensive suits stood together as the wraiths waited f  
a lethalorders. “Do you recognize them?”

“Not all of them, no. The tallest one was at Celeste’s shop a few da  
ouldn’tHe isn’t a regular, though, which is why I noticed him.” It wasn’t a li  
anotherbeen inside her shop, but he’d always been there with two of th  
d.” witches employed by Nasir. Celeste was their coven leader, which



either they were stupid enough to try to steal from him or they were ghastly cahoots with whomever was. “There are more people over there.” I moved forward, toward the open loading dock, and Nasir tugged me along behind, with a little forcing me to run to keep up with him.

“Son of a bitch,” he growled as Kane stepped into sight. “There were no Italians.”

“You’re marrying one, so shouldn’t they be on your side?”

“No. He’s opposing my wedding. The cartel is as well. The invention I took was my wedding gift from her father.” My stomach sank as I unlocked our fingers. “Jealous?”

“I’m going to throw up. I just exhausted a shit ton of magic for you, and it’s all rivalry over you marrying some Italian mafia brat. Did you get what I wanted?” I snapped, unable to prevent my tone from being sharp.

“Yes,” he stated as he turned, threading his fingers through mine. Jerking me into the firmness of his form, he hissed. “I can feel you, and I’ve killed your jealousy, need to be wanted, and desire to destroy me. I’m going to warn you once. Do not do anything against Vanessa. If you do anything to ruin this deal, I promise you’ll regret it tenfold.”

I snapped the thread on the spell, knowing he’d end up disorientated when we returned. He swayed against me, and his hold loosened enough for me to turn to leave. Before I got more than a step away, he gripped my arm, and he looked at him over my shoulder and waited.

“Thank you,” he whispered as confusion lit on my face, but then he turned and headed to Merikh. “Where did the girls go, Merikh?”

“They said they’d meet us at the club,” Merikh informed softly, his hands scouring over me as if he thought I’d be shredded apart or some shit.

“They’re running,” I whispered.

were in “Put an alert out. They’re working against us. I want them found, pointed drawn and quartered in front of the other witches.”

id him, A single slap of my hands had the rift opening, and I made short work of forcing my altar and supplies back to the room above my shop. Once I was sure I’d left nothing behind, I stepped through the portal and whistled for my grimoire back to me. The moment I was inside the upper level shop, I turned to close the portal, but Nasir stepped through.

ry they “What are you doing?” I asked worriedly.

tried to “Stay home tonight. I will send men to guard the house at dusk, so make sure you’re in it before they arrive. Tonight, I don’t want you in my room, so I mean it, do not fuck this up. You do not know what is at stake.”

at you “So, first you demand I stay at the club, and now you’re banning me from the club?”  
“Don’t question me. Do as I say,” he snapped.

ly hair. “Noted,” I laughed coldly. “Anything else?”

Aderyn. “Be at my house early on Friday. I have some shit to do, but I’ll be going to meet you there the moment I’ve finished.”

hing to “I don’t know where you live, Nasir. And I’ll be there at five, so the contract demanded.” I’d never figured out which lofty mansion he used as his primary residence.

r me to “I’ll send one of the men to pick you up. Make sure you bring something sexy to wear around the house.” With that, he stepped out of the shop and went home. Vanessa is waiting, and we have a witch hunt to partake in.”

turned

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his eyes

“Put an alert out. They’re working against us. I want them found, then drawn and quartered in front of the other witches.”

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“What are you doing?” I asked worriedly.

“Stay home tonight. I will send men to guard the house at dusk, so make sure you’re in it before they arrive. Tonight, I don’t want you in my club. I mean it, do not fuck this up. You do not know what is at stake.”

“So, first you demand I stay at the club, and now you’re banning me?”

“Don’t question me. Do as I say,” he snapped.

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“Be at my house early on Friday. I have some shit to do, but I intend to meet you there the moment I’ve finished.”

“I don’t know where you live, Nasir. And I’ll be there at five, as the contract demanded.” I’d never figured out which lofty mansion he used as his primary residence.

“I’ll send one of the men to pick you up. Make sure you bring something sexy to wear around the house.” With that, he stepped out of the shop. “Let’s go. Vanessa is waiting, and we have a witch hunt to partake in.”

# CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE SCENT OF SAGE, lavender, and freshly cut herbs soothed my nerves as I strolled through the shop, smiling. All the shelves had been restocked and organized, proving that I'd made the right choice in choosing Mabel the promotion. Obviously, I'd hired competent workers, which was a good thing since Khaos was hellbent on making me spend my week at his house. Pausing in front of the large display of crystals, I moved them back to their respective places and turned off the light that lit from above.

I spent a little over an hour tidying up the store, but the girls had done an amazing job of cleaning up. I hardly had anything to do. Honestly, I was worried about hovering over the girls. I'd trained them how to run the store, but the event I ended up back in Nasir's merciless hands. Call me paranoid, but I didn't trust the false-freedom he'd awarded me, and he'd told me he had men watching me.

After flipping the downstairs lights off, I headed upstairs to grab my bag. As I grabbed my purse, glass shattered downstairs, and I froze, listening for any other sounds. When none came, I moved to the window so I could see the sidewalk below. Several heavily armed men were approaching my shop.

“You’ve got to be kidding me. What now?” I muttered beneath my  
Yanking on the threads, I forced a fissure between the shop and  
neighbor’s house instead of my own just in case I had visitors there.  
Once I was fully inside her home, I carefully closed it, frowning before  
my sleeve to cover my nose and mouth.

The house smelled of death and rot. Ignoring the roiling of my stomach,  
I entered Tara’s room, staring at where she lay on the bed, lifelessly looking  
at the ceiling. There was a large bullet hole in her forehead. Regret  
rushed through me when I considered how shitty of a neighbor I’d been. Sure,  
I’d done a lot of work in her yard in exchange for using her attic, but I  
hadn’t been close to her. Tara had not known I was using her attic, but that was  
a matter of semantics.

When I stepped back from the bed, my foot connected with something  
hard, which turned out to be Tilly. Cameron had shot a puppy who was  
even six months old. Tears pricked my eyes at the loss of the pooch,  
and it made me feel like shit.

“Sorry, Tara,” I whispered on my way out of her bedroom. In the hallway,  
I pulled the rope to bring down the retractable ladder, climbed the  
wooden slats, and then pulled everything up and closed behind me.  
I headed for the attic window that faced the side of my house, and most  
likely from a front angle.

Men were beginning to infiltrate my house, but from this far away  
I couldn’t make out the insignias on their arms. Whoever they were, they  
were packing M16s. After the third or fourth one disappeared through the  
doorway, I counted to five and smiled. Urgent sounds of distress  
came from within the house, and everyone who’d gone inside without  
my permission came running out.

breath. The moment they stepped from the covered porch, their bodies st  
nd mysteam as their skin burned, and the men started to scream. Their s  
as well.intensified as the skin sizzled. The ones who hadn't gone inside tried  
e usingthem, but it was pointless. They grabbed one man's hands, which caus  
to howl as the skin liquefied from the bone. Idiots. One shouldn't ev  
mach, Iwith a witch's home when she wasn't there to invite them inside.  
king up I'd built the house from the ground up. The foundation held a pen  
et shotwhich was strengthened by the crystals placed into the cement. Herl  
e, I hadplanted around the perimeter to enhance the circle. I had burned ru  
hadn'tincantations for protection into the wooden beams. Anyone, save for  
was justand those under his direct order, was protected from my magic. I hadr  
allowed to spell my home against him or his men. Khaos had included  
nothingthe contract we'd written before he had agreed to give me space. But  
was notwho entered it intending to harm me? My house wasn't very forgi  
, whichthem.

A loud explosion sounded beneath me, which shook the entire hou  
allway,sound of boots moving over the hardwood floors on the first floor bel  
narrowme heading for the bag I kept in her attic, making sure to byp  
Then Ifloorboards I knew would creak. It was tucked under a pile of bag  
t of thestacked up here when she'd first moved in, and as silently as I could, I  
it free. Call me paranoid, but I'd had an escape plan in place si  
away, Ifinished building my home.

ey were Kneeling, I pulled off the jacket Khaos had dressed me in this m  
gh myopened the large duffle bag, pulled out my holster, then secured it o  
eruptedchest. Next, I slid on the waist belt, which had slits for the vials of  
out mytoxins, and spell jars, and pulled out the one labeled 'drink me'. I dow

arted to citrus flavored, nulling tonic like a shot, then reached for the re  
screams behind the tonic.

to help In the last fifty years, I'd become adept at creating spell jars that co  
sed immortals or immortals in gruesome manners. Of course, it hadn't been  
er fucksome catastrophes that ended up with me being spelled, but I'd found  
to null the magic from affecting me as they'd done when I'd begun pra  
tagram, dark magic. I had to experiment through trial and error.

as were Once I had all the vials in the slots of the belt, I grabbed one ha  
nes and checked the chamber and magazine, and slid it into the holster. A  
Khaos checked the second one and secured it in its place, I pulled my jack  
it been on.

l that in "She has to be close," a man snarled from the hallway below. "The  
anyone bitch wasn't at her shop. Our intelligence states she doesn't go else  
ving to Find her! I saw an upstairs from outside. Find the fucking staircase."

"Someone put a bullet in this bitch and her fucking dog. That's fuck  
se. The someone else stated before chuckling. "Maybe we aren't the onl  
ow, had hunting this demon bitch?"

ass the "It's a possibility. Many have tried to end her throughout her li  
s she'd She's an enchantress, according to the last asshole's report." Th  
I pulled speaker was moving into the hallway where the dropdown staircase w  
nce I'd visible as he spoke.

"She's one of the original witches. Aderyn Caine isn't even her na  
orning, told you who she was, you'd shit your pants, gentlemen. Fucking he  
ver my when the Herne's told me who this bitch actually was," the first  
tonics, replied.

ned the I was weakened from casting the earlier spell and opening the las  
from my shop to the attic. So, of course, this would be when they

asoning attack me. If it wasn't for shit luck, I'd have none. I'd be lucky to these pricks, whoever they were.

uld end "Found the stairs, sir," the third man called out.

without As I backed toward the thin window, a floorboard creaked, and I fr l a way even daring to draw a breath. There was a heavy beat of silence before acticing were ripping through the floor around me. I gave up all pretense of and rushed toward the window, pausing only long enough to yank th indgun, one open before swinging one leg over the windowsill. Several points fter I'd streamed through bullet holes in the attic floor, and my lips twitch et back uncorked a vial of toxins and tossed it into the room. Before it hit the was through the window and shutting it behind me.

fucking I slipped into the alcove of the roof and watched men and women i 2where around on the ground. They'd brought an entire army to my house, meant they were witch hunters. They were deadly and a huge issue ed up," had discovered Khaos's sleepy little town of otherworld creatures.

y ones Coughing sounded from inside, and I turned in time to see the v shatter. The asshole inside emptied his side arm into the window as he ifetime fresh air. The ghastly, wet sound of his cough was a prelude to his u ie third demise. A loud thump told me that whoever had been climbing the lad ould be fared no better. Unfortunately, the hunters on the ground below he shots and had come to check them out.

me. If I Shots peppered the roof around where I was hidden in the shadow ll, I did before I could move from the spot, a stinging began at my side. Whisp speaker spell, I rushed to the edge of the roof, leaping to the ground below ripped from the ground, seeking the shooter as my blood dripped o t portal soil. Another protection spell, one of many I'd implemented.

ould "She's on the south side of the house!" a woman shouted.



escape “So much for sisterhood, bitch,” I muttered while holding my side. I lifted my hand and sent tendrils of dark magic shooting at her, through her throat. Blood sprayed from her neck as her head slid to the ground, not and then rolled onto the ground, moments before her body joined it the bullets I didn’t stick around to see who would come check on her. Instead, I hid and booked it to the corner of the house. As soon as I rounded it, I came out the rightface with a man. My hand lifted, brushing over his cheek. “Be a gentleman of light, darling. Go murder some of your friends.” His eyes turned white behind me as he lifted his rifle and shot toward me. My mouth dropped open in shock on the floor, I fear, but then the thuds of bodies hitting the ground sounded behind me.

When I checked, the handful of men who had been creeping up behind me moving were dead. “I wonder how well they’ll work as compost?” While they were dead, which opened fire on another one of his buddies, I inched my way to the back of my house, keeping close to the siding.

“Find her!” A male snapped inches away from me. The moment he was in front of me, my fingers snaked out, brushing his hand. “Murderous intentions,” he whispered.

“Hey, I didn’t come looking for you. Now did I? No. You came to my house. Hand me your earpiece, baby boy. After you’ve done so, I want you to walk around the house and see how many of your friends you can shoot. If you do so, I want you to scream how small your cock is.” His eyes were covered with the white, sightless film of my dark magic.

“We’re going to end you, demoness.”

“I’m not a demon. I do not do that whole ‘feed from sex’ thing, and I’m not a witch. But if you are looking for a witch? Then I am your girl. I’ve got so much witch energy, baby boy. I grew up in Witch-A-Bitch-Woods, and I’m straight from the fucking hood of wish a motherfucker would. So, choose your words.”

Then I hand me the earpiece because you have friends to kill, and I have place tearingtonight.” He dutifully handed over his earpiece, which I held to my ear. He sideambled around the house.

re. “I have a small cock, friends!” he shouted, which startled most of them. Instead, I into silence. Then he raised his gun, only to be cut down by his friend. His face to he could so much as pull the trigger.

tleman, “Good help is so hard to find when you need to murder people,” I heard before he before static sounded on the earpiece.

ock and “This bitch is going down! She murdered Hester and McMullen. Turn and me.motherfucker to aim his gun at us? Kill the asshole,” someone demanded behind me.“Regroup at the front of the house. Five of us will go one way, five that guy other way. We’ll surround this evil crone.”

k porch Crone? I wasn’t that old. Who the hell did they think I was? Baba

Now, that witch was an actual crone. Well, she was most days, a passed.Maybe this was why Khaos demanded I steer clear of the club tonight. “bitch,” had me thinking it was because he didn’t want me around his little place.

but he maybe was just trying to torture me with hunters. Sound like to me something he’d do.

t you to A branch snapped beside me, and I moved from the shadows, calling out. As the magic I’d stored around my house. Then I strolled to the middle of the yard, right between both sets of assholes seeking to end me. Smiling.

ignored the stinging pain in my side, I twirled a strand of my hair.

“Trespassing on a witch’s land isn’t wise,” I announced in a singsong voice to the asshole.“It’s actually really bad for your health.”

me big “Get on the ground, bitch. You’re surrounded!” the man in charge said to me.

d I am “Is that how you speak to women nowadays? It explains the lack of respect you’ve had,” I snorted, turning toward him, giving the other faction my

es to be “Get the fuck down!” he continued, as the people with him trained  
ar as heweapons on me, only to then lower them when they realized what th  
done.

of them Then I laughed.

l before “I imagine the idea of shooting me and killing them isn’t ideal,

Swaying my hips as I strolled closer, I cooed, “Don’t worry. You’re  
uttereddead. You just don’t realize it yet, sweet boy. Pity you’ll die a virg

what’s a bitch to do when you come fucking around her hood?” Shrug

he nexttested the thread of magic that was woven throughout my yard. At fir

anded.shifted to wide-eyed, pain-filled gazes. But then, I yanked a tad ha

go theensure they felt genuine pain. “Do you feel that? That is death knoc

your fucking door,” I said as I pulled the fabric and had their heads t

Yaga?from their bodies. One by one, they popped from their necks. “Pop g

nyway.weasel.”

ght. He I was turning to ensure there wasn’t anyone left standing when sor

othing,hissed through the air and punched into my chest. Another jolt hit thro

ed likebreast. Peering down, I gazed at the crossbolts protruding from my

Two had embedded deeply in my torso. One precariously close to my

ling upthe other in the lower right flank. I snarled as darkness took hold and

e of theout viciously at the woman who’d remained in the woods. Roots shot u

ng as lthe ground to wrap around her ankles, holding her to the ground.

exploded from within me, causing the roots to pull, until slowly, it c

ig tone.her body beneath the soil. The crunching of bones combined w

screams was not nearly as satisfying as I wished it were.

narled. “Fuck,” I growled as acid sizzled beneath my flesh.

of sex Long ago, hunters had discovered a toxin that could render immorta

y back. From the acid charring beneath my tissues, and the burning spreading

ed theirmy skin, I was willing to bet I'd just been poisoned with the same shit.  
ey had Fumbling through my pocket, I withdrew my phone and hit the call  
on Nasir's number. They immediately sent the call to voicemail. Clos  
eyes, I peered down at the headless body nearest to me, frowning at th  
hmm?"and sword tattoo on his wrist.

already "You've got to be fucking kidding me," I muttered. Kneeling besi  
gin, butpushed his sleeve up to stare at the House of Herne family crest  
gging, IMaxwell. Your dad is relentless in his pursuit of justice, love."

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rder to  
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wisting  
oes the

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nething  
ugh my  
/ chest.  
/ lungs,  
l lashed  
ip from  
Anger  
lragged  
ith her

ls mad.  
g under

my skin, I was willing to bet I'd just been poisoned with the same shit.

Fumbling through my pocket, I withdrew my phone and hit the call symbol on Nasir's number. They immediately sent the call to voicemail. Closing my eyes, I peered down at the headless body nearest to me, frowning at the shield and sword tattoo on his wrist.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me," I muttered. Kneeling beside it, I pushed his sleeve up to stare at the House of Herne family crest. "Aw, Maxwell. Your dad is relentless in his pursuit of justice, love."

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# CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

IT TOOK ALMOST AN entire hour to collect the heads of the hunter; they were in garbage bags, I dragged them to my car, shoved them in the backseat, and then drove to The Sinner's Den sideways in the seat, a yanking the poisonous arrows free without Khaos's help. By the time I reached his club, I'd only sideswiped three parked cars and narrowly avoided hitting a poor pedestrian.

Sweat trickled down my face as I slid out of the front seat and collapsed my knees on the hard pavement. Holding on to the vehicle, I climbed out with my feet and swayed for a second before yanking open the back door. I did a quick workout to get the bag of bloodied, lifeless skulls from the back seat.

I approached the line carefully as I concealed the wounds from my eyes. I staggered toward the front doors, then scanned the lively crowd, pushing the line forward as the doors opened. Everything hurt. I could feel the poison spreading in my system, inching toward my brain. Sweat trickled down my neck and then continued trickling its way between my fingers. Maybe it was blood? It didn't really matter which one it was, right? I

in front of a bouncer I hadn't met before, who stared at me with unfeeling eyes.

"Back of the line. Now," he snapped.

Rune turned with wide, horrified eyes aimed at me. "Aderyn?" I must have looked worse than I thought for him to sound so concerned. "What the hell happened?"

"I had an issue. It's handled," I informed, my voice thready, as I pulled my bag up. "He'll want to know what happened."

"He's busy tonight," he returned before shoving long, tapered fingers through his hair.

Once I stepped into the hallway, I was afraid of the time I missed. I pressed to my chest. Slowly inching forward, I coughed. The blood splattered his face, causing him to pale as I coughed toward him. He motioned to the doors, issuing an order. "Open them." His mouth tightened with worry as he looked at me. "You forced your way in. Go." Removing the red rope for me, he exhaled loudly. "Dalton, call security and have them clear a path to the elevators. Do it now."

I didn't wait to see if he changed his mind before moving through the doors. Music pounded, but the words eluded me. I righted myself, stumbling toward the stairs and clutching the handrail, so I didn't topple. Someone bumped into my side on the stairs, and I whimpered, jostling the two arrows protruding from my back. Burning pain seared my side as the shirt stuck to the gunshot wound, sticky with blood. I reached the main floor, two men sidled up beside me while another cleared a path to the elevators across the room.

No one spoke to me as I forced my legs to move forward. The black bags dragged behind me were getting heavier with every step I took. Holding my hand against the bullet hole, I had to swallow back bile when I felt the

h hard,rip deeper into my torso. It was moving. Those assholes had shot n  
poisoned arrows and magical bullets. Bastards! Fuck. I didn't have  
magic left to heal myself or prevent it from tearing its way to my vital  
ist haveHow the fuck was it even moving? Fucking hunters and their nifty shit  
he fuck The moment we reached the elevators, the man used his keycard t  
them. People tried pushing their way toward the doors as they parted,  
ield thesecurity detail forced them back. I stepped into the elevator car, and t  
followed. His soft gray eyes moved down my body with curiosity  
fingersdescended, and after a second, he cleared his throat.

“Rough night?”

, which “Nah, it was amazing.” I scoffed. “Yours?”

: before “Are those bolt heads protruding from your body?” His exp  
e staredwavered when I opened my coat. “Fuck. You need a medic or a hospit  
to pass, “No, I just pissed off some bees with really large stingers,” I utterec  
1 to theshrug, which caused tears to prick my eyes. “Just another fucked-up  
the neighborhood.”

ugh the The slight jostle of the car stopping almost made me lose my footin;  
elf as I cursed myself for not changing my shoes. Though, considering I'd ha  
e downthan a dozen bodies littering my lawn, I'd figured it was a better idea  
when itto Nasir's before more hunters showed up. Entering the chamber lea  
throughthe main room of the ninth level of hell, I dragged my feet and igno  
Once Irrattling that had started in my chest. Luckily, I would not make  
r beganenough for madness to set in.

Once the toxins reached the mind, it was game over. I'd be forc  
κ bags Istasis until I'd overcome the madness. If I couldn't overcome it, I'd be  
ling myin a casket, placed beneath the ground, and guarded by the st  
e bulletimmortals in existence. Sadly, it sounded like a vacation I needed



ne withdidn't hate the thought of spending the rest of eternity in the cataco  
enoughParis with the thousands of other insane immortals.

organs. I paused as Khaos, who was seated with the blonde from the picture  
: into view. Their heads were bowed in conversation, which looked in  
to openenough. Khaos's head lifted, giving me a better view of the smile pla  
but thehis generous mouth. My heart twisted at the sight of it. He lifted their  
he manhands, kissing her knuckles before lowering them to rest on the table b  
as wethem. A server delivered champagne and strawberries, and he imme  
plucked a berry up, dipped it into cream, and offered it to her.

My insides twisted until I felt as if I'd be torn asunder. For a mo  
stood at the threshold, watching him feed her berries, and hating the v  
ressionlicked his fingers clean after each one. The way he touched her was  
al." loving. His eyes sparkled with love, which they'd never done when  
l with agazed at me. Despair settled inside me, unpacking as it moved into th  
day inof my soul. I fought against the tears closing my throat while I grie  
death of what I'd felt for him, but then I started forward.

g, and I People moved out of my way while glancing curiously at the  
id moredragged behind me. The moment I reached their table, Khaos'  
to headshimmering with murderous rage. Nothing but disdain and cc  
ding toremained on his face while he glowered. I was glad I'd concealed the  
red thesince Vanessa was the vision of every man's dream girl, and I looked l  
it longshe'd wiped off her expensive shoes.

"I warned you, Aderyn." The threat underlining his words did little  
ed into my reply.

sealed "There was a problem."

rongest "I don't give a fuck what problem you had. I told you not to come h

, and I "Who is this, darling?" Vanessa asked.

ombs of “No one worth introducing you to, love.” His flippant response made my heart wither and die. Fighting the tears threatening to fall, I shook myself, came “She’s leaving. Isn’t that right?”

innocent “Khaos,” I whispered as the bullet moved again inside me, and I fainted on blacked out from the pain.

er linked “You heard my fiancé. Leave,” Glamour Barbie said. I ground my teeth together as I dropped my hold on the bag and began fishing through it immediately pocket for the hand I’d taken from the Herne Knight. “Are you daft, bitch?”

“Don’t make this worse than you already have. Turn around and walk away from me,” Khaos began to slide from the rounded booth.

“Did you hear him? Do you have any idea who he is, bitch?” Vanessa snarled.

“Unfortunately, I know exactly who he is,” I muttered. “Now, if you don’t want to ruin the fuck up, I’m trying to have a conversation here.”

“Aderyn.” My name from his lips had never sounded more like mine than it did at that moment.

“Leave, you stupid slut!”

“Look, shut the fuck up. I googled ‘who gave a fuck’, and my name was on that list. If you’d be so kind as to seal your over-filled lips, I’ll say what I want to say and be gone. Forever.” At the last word, Khaos’s anger became palpable. The moment I’d placed the severed hand on the table, the room spun around me as Khaos jerked his chin at someone behind me.

“Take the trash out, Merikh,” Vanessa pouted. “She is ruining our wedding. How can we plan our wedding with something so worthless and both of you interrupting us? You should’ve stopped her at the door. We don’t need her here.” “We don’t want this garbage inside the venue.”

“Take the bags and Aderyn to the holding cell. Leave her there until she wakes up.”

ade mydeal with her in the morning.”

y head. “What? No, K-bear. I want her gone or dead. Daddy said you had a  
who I’d need to rid you of. If this is her, I want her gone. I want it  
nearlybaby.” Vanessa smiled, but her eyes were cold as Khaos turned and pr  
soft kiss on her forehead.

y teeth “She’s useful, and I wouldn’t touch her with someone else’s cock, lo  
igh my My heart shattered into a thousand tiny, broken shards of useless pi  
tch?” blush of shame stained my cheeks as Ryat picked up one of the garbag  
leave.”which tore. Severed heads thudded to the ground and then scattered c  
floor. Pain drained the color from my face as I turned, drifting away  
/anessapeople gasped in horror at the heads and backed away. Misery finally  
the control I’d held over my emotions, stealing a sob from my lungs.

i’d shut “What the actual fuck, Aderyn?” Ryat’s voice carried above the p  
the crowd. “Oh, my gods. Nasir, look.”

a curse Ignoring them all, I stumbled toward the exit. The room of people  
like the Red Sea as I tripped, barely managing not to land on my face.  
large hand landed on my chest, forcing me to stop.

wasn’t “Little bird, you’re wounded.” Merikh stated as if I weren’t already

r what I “And?” I asked through trembling lips.

became “You need to come with me.”

e room “No, I don’t.” Merikh held my arm while glancing at the wounds vi  
my coat slid open. “Release me.”

r night. “Not until we handle the bolts.” I glared at him as I grabbed one, fo  
ersomethrough my chest. His eyes widened as his dark head shook. “Stop th  
eed nordemanded. Not caring what he wanted, I dropped the bloody bolt  
ground at his feet and then jerked the other one out without making a  
il I can“Damn it, little bird.”

“Goodbye, Shadow,” I whispered thickly as I forced my body to  
a whore again before it locked up from poison.

to hurt, I’d almost made it to the open elevator doors when Nasir shouted  
“Cursed father! Don’t let her leave.”

I’d love to see him try to stop me. I pulled both guns from their hol-  
ders.” One, I aimed at the guard who’d accompanied me down, the other, I aimed  
at the men rushing toward the elevator.

the bags, “Main floor. Now,” I hissed, pushing the barrel against his temple.

over the “You fucking leave here, and I swear you’ll regret ever being  
here, as the Aderyn,” Nasir snarled.

my broke “Too late, Khaos. I regretted that the moment I met you,” I whis-

pered before coughing violently, which sent blood splatter everywhere. The  
bullet tore through my belly, moving toward my heart. “Move this thing now

or I swear I will bring you with me when I go mad,” I warned through clenched  
teeth. The guard moved, pushing the button to start the car moving.

Then away.” I found Khaos in the crowd and told him, “Go back to your father

and tell him you won’t need to bother yourself with me anymore, bastard.” The  
elevator closed as the guard pressed himself against the back wall.

“You know he’s worse than the devil, right?”

“I’m very aware of who he is,” I replied with blood trickling from my  
mouth as “The thing is that I’m not even going to bother fighting the madness

of him. I won’t be the girl he enjoys torturing anymore, and maybe he’ll  
be forcing it on me the fuck alone. I’m okay with that.”

“That,” he said. When the doors opened, I kept the gun trained on him as the other  
men moved toward the men waiting for us. He slowly inched from the elevator

and toward the sound, rushing toward the other men. I followed his retreat, never allowing  
myself to waver. I ignored the commotion to my right, already knowing what

o movecausing it, and headed onto the dancefloor to disappear into the crowd. As people surrounded me, I turned, then discovered Khaos marching straight at me. "Stop me."

I holstered one of my guns as I slid behind a group of girls, dancing. They didn't have a care in the world. One was moving away from the crowd, so she was the one I shifted closer to. Then I slid my fingers against her arm, switching our images. The moment I'd done the spell, I aimed my remaining gun at the ceiling and fired several shots at the lights above. Glass rained down on the dancefloor as panic ensued. It took everything in me to keep pace with the girls, who were grasping on to one another. I whispered to everyone in their group that they were together.

People were screaming about shots being fired, as if the sound of the bullet or the glass hadn't been enough of a clue, and there was already a bottleneck at the bottom of the steps and another at the doors. I fought to keep on my feet. "Smart because, if I fell, I'd get trampled. Finally, after what felt like forever, the air rushed over me as we moved through the doors, bursting into the open air."

I remained with the group as they moved toward a car in the parking lot. After brushing my fingertips along the driver's arm to spell him, I gave directions to my place, I slipped into the backseat, whimpering as the car started. If I'd piled in over the top of me. As everyone else screamed for the driver to leave the vehicle, I was pulling myself up so I could see out the window.

My eyes drifted to where my car was being surrounded. Khaos was moving, forcing the door open as he scanned inside for any sign of me. When he found me before up empty, he yanked the keys from the ignition and turned to Merik. My aim was busy scanning those flooding out of the club.

who was "Take me home," I ordered the driver, igniting the spell I'd placed on

1. Once With that done, I sank against the seat and shivered as the toxins  
ight forthrough me. It wouldn't be long before the madness took control. I  
want to be anywhere near mortals when it consumed my mind.

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With that done, I sank against the seat and shivered as the toxins spread through me. It wouldn't be long before the madness took control. I didn't want to be anywhere near mortals when it consumed my mind.

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# CHAPTER NINETEEN

FROM THE SAFETY OF the woods in front of my house, I scanned the yard for headless bodies that still littered the yard. After I'd waited in the shadows to verify the hunters weren't camping outside of my house, I stumbled and tripped my way to the front door, which hung off the hinges. Blood was smeared across the porch, along with a few bullet holes. Had they seriously shot me out of my house because I wasn't home? Assholes.

Inside, the few pictures I'd hung on the walls were shattered on the floor in the living room. Ignoring the crunch of glass beneath my boots, I picked up the photo of me standing outside of my shop and placed it on the coffee table before making my way to the kitchen. I grabbed the brandy from the cupboard, a glass, and then headed toward the bedroom. Shivering from the heat shooting through my chest, I walked through my bedroom and my cramped bathroom. After setting the brandy on the edge of the tub to grab the healing salts, but the entire room tilted.

Grabbing the counter for balance, I slowly lowered myself to the floor. I tossed the entire container of salt into the tub, then leaned over just enough to turn the water on. All the while, it felt as if acid were rushing through



system. Fucking hunters, they continually came up with ways to bring me down to their level. It was so ironic that Aiden Herne, Maxwell's father, was not only immortal but also the head of the hunters.

It took an effort to remove the boots I'd slipped into this morning, but when I had, I forced my pain-riddled body up from the floor and removed my pants and shirt before giving up. After placing a sidearm on the lip of the tub, I climbed in the tub, moaning as the heated water eased the pain in the wounds, peppering my body.

"Alexa, Play Breaking Benjamin's 'Ashes of Eden,'" I muttered in a low voice. The music began playing loudly as I sank deeper into the water. It wouldn't be long before the madness consumed my mind. Khaos probably come here looking for me—or not? Maybe he'd gone looking for Vanessa, who appeared rather possessive of the sociopath she'd agreed to wed.

I attempted to sit upright, but the pain slicing through me made it impossible. Giving up, I sank back into the water. With my eyes squeezed tightly against the excruciating sensation of acid pushing through my wounds, I tried to focus on my breathing, on the erratic pulse thumping in my chest, on the soft *plunk* of drops falling from the faucet to the water. It wasn't until a loud noise echoed through my house, jarring me from slumber, that I opened my eyes. The water within the tub was cold, and the blood oozing from the wounds had tinted it pink.

I yanked the shower curtain closed before forcing my back to the wall, aiming the barrel at where I assumed the door to the bathroom was. Confusion whirled through my mind as I fought to gather my thoughts. Had I fallen asleep in the tub? Glancing down, I frowned at the wounds

ring ustorso and the black, inky lines that threaded from each one. They look  
er, wasspider webs beneath my tanned skin.

The sound of footsteps over the carpeted floor made my focus shift  
ut oncethe issue at hand. Voices spoke in soft tones outside the bathroom  
ny skirtdoorhandle moved, which had my finger squeezing the trigger, firing u  
e tub, Islider cracked open on the handgun, indicating it was empty. A b  
woundscurses erupted from the other side of the door before it sounded as if so  
kicked the door open.

a shaky Then the shower curtain was jerked back so hard it ripped from t  
Furious blue eyes met mine before they lowered to the mess of my  
ater. Itnude frame. His chest heaved as he stood eerily still, murderous rage  
wouldfrom him in violent waves.

back to “Fancy meeting you assholes here,” I whispered through the drynes  
reed tomouth. It felt as if I’d been drugged by strong sedatives instead of po

An eerie giggle left my lips before I coughed violently, wincing as pa  
nade itthrough me.

closed “What the fuck are you doing?” Khaos demanded in a sharp, clipped  
system, “Dying,” I replied before sinking deeper into the filthy water. “Go  
ears, onwill be ready to bury soon enough, Nasir.”

until a “Why the hell did you run from me, love?” As if he actually ca  
at theydidn’t. We both knew the truth of it now.

ig from “I was looking for the garbage. You know where you and your b  
fiancée said I belonged?” I snorted, which caused me to wince fr  
/all andagonizing burn. “Can’t you just come back once the madness has set  
n was.rather not deal with you right now.”

s. Why “You just fucking shot me, Aderyn. Do you honestly think I wi  
s onmyslide?” he growled before removing his suit jacket and then rolling

rolled his sleeves to reveal his sinfully hot tattooed forearms. "Get up. Now."

Laughing at his order, I sank deeper into the tub. I couldn't stand back to back. I was barely preventing my mouth and nose from becoming submerged in the chilled water. Khaos's regard slid down my battered frame before he expelled a soft huff of air. He bent and pulled the plug before sliding himself over me, hefting me out of the tub. A soft whimper of agony burst from my parted lips as he pressed his nose against my wildly beating pulse.

"You shouldn't have run from me, my love."

"Why? You didn't want me there anymore than I wished to be there," I muttered.

"I warned you not to come tonight. You could've called ahead and let me know. You chose not to do so."

"I called you. It went to voicemail, asshole. I should have just let you know. Hunters have me. It would've been kinder than you'll be, I'm sure."

Nasir moved into the bedroom. "Everyone out except Merikh. Secure the perimeter in case those bastards return to finish her." The men shuffled out, closing the door of my bedroom, exiting without a word. Merikh stood by the door, closing it once the men had left.

Khaos gently placed me on the bed before lowering to a crouch beside me. His fingers danced over the ruined flesh the bolts had shredded. He hissed as one of the black, ugly snakes beneath my skin moved, shooting through my stomach.

"You've indeed been poisoned," he whirred mellifluously.

"Fucking hell, Nasir. Her side," Merikh stated. Khaos pushed my arm away and flinched when he saw whatever Merikh had pointed out. "If you're ill, let me remedy this, I'd do it quickly."

Sliding his hand behind my back, Khaos used two fingers to unh...

bra. My eyes slid to Merikh, who was watching me with heat pooling up in his frenzied green stare as Khaos pulled back, gently removing my bra. My breathing grew labored.

“What are you doing?” I whispered, feeling excitement and fear grip me as the madness hooked its claws into my mind.

“Whatever the fuck I want, brat. You are too far gone from the point you already knew that.” Khaos eased me back onto the bed, which I started crying from. Blood dripped from the wound after being here,” I but when cold air rushed over my body, my nipples pebbled and my body twisted into the soft, plush comforter.

“Admittedly, I hate when you die, but I also love the glimpse I get of my bonded mate when you do. I love the fight you put up to remain alive, let the living, darling.” The sound of a blade being unsheathed caused my focus to shift to Merikh, who remained silent at the edge of the bed. “Don’t worry about him. He is here to ensure I do nothing too drastic or something that cannot be undone.”

“Please, Nasir? Just let me die in peace,” I murmured.

“There is no peace for us, Aderyn. You destroyed any chance of that. You fucked with the gods. You ruined us, and now we get to ruin you as the end of your days.” His cryptic words had my nose wrinkled. Khaos hooked his thumbs through my panties, then yanked them off. “Isn’t that beautiful, asshole?” Khaos’s dark head lowered to my cunt, and he forced his tongue through the slit. I moaned even though I fought to prevent any sound from escaping my lips. “Mmm, sweetest tasting pussy in the world,” his tongue flicked my clit, forcing pleasure to rush to my abdomen in a wave of fiery need.

“She is divine. But considering who she is, it makes perfect sense

g in histo taste like heaven even though she fucks like a demon.”

as my Blinking slowly as Khaos continued tonguing my pussy, I let my he  
to the side so I could see Merikh. How the hell would he know what  
growinglike? The asshole would not even kiss me more than a tease of c  
brushing against one another’s! Khaos pushed my thighs farther apart  
on. But had pain rushing through my chest and a cough violently pushing fr  
orced alungs. The bullet inched just that much closer to my heart.

jostled, “I love the sound of your pain,” Khaos murmured before sittin  
fingerstaking in the sight of my pussy being held open for his gaze.

“I’m fucking dying. Go fuck Glamour Barbie and leave me to die in  
t of my Nasir.”

ong the “You think I want that simple-minded bitch when I have a battle c  
ocus to His words slithered through me and then disappeared into one of the  
t worrytorn rips in my sanity. His feverish breath fanned my naked pussy be  
ng that turned his head, biting playfully into my thigh. “Goddamn I love you  
cunt, slut.” Khaos slid his hands under my back, forcing me up des  
pain he knew I was in.

at when “You motherfucker,” I cried, as agony vibrated through my entire  
ou until My vision swam as the toxins clawed deeper into my mind. “I want to  
Khaos you, bastard.”

she so “I bet you fucking do.” He laughed coldly. “You did this to us. Yo  
ced histo fuck with people you held petty grudges against, fucked us all. Now  
y soundsuffer because of you, my queen. The best part of it all? You don  
d.” His know why we’re all stuck together for eternity.” Maybe it was the m  
nite ballbut the rage in his tone made my body heat with lust. From the corne  
eye, I watched him extend his hand and Merikh place the knife in  
for her

buried my head in the crook of his neck as I ran my hands over the hard drift muscles of his abdomen.

I tasted “I need you to fuck me, Khaos.” I moaned huskily, moving my fingers over his sinewy stomach until my fingers found the bullet hole in his side, which, lifting my head, I licked my lips as he watched me through smoldering eyes. Then I shoved my fingers through the hole and bashed his head, shoving him away from me and rushing past him into the bathroom.

Coming back, “You fucking bitch!” he bellowed as I slammed the bathroom door behind me. My world tilted and my vision exploded in black darkness. I scanned the bathroom for my remaining gun. I found it still in the pocket under my discarded top and grabbed it before pressing my back against the wall and leveling the weapon at the door.

“I hated how badly my hands shook. Instead of him kicking down the door like I expected, darkness filled the entire bathroom until it enveloped everything inside of it in eternal night. I rose to my feet, chest rose and fell with labored breaths as I struggled to see with the darkness. Knocking sounded at the door, and I whimpered in fear.

“If I were you, I’d let me in, my love.” “Fuck you!” I wouldn’t escape Khaos. You didn’t escape the devil, Khaos knew it better than most. I couldn’t see, which could have been because of Khaos’s magic was blinding me, or the toxins were. Either way, I’d be blinded in eternal darkness.

“Do you honestly think you can escape me?” the darkness whispered against my ear, but then fingers—Nasir’s fingers—wrapped around my neck and his lips brushed against mine. “You’re shaking like a leaf,” he muttered. Before his other hand threaded into my hair, wrenching my head back, he brought the gun up against his skull, but it hit something else. Embers

ie solid where it had struck, and then his dark silhouette was revealed as the  
inside the bathroom erupted with flames.

gers up Broken horns protruded from his skull, dripping fiery sparks onto the  
oulder. Lines of glowing crimson slithered over his arms and torso. The hand  
g eyes. my jaw grew bigger, and wicked-looking wings unfolded from his  
before shielding us from the candlelight.

I'd never seen Khaos in anything other than a human form. This c  
closed terrifying. Crimson-colored eyes held a hushed threat, but I remained  
ts, as I frozen in shock. I couldn't wrap my mind around what I was seeing. T  
holster laughter he released told me he was enjoying my fright at the sight  
inst the monstrous beast he'd become.

"Khaos?" I whispered. The smug, masculine amusement he  
crowded the bathroom, while something hard and hot curled arou  
lled the calves and then moved to my thighs.

ght. My All at once, I was forced into the air with my thighs spread apart. A  
hin theripped from my lungs as I felt the same thing slithering around my wri  
arms were yanked up above my head, which caused my brain to

Tears swam in my eyes as he stepped back, his inhuman focus feasting  
ever. I vulnerable body.

because "Naughty girl. I warned you not to push me. Didn't I?" His voi  
'd been strangely layered and sharper than ever before. It was otherworldly an

Something pushed my cunt open, and I glanced down, seeing strange  
ispered of vine-like magic forcing my pussy to spread open. They almost appe  
y throat be tentacles, but they weren't. They slithered like vines, but the  
rmured attached to Khaos somehow. Either this was turning into a horror show  
back. I toxins were causing me to hallucinate. "So pretty, yet tender. I was g  
ignited make this easy on you. I'd intended to slit your throat and take you

candle until you'd fully healed, so just remember who started this, my love. He released me, dropping me unceremoniously to the floor, where I blacked out from the pain of landing.

Before I could get my bearings and control the lightheadedness, his hands, sliding through my hair, and he was dragging me into the bedroom onto the bed. The monstrous beast who stood next to me looked like a vengeful angel and devil, and I wanted nothing more than to flee from him. I attempted to crawl away, but dark tendrils wrapped around my wrists and ankles. They went taut, spreading me out like a sacrifice to the gods.

Khaos stared down at me, his eyes raking over my naked, broken body. There was madness in his eyes, and fuck if I didn't crave a taste of him. My body ached, but the pain was a slave to the madness that was sinking deeper into my mind, madness that flooded my veins with new life. Once, I wanted him to lose control and fuck me like the rabid, cruel beast he was.

A strangled groan erupted beside the bed, which had come from the fire. He'd grown as well, now standing taller than the doorframe with long, gossamer wings fanning out behind him. Where Khaos had been slithering over his flesh, Merikh had obsidian markings. His horns, once weren't broken like Khaos's, twisted in a spiral and ended in lethal, sharp points. Gone were the vibrant green eyes, replaced with voids of darkness that couldn't seem to look away from me. His shirt had been ripped from his chest, exposing intricate ink that covered every inch in dark, sinful tattoos. Khaos's hand gripped my throat, forcing my attention to return to him, but the anger radiating from him was palpable. I'd expected pain, but his hands lowered to brush against mine in a soft whisper of tenderness.

"I was intending to make your death as painless as possible, darling."



ve.” Heyou push me to violence.” Fear snaked through me as he pulled back almostare gasoline that burns so fucking brilliantly. I can’t wait to make you my name.”

fingers

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you push me to violence.” Fear snaked through me as he pulled back. “You are gasoline that burns so fucking brilliantly. I can’t wait to make you scream my name.”

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# CHAPTER TWENTY

“GO AWAY AND LEAVE me to die in peace! Isn’t your bimbo waiting for you? Go back to her. At least she wants you, bastard.”

“You think I want her? Why the fuck would I want some narcissist bitch when I have a fucking battle queen?” he asked, forcing his eyes to narrow. “It’s pathetic that you can’t see how fucking beautiful and wicked you are. You and me? We are the same. Am I evil? Absolutely yes, are you.”

“I am nothing like you,” I spat out vehemently.

“No? You are savagery in the purest form, darling. Like me, you do what you want and don’t care about the consequences. It is how you enjoy being mine. Not because you burned down my establishments. Nah, that’s too easy, I’m afraid. In your true form, you were forbidden to me and that didn’t stop you from taking what you craved, though. Adversities weren’t just savage. You were this phenomenally gorgeous, magnificent creature who cared naught for the laws or rules of men or gods. You were petty, mean, and so fucking violent.” Magic slithered up my legs, wrapping around them as something warm and thick slid through my arousal.

whimper escaped my lips as he smirked. “I remember the day you connected. I’d never wanted a mate and prayed to the Fates I’d be free by their threads of destiny. When I first saw you, I felt my soul come alive.”

“You’re insane,” I murmured breathlessly. Blood dripped down my face and I couldn’t find the willpower to care. My hands lifted and settled on your chest as my head rolled back against the wall. “Nasir.” My tone was low with sex and need.

“The moment I kissed you, I tasted home upon your perfect pout and lips. You were a battle waiting to be waged. In your eyes, there was desire, blood, and lust. Everything I knew I’d ever wanted was right there of me. This dark, ethereal queen who’d been forbidden from me, like all other men like me. You were a region of moonlight, constellation, and chaos. I was sure the Fates had made a mistake, and you’d be snatched from me. I never expected to end up with you, brat. I was nothing. A nobody and prince who would not ever hold a throne, who had nothing to offer, but so and yet, you didn’t care. ‘Kismet,’ you’d said, ‘requires nothing but a spark and the whisper of forever, and two people who crave one another more than material things.’ But we found one another too late, my love. You were on the brink of madness and refused to go to stasis to heal your broken mind. Instead, you fucked us all over. You betrayed me and the men who followed my lead. Now, you and I are cursed by the gods. They cursed you to forget us or what we were. But the rest of us? They took what we wanted most and then made it impossible for us to have it. Then they added a safeguard against us having that which we craved most. Can you guess what my curse is, Aderyn?”

A soft “No, but I’m sure it is dark and filthy.”

“No, that is what you spread, mistress of darkness. I enjoy the de-

ir souls your presence creates in others. You think I'm the monster, but you've forgotten darkness in the purest, wickedest form." His tendrils of magic slid against my skin, opening, teasing me with the threat of being larger than anything I've ever felt on my side, before. "But you don't remember it, and you won't remember what I'll do to you either. Scream for me, slut." It pushed into my cunt and I screamed in both pleasure and pain. "So, fucking tight and delicious." He purred as tendrils wrapped around my waist and carried me to the bed. "You're trying to pinkfight me. You never win, darling."

As fear, I was flipped over with my ass pointed in the air, and the tendrils in my front pussy began to thrust hard and fast. Nasir's dark, wicked magic secured my hands above my head, and then his feverish breath fanned my cunt, his fingers along the stretched lips teasingly. The wet sounds of his solidified magic were almost as obscene as they were erotic. Nasir hummed against my neck, his hand on my knight thigh and then sucked one lip, then the other, into his fiery mouth. His magic forced my pussy to spread as his hands tightened on my thighs, digging into the flesh.

More than "Khaos," I panted as my stomach clenched.

He roared on "Shut your pretty mouth, brat," he growled. He spit on my ass and his magic pushed his thumb in, producing a hiss of air to escape my lips. It was his magic that allowed lust to overrule my mind, ignoring the pain rushing through my side. He had never magic fucked me and he added agony.

I desired "Khaos!" I cried as his magic attacked my clit.

He added a "I said shut up, didn't I?" he growled, slapping my ass cheek, his magic what caused my lips to part on a sultry whimper. His magic invaded my body until I was forced to swallow around it, moaning wantonly as the tendrils in my pussy mercilessly jack-hammered in and out of me. Tears rolled down my face as Khaos's hand slid to my clit and rubbed small circles against it.

you are a naughty bitch, aren't you? You're bleeding out and all you want to do is come like a good girl for me," he rumbled before my hips were lifted and taken air, forcing my face into the mattress. "Messy girl," he praised as he began aboutflicking my clit with his tongue.

Merik, and I "Merde," Merikh muttered, but neither of us paid him any mind. "You're messy," he *comme l'air*."

l. "Stop Khaos's lips closed around my clit, and his tongue moved with lightning speed as something pushed against my ass. I whimpered in fear for a moment in my second before the tendril of magic thrust into my ass and light burst through my vision. I might have blacked out because the next thing I was aware of was the drool dripping from my lips as the promise of pleasure blossomed in my belly. I tumbled over the edge, but then everything stopped, and my body innertopped to the bed.

his magic Khaos flipped me over onto my back as he peered down at me in a humanized form. My chest rose and fell with each of my rattling breaths as he pushed up, but several black tendrils of magic shot out of his torso and pinned me in place.

and then "You're not in control right now. I am, and you will take whatever I want from you and be grateful. Won't you?" he asked in a rough tone that drifted through the air as his.

"Yes," I replied willingly.

"Will you bleed for me, my love?"

which Licking my lips, I nodded. "Yes, Khaos."

mouth "I don't believe you," he crooned, eyes shimmering with madness as he traced the blade up my thigh toward my sex. I stilled and closed my eyes as my fear snaked down my spine. I was prepared for pain, but not for the pleasure. "Such his mouth as his tongue pushed through the sleek arousal of my entrance."

to do is lips wrapped around my clit, and then pain shot through my side as th  
into the sank into my belly.

he began When I screamed, begging for him to stop and keep going in th  
breath, Khaos only sucked harder, sending pleasure fighting for don  
“*Libre* over my emotions. The blade left my body, and Khaos chuckled, liftin  
from my clit as he ran his tongue over the blade, licking it clean of my  
ghtning I gasped and whimpered as he crawled up my body and jerked me t  
a split He forced my legs to spread, and I ground against his knee, need  
t across pleasure to wash away the pain.

ware of “You bleed so prettily for me, love,” he growled silkily. “I don’  
omed in what I love more—the taste of your cunt, or your blood against my t  
y body he murmured as my arms wrapped around his neck, even as the bla  
pushed into me beneath my ribcage. A shriek of agony burst from m  
a more as it sunk in deeper. “That’s it, my good girl. Come for me.”

eaths. I My hips were hardly moving, and he slowly pulled the blade, an  
nd held aside before grabbing my chin and devouring me whole. He didn’t  
permission. He plundered my mouth as if he had every right to do  
r I give either hand snaked around my head, threading his fingers through my  
ed over he kissed me with ravenous hunger. Our tongues collided, and the taste  
pussy and blood exploded on my taste buds, which should have horri  
but didn’t.

I rocked on his knee, dry fucking it with a feverish need. He moan  
my mouth, and it was all it took. I exploded. My body trembled w  
s as he intensity of it, shivering and coming apart as a kaleidoscope of col  
eyes as my vision, and the window and light bulbs in the bedroom shattered.  
heat of surged from the few candles in my bedroom, bathing us in soft, golde  
ice. His Tendrils of dark, wispy strings of magic slithered over our bodies and

the blade was in crimson light. Nasir broke the kiss and released me as his inky fingers pushed against my back as I gasped for breath.

The same “Don’t get too lost in the past, my love. I hate when I cannot feel your dominance against mine,” he murmured as he placed me on the bed and tucked away blankets around my naked body. Khaos turned his head at the exact moment Merikh bled. Merikh exhaled. “The fuck are you doing?” he seethed.

Upright. “You told me I couldn’t leave. Do you think it’s easy for me? Sending her mine, asshole. You stole her after I had that for a moment. I get it, you fucked us all. I don’t envy you having to tend to her tonight, but don’t think it’s easy for me, either. I love her, and I always have, Nasir. Just because she’s your soulmate, it doesn’t make losing her easier on me.”

His side was “You want to hold her as she dies? Is that it? You want to live your whole fucking day with your gorgeous wife, never knowing who the fuck you’re talking about?”

She’s the only woman I want, and she’s also the only one I can never let go. I want her so fucking bad it aches, and I know the moment I break down and ask for forgiveness into this overwhelming need to fuck her, she’s dead. Unlike the others, she won’t awaken from the healing sleep and come back to me.” Khaos’ hair was a strangled sound in his throat as Merikh mirrored the noise.

One of my “I can’t stand her because of this damned curse. I want to tell her how beautiful she is and that she’s the most amazing woman I’ve ever met, but I can’t. Because, if I did, pushing her away would be unbearable,”

he whined into a snarl. “She is the only one I want, but because of what I am, I have to let her go. I would burn this world we’re trapped within to the ground if it meant she’d be mine again. You and I know that, just as you know that Khaos’ flames of bloodlust is only placating your need for her. Aderyn fucked us all over the world in light. She messed with those she should not have fucked with, Merikh. She’s damned off the gods, and by doing so, we are all damned for eternity unless I find a way to save her.”



7 magiccourse and break them once and for all. I am so fucking close to taking the syndicate and forcing them to face me. Whoever is powerful enough to take control of the immortals is promised power from the gods. I don't need the power. I want the curses undone and us free of the chokehold they have on us. I want her to be reborn with her fucking memories."

As they spoke, my hand had moved to my side, finding it pouring blood. He was liquid at an alarming rate. Khaos sat and turned toward me.

"Pitiful, truly," he growled. "Your blood tastes like sin and nirvana. I expect both purgatory and holy water with a side of carnal sin, darling. When I first met you, you told me that if I touched you, I'd burn. I am burning, Aderyn. I burn for what I can't have. I burn for you, darling."

"Every moment of every day that I can't take you or make you mine. They promise you are? me pain, but this, this is eternal damnation. To see you, taste you, and know that you're my fucking anchor that I can never possess. I hate you for it as much as I despise them. You fought me, even though you craved me first. Now it's my time, this to us, all of us. I'll ask you again. Would you die for me, darling?" Khaos made a sound as he turned and gazed over my bloody body, still wrapped in his inky magic.

"Yes," I responded, since I was succumbing to death, anyway.

"Would you give me your soul if I coveted to exhaust it?"

Khaos "I have no soul to sell or offer you."

"That's because it's already mine, love."

Khaos stretched his neck and exhaled as he picked up his ruined slippers and put them back on. He tilted his head, turning to peer over at Merikh. "Get your pants up and pull yourself together, Merikh."

When his attention shifted back to me, he was painted in torment by the bitterness. "Bloody hell, darling," he whispered, kneeling next to where

ng overon the bed. “That got out of control rather quickly. Don’t take too dre  
ough tolong to come back to me, my glorious little savage. I miss you when  
l’t wantgone from me, as you revisit the past.”

ave on It actually seemed as if he regretted murdering me. Khaos pushed t  
from my face as he regarded me through heavy eyes, laced with pain  
g warmto be a trick of the lighting because he did not look like he had e  
murdering me anymore than I had. Merikh exited my bathroom, and  
You’returned, growling low in his chest.

ien you “Go find me something strong to take the edge off, Merikh. Send M  
fuckingand see if you can find me something strong to drink. I’ll need it to wa  
, everyfading. I fucking loathe this shit. Of all the shit those bastards curse  
omisedface, this is the one that fucks me up the most.” Khaos muttered, rubb  
d knoweyes with his fingers before sitting up and dropping his head back. “I  
s muchyou love her too, but she’s my girl, and the crap that took place in t  
ou didcan’t happen again.”

ing?” he “You’re right. I love her and always have. I loved her before she r  
is dark,and attached her soul to yours. It drives a blade farther into my hear  
fucking time I see the way she looks at you when you’re not watchin  
may be my best friend, but she’s the love of my life, prick. She’s the o  
got away. I’ll send Malik or Ryat in, whichever one lingered in the  
when the death match started,” Merikh muttered before casting on  
glance my way, raking his fingers through his hair, and then walking  
nirt andthe room.

et your My heavy eyelids closed, and the pounding in my temples  
considerably. The wounds in my abdomen no longer raged, but they s  
ent andlike hell.

re I lay The air was harder to get into my lungs, which made Khaos turn

Madfullymy face with pity. Clearly, I'd reached the hallucination stage of the  
you're impairing my system. He drifted down beside me on the bed, pushing  
bloody tresses of sticky hair away from my face. "Don't resist it, love,  
the hair always do, and it only makes it worse. Death is not your end. We are  
. It had and you'll merely slumber for a time until you're healed. You'll sleep  
enjoyed time, and then once you're healed, you won't remember this pain you  
Khaos It's what happened when I buried you in the swamp. Something did  
which made it so you cannot truly die. You appear dead for a time, but  
Malik inawaken healed now."

He touched her "It hurts," I whispered.

He led us to "I know, darling. I know. You'll be numb soon enough."

He said to me "Don't leave me alone." My request was little more than a breath of

He realized "I won't ever leave you again. I fucked up last time by assuming you  
he past and . . . I fucked up. Let's go with that, love. It's why I . . . never met

you remember when you danced with me in New Orleans? The dress  
net you wore was the color of blood. I'd never seen a lovelier sight in my exist  
t everyone wanted to tell you how beautiful you looked, but you and I only ever  
ing. You're slipping away from me." He shifted closer, placing  
me who against my forehead. His Adam's apple bobbed repeatedly, and I  
e house clenched before he pulled back, so we were face-to-face again. Gen  
e more fingertip traced down my cheek, and he smiled. Not even the warmth  
; out of gesture could prevent the ice that encapsulated my heart, or chase away  
temptation of death lingering in the shadows. Khaos didn't look delig  
slowly satisfied that he'd won against me. Instead, he appeared more trouble  
till hurt miserable, which sorta gave me a sick twinge of amusement.

Khaos released a shuddered breath before releasing it in a hiss of a  
to scan between his teeth, once again tucking the blankets around my shivering

poisonHe made a pained sound from deep in his chest as the air crackled fr  
ing the lungs. Eyeing the door, he glanced at me with regret burning in his  
re. You depths. Grunting at the sight of my miserable appearance, he drop  
forever, head into bloodied hands. A knock at the bedroom door had his dai  
p for alifting, peering toward it expectantly.

ou feel. Malik's eyes rounded as he took in the blood splatter on the ceilir  
anged, the blood smears coating the walls, and finally moved them to the po  
out you around the floor. He released a soft breath of air as he hesitated just in:  
doorway, as if he were unsure whether he wanted to be in this room.

“Bloody hell,” he muttered, dropping his mouth open before clanc  
shut. “It looks like a fucking murder scene in here.”

air. “It is, asshole,” Khaos growled, dropping his head into his palms. “  
ou died, you found something to take the edge off this agonizing pain.”

ind. Do “Yeah, she had some shit put away at the back of her cupboard,”  
ess you stated, strolling over to hand Khaos a glass of my expensive Irish w  
tence. I “You motherfuckers need some serious fucking help.” He whistled, r  
get the toward where the bathroom door lay on the floor with the frame still at  
g a kiss Ryat issued a low whistle from where he'd leaned against the  
his jaw arriving silently. His Nordic-blue gaze slid to the bloody window  
tly, his walls, and then to me. He crossed his heavily tattooed arms over his ch  
of that kicked one foot up to rest on the other.

way the “There's an issue developing. Some assholes set the warehouse dis  
ghted or fire, and several of our containers have been engulfed already. The  
led and also several trucks backed through the fence and loaded with cargo  
they were driven off. I'm going to head over there and see wha  
ir from discover about who set it and who we're murdering next.”

g form. “Handle it, Ryat. Take two guys with you and watch your backs. So

om myis starting a war before the syndicates can unite and become too pow  
stormyface off against. I want to know who, and I want them dead and bur  
ped hisfeet deep, yesterday.” Khaos slid his hand to my cheek, as concern s  
rk headover his face.

“You don’t want to come with me to murder these pricks? I think y  
ig, thenagainst your little spitfire. Let Merikh babysit and come have some fu  
ols of itknow you enjoy being a murderous, psychotic prick when our mercha  
side theplayed with.” Malik smiled at me. “Red looks stunning on you. You  
consider dying your hair crimson. My boy here would walk around v  
iping itcock hard as shit every time he glimpsed it on you, girlie.”

“Fuck off, Ryat. I haven’t ever left her to succumb to death alone  
Tell meand I’m not about to start now. Last time, we ended up burying h  
because of these assholes. I won’t do it again. The hunters are in tov  
’ Maliksyndicate is converging as well, and right now, I don’t care if the  
’hiskey.empire I built for us to rule together collapses around us. I don’t car  
ioddingbloody bastards raid my club and raze it to the ground,” Khaos wh  
tached.angrily, closing his eyes to bow his head. I could hear the death rattl  
e door,lungs, which meant he could as well, but at least the numbness had  
ess sill,won against the pain. Everything was feeling irrelevant and disembodi  
rest and Ryat’s eyes hardened and then thinned into slits. “I know you h  
part. We all do, but until we find a cure for the curse, we’re stuck  
trict onwith it. You and Aderyn got the shit end of the stick, I get it, but you’  
re weremoving pieces on the board for over a thousand years for this one t  
beforecome together. You can’t stop now, brother. If she knew what yo  
t I candoing, she wouldn’t want you to either,” Ryat stated before strolling i  
room and clapping his hand on Khaos’s shoulder. “We’re with y  
omeoneAderyn until the end. Whatever it may be or whenever it comes, w

erful toteam. Us against those righteous motherfuckers who placed us he  
ied six-cursed us all,” he whispered vehemently.

tamped Khaos clapped his hand over Ryat’s before tipping the whiskey bac  
focused on the empty glass. Tattooed fingers shoved through raven-  
ou wontresses. A delicate silverish-blue inscription that covered his flanks  
in. Youand moved with a strange, hypnotic beat. He dropped his hands a  
ndise issteeped them in front of his lips. He turned, seeing the glaze coat  
shouldeyes, and frowned before he released a soft, pained sound from his lun  
with hismen exited the room to refill his glass and make plans to leave as he t  
on me.

before, “You’re not the queen, Aderyn. You are my entire fucking kingdo  
er alivewhispered. Then there was a low-pitched whistle outside, and he  
vn. Thestaring at the window before he stood. “Incoming! Get down, no  
e entire roared a split second before there was an explosion that shook the  
e if theWood creaked, and then the sound of something crashing rever  
isperedthrough the bedroom. The flash was violet, and then noxious smoke st  
e in myfill the room. I couldn’t move, let alone run. If my mind could be b  
finally someone had just blown the fuck out of my neighbor’s house.

ed. “Get . . . off.”

ate this “Herne hunters are outside your house and you’re more worried ab  
dealingcovering you from harm?”

ve been “Hate . . . You . . . more.”

hing to “No, you really don’t. You hate that no matter what we do to one a  
u werewe’re fated to be forced together. Now, close those pretty lips of y  
into thethey don’t sense you’re in here. They’re after you, not me, brat. You  
ou andone who changes everything you touch into chaos. Zealots hunt you  
e are aass down because they’ve figured out who and what you truly are, A

ere andThe sound of glass shattering in the distance had Khaos placing even more  
his weight on me. “Slaughter every motherfucking last one of them! Kill  
them, then their fucking heads,” he shouted, sliding his focus from me to the door  
colored window. He dove for me, sheltering me with his larger frame seconds  
pulsed another explosion shook the house.

and then “I truly wish they’d stop trying to take you from me. As if I’d ever let  
anyone have my girl? One day, we’ll find the key to ending them and finish them  
things. The end for all.”

focused “Ouch,” I hissed. His eyes dropped to my mouth and rolled to look  
at mine. “Off . . . me, prick.”

smile,” he His lips curled into a disarming smile. “You cannot do anything the  
turned, way, can you, Aderyn? Be a good girl for me and just fucking die slowly  
with me!” he roll your gorgeous ass up in the blanket and we can get the fuck out of  
this house before they cave this shitty little shack you call home in on our skulls.”

berated “I h-h-hate . . . you.”

started to “Love is madness, Aderyn. The line between it is so insignificant that  
we never realize one from the other. At least monsters like us do not see  
the difference or where it crosses. Don’t spend too much time in the past. *Reviens-moi  
sœur,*” he murmured.

about me The room around me went fuzzy, and I wasn’t sure if it was because  
of the smoke or because I was dying. Blasts were still going off around my  
house. The shrieks and painful, wet exclamations of death reported that  
my mother, were out guarding Khaos, as well as my dying body from being taken  
by our hunters. Arms slipped beneath me, and Khaos lifted my blanket-wrapped  
body before heading toward the hallway. He was bathed in my blood, and  
my pretty movement had more oozing from my wounds. Then the slender ta  
Aderyn.” death gripped me, taking me from him again.

more of *Death is only the beginning . . .*

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amelia Hutchins is a *WSJ* and *USA Today Bestselling* author of *Monsters*, *The Fae Chronicles*, and *Nine Realm* series. She is an alpha coffee addict who drinks magical potions of caffeine and turns the magical worlds. She writes alpha-hole males and the alpha women who knock them on their arses, hard. Amelia doesn't write romance. She writes fast-paced books that go hard against traditional standards. Sometimes it isn't about the romance; it's about rising to a challenge, breaking them like wrecking balls, and shaking up entire worlds to discover what they really are. If you'd like to check out more of her work, or just hang out with an amazing tribe of people who enjoy rough men, and sharp women, join the Author Amelia Hutchins Group on Facebook.

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