



# Black Shadows

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**Category:** Erotic, Romance, Adult, Dark

**Description:** Shadows of my past haunt me, but I don't know what's real anymore. My only truth is being his captive, and my only wish is that tomorrow will never come...

Waking up in a hospital after a deadly fire with barely any memory should be a terrifying experience, but I know the real danger is still out there, waiting for me.

Despite my new freedom, I can't help but shake the feeling of Deja Vu...

The last thing I expect after escaping my blurry past is several teammates from the the Las Vegas Mavericks showing up to save me from dangerous situation...

My nightmare is far from over, but I know I'm going to need all the help I can get if I am going to find the answers I'm searching for.

Will the truth set me and the men sworn to protect me free? Or will it be the very thing that destroys us all?

Black Shadows contains cross over characters from The Darkwood Academy series. While Black Shadows can be read without reading that series, I would recommend reading The Darkwood Academy series so you get to know the characters even better.

Black Shadows is a dark romance reverse harem. It ends on a cliffhanger. There are dark themes in this book but it does have a HEA (eventually). Again, this is a dark romance. You have been warned.

**Total Pages (Source):** 96

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:44 am*

## Prologue

RAELYN

Light barely filtersthrough the crack of the dirty drapes of the room, my gaze catching on the particles of dust that are floating all around. My room—well, cage—is dusty and smells of mold and whatever has died in the walls. The windows are covered in a film of dirt, and combined with the drapes, it keeps this cage barely lit during the day.

The carpet is filthy and torn. Worn from where I have walked in circles on it. Blood and bodily fluids stain it. I have no recollection of what the actual color of this carpet should be.

The walls used to have a floral wallpaper that I have peeled off since I have been here. And I have no idea how long I've been here. Dust lines every crevice; the fan above me, which doesn't work, is layered in it. My lungs are probably black from me breathing all this crap in.

And maybe that will make my death quicker. Maybe I should be thankful for that.

The springs in the mattress dig into my back as I lie on it. It's barely a bed, but it keeps me off the floor. By like three inches, that is. And at least I'm not sleeping on the floor. Not thatthis mattress is any cleaner than the carpet, but I will take my chances with at least having a bit of awful comfort over none.

My dirty dishes sit in a corner of the room from the last paltry meal he fed me. If I'm

lucky, I get two or three meals. If not, I get one a day.

I have no concept of time in my cage. I can't remember things, and everything is blurry. A lot of my memory is fuzzy, hazy. But when I do get some clarity, I get to stare into the black hole of this cage.

There are books in here, and sometimes I read them, but it's hard for me to concentrate. Or I forget where I am in the book or what the story is about.

Time doesn't exist here. I don't remember why I came to this place. Or how. My body hurts from the abuse at his hands. I'm tired, and I spend most nights on high alert, because when I fall asleep, that's when he comes in to do unspeakable things to me.

He makes me call him Sir. I have no idea what his name is. I have no idea how I know him or how he got me. And I only know what he calls me: Raelyn. Is that my name? I have no fucking clue.

I wish I could remember myself. I feel so frozen inside. So lost.

This room and the adjoining bathroom are all I know. They are all I can remember. It's my past, my present, and what I hope will not be my future. But with every day that ends and each new one that begins, I lose hope that I will even escape. I lose hope that someone who knows who I am will actually find me.

I'm staring at the discolored wall when the door slams open, and it startles me out of my thoughts. Looking up, I see his shit-brown eyes staring at me.

My lips curl in disgust. He isn't unattractive by any means, but he is a vile human being. And it makes him the most disgusting and ugly person alive. His T-shirt clings to him, and his sweatpants are ratty and stained. His jet-black hair is slicked back, his

fists clenched at his sides.

He looks angry. And that isn't good for me.

I back up against the wall, my eyes widening in fear at what he plans to do to take his anger out on me. I can feel my body start to shake as he steps into the room.

“Why are you not greeting me, pet?” he growls.

“I-I-I'm s-s-sorry, Sir. I forgot,” I stutter through my words. Holding up my hands, I repeat what he wants me to say, “Hello, Sir. I missed you today. I-I'm so glad you are home.”

Usually, I hear him come into the house, and it gives me enough time to prepare for the onslaught of abuse I will suffer at his hands. The assault my body will take from him. Even when I don't remember what he does to me, I still feel it. My body won't dare let me forget.

He huffs and takes a step into the room. “You know, I'm beginning to think you don't mean a single word of it, pet.”

“N-No. I do, Sir.” I watch every step he takes, fear creeping up my spine, and my mind preparing for the shutdown it's about to do. My body already hurts from the blows I took earlier.

“If my pet did, then she would be on her knees, greeting me as a good pet would. But there you fucking sit, stuttering your fucking way through my greeting.” He walks over to my books on the floor and picks up one of them. “Pets that misbehave don't get toys to play with.” And with that, he rips the pages from the book.

“No!” I let out a scream as my only bit of sanity is torn to shreds before my eyes.

They are my escape from this reality. A window to a different life. And he is shredding all hope I have to escape once he is done with me. His eyes flit to the paper cup on the floor filled with the pills I didn't take, his jaw tightening.

“You didn't take your vitamins, pet. Why didn't you take them?”

Spit flies from his mouth as his face turns red. He stomps over to the bed as his arm raises up toward the ceiling. My reaction is too slow as his hand comes down hard across my face.

I let out a scream from the burning pain along my cheek, when suddenly I'm being dragged by the back of my head. His dirty, rough hands are pulling on my hair, moving me to the floor. He straddles my body and wraps a hand around my throat.

“Now, be a good pet and take your vitamins,” he commands.

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My eyes go wide as I try to take a deep breath and struggle under his body. I hate the “vitamins”; they don’t make me feel good. I lose track of time, hours, days even. It’s why I think I can’t remember anything, or at least not for very long.

I just want to remember. To remember where I came from, how I got here, and why he has me. They make me feel so funny. When I wake up from them, I feel like my body is dead weight.

He lets out a loud grunt as he shifts over me, removing his hand from my throat and gripping my cheeks, squeezing them hard. He throws my head to the side. I let out a scream from the pain of his hand squeezing my face and the weight of his giant body over me. I feel like I can’t breathe with him on top of me, and I struggle under him.

“Stop squirming or I will cut off your next breath,” he warns, and I freeze.

The truth is death would be welcome at this point. Death would be better than the world I exist in now. Death would be better than being touched and assaulted by this monster. And yet I stop moving instinctively, unable to do anything else.

A sharp poke in my neck makes a whimper slip from my lips. The fear of sleep causes tears to streak down the side of my face. But I don’t have a choice. Either I die by suffocating, or I fall into the darkness.

So, I welcome the darkness.

And the nightmares that will come from it.

## Chapter One

RAELYN

The body on top of me smells rancid, like B.O. and smoke. His breath is a pungent mix of bad breath and alcohol. This person isn't my captor.

Blinking, I try to get the fuzz out of my eyes. Whatever I was given hasn't cleared my system enough to help me see straight. But I have enough sense to know I just need to lie here. Everything feels like it's moving in slow motion.

The weight on me makes it tough to breathe as his grunting starts to pick up. Silently, I pray that whoever this is finishes soon. The sweat from his face drips onto mine, and bile rises in my throat.

My stomach turns, and there's a foaming in my mouth. Vomit fires from my mouth and all over myself and the body on top of me. Almost immediately, the weight above me is gone.

"What the fuck? You fucking cunt! Did you seriously puke the fuck all over me? Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!" I can hear him gagging and coughing. I blink a few times, and I can almost make him out. He looks short and round. I can see a bit of his stomach as he tries to put on his pants, still cursing at me for puking on him.

Maybe don't fuck unconscious women who are here against their will.

"Fuck! David said you were going to be out for another few hours!" he screams at me.

David. Is that my captor's name? David is a stupid fucking name. I roll onto my side as I start to feel my stomach turn again. More bile rises in my throat as I start to dry

heave. My entire body lurches as it tries to bring up whatever else is in my stomach.

“Fuck this. You are definitely not worth this. Shit, now I need a goddamn shower.” The man throws the bedroom door open so hard it slams against the wall, and I hear the drywall crack and break. Just one more fracture added to the many in this room of horrors.

The minute I watch him leave, I expect my captor, apparently who is called David, to come in here and punish me for throwing up on his bestie or whoever the fuck that was. The thought sends me over the edge. Spittle flies from my mouth as I heave through it.

Except I can't move. My muscles feel frozen, like they are being held down by weights. My eyes get heavy, and I feel myself start to be pulled under again. I fight with every ounce of strength I still have to keep my eyes open, but ultimately, I fail. And my body succumbs to the drugs still in my system once more.

I wake with a start. My eyes fly open as my nose is assaulted by the disgusting smell of vomit. I can't see much. The room is dark, and I can only guess that it's late at night now.

With a wince, I sit up. My hair is covered in puke and dried to the carpet. It takes me a moment to remember what happened, why I am stuck to the carpet? And then it hits me. I was being raped by some random guy. My eyes start to tear up from the horrid memories.

I look over at the door, which still stands open from when the asshole stormed out of here. I shake my head and slowly turn around, walking toward the bathroom. I'm sure my captor is just waiting for me to try to walk toward that open door. It will give him more reason to beat me mercilessly. But when he's ready to use and beat me, he will expect me to be clean. My beating will only be worse if I'm not.



My body hurts with each step, but I am hoping a shower will help ease the pain. Between the drugs and the abuse, I'm in a constant state of agony and uncertainty.

I look forward to showers, though; it's like a cleansing. I can rid myself of the evil before it creeps on my skin again. The water here is never hot, only warm at best. But it beats it being ice cold.

I turn the shower on and step under the shitty shower head. I don't wait for it to warm up; I just need this shit off me. As the water barely sprays out of the nozzle, I run my hands through my hair to try to get it wet, reaching over and grabbing my shampoo and lathering the hell out of my hair. The fruity smell starts to overtake the smell of the puke.

The water warms enough that I stop shivering as I wash my hair. I tip my head back and let the flow of the water rinse the soap off. My body is still tired and weak, but I need this shower badly.

My brain is still fuzzy—it always is. Everything is a haze, like it's in my grasp but then slips away. I hate this.

When the water is no longer full of suds, I reach over and grab the cheap soap my captor got me and start to scrub. The clean smell doesn't help to take away the feeling of that body ontop of me. Grimacing, I scrub my face where his sweat dripped down onto me. My stomach where his rubbed against me. I wish I could skin myself, remove the vile feelings. But all I can do is scrub until it hurts.

## Page 3

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My captor has always said he wants to make money off me, but I thought it was just a threat. Not something he would actually do. Apparently, he was serious.

Or maybe this was just a one-off. A test. Maybe that's why the door is open. It's all a test. Everything is always a test with him. It gives him an excuse to hit and kick me. To fuck me.

I stop scrubbing myself and bite my lip. He's never not home at night. But even when I woke up, the house was quiet.

When I finish rinsing off, I turn off the water, take the dirty towel that I have been using for god knows how long, and dry myself off. Then I creep toward the open door and listen.

Not a fucking sound.

Except the beating of my heart.

That I can hear loud and clear. It feels like it's ready to burst out of my chest as I grip the door frame. The hall is dark, and I see no lights anywhere. My eyes adjust to the black in front of me, and I can see the outlines of the house.

Do I risk turning on lights? I have never been past this door. I can't tell if the bumping I hear is my heart or in the house. Maybe I should wait until morning? No, that would be stupid.

What if this is my only chance to get out?

I look down at myself, seeing that I'm completely naked. The way he likes me. I need to find some clothes.

Fuck!

I stand frozen in the doorway of my prison. There is a door to my left that is closed and one farther down on my right that is open.

Ever so slowly, I tiptoe toward the open door. My feet move quietly along the carpet under them. After several steps, I try to squint to see what is inside the room. There is a night light along the wall that helps illuminate where I am.

The laundry room.

The washer and dryer sit along the wall in front of me. The fresh smell of the detergent hits my nose. It smells clean in here. A stark difference from the horrible smell of my cage. I creep closer toward it and see that along the wall opposite the machines is a rack with clothes hanging from it.

I start to salivate at the prospect. But then I freeze up. What if this is a test? This is too easy. The door was open, the clothes... this is way too fucking easy.

My hands shake with the rest of me. The coldness from being wet starts to seep into my bones. These clothes would be so nice to wear, so warm. I don't know if this is worth the risk.

But I need to escape. I need to get out of this hell.

I shake my head and try to steady my panicked breathing. I need to take this risk. If I stay here, I will die here. If I get caught, he will probably kill me. But if I escape, I can be free. I don't know where I will go—fuck, I don't know where home is.

But maybe I will remember. Maybe it will come to me, and I can find my family. Whoever they are.

Are they still looking for me?

My hands shake as I reach up and grab the T-shirt. It smells like him. It still has the scent of his body on it. The detergent isn't strong enough to get rid of that putrid stench. I almost gag as I throw it over my head.

I just keep trying to remember the goal. Get the fuck out.

Before I grab a pair of shorts that are sitting on the dryer, I quickly take a listen to see if I can hear him.

Still, silence.

I need to do this. I need to get out.

I quickly grab the basketball shorts and throw them on, tying them to keep them from falling off. They are huge, and my smallframe is swimming in them. Hell, I am already small to begin with. Five foot nothing, thin frame.

I think I used to have boobs. I don't know. The skin looks wrinkled. They are flatter; they just hang there, bruised and beaten. My brunette hair is dry and damaged, hanging down to the middle of my back.

My captor tried to give me a trim once. He wanted to dress me up in these doll clothes. But he fucked up cutting my hair, making it too short and crooked. He beat me until I apologized for his fuck up. Even used the scissors to carve "fuck doll" and "stupid toy" in my back.

I look down at my feet and realize that I need something for them. His shoes will make it too difficult to walk in. Next to where the shorts were are a few pairs of socks. I quickly grab two pairs and double wrap my feet in them.

## Page 4

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My breathing is labored as I try to hurry. I have no idea if he will be back soon or how long he has been gone. Usually, by this time of night, he is in the room, forcing me to do unimaginable things to him.

Once the socks are on, I climb to my feet and quietly creep out of the laundry room. I never got to see the lay of the house when I first got here, since I was drugged and blindfolded. Hell, I don't even know what state I'm in.

I keep my hand on the wall as I try to adjust to the darkness. There are no nightlights to lead the way, and I am too scared to turn on a light. What if he is waiting for me in the shadows, just watching and waiting to beat me to a pulp?

My heart pounds away in my chest. I'll either die trying to reach freedom or die at his hands. And I would prefer the former.

When I make it down the long hallway, I come upon an open room. The light from the windows illuminates it enough for me to see that I have reached the living room. I try to quiet my breathing and the beating of my heart to see if I can hear anything, but there's nothing. The house is completely silent.

Trying not to wince in pain, I tiptoe toward the front door. My hand is on the handle when I see lights coming down the street. I duck down by the door as I hear the garage door open.

Shit! Shit! Shit!

He's home. What the fuck am I gonna do? I take a peek out the front window and see

the car pulling into the garage. The front of the car is already inside, so I open the front door. I hear the car shut off and the garage door start to shut.

And that is when I make my break. I need to get as far as I can as fast as my legs will take me.

I slip through the front door and quietly shut it behind me, heading down the concrete path and taking a left once I hit the street. Then I fucking run.

With every ounce of strength in me, I push my legs as fast as I can, my feet hitting the pavement with such force it hurts, and I let out a whimper with each stride. As soon as I reach an intersection, I take a right and head down another row of houses.

And then I hear my name.

“Raelyn! Where did you go, girl?” My blood freezes, my stomach sinks. I haven’t gotten that far, and if he gets in that car, he will find me. I need to hide, and fast.

I quickly run toward a driveway with a boat in it. My feet pound against the pavement, my heels already sore from running. When I make it to the boat, I use what little strength I have to pull myself up onto the boat trailer, lifting the cover up just enough to slip myself inside.

On my hands and knees in the pitch black, I try to fumble through and find somewhere to hide. When my eyes adjust, I start opening anything I can to see if I can squeeze in. I finally get to a door, and it leads down into a small bathroom. I immediately slide down into it and close the door behind me.

“Raelyn!” I hear him call out. It’s more of a controlled yell; he’s not yelling loud enough to startle people and draw attention to himself, but it’s loud enough for me to hear if I am nearby.

I can hear the footsteps hitting the pavement, the sound of it getting louder as he gets closer. That sound echoes in the space where I'm hiding.

Fuck. Please, don't let him find me. Please let me get out of this.

"Raelyn! Come on, I won't be mad if you come back home." He sounds closer as his fake sweet voice rings out. "Just come home."

Home. I almost want to let out a chuckle if I weren't scared out of my mind. It was a prison. A prison I have no idea how I ended up in. One I thought I would die in.

One I hoped I would just die in.

"Are you hiding in here?" My body freezes as I hear him and realize he is near the boat. He taps the boat, and my heart races. Tears silently fall from my eyes.

He's going to find me.

My body starts to shake uncontrollably with fear. My breaths are short and fast as panic creeps up my spine.

"Hey! What the fuck are you doing by my boat, motherfucker!" a voice rings out.

"Oh, sorry! I was just looking for my daughter. She ran away," my captor tells the angry voice.

"I don't give a fuck who ran from you. I'm calling the fucking cops. Because if you don't get off my property and get the fuck away from my boat, you better hope they get here fast to save you from holes I will be putting in you."

I hear what sounds like the racking of a gun.



“Woah. I’m going. I’m going. No need for the gun. I will call the cops to help look for her. So sorry to disturb your night,” my captor says as I hear his footsteps walk away from the boat.

“If I see you on my property again, I will fucking shoot you. Let this be your final fucking warning!” the voice yells at him.

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And suddenly, the world is quiet. I try to strain my ears to listen for anything that would tell me he is still out there waiting for me, but all I hear is the front door to the house whose boat I'm in shut.

I just need to sit here for a little bit, and then I can find my way out of this mess. I have no idea where I will go, but living on the street is better than living with a monster.

A monster who uses my body, who beats me relentlessly. A monster who will take everything from me, including my last breath.

Closing my eyes, I give myself a few minutes to rest and try to calm myself. I just need to find enough strength to keep going, so a few minutes of rest should help.

Except the minute I close my eyes, darkness takes over me.

### Chapter Two

#### DREW

Nickelback blaststhrough my headphones as I sit in front of my locker in the locker room of the Midnight Phoenix Field.

Yes, the field is owned by one of my best friends and her husbands. Phoenix and her men, Daxon, Mason, and Colton. And yes, husbands, plural. They are all madly in love with her, and it works for them.

And all I ever wanted was for Phoenix to be happy.

But back to the field.

A couple years ago, after Phoenix had Raven, her daughter, the owners of this fine establishment and team decided they wanted out of the Las Vegas Valley and put the stadium up for sale. Phoenix took that opportunity to come in and sweep it up. So now, technically, Phoenix is my boss. I let out a chuckle.

Never thought I would utter those words. But she has always been a boss babe, so I guess it was inevitable that she would lead one day. Just never thought I would be under her.

My eyes widen at the thought. Note to self: don't let the guys hear my thoughts. I'm sure they will kill me. No, I know they will.

Since my days at Darkwood Academy, Phoenix and the Kings, as they were called back then, have been a huge part of my life. I got lucky and was drafted here to the Las Vegas Mavericks. Been with this team for the last four years.

And I don't plan on going anywhere else.

I just signed on for another five years with the Mavericks. And I couldn't be happier. I get to be with my Darkwood family. And I get to play the game I love.

Speaking of the game I love, Burning It To The Ground by Nickelback is blasting through my headphones. This has been my routine since high school, listening to music before I go onto the field. Nothing but Nickelback pumps through these headphones.

Why? I don't know why. But I know that they were what I was listening prior to

when I pitched the best game of my life, and I'm superstitious as fuck.

So, Nickelback it is. Every fucking game day.

If Today Was Your Last Day comes on, and I close my eyes. There was a point in my life when I thought I wouldn't see tomorrow. From the moment that car was following Phoenix and I, and hit us, to when I was in that basement of that club with Phoenix. I had lost so much blood from a gash on my leg from the accident.

The fear of burning alive down there, dying, and not being able to save Phoenix... I had never felt so helpless as I did that day.

I shiver at the memory.

It has taken years of therapy to get through it all. In the process, baseball ended up being more than just a game I loved to play; it saved me. It gave me focus and a reason to keep pushing to get better. Baseball is my release.

Eventually, the nightmares stopped coming every night. My fear of driving went away, and the scars faded.

So, now I live like today is my last chance to pitch in a game, my last chance to love what I do. I live like it could be my last day, because nothing lasts forever.

A hand wraps around my shoulder, bringing me out of my thoughts. I pull back my headphones and see it's my catcher, Cameron Davis, standing next to me.

Standing at a little over six feet tall and built like a brick house, he looks like a beast behind the plate. His throw is so accurate, I trust him to whiz a ball right past my head to catch a runner trying to steal second. I can literally hear the ball break through the air as it sails past me. There is trust and a bond between us.

“Hey, Spencer, you ready?” Davis looks behind him, and I see the coach waiting for me to join our pre-game meeting. I glance back at Davis as he runs a hand through his dark hair before throwing on his cap. “Come on, Pitch.”

I take off my headphones and toss them on the shelf of my locker. “Yeah, let’s do this.” Grabbing my glove, I head toward the center of the locker room where the rest of the team is.

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Head Coach Tony Bertelli stands in the center as we all take a knee around him. “We need to stay focused. Today, we need to focus on making sure we complete the plays, make the throws, and connect that bat with that fucking ball. We are number one in the division, but the Los Angeles Wildcats are right behind us. They have nothing to lose, and we have everything to lose. So every second you are on that field or behind the plate, you are fighting to stay on top.

“Now, as you know, we are playing the Salt Lake Bears today. We have beaten this team every time we play them, so that means we need to play smart. They are hungry. They want a win against us. They are going to come at us with their best, so we need to come at them with ours. We do not want to lose to this team!

“They are last in the division, and they sure as hell are looking to knock us off our top spot by beating us. The Wildcats are hoping the Bears beat us, too. So, let’s go out there today and disappoint two teams! Get the fuck up and let’s do this!” Coach Bertelli yells as we all jump up and start hooting and hollering along with him.

“Hey, Spencer.” I look over at my third baseman, Tristan Evans.

His lips form a straight line, and his brows furrow. His face always looks like he’s ready to fight someone. He’s usually quiet, and unless he’s out on the field, he’s not typically in the mood to deal with people, or life in general. Baseball is all he gives a shit about.

“What’s up, man?” I give him a short nod.

“I heard they called up Johnson from the Sharks.” Evans looks at me.

Luke Johnson is a young, well-known minor league player who has been making waves for quite a few months. He was taken right out of college and has been waiting for his time to shine. His batting average is extremely impressive, as well as his outfield skills.

“They didn’t have anyone to actually hit on the team, so they had to call up a player?” I laugh. “Don’t worry, I’ve been keeping an eye on that kid.”

“Well, then you know his batting average is .375, the best out there.” Evans stares into me, his eyes boring right through me.

“Yeah, I do. In the minors. This is the big league. Kid’s in for a surprise.” I waggle my eyebrows.

“Cocky much?” Kayce Anderson, our first baseman, comes sauntering up toward Tristan and me and slaps Tristan on the ass. He turns to Kayce and growls. “Calm down, big guy, just a love tap.”

I let out a small chuckle and focus back on Kayce. “Look, all I’m saying is that I have been watching Johnson. He’s good, really good. At the minors level. This is the majors; he’s got his work cut out for him.” I shrug.

Kayce’s face cracks into a smile. “Famous last words, Spencer.” He turns to Tristan and gives him a little light tap on his cheek. “Let go, Goliath. We’ve got to warm our arms up.” With that, he walks away laughing.

“I swear he’s lucky we need him,” Tristan growls and turns around, following Kayce.

“Let’s go, Pitch!” Cameron calls as he tosses my lucky ball at me. It’s the one we always start warming up with: the winning ball from my first game as a Maverick.

I tap him on the shoulder with a grin. “Let’s do this.”

Goddamn that fucking Johnson. I lift my hat off my head enough to wipe the sweat off my forehead with my other arm. With my glove tucked under my arm and the ball in my hand, I take a look at the scoreboard behind me.

Four to three. With bases loaded, these assholes are set to win if I give up this hit.

To Johnson.

Because of fucking course this kid is set to possibly win this game against us.

At the top of the ninth, with a full count on this asshole, and the bases loaded, I’m sweating bullets.

“Time!” the umpire behind the plate calls, and I see Cameron run up toward me.

I call out as he gets closer, “Did we need a timeout?”

He grabs the ball from my hand with a nod. “Yeah, I’m starting to see the panic in your eyes.” He gives me a knowing look.

“You’re sixty feet away,” I remind him with a scoff.

He shrugs a shoulder. “I have excellent eyesight. Listen, what’s this kid’s weakness?” he asks me.

“Knuckleball. It’s the only one he can’t hit. Ever,” I instantly respond.

Cameron drops the ball into my hand. “Throw it.”



“Ump’s strike zone is all over the place. He’s never gonna call it.” I shake my head.

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He narrows his eyes at me. “Throw the fucking pitch. Put it where it needs to go. He will call it because that kid isn’t gonna lay off it.” Cameron throws his face mask down and runs back behind the plate.

I blow out a breath and look over at Tristan at third. He scowls at me, and I crack a smile. I quickly get set and see Johnson step up to the plate. The noise from around the stadium disappears as I hyperfocus on the plate before me.

My mind instantly zones in on Cameron, and I watch him give me the signs for the knuckleball. I nod and bring the ball in. My eyes glance up at the runner on third, and I know he’s itching to go.

Not this time, bro.

My head turns, and I wind up for the pitch. The slight breeze cools my face as I bring my leg up and drop my arm back. As I step forward, I release the ball from my grip at the right time and watch my pitch head toward the mound.

The ball speeds toward the plate, fluttering and jiggling in different directions. Johnson winds back and steps toward the ball, bringing his bat around.

“Strike three!” the umpire calls out, and I stand there for a moment as the sound of the stadium erupts. “Game!”

Cameron comes running over toward me. “You son of a bitch, you did it!” He grabs my face with his hands and shakes me. “You fucking did it! Still number one, baby!” Cameron hoots and hollers as the rest of the team comes running over to the mound.

The stands are going crazy, with hands waving in the air; the sound of elation can probably be heard all the way in Henderson. High fives start slapping all around me as I see the other team line up for the handshake.

“Let’s go tell ‘em good game boys!” I shout over the chaos.

We all line up and shake each of the Bears’ hands before turning and heading back to our dugout. The team shuffles into the locker room, and celebration erupts.

By the time all the speeches are given, recaps of the game shared, and interviews with news outlets done, I am dressed and ready to go back to my house where I can rest my arm before our next game.

As I make my way out of the locker room, I hear my name being called.

“Andrew Spencer! You better not leave without giving me a hug!” a familiar voice shouts at me.

I turn and see a redheaded beauty flanked by her three husbands. Phoenix has only gotten more gorgeous than she was back in the Darkwood Academy days. My face breaks out in a smile as I saunter up to her and her men, Daxon, Colton, and Mason.

Opening my arms wide, Phoenix runs up and I wrap them around her. After many years, the guys have finally accepted that Phoenix and I are best friends, nothing more and never anything less. I think almost dying alongside her gave me some street cred.

“Hey there, how are you doing? And where is my good luck charm?” Phoenix has been bringing Raven to every home game to watch her Uncle “Roo” play, so she’s my designated good luck charm.

Like I don't have enough superstitions.

I give Mason and the other two a "man hug" and grunt of appreciation. The guys have all become even more scary since high school. Who would have thunk it?

Mason and Daxon play for the Las Vegas Aces, the professional football team out here. They won the Super Bowl the day Raven decided to make an appearance. What a way to come into the world, showing up the day your dads have the biggest game of their lives.

Just like her mom, she does things on her own terms.

"She went with Lucy," Phoenix answers. Lucy is their next-door neighbor who retired from her real estate job a few years back. She has become like a pseudo mom to Phoenix, and Raven has taken a liking to her. So from time to time, Lucy will take Raven so Phoenix and the guys can have a date night or when they have to stay late to handle stadium business.

"Well, I'll come by later and read her a book. I can't have Lucy becoming the favorite." I grin.

Phoenix playfully slaps me on the arm, and I wince. "Oh! Drew! I'm sorry!"

I hold up my hand. "No, no. I'm just sore as can be from pitching. I didn't expect to be in for the entire game. My arm is just shot."

"Yeah, that was one hell of a game." Daxon nods.

"I was on the edge of my seat when that kid came up, but I kept my cool. Though, I was kinda hoping you would nail him with one." Mason shakes his head.

“That would have sent the run in to tie up the game, dude.” Daxon scrunches his face at Mason. “And don’t let him fool you. He wasn’t just on the edge of his seat; he was jumping all around and yelling at the top of his lungs.”

“Hey!” Mason interjects.

“So, he was anything but calm,” Daxon finishes.

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Colton lets out a chuckle. Some things still have not changed from the Darkwood days. Colton is still all about observing and not as talkative as the other two.

“It was a good game,” Colton adds.

Way to add to it, man.

“Are you headed home?” Phoenix asks, turning back to me.

I nod. “Yeah. I’m tired. My arm needs to rest. Thankfully, Bower is pitching next game. But I will be over later to read to the little one.”

“No, you rest.” Phoenix levels a pointed look at me. “She will be there tomorrow, so you can come by and read to her then. I want you to rest and take care of that arm.”

“Yes, ma’am.” I give her a smile, and she grins back at me.

“Okay, we are headed out. Good game, Drew. Now, go home.” She leans in and gives me a kiss on the cheek, and she and the guys take off in the opposite direction.

I make it out to the parking lot and find my beautiful 1967 Mustang Shelby GT 500. Pewter exterior with a beautiful black interior. It’s not the original Elenor, but it’s an ‘Elenor’ tribute. She’s got a 5.0-litre V8 engine and automatic transmission, a ProCharger supercharger, and the correct body and body kit. She is perfection. Her name is Charlotte.

Don’t judge. You would have given her a name, too. She’s too pretty not to have a

name.

Loserby 3 Doors Down blasts through the speakers as I start her up. The engine roars over the music, and I get chills down my spine and goosebumps along my skin. I love that sound. It sends a thrill through me.

I back out of my space and head out of the stadium parking lot. Fighting through the traffic of the Las Vegas Strip, I finally find myself on Interstate 215 and head up toward Summerlin, where my home is.

It's a huge house tucked away in the mountains; it's quiet, and I have a view of the Las Vegas Strip that is to die for. I mean, it cost me a pretty penny, don't get me wrong, but it was worth every cent.

As I drive down the highway, Popular Monsterby Falling In Reverse screams through my speakers. I start bobbing my head and spitting out the lyrics as I release any stress I may have had in me.

One thing I learned from Phoenix is how therapeutic singing and belting out songs can be. I mean, I can't sing for shit, but it definitely makes me feel better. Every now and then, we go out as a group to Ellis Island to do karaoke. While Phoenix blows them away, I make people cringe and cheer to get me off the stage. I love it.

As I pull off the highway, I notice thick black smoke coming from the subdivision I drive past to get to mine. Hair on the back of my neck stands up, and something is telling me to go toward it.

The pit in my stomach grows as I drive closer toward the subdivision. Do I turn in? Drive past? What if someone needs help? Surely the fire department has been called, right?

Fuck it. I need to put my mind at ease.

Quickly, I turn into the subdivision, and I drive down the streets, getting closer to the thick black smoke. It feels like I am driving for hours, but it's a matter of minutes until I pull up in front of the source of the smoke.

It's a house. And it's definitely on fire.

A crowd has formed across the street, but everyone is filming the fire in front of them on their phone. No doubt there are even some live streamers. Because that's what we do these days—we live stream.

“Hey!” I yell out to the crowd. “Has anyone called 9-1-1?” No one responds. “Hey! Has 9-1-1 been called?” I scream louder.

“Yeah, man. I did,” a younger kid, probably in his late teens, says. He runs a hand through his hair and goes back to filming. Maybe there is hope for people.

“Do you know if anyone is in there?” I ask him.

He shrugs. “No idea, dude.”

For fuck's sake. I throw my phone in my car and my car keys in my pocket. Locking the door, I slam it shut and head toward the ranch. Flames are shooting up from the left side of the house where the garage sits. The other part of the house appears untouched from the outside, but looks can be deceiving.

As I try to dodge the flames, I see that the front door is completely inaccessible because of a security door installed at the entrance archway.

Fuck.



I quickly go around the side of the house and see the back gate. Running up to it, I see that it's not locked, so I push it open and sprint to the nearest window. I look in and get a glimpse of a kitchen and a living room.

No one seems to be in there, though the smoke is making it a bit hard to see inside. I hurry over to another window on the far side and notice that there are bars on it.

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I really don't have time to try to think how odd that is; that it's the only window with bars on it. I cup my hand around my face and peer into the dirty window, and my stomach sinks instantly at what I see.

A body of what looks to be a young woman is lying on the floor. The room looks bare except for a mattress. Sirens in the distance break my train of thought as I quickly look for something to try and get into the house with. I pick up a rock from the landscape and move to stand in front of the sliding glass door.

Winding my arm back, I throw some heat on it and watch as the rock leaves my hand and shatters the glass in front of me into pieces. I take my foot and kick away any of the pieces I can, reaching in to unlock and open the sliding door.

"Hello? Anyone here? Your house is on fire! You need to get out!" I yell out.

The house is barely furnished. Through the smoke, I can see a worn-out leather couch that has rips and tears all over it. The white leather is marked and dirty. There is no kitchen table or signs that anyone lives here.

Except that body lying in that disgusting room with the bars on the window.

I place my arm over my face, trying to see through the smoke. My lungs are starting to feel the effects, coughing and gasping a bit for air. I turn to my right and see a small hallway where I think that room, where that body is, may be.

As I quickly make my way through the hall, there is an empty bedroom to my left, with just a headboard leaning against the wall. I walk a few more steps toward a door

on my right and see that it's shut. There are no other doors around me, so this has to be the one that leads to the room I saw from the window.

I touch the knob with the back of my hand just to be sure, finding it's cool to the touch. Hurriedly, I try to turn the handle, but it's locked. Fuck. I try using my shoulder as I ram against it, letting out a groan when I realize that was a stupid fucking move.

Winching at the pain in my arm, I blow out a breath and realize I will have to kick it open.

"Listen, if you can hear me, stay away from the door. I'm going to kick it in!" I yell over the sounds of the flames and wood crackling. That's when I suddenly realize none of the smoke detectors are going off.

What the fuck?

My hand rubs my chest, and I cough as the air gets thicker with smoke. I need to get this person out of here. With as much strength as I can muster, I take my leg and lift it up. In one swift motion, I kick it against the door. It flies open, and even over the smell of the burning home, the vile smell of this room assaults my nose.

It smells like mold, body odor, and death. Fuck. I feel my lungs burning as I step in, and I immediately see her lying on the floor, her brunette hair oily and filthy. It takes two giant steps to get to her, and I drop to my knees to roll her over.

I have no idea if she is still alive, but I need to get her out of here, and fast. Slipping one arm under her knees and one under her neck, I lift her up and carry her out of the room and back through the sliding door.

Running with her out to the front of the house, I drop her down on a patch of grass on

the front lawn. It's a rarity to have grass here in Las Vegas, but I am thankful for it right now.

I place two fingers under the side of her neck to check for a pulse. It's faint, but it's there.

A fire truck and ambulance pull up at the same time I arrive outside. I wave them over to the woman I pulled from the house.

"Here! Help her. She was trapped inside!" I yell out, coughing as I finish.

A paramedic runs over to me. "What's her name, sir?" She starts to check out the woman.

"I-I don't know. I just found her inside. She was trapped in one of the rooms," I wheeze out.

"You went in the house to pull her out?" she exclaims, her eyes looking me over.

I nod. "Yes."

"Ricky! Get over here! He was inside, too," she turns around and yells to another paramedic.

Ricky runs over and starts getting his equipment out.

"I'm fine. Really," I try to insist.

"Sir, you were in that fire. We need to at least get you checked out and—holy shit. You're Andrew Spencer! Pitcher for the Mavericks." Ricky's eyes widen with shock. We may need a paramedic for the paramedic.

“Yeah, listen, I’m fine.” I shake my head and try to stand up.

“I need you to sit down so I can check your vitals.” Ricky pulls out a pulse oximeter and wraps it around my finger. “How’s your breathing? Are you short of breath at all? Any chest pains? I can hear you wheezing a bit.”

“A little short of breath, but I just came out of a fire, so...”

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He looks at his machine, and I see eighty-seven pop up on the screen under what I am guessing is the oxygen reading. Guess I know where I'm going.

"You need to go to the hospital to get checked out," Ricky informs me.

Well, so much for going home and getting rest.

### Chapter Three

KAYCE

"What the actual fuck, man?" I come bursting through the curtains separating his room from the rest of the place.

"Dude, this is a hospital, not a bar. Keep it down," Drew scolds me.

"Yeah, a hospital, not a library. So, I ask again, what the actual fuck?" I fold my arms over my chest and narrow my eyes at him as monitors throughout the floor beep and buzz with life, the smell of antiseptic strong.

"How did you even know I was here?" Drew scoots back against the hospital bed a bit more. Before I can answer, Cameron and Tristan come waltzing in.

"What the fuck, dude?" Cameron chastises.

I swing my arms out. "That's what I said!"

Tristan grumbles something that sounds like, “This fucking is bullshit,” and then goes to sit down in the seat along the wall.

“Is the whole team showing up to this party?” Drew runs a hand through his hair.

“You’re just lucky coach isn’t here,” Tristan grunts.

Drew rolls his eyes. “Well, then I’ll ask again. How did you know I was here?”

“Social media, Pitch.” Cameron takes out his phone and shows him the Instagram and Facebook stories of him running out of a burning house carrying a girl.

He curses. “Shit. Fucking hell. If Phoenix gets wind of this?—”

“If Phoenix gets wind of what? That her pitcher is in the ER after stupidly running into a fire?” Her voice causes me to look over to see Phoenix standing at the curtain with it partially open. “It’s a little too late for that.”

She steps into the room. “What the fuck, Drew?” She narrows her eyes at him, and he winces.

“That seems to be the question of the hour.” I smile as I turn back toward Drew. “Mommy is mad.” A small hand slaps the back of my head.

“Watch it, Anderson,” Phoenix scolds as she walks past me and looks straight at Drew. “This is not going home to rest. What happened?” Her voice turns to one of concern.

I know her and Drew have a past, nothing sexual, but one like brother and sister. Or at least, that’s how he passes it off. I personally think he has always had a crush on her, but she friend-zoned him.

Also, her husbands are scary as fuck. Nice guys, but they will kill to protect her. And I don't think Drew wants to be on the end of that.

Drew and Phoenix went through some shit back in the day. Drew has told me bits and pieces of it, but he keeps most of it close to the chest. They have a bond that no one can break, so I can understand her worry right now about his stupid run-into-a-burning-building move.

"I was driving home, and I saw this thick black smoke. I don't know, something told me to go investigate it. And I did. When I got there, everyone was just standing outside recording. It took me a minute to get someone to tell me they called 9-1-1. But no one was sure if anyone was inside. That's when I went in to investigate." His eyes widen. "Oh my God, is she okay? The woman I found?"

Phoenix shakes her head. "I have no idea. I came to find out how you were doing. Give me a few and let me go ask." With that, she turns and walks out of the room.

"So, you found a woman in there?" I frown, recalling the videos.

He nods. "Yeah, and the fucking condition of the room she was in... it was bad. Like, I wanted to vomit bad. And I need to be careful with what I say around Phoenix because of the time she was kidnapped, but I think this woman was taken and being held against her will." Drew runs a hand down his face and blows out a breath.

"Are you serious?" Cameron creeps closer to the bed.

"Wow, that's... fucked." I lean against the wall, waiting for more of the story from him.



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Nodding, he purses his lips. “She was naked and looked like she hadn’t showered in at least a week. There was God knows what on the carpet, and the room reeked. There was a shitty mattress on the floor and bars on the window. It was fucked.”

Listening to all this, it’s upsetting me. Making my stomach turn. Hearing how she was left, possibly to die in that fire. She would have died alone and in the worst condition. I need some air.

“Let me go see if I can help Phoenix.” I head out of the room and turn my head to see if I can spot Phoenix. Walking out of the hall, I look at the nurses’ station and see her with Mason and Daxon.

Tilting my head to the side, I motion for Daxon and Mason to step over toward me. When they get to me, I whisper as quietly as I can to them. “The girl that Drew saved, she may have been kidnapped.”

“Whoa. Are you serious?” Mason’s eyes go wide.

“Serious. Drew said the conditions were really bad. I had to step out. The shit he was describing...” I blow out a breath.

Daxon rubs the back of his neck. “Okay. We need to call Jonathan. He might be able to help. But also, Phoenix...” he trails off.

“That’s what Drew was concerned about. Considering she has a past, he was afraid it could trigger something,” I say honestly to them.

“He’s always protecting her.” Mason smiles.

The Jonathan they are talking about is Special Agent Jonathan Steele with the FBI. They have been good friends with him, from what I understand, since their days back in high school. Drew occasionally talks about how he owes Jonathan his life.

“Have we heard anything about this woman? Know where she is?” I ask Mason.

He shakes his head. “No. Phoenix is trying to find out now.”

“I am tempted to just go up and down looking for a room with cops coming in and out of it. No doubt a naked woman who was pulled out of a fire is going to raise some eyebrows.” I frown.

Daxon puts his hands in his pockets. “Did he mention a name?”

“No. He didn’t mention it.”

“Hey,” Phoenix’s voice pulls us away from our conversation as we watch her walk over to us. “She’s in room 529. But they won’t let her have any visitors right now. I’m going to call John.” She turns on her heels and heads off to do what she said she was going to do.

“Let me know what your friend says. I’m gonna let Drew know she’s in a room. I’ll see you guys later.” I pat Mason on the shoulder and nod to Daxon.

Making my way back into Drew’s room, I pull the curtains back and slide into the very crowded room. And then I spot Coach Bertelli.

Shit.

“Do you have any idea how dangerous that was?” Coach stands there with his hands on his hips, glaring down at Drew.

“Yeah, Coach, I do. But I couldn’t stand there and risk someone being in there, and someone was. Who knows if Fire and Rescue would have gotten there in time?” Drew answers back.

“You could have gotten hurt! You are an amazing pitcher, and you risked throwing all that away for someone you don’t even know.” Coach throws his hands up in exasperation.

“Coach, he was just trying to do the right thing. That’s all,” Cameron jumps in.

“It was fucking stupid, and he had no business doing it,” Tristan grumbles from his seat in the corner.

“Of all people, Evan agrees,” Coach snaps. “This is going insane on them social things you kids are always on. It’s a mess. And I don’t know what type of publicity will come from this.” He pauses and shakes his head. “Now, I know they have doctors taking care of you and checking you out, but I want Dr. Nichols to examine you and make sure you are fit to play. Understood?”

“Understood, Coach,” Drew agrees, staring at his lap.

“When they release you, these three,”—he points to me, Evans, and Davis—“will make sure you get home this time. No more playing superhero. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, sir. No more hero.” Drew sighs and tips his head back against the pillow.

Coach grumbles something unintelligible and heads out of the room. I glance over at

Drew, seeing that he looks lost in his thoughts.

“Talk to me, Spencer. What’s going on in that mind of yours?” I wonder.

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“Nothing.” Drew frowns.

“Liar. Now, talk,” I push.

He lets out a loud sigh and runs his hand through his hair. “I just can’t get that room out of my mind. I can’t get the image of her battered and bruised body lying there, lifeless. Dirty. It’s fucking killing me. What if I had decided not to go there? What if Fire and Rescue didn’t get there in time? Who is she? Why was she there? You want me to keep going?” He side-eyes me.

“Nope, I think that is good enough. Look, I talked to Daxon and Mason. They are going to talk to your FBI friend and see if they can figure out what happened,” I assure him.

“Did you find out what room she is in?” he asks.

“I did. Room 529. But no one is allowed to visit right now.”

Drew immediately starts to remove the covers from the bed, and Tristan gets up and stares him down. “Sit back down,” he orders.

“I need to go talk to her, Evans.” Drew glowers back at him.

Tristan clenches his fists at his sides. The guy is basically a brute. He says so little, but one stare can put the fear of God in you. Sometimes I wonder how he even gets pussy. But women flock to him. I don’t get it.

Drew smartly falls back against the bed again. “The minute I can, I’m getting out of this bed and heading over there,” he mutters.

“Let’s just get you better, Pitch. Right now, let’s focus on that.” Cameron pulls Drew’s attention. “You can check on her later. I am sure that FBI agent will be able to help you see her. Just rest and make sure you’re okay. You did just go into a burning building.”

“Yeah, okay,” Drew sighs.

“Look, I don’t think you have a choice. If you don’t, you will make Evans Hulk out, and that could be dangerous for us all,” I chuckle, earning a sidelong look from Tristan.

Drew keeps the frown on his face and closes his eyes. I get it, he’s not sure if he made the right move, but he knows he did what he naturally had to do. He risked his career with that move. But that’s who Drew is. He’s a protector.

He’s the kind of guy who will jump in front of a bullet to save a person. Today, he went into a fire to pull that woman out. He just has that natural instinct to run toward danger.

Sometimes I think it stems from his trauma that he went through when he was younger. His need to protect.

And one day it could get him killed.

Chapter Four

RAELYN

My head is pounding. My eyes refuse to open. There is a heaviness to my body, an odd smoke smell assaults my nose. A beeping sound comes from my left side. Even the bed feels different.

Where am I?

With sheer force of will, I slowly peel open my eyes. The lights from above blind me. My vision is blurry, and my eyes feel dry and scratchy.

Where the fuck am I?

The fog in my eyes starts to go away the more that I blink, and the room I'm in becomes clearer. I'm not in my hell cage. The sight around me is filled with stark white walls, a linoleum floor, fluorescent lights, and ugly orange drapes.

Turning my head to the left, I see a machine that I am hooked up to.

Shit. I'm in a hospital.

How the hell did I get here? Taking my palm to my forehead, I push into it, the pain overriding any ability I have to figure out how I'm finding myself in a hospital bed. What was I doing? I know I was doing something.

The door was open. There was a body on me, and the door was open. I blow out a breath. Squeezing my eyes shut, I try to remember how I got here.

My captor was giving me my vitamins. I hear the grunting in my head. The smell of bad breath and alcohol suddenly came out of nowhere. I start to dry heave, causing my head to feel like it's getting ready to split into two. The name David runs through my head. I can suddenly feel the man who told me his name on top of me, his disgusting sweat dripping onto my face.

The door was open.



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And then it hits me. I escaped. I got out. That guy left the door open, which allowed me to leave. And I did. I made it to... a boat. All the flashes of memory start coming back to me in pieces.

How did I end up here? I start coughing, causing me to rub my chest. It hurts. What the hell happened after I found the boat? The beeping on the machine next to me starts to go crazy.

“Oh, ma’am, I am going to need you to calm down. I know just waking up can be a bit scary, but you are in a hospital, and you are safe.” A redheaded nurse comes walking over to the machine that is going haywire, pressing a few buttons, and the machine quiets down. “How are you feeling?” she asks me as she starts to look at a computer next to the bed.

I don’t say anything. I still have no clue what is going on. My mind is slow to catch up.

She adds, “You know, you’re lucky that baseball player found you. He got you out of that house fire in pretty good time. Thankfully, there’s not much damage from the fire. Just a bit of smoke inhalation.”

Her words drown out as I realize what she said. I was in a fire. Someone saved me from a fire. That’s impossible. I was in a boat. The asshole chased me. I hid from him. How was I in the house? Did I actually leave the house? Maybe I didn’t make it out?

He got to me before I could escape. Gave me more of the sleepy stuff. Maybe he

found me and dragged me back.

I ran. My feet were on the pavement. I ran.

I feel my chest tighten, and my breaths start coming out short and fast. My hand flies to my heart, and I can feel it beating so fast in my chest.

“Hey! Miss! I need you to calm down! You are having a panic attack. I need you to take deep breaths and calm yourself. Listen to the sound of my voice, focus on that.”

My mind keeps swirling with memories, but I can't tell what is real and what isn't. Is this real life? Am I imagining this? I look down at my hand, seeing that it's shaking. Her voice drowns out again, and I feel dizzy.

Is he here? Is my captor here? Did he come in with me? Was any of it real? Is he real? My head snaps up, and I realize I need to get out of here. It's my chance to break away.

Shaking my head, I throw the blankets off me. Screaming can be heard beside me, but I ignore the sounds outside of my own head. I need to leave this place, and fast. There are lines going into me, and I start to reach for them, but immediately my hands are held back.

Eyes. I see eyes. So many eyes and hands touching me. The world around me darkens; all I can hear is my heartbeat.

All these eyes...

It's cold, damp, and dark. I hear quiet sobbing somewhere near me, but I can't be sure where it's coming from. My body shivers, and my heart feels like it's about to jump out of my chest.

I take a deep breath, and it's hard. My head hurts, and my eyes can't focus on the world around me.

Help, please.

I don't know how long I lie on what feels like cold concrete, but suddenly, hot hands are grabbing me and lifting me up. My vision is still not focusing, and there is only a slight bit of light in certain places I can't make out.

I'm in the air, and I feel like I'm being thrown around like a sack of potatoes.

Everything in me wants to struggle, wants to fight off whoever is manhandling me, but I can't. I want to scream, but I can't get my head to open my mouth and make the sound come out.

The only thing I seem to be able to control are my thoughts. I'm locked in my head.

Someone help, please.

I'm suddenly flipped and laid out on my back. The room around me is dark, but there is a bit more light from what I think are candles. I am not sure if I see flickering or if that is the blur in my vision messing with me.

Voices hum around me. They are low, and I can't make out the words.

Suddenly, I feel hands on me. Whatever they had me covered with is stripped off me. Murmurs still hum around me. I blink a few times, and my vision starts to clear. Not much, but I can start to make out shapes better.

And that's when I see them. The eyes.

So many fucking eyes.

The fear in me starts to multiply. All the eyes stare back at me, the figures shrouded in blackness. Inside my head, I am screaming for them to stop, for them to leave me alone. A hand reaches out toward me, and I can feel my body tremble.

But then darkness comes. And I let myself fall into it.

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Voices around me stir me awake, and I slowly open my eyes to find a nurse and doctor talking to each other.

“Oh, there she is. How are you feeling, dear?” the redheaded nurse from before asks me. I look at her badge and see her name is Diana, but I don’t answer her. She helps me sit up; my head still throbs, but less than it did before. I’m sore, and my body aches.

“Hi, my name is Dr. Berton. Do you know where you are?” Dr. Berton is a tall man, probably in his fifties if I had to guess. His black-rimmed glasses outline his dark hair, but his blue eyes stand out against his face.

My lips stay shut. I nod but don’t give him anything else besides that.

“Can you tell me your name?” Dr. Berton asks, his brows furrowing in concern.

My head drops. I just want to leave. I don’t want to have a conversation with him or anyone. Talking won’t do anything. I can’t remember anything, so my words would be empty anyway. My fingernails dig into the palm of my hand. I don’t respond.

“Okay, but you do know your name?” I look up and see him tilting his head to the side as he asks.

Again, I stare at him. Afraid to respond, afraid to hear my own voice. Fearful of reality.

“What about if you write it down for me? I just would rather have something to call

you other than the woman in room 529. Can you write down your name for me? Please?" His voice softens.

My eyes look down at my hands lying on the hospital blanket. I wring them together, my mind still trying to play catch up. My stomach starts to turn, a wave of nausea hitting me, and in an instant, I turn my head and vomit over the side of the bed. The nurse tries to grab a vomit bag, but she doesn't get to me in time.

Tears fill my eyes as my anxiety starts to ramp up.

"You are going to experience some withdrawal symptoms. We think you were drugged with opioids." Dr. Berton stands at the end of the bed. "We are going to get you started on some Clonidine to help with some of the symptoms. But we do not know how long you were being given the opioid, so we may need to change it up depending on how you go through the withdrawal. The Clonidine won't get rid of the cravings for the drugs, but it will help with some of the anxiety and other symptoms. We will watch you over the next few hours, and if we need to add Methadone or Buprenorphine to help with the detox, we can."

I cough as the acid taste covers my throat and tongue. My chest feels tight, and I can feel my breaths coming short and fast. Drugs. Sir had drugged me, time and time again. And now I was really feeling the effects.

"Calm down, sweetie." The nurse comes up beside me. "Take a deep breath and just relax. You are safe here," she tries to assure me.

I try to blow out long, deep breaths. My eyes water, and I swipe the tears away.

Dr. Berton lets out a sigh. "We promise we will help you through this, but please let us help you. Write a name on this paper for me. Let's start there. Let's focus on that right now."

He flips over a piece of paper on the clipboard he has in his hands and grabs a pen from the front pocket of his white coat. He hands it to me and then steps back a bit to give me some space. I take the pen into my left hand and hesitate. My hand shakes as I hold it.

If he's asking my name, there's a chance my captor isn't here. Do I risk giving him my name? Will the devil find me?

I bite my lip as I look down at the paper and shake as I place the tip on the paper. My handwriting is sloppy and unsteady. But you can clearly see the letters R-a-e-l-y-n.

I hand back the clipboard, and he looks down at my chicken scratch. "Raelyn. Thank you. Now, I know you may not be comfortable with what we are about to talk about, so I have asked Nurse Diana to stay here with the both of us. Is that okay?"

I nod.

He proceeds with my approval. "Do you know what happened at all, Raelyn?"

I frown, as my memories are so mixed. I don't know what is truly reality. Shaking my head, I look down at my hands in my lap in defeat.

Dr. Berton grimaces. "For starters, you were in a fire. The house you were in. But tests show that you are okay from the aspect of the fire, besides a little smoke inhalation, but you will easily recover from that. But what I am concerned about is the bruising we found both in and out of you. As well as the detox from the opioids."

The sound of his shoes causes me to look up. I see him pull over a laptop on a cart. He pulls up some things, and they look like bones. I inwardly cringe. That's me?

"You have extensive bruising all over your body. A lot of bruising in the stomach and

vaginal area. There's some blunt-force trauma to your head, as well. Track marks along your skin from needles. You also have some broken ribs, and it looks like you had a broken nose." He clears his throat.

Tears slip out of the corners of my eyes. My nose was broken by my captor. I tried to escape and run away from him one day. I reached for the doorknob to the room, and he pulled me back by my hair, dragging me back to the middle of the room.

He began beating me with his closed fist. Punching me in my stomach, hitting my ribs and my face. I heard an audible crack when his fist connected with my nose. There was intense pain, and I saw stars. Blood gushed from my face as he got up and left me on the floor screaming and crying.

I swipe my tears away and look up at the doctor. I nod, though I don't even know what I'm acknowledging.

"Raelyn, we would like to do a rape kit. We think you were sexually assaulted, and the kit will help the police catch who did it," Dr. Berton says softly.



*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:45 am*

I vigorously shake my head, my blood running cold. There is no way that can happen. I just want to disappear. Fade into nothing.

“Raelyn, I can’t stress enough how important it is to try to catch this person.”

I let out a huff as I slam my hand down on the hospital bed. I continue to shake my head. I can feel my heart start to race, and panic sets in. My breathing speeds up, and I hear Nurse Diana come over to me and try to talk to me.

“I need you to calm down, okay? Just relax. We won’t do the test, okay? Just breathe for me.” She lays me back against the bed that is tilted up in a sitting position. “I need you to take deep breaths and relax.”

I let out a sob and turn away from the both of them. I just want to leave. This nightmare is too much for me. My brain doesn’t want to work, doesn’t want to remember the whole story. I just see bits and pieces of it. Everything is jumbled, and my mind is tired of trying to put it together. The nausea is making my stomach do somersaults, and I can taste bile again.

I’d say I want to go home, but I don’t know where home is.

I can’t remember where I came from; the fog is too thick.

Part of me wishes that whoever saved me from that fire would have just left me in there. Let the fire consume me. Let it burn the flesh he touched off of me. Let it take my last breath, and whatever was left of my soul.

Then, maybe then, I would find peace.

## Chapter Five

RAELYN

A knock on the door pulls my attention away from the white wall I was staring at. My vision still has trouble focusing, but it's getting better. I still feel like I am being held down by a weight, and my exhaustion levels are high. Just getting up to use the bathroom tires me out.

Nurse Diana comes in and smiles at me, but I do not return the gesture. "Raelyn, how are you feeling?"

I purse my lips and continue to sit in silence. How am I feeling? My body aches, my nose won't stop running, and my anxiety is at an all-time high. Oh, and the nausea is a fucking walk in the park. I scoff and turn my head back toward the wall I was staring at before she came in.

As if she is reading my mind, she says, "Well, the detox drugs will lessen the withdrawal symptoms, but not completely. So, it's totally normal that you are still feeling some of the effects of the drugs you were on."

She walks closer to my bedside and places her hands on the railing.

"Listen, there are some police officers in the hallway, and they just want to take a moment to talk to you. Would you like me to stay in the room with you?"

Without hesitation, I nod. There's no way I can handle any of this alone right now.

Nurse Diana gives me a weak smile as she pushes off the rail of the bed. She

summons the officers from outside in the hall to come in, and they slowly make their way inside my hospital room.

There's a tall officer who offers me a polite smile. He is stocky, while worry lines etch his face. His salt and pepper hair is combed to the side to try and hide his balding, but it does nothing to cover it up. His partner is a woman who looks to be in her early thirties. Her hands rest on her belt as her eyes study me. Her raven hair is pulled back into a bun, and her face is devoid of any makeup.

She offers me no smile or any greeting, just stands there like she is trying to peer into my soul. I swallow over the lump in my throat as I study her. She must be the bad cop.

"Miss Raelyn, how are you doing? I am Lieutenant Hilt, and this is my partner, Officer Ransom." The man nods to the woman next to him. "We want to ask you a few questions, if that's okay?"

My eyes dart between them. They both step closer toward me, and it makes me feel incredibly nervous that I find myself trying to scoot back in the bed. I shake my head and let out a whimper. They immediately take a step back at my reaction.

Lieutenant Hilt holds up his hands and nods. "Look, you have been through a lot over the last couple of days. I just want to make sure you're okay. Can you tell me your full name?"

I bite my lip and shake my head.

"Do you know your full name or date of birth?" he asks.

I frown at the truth. I don't. I have no idea what my full name is, when I was born, or where. I'm no one. I'm a ghost. My eyes slowly meet his, and I shake my head.

“Okay, no problem. Did you live at that house, Raelyn?”

Again, I respond with a no.

Lieutenant Hilt hums. “Do you know how you ended up at that house? Were you visiting?”

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My mind blanks. I have no idea how I ended up there. I don't remember a lot of my past. It all seems so foggy, so unclear. I let out a groan as I try to picture my life before all this, but there's nothing there.

I look over at Diana, who is standing against the wall watching everything. She tries to give me an encouraging smile, but it doesn't help.

Why can't I remember?

The lieutenant clears his throat, and my head snaps to him, breaking me from my thoughts. "Let me try something a little easier for you. Is there any family here in Las Vegas that we can call for you?"

My eyes widen at his words. Las Vegas? As in... the state of Nevada? Am I from here? Do I have family from here? No... New York. I am from out east. I feel that to be true. I feel it in my bones.

But maybe that's a lie. Fuck, I don't know what's true and what isn't anymore! I can't remember who I am! Where I'm from! My entire life is nothing more than a black hole. My heart rate starts to pick up, my frustration starting to grow.

"You look surprised. Are you from Las Vegas?" Officer Ransom asks me.

I pick up my hands and pull at my hair. The machine next to me starts to beep, and Diana runs over to me. I can feel the tears falling from my eyes as I assess that I am no longer sure where I come from.

But I am sure that I am lost and forgotten.

Dizziness starts to come over me, my chest constricting as a new fear washes over me. How will I survive out here? How will I get back to wherever it was I came from? How is all this fucking happening?

My vision starts to tunnel, and I feel like I can't catch my breath. I claw at the hospital sheet and my gown, and then I see nothing but darkness.

And I welcome it.

I wake with a start. My eyes fly open, and I instantly recall there being people in the room with me, but the room is currently empty. Thank fucking God.

Scanning the room, I see that new water has been brought to me. I look up at the clock on the wall and see that it's a little after ten in the morning. I have no idea how long I have been out. Has it been a day? A week? Three hours?

I need to get the fuck out of here.

My stomach cramps, and a wave of nausea hits. I immediately grab the vomit bag next to me and empty the bile into it. Sweat breaks out on my forehead, and my body feels like it's on fire. These withdrawals are the worst.

Out of the kindness of their hearts, the nurses pooled some clothes for me yesterday, since I was brought in here completely naked. They thought I might be more comfortable not being in a gown all day long, since I have nothing on underneath. But naked was how the asshole kept me. Completely bare.

Fuck. My captor. The mere thought of him sends shivers down my spine. My eyes widen as I look around the room again. Of course he's not here, but that can change.

What if he finds me here? What if he has been looking for me?

I can't let him find me. I need to get far away from here. I need to find shelter and safety. I'm a rat trapped in a cage right now. What if the cops put out a picture of me to see if people know who I am? He could see that, and know that I'm here.

My eyes water, and I feel myself get more agitated the more I sit here. I need to get the fuck out of here. And fast.

Without wasting another second, I jump out of the bed and head toward the clothes on the chair. Except my arm is yanked back by the wires connecting me to the machines and the IV. Shit.

I walk over to the beeping one and look for a power button, seeing a switch on the side and clicking it. The most annoying machine in the world finally quiets. Then I take off the blood pressure cuff and the thing they have wrapped around my finger.

Looking down, I see the IV in my arm. Fuck, I need to get this out. Taking hold of the tape around the needle, I slowly peel it back, grimacing at the slight pain it causes as it pulls on the skin. Then I pull out the plastic tube from my arm. The IV liquid starts leaking on the floor, making a slight mess.

But I don't have time to think about that right now.

Quickly, I put on underwear, throw on the leggings and T-shirt, and slip on the gym shoes they gave me. They are a little small, but they will do the job. My anxiety starts to creep up. I shut my eyes for a moment to try and balance myself. The dizzy feeling fades as I open them again. I need to get out in the open; the walls feel like they are closing in on me.

Walking toward the door, I peek my head out and see that I am close to the end of the

hall. A sign hangs on the wall pointing to the direction of the elevators.

I look to my left and see the side of the nurses' station. No one is paying me any attention, so I hurriedly slip out the door and walk toward the elevator. There is no one there waiting, and I let out a sigh of relief, punching the button to call the elevator multiple times. I am in such a hurry to get out of here.

When the elevator finally does arrive, the ding that sounds to let me know it's there is so loud, I worry that it will attract someone's attention. But it doesn't.

I get in and slam the first floor button. As the doors close, I let out a long breath. Once I reach the ground level, I immediately make a beeline for the exit.



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The minute the fresh air hits my face, I almost start crying. It feels so good to feel the sun against my face. I don't know how long I had been held in that room. The suffering went on for what seemed like forever. The drugs he gave me... I don't know how long I was out for. As the days went on, I lost hope that someone would save me. The days rolled into the nights, and at some point, I just stopped caring.

I start walking through the parking lot until I come up on a main road. I have no idea where I am or how I'm going to get back to where I call home. I obviously don't have money, and I have no car. I don't even own a phone. Not that I have anyone I could call.

I can't remember my name or my birthday, let alone a phone number.

So, I do the only thing I can do. Just walk. Walk until I get somewhere. Anywhere.

When I reach a stoplight, I see that it says Charleston Boulevard on the sign. I am at the corner of Rancho and Charleston. A Chase bank sits on the corner, a gas station across from it. I would love water, but without money, I'll have to steal it. The last thing I want to do is attract more attention to myself. So, I keep heading down Charleston until I find some shade from this heat.

There is a nice grass patch under a tree, so I take a moment to sit down, relax, and try to assess what I'm going to do. With no funds, I will have to find a place to sleep. A shelter or something.

I pick at the grass blades as the cars whizz by. The sun beats down on me, and my body feels restless. I have no idea how long the detox meds they give me will last. So

when they are out of my system, I will be miserable.

I need to find some place to hole up soon.

As I sit there, a cop car slowly comes to a stop before me. I look around to see if there is any other reason they would stop, but it's just me under the tree.

My heart starts to race a bit as I wonder if they are looking for me to try and take me back to the hospital. Slowly, I stand, getting ready for whatever is about to happen. A female officer gets out of the car, her red hair in a short pixie cut.

"Hello there, ma'am. I'm Officer Laura Doran. How are you doing today?" She rests her hand on her belt as she slowly walks up toward me.

Tears start to form in my now stinging eyes. And I'm not sure if it's from fear or a symptom of my withdrawal that is causing them to tear up. Maybe both. My vision blurs a bit as I stare at the officer.

"Do you have any ID on you?" she asks, raising an expectant eyebrow at me.

I shake my head. I have nothing to my name, much less an ID.

"Are you homeless?" She looks me up and down, no doubt noticing the bruises on my arms.

I nod as tears fall down my cheeks. Fear. It's definitely fear.

She frowns and then turns around to head to the back of her police car. Then she opens up the trunk and rifles through some things before returning to where I'm sitting.

Holding out her hand, she offers me a bag filled with some stuff. I cautiously take the bag from her and open it to see that there are a couple of bottles of water and some granola bars inside.

“It’s not much, but it’s something. If you would like, there is a women’s shelter down the street. I can take you there and you can have a place to sleep for a few nights. They may be able to help you get on your feet,” she offers.

“I just want to go home,” I say so softly that I’m not sure she hears me until she responds.

“Where’s home, sweetheart?” Her voice is calm. “Do you have family here in Las Vegas?”

I shake my head, biting my lip. “Back east.”

“You are on the opposite side of the country, ma’am.” She turns and looks down the road and then back at me. “Would you like me to take you to the women’s shelter?”

I slowly nod. Maybe someone there can help me get my memory back. Help me remember where I’m from.

She leads me to the back of her car, and I hesitantly start to back up. My eyes widen in fear that she is going to take me back to the hospital.

“I am just taking you down the street, okay? I swear. I’m not taking you to jail. I just can’t have you riding up front with me,” she assures me, sensing my unease.

She doesn’t seem like she’s lying about this. And she didn’t mention the hospital, she mentioned jail, so chances are she has no idea I just escaped from there. I cautiously make my way into the back of the vehicle. She helps me with the buckle and then

closes the door. I start to feel a bit boxed in once the door closes, and I have to sit there and breathe to try to calm myself.

Officer Doran gets in and takes off toward the shelter she was talking about. Gripping the bag tightly, I swallow over the lump in my throat. We drive for maybe a few minutes before she pulls into a parking lot that looks like most of them around me. There's a building that almost looks like a hospital, which makes the blood rush from my face.

"They're really nice here," the officer assures me. "They will get you some meals and a place to lay your head. They have counselors here you can talk to, and hopefully, they can help get you on your feet. And here,"—she hands me a card—"that is my contact information. If you need anything, please call me. Day or night. Okay?"

"Why are you helping me?" My voice wavers.

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She lets out a sigh. “Vegas is a scary place, and for a woman, even scarier. My mom and I lived on the streets for years before we got help. If I can make sure you’re not sleeping on the streets, then that’s all that matters to me.”

I look down at her card. “Thank you.”

“Come on, let me walk you in.” She gets out and comes to my side of the car to help me out of the vehicle.

Then she walks toward the building, but I hang back for a moment, the hair on the back of my neck standing up. Fear creeps into the pit of my stomach as I scan around me. My anxiety kicks up, and I try to blow out long breaths. I can feel the eyes on me, I just don’t know from where.

“You coming?” Officer Doran calls out to me.

I nod and quickly catch up to her.

What if he followed us here? What if he’s been watching me this entire time?

I can’t go back with him. I just can’t. I can’t live in that hell anymore. A rat trapped in a cage. Being used and abused. Drugged.

Death would be preferable. I choose death.

Chapter Six

DREW

“What the actual fuck? When can I get out of here?” I look over at Kayce, and he blows me a kiss. In turn, I flip him off. God, he gets on my nerves sometimes. It’s a good thing he’s like a brother to me. Well, good for him. Otherwise, I would pummel him.

“Maybe if you didn’t go running into buildings to play hero, you could be at home now.” Phoenix steps into the room with a smirk on her face. “Look, you can’t see her right now, but come back tomorrow and you will be able to. Hopefully.”

“Mommy’s grounding you.” Kayce laughs and slaps his leg at his own fucking joke.

“I swear to fucking God, Anderson. Do you have a mommy fetish?” Phoenix throws her hands up in frustration.

“Hey, don’t kink shame. Plus, mommies always have snacks. Don’t they, Mommy?” Kayce waggles his eyebrows at her. “Mommies are yummy.”

“Dude, did you fall and hit your head and forget who her husbands are?” I scowl at him. They will kill him. Rip his skin from his body and gut him like a fish.

Kayce shrugs. “Maybe I’m a masochist who likes snacks.”

“Remember who signs your checks, Anderson,” Phoenix growls.

“Sorry, Mommy.” Kayce howls with laughter.

I roll my eyes. “Ignore him, Phoenix. I will kick his ass later.” I flip him off again before turning my head back toward her. “But seriously, when can I go?”

“I don’t know how you deal with that man child.” She shakes her head.

“Alcohol.Hardalcohol,” I respond sarcastically.

Phoenix clears her throat. “Doctor will be in here in the next few minutes. You will get released. The dick behind me can take you home. Straight fucking home, Drew. I’m dead serious.” She levels me with a stare.

“Okay, straight home. Got it. But I want to come back and see her tomorrow.”

She smiles at me, “Drew, that’s fine. But you need to rest, and I’ll make sure she gets some help. I need you focused, okay? I already have a call into John; he will be by tomorrow afternoon. He is going to help get her a place to stay and figure out where she came from.”

“All right. Then home it is.” Just as I finish my sentence, a doctor walks in and takes in my very crowded room with wide eyes.

“Well, isn’t this the fanfare. I’m Dr. Park. Do you all mind leaving the room while I talk with the patient?” She stands at the foot of the bed, a smile stretching across her face at the view in front of her.

“We aren’t going anywhere,” Tristan mumbles from his seat. His head tips back against the wall, his eyes closing. I was sure he was sleeping up until he mumbled that.

I shake my head and grin, turning back toward the doctor. “They’re fine to stay here.”

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Her lips purse, but she nods. “Okay, then. Well, Mr. Spencer, you are cleared to go. However, I want you to be aware of any shortness of breath, headaches, or dizziness. If you experience any of those symptoms, you need to come back into the hospital. Do you have any questions?”

“Am I cleared to play?” I raise an eyebrow at her.

“As long as you have no problems breathing or any of those signs I mentioned, I don’t see why not. I would get with your team doctor and keep them in the loop.” She smiles at me. “Any other questions?”

“Nope. Just want to get out of here.”

“The nurse will come in with your discharge papers, and then you can go. Good luck at your next game.” She nods to me before turning to leave.

“Hey, uh, Doc, do you like baseball?” Kayce offers her a sly smile. “Because I can get you some special tickets. You can be my special guest.”

She hums. “Not a huge sports fan. But my husband is an avid Wildcats fan, so he would love free tickets to your next game against his favorite team.” Dr. Parks grins ear to ear as Kayce’s lips turn down. His face turns red with embarrassment.

“Sorry, ma’am,” he murmurs as he looks down at the floor.

Dr. Parks lets out a chuckle. “Remember, if you start to feel short of breath, come in. Enjoy the rest of your day, Mr. Spencer.” With that, she turns on her heels and heads



out of the room.

“Thank fucking God. I’m itching to get the fuck out. Dude,”—I nod to Cameron—“did you bring me my change of clothes?”

He tosses a bag toward me. “Here ya go. I made a call, and your car is back at your house, too.”

“Thanks.” I quickly throw on the T-shirt and basketball shorts he brought me. All I want to do is crawl into my bed and get some sleep. Well, that’s a lie. What I really want to do is go see how that girl is doing. Find out why she was unconscious and naked in a burning house that had barely any signs of someone living in there.

But that will have to wait until tomorrow. For now, I need to rest and sleep. Because if I don’t, Phoenix will more than likely kill me. Or bench me, and I don’t know which would be worse.

A few hours of shut-eye won’t be a big deal.

Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.

I let out a groan as a consistent buzzing wakes me from my nap.

Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.

Fuck, that is annoying.

Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.

Goddamnit. I roll over and fight to open my eyes. I’m beyond exhausted, and my body feels like I went twelve rounds in a ring.

I grab my phone just as the buzzing starts up again. “What?” My voice is hoarse and dry when I pick up, and I see Kayce on the other end of the screen.

“Hey, it’s Kayce. Um, so your mystery woman, well...”

I let out a sigh. “I know it’s you, I can see you. Spit it out, Anderson. I would like to at least get a couple of hours of sleep.”

“Couple of hours? Dude, it’s tomorrow already. You must have been sleeping since you got home yesterday.”

“Wait, what?” I immediately sit up in my bed. “What do you mean? Why is it tomorrow? What the hell?”

“Because the world keeps turning. Um, because time flies. Um... That’s all I got. But yes, you apparently have been sleeping since we dropped you off yesterday. Which is evident that you needed it.” He laughs through the phone.

“Well, shit. Wait, why did you call again?” I furrow my brows, rubbing the back of my neck.

“Oh right, yeah. That chick.”

I wait for him to continue, but he doesn’t. “I’m gonna need more information than that to understand what it is you’re calling about, Anderson.”

He lets out a sigh. “She’s... gone.”

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“What the fuck do you mean, ‘She’s gone?’” I jump out of bed and start running toward the door, only stopping when I realize that I’m in my boxer briefs. Shit.

Clothes would probably keep you out of the tabloids, Drew.

“She ran. Nurses went to check on her, and she was gone,” he huffs through the phone.

“Well, are they looking for her?” I place him on speaker and jump into my jeans before throwing a T-shirt over my head.

“No. They’re saying she left against medical advice, and they are moving on with life.”

“Are you fucking kidding me? She was naked in a room! In a house that was burning down around her. Something bigger was at play, and they are just letting her go?! What the fuck?” I run a hand through my hair, my heart beating out of my chest.

I’m well versed on people not giving a shit about someone. Phoenix needed help back in the day at Darkwood, and adults—hell, even other students—turned a blind eye to her torment. Someone who was in that bad of condition should be protected. She needed help. And the hospital let her down.

“They apparently don’t care enough or just don’t want the trouble. Who the fuck knows?” Kayce sighs, running a hand through his hair.

“I need to call John. He’ll know what to do.” I hang up the phone and dial the man

who saved Phoenix and me all those years ago. A man who has become family to us.

“Agent Steele,” John says as he picks up the phone, obviously not looking at the caller ID and seeing that it’s me.

“John, it’s Drew.”

His tone perks up. “Drew, how are you feeling? Phoenix gave me a rundown of what happened. Are you okay?”

I let out a sigh. “Yeah, I’m alright. A little smoke inhalation, but I’m fine. Hey, that woman I found?—”

“What the hell were you thinking of running into a burning building?” John scolds.

“Really?” I throw up my free arm in exasperation, even though he can’t see. “I was making sure someone wasn’t in there, and what do you know? Someone was!”

“Son, you could have been seriously hurt. There’s a reason firefighters have gear they put on. To protect themselves.”

“Yeah, I get that John, but... I just had to.”

“I know, I know. You have a good heart, Drew. You’re a good man. Don’t ever change.” He blows out a breath. “Now that I got that out of the way, to what do I owe the pleasure of this phone call?” he asks.

“The woman I found. Do we know who she is? She took off from the hospital.” I run downstairs and find my keys to my Mustang sitting on the counter, swiping them and heading toward the garage.

“She left? AMA?”

“Kayce said the nurses went in there for something and found the room empty. She ran. Or at least, I hope she did. Do we have any information on her that would tell me where I can find her?” I jump in my car and slam the door.

“No. I have nothing. I can call local PD and see if they got anything from her, but this isn’t a federal case. I don’t really have jurisdiction. Last I knew, all we had was her first name. Raelyn. And I’m not sure if that’s even her actual name. Outside of that, I don’t think there is much we will be able to do,” he sighs into the phone. “Sorry, Drew.”

“Well, I can’t just do nothing.” I lean my head back against the headrest.

“You may have to, kid. Sometimes, there is nothing we can do. In this situation, you have to accept that. Accept that you saved someone’s life and move on.”

“Sure. Thanks, John.” I click end on the screen and sit there defeated.

I throw the phone down into the seat next to me and run my hands over my face.

Fuck it.

Like John said, I saved someone’s life and need to move on. But something in the back of my mind won’t let me just be happy with that. I need to find her. I need to make sure she’s safe. Above all, I always need to trust my gut. It’s gotten me this far. And it’s screaming at me to listen to it.

She’s not out of danger yet.

Chapter Seven

RAELYN

I struggle against the binds that hold my wrists together, my arms pulled behind my back. I can't speak, I can't hear anything. But I feel the vibrations under me. My fingers touch something cold as my heart beats fast. I try to move my legs, but they feel heavy, like they're numb.

Help me.

With every ounce of strength I have, I try to roll to get some leverage to sit up. Except I can't move. It's like my entire body is dead weight.

Why can't I move?

I try to scream, but no sound comes out. My eyes widen under the blackness that surrounds me. Without warning, fingers touch my head, and I shiver.

In a flash, the black veil is lifted from my head, and wicked faces surround me. Their eyes bore into me. I try to let out a scream again, but nothing comes out. But then hands reach out toward me?—

My eyes fly open as I try to catch my breath. Sweat drips down my back and face. My stomach rolls, and I have to choke back the bile crawling up my throat. The withdrawal symptoms are becoming worse now that I don't have the detox meds. My skull feels like it's splitting in half.

I look around, trying to adjust my vision to my surroundings. A low light comes from

some night lights and the streetlamps outside the window. Nighttime is the worst. The darkness brings horrible things to life.

Placing my hand on my chest, I can feel the speed of my heart beating. I lay my head against the wall. I refuse to budge from the corner I found and took residence in once I got inside this room. The corner keeps me rooted in reality.

“Are you okay?” a soft voice across from me asks. My head snaps up toward her, but I don’t give her an answer.

They room you with others in this place. The feeling is familiar to me. I don’t know why, but it’s an unwanted sensation.

“Here.” Her soft voice speaks again, as she stands a few feet from me.

My eyes widen at how close she is to me. I try to push back farther, but the wall stops me. She frowns at my reaction but doesn’t say anything. Instead, she rolls a bottle of cold water at me.

The water hits my feet, and I look between her and the bottle. Is this a trick? My mouth feels like the desert, and suddenly my throat feels like it has sandpaper in it. The water would be so nice right now. So I grab it and quickly open it, chugging it back. The cool water hits the back of my throat, cooling me off instantly. I close my eyes and let out a long breath.

“Did you have a nightmare?” My eyes shoot up to the petite woman.

Her blonde hair is disheveled, with one strap of her tank top sliding down her shoulder.

She clears her throat and continues, “I get it. It’s a new, scary place. But this is a nice

place with some nice people to help. Still, we all have those nightmares at some point. Hell, you would think they wouldn't be scary the older we get knowing that they aren't real, yet we get all freaked out anyway. But you're good here. Nightmares or not, this is a safe place. They want to help us."

No one ever helps.

My thought hangs there in my mind. Where was my help when I was in the cage? When I was raped? Where was my help when I was running to get away from him?

Wait. I shake my head. That didn't happen. I don't think. Fuck! Everything is so confusing. Is this reality now? I blink a few times, my hand rubbing the ground. The rough carpet scrapes against my skin. It feels real. I'm not asleep.

"It's probably more comfortable sleeping in the bed," the girl offers.

My eyes shoot over to the bed, the red blanket that covers it neatly tucked into the sides. The single pillow in a white pillowcase on top of it. And she's probably right, it more than likely is more comfortable. But I can't.

I shake my head. No, I am safer here, I think in my head.

"Okay, well, if you change your mind, I'm sure you will get better sleep. But I get it. My name is Veronica Foster, but most call me Ronnie. Or Smalls, because I'm, well, small." She looks at me, waiting for me to say something, but I offer her no words back. "I'm gonna get back to sleep. Feel free to wake me if you need me, alright?"

I nod my head and watch her get back under her covers. Within minutes, I can hear her soft snores. I rub the palm of my hand into my eyes.

I'm exhausted, but my mind doesn't want to shut down again. My muscles feel stiff,



and my neck hurts from keeping it up against the wall. My stomach cramps, and I try to contain my groan. My entire body just hurts. This fucking sucks so much. I have no idea how I'm going to survive all this.

Part of me just wants to find whatever drug will make this go away. Make the shakes stop, the muscle aches stop. But I know all that will do is delay the withdrawals all over again. I just want it all to stop. The hurting, the blank memories, everything.

It's all so fucking confusing. My mind replays events from my captor, and dread fills me. But I can't remember what happened before or how I ended up in Las Vegas. Everything is hazy, a blur. Was I even with my captor? I could have sworn I left and escaped, so how did I end up back in his house? In the fire?

My stomach rolls, and I can feel panic start to set in. The walls are starting to close in. It feels like his hands are wrapped around my throat. I claw at myself, trying desperately to get air. I need to get out of here.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:45 am*

It's a trap, this is all a trap. The walls are too close. The buzzing I hear doesn't stop. Pain radiates throughout my head. I need to escape him.

Immediately, I get up and run out of the room. The world is a blur around me. My focus is set on trying to find my freedom. Noises invade my hearing, but I can't decipher what they are. I just need to get out of here. I find the nearest exit and bust through it. As soon as the air hits me, I feel like I can suddenly breathe.

I gasp, my heart wildly trying to escape my chest as I breathe through the panic. There are no walls, no prison. Just openness. Freedom. I close my eyes and let the sounds of the road and cars be my focus.

"Hey, are you okay?" Ronnie sticks her head out of the door, and her voice startles me. I jump back a bit as she comes forward, but she holds up her hands in front of her. "I heard some weird noises, and you were gone."

My head starts to swivel as I look around me, looking for a way out. I claw at my shirt on my chest, and tears start to pour down my face.

Her eyes widen. "Oh, no. Relax. I'm not going to hurt you. I just wanted to make sure you were okay, I swear. What's going on? Do you want to talk about it? Wait, I'm sure I can figure this out. You felt suffocated?"

I nod as I rub my chest and take a deep breath.

She purses her lips and nods, then ducks back inside and shuts the door. Guess that suited her curiosity. But her leaving allows me to breathe a little easier. For a

moment, I just let the air hit my face, and even though it's warm, it feels less suffocating,

Looking up at the night sky, I notice there are zero stars visible. I find that so odd, and I frown. Where are the stars?

"It's because of all the lights in this city." Ronnie appears behind me. I turn around and widen my eyes at her sudden appearance. "This city is bright at night. Between the strip, Downtown Las Vegas, along with all the lights everywhere else in this valley, you can't see the stars." She shrugs. "Some places you can, but you have to go far outside the city to see them. It's a shame, really."

She hands me a black backpack, and I hesitantly take it from her.

"Here, I grabbed some supplies. Let's go get you some fresh air. Well, Vegas fresh air. It's not the best, but you get used to it." She throws on her bag and smiles at me. "Look, I love to talk, and I can probably talk you to death, but you will get sick of it. So just tell me if you do."

She pauses, observing me for a moment.

"Can you talk? Do you have, like, a problem speaking? Do you even understand what I'm saying? Of course you do. You have been answering me in your 'I'm not using words' way. You totally don't have to respond to me; you can just let me keep talking. But do know I will probably drive you crazy." She smacks her forehead with the palm of her hand as she starts to walk away from the building.

I look around confused at the last few minutes. She just handed me this backpack, and I have no idea what's in it. She hasn't stopped talking, and she has just started acting like we have been besties for years.

Ronnie pauses and turns to face me.

“It’s some clothes and food,” she answers as if reading my mind. “Come on. Let’s go find ourselves a better place for you to get some sleep.” She tilts her head for me to follow, and I hesitate for a moment.

But for the first time, I don’t feel so alone. And she kinda gets my silence and my reaction to things. Maybe she can help me at least find a better place until I can leave Las Vegas. So, I do something I probably shouldn’t: I follow her.

We walk past the hospital that I thankfully escaped with no issue. No one seemed to care that I left. But as we continue on Charleston Boulevard, I can’t help but feel like I’m being watched. The hair on the back of my neck stands up. There are literal chills running down my spine despite it being hot outside. Sweat drips down my back, and I shake out my hands from the cramps that form in them.

“You doing okay? You got a little pale there.” Ronnie stops and looks at me. She wasn’t lying when she said she talks a lot. She hasn’t stopped since we left. And I’m okay with that.

Breaking contact with her, I look around at the area and bite my lip. The cars whiz by us, and the air smells like dirt and garbage. Shaking the weird feeling from myself, I nod to her, and she continues on. I should tell her about the withdrawal, but maybe I won’t have to if we find a place I can just hide out.

Ronnie tells me stories of how she ended up on the street. How her mother met a guy who got her hooked on drugs. Her mom lost her job, and they had to move in with this guy. They eventually got married, and her new “stepdad” wanted her out of the house. But what Ronnie never told her mom was that her “stepdad” tried to have sex with her, and when she refused and shut him down, he got her mom to agree to kick her out of the house.

So for the past year, she has been living on her own. Sometimes taking some under-the-table odd jobs here and there, begging on the streets, anything to get a few bucks. She is a regular in the shelters and has tried to get help to get a job and start life, but she has been unsuccessful in actually landing a job.

So, she just roams the streets. Ronnie says she is happier this way, but I can see the sadness in her eyes. The sadness that this is her life, that her mom abandoned her.

“I was studying to be a teacher.” She lets out a laugh. “I know, I wouldn’t strike anyone as the teaching kind, but I’m quite the nerd. Plus, I didn’t always look like this.” She gestures to her ripped jeans and dirty shirt.

I frown at how much she’s lost in her life in such a short time. Her future, her family, her home.

She continues, “I had to blend in. But I used to be very clean cut, nerdy, and never wore anything that wasn’t more conservative. But out here, it’s better to blend in and be forgotten.” Ronnie blows out a breath.

We walk in silence for a moment before she turns to me.

“Do you know where you’re from?” she asks. I shake my head, and my lips turn down. “Damn, girl. That sucks. Well, look, you have me. We can be friends and get through whatever life we have left on this shit dirt they call earth. It’s better than being alone.”

She’s right. It’s better than being alone. I was alone in that room, and I have no memory of before, so for all I know, I could have been alone then, too.

## Page 23

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Ronnie doesn't seem like a bad person. She seems genuine and sweet.

"Sounds good," I say softly to her, and she flashes me a huge smile. She doesn't make a big deal that I gave her actual words, but I can tell the excitement in her bounce.

Now, I just need to hope that my memory of how I ended up here in Las Vegas comes back. How I ended up in that house, suffering and beaten.

I hope he never finds me.

That the shadows don't come alive in the night.

### Chapter Eight

#### DREW

"Stop your fucking bitchin'," Tristan growls from in front of his locker. God, he's a miserable fucker sometimes.

"Dude, shut up. It's bullshit. I was cleared to play by Doc and the trainer. It's bullshit Coach won't let me play." I run a hand through my hair as I let out an exasperated breath. "If I'm fine to suit up, I'm fine to play. I need to be out there with you."

"Pitch, it's one game. You weren't even set to pitch today. And you are out there," Cameron says as he puts on his cap.

I roll my eyes, but Kayce adds, “Stop being a drama llama. Also, for future reference, maybe don’t go running into burning buildings and saving the damsels in distress. Or at least make sure you’re Superman before doing that.” He smiles at me.

“Look, I did what I thought I had to do. And I’m glad I did. Right place, right time.” I shrug.

“And now you aren’t cleared to play,” Tristan reminds me sourly. Did I mention he’s a miserable bastard?

I huff in annoyance. “Yeah, whatever.” I slam my bag into my locker. I’m stressed to the max. Not being given the go ahead by coach to play and having to be sidelined while we fight to keep our undefeated streak going is internally killing me.

Then add in that no one has been able to find Raelyn. She disappeared into the wind. If it wasn’t for others knowing she existed, I would question my sanity.

Though I don’t even know if anyone cares. It’s obvious she was in trouble, that she had been through more than most people in their lives. Not to mention the condition I found her in was deplorable. So it makes sense that she disappeared.

She is a lost soul. She got scared and ran from people who were legit trying to help her. My heart pulls at the idea that she is out there all alone.

But of course, I don’t know that. She could be with family, friends, anyone really. I know nothing about her. Just her name.

Raelyn.

“Spencer! Get in here!” Coach Bertelli yells from his office, breaking me out of my thoughts, and I wince.

“Oh, someone is gonna get yelled at for pouting.” Kayce frowns and makes sniffing noises at me and then laughs as I throw my glove at him. That only makes him laugh even harder.

“Shut it, Anderson,” Tristan snaps from where he sits in front of his locker.

I shake my head at the guys and walk into Coach’s office. It’s covered in baseball memorabilia, a lot of it from the days when he played. Coach Bertelli was a legend back then and an amazing third baseman. We are all very fortunate that he’s our coach and that we get to learn from the best.

“What’s up, Coach?” I nod as I walk in and sit on the black leather couch that rests against the wall.

He sighs. “I know you’re pissed?—”

“Pissed is an understatement,” I cut him off.

He holds up a hand to stop me. “We are just playing it safe with this game. And you weren’t even on the pitching rotation for today anyway.”

“Coach, you always list me as a backup, and today I’m not. Please put me on the roster,” I beg. “I get it that you’re playing it safe, but I need to be part of the team. It’s been a week since the fire.”

Coach Bertelli hums for a moment as he watches me. “You get why it was stupid to do what you did, right? It was a house onfire. You had no idea who was in there or if you could get out! What if the building collapsed? What if you went in there for nothing? It was stupid. It was a stupid fucking thing to do.”

My jaw clenches. “Look, you and I have different definitions of stupid. Anderson live



streaming his drunken escapades dry humping strippers on the Vegas Strip is stupid. Me rescuing a person from a fire? Not stupid. And I would do it again in a heartbeat.” I shrug as I lay down the facts.

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“Fuckin’ Anderson needs his phone taken away.” Coach pinches the bridge of his nose. “Look, you’re a good kid, son. But one more day isn’t going to hurt. I get why you did what you did. Like I said, you’re a good egg. But I need to look out for your best interest as well as this team’s.

“And I can’t risk having my best pitcher rushed back to the hospital because he passes out on that mound. I know you were cleared, but I, as your coach, am saying you’re sitting out this game. It’s one more game. Then you are back on that field and racking up the strike outs. Okay?”

I let out a huff. “Yeah, Coach. One more game.” With that, I I stand up from the couch, spin on my heel and head out, not even turning back into the locker room. Instead, I head up toward the offices. I walk through the tunnels until I find myself at the office of my best friend.

I knock on the door and wait to get let in.

“Come in,” a sweet voice says from behind the door.

Slowly, I open it and see Phoenix sitting at her desk, typing away with Raven on the floor next to her desk.

“There’s my favorite little human.” I immediately kneel down and pick up Raven.

“Drew! Shouldn’t you be getting ready for the game?” Phoenix eyes me.

I blow out a breath. “I’m sitting out again. Coach’s orders. Though, supposedly, this

will be the last one.” The irritation in my voice is evident because I hear her sigh.

“That’s bullshit, but I trust Coach Bertelli. So, if he thinks you sitting out one more game is the right move, then it’s one more game. Besides, you wouldn’t have started this game anyway,” Phoenix adds.

“Yeah, yeah. I haven’t played in a week. Who says I wouldn’t have started?” I shrug.

Phoenix looks over at the giant game calendar on her wall and smiles. “Because you play against the Chicago Ravens this weekend. And you know you need to pitch that first game.”

My lips tip up. Yeah, I do. My rivalry with a good friend of mine, Kyle Moody, hasn’t died down one bit since we were both drafted to the Major Leagues. “Fuckin’ Moody.”

“Moody. Exactly. And you know you need to be sharp and ready to take them on. So, while I get you are upset, Drew, Coach Bertelli knows what he’s doing. He needs you ready to go this weekend.” Phoenix offers me a smile.

Raven babbles and dances in my arms as she tries to recite the words to the Cocomelon song playing on the TV in the office. I give her a kiss on the forehead and place her back on the floor. She goes back to her toys and making noise.

“I know. Fuck, I-I’ve just got a lot on my mind, and I need a way to get it out, I guess,” I confess.

“It’s that woman you saved.” She doesn’t ask it, she states it. She knows me better than I know myself sometimes.

I nod. “I just can’t get her out of my head. The way she looked, the pain I felt for

her.” I rub my chest. “And she took off. I couldn’t help her.”

“You can’t save everyone, Drew,” Phoenix says softly.

“I know, but she needed help. They should have kept a better eye on her.” My voice is thick with emotion.

“From someone who was once scared out of her mind, sometimes fear doesn’t let you make rational decisions. All you know is what’s in front of you. Broken pieces of the puzzle. And when you try to put it together, well, it can be overwhelming. She ran because she didn’t know what was going on. John says he’s searching missing persons and trying to see if anyone reported someone who looked like her missing.”

“But what does it matter? She’s gone. Las Vegas is a big place.” I run my hand through my hair. “I would have preferred making sure she was okay with my own eyes. I should’ve just seen her that same day.”

“Look, focus on the game. Focus on what you are doing after the game. I heard the guys are going downtown for some concert tonight on Fremont Street.” Phoenix gets up and walks over to Raven, picking her up and giving her a kiss and hug.

“Focus on a game I’m not playing?” I throw back.

“You know you need to be there for the team, so don’t give me that shit. The team needs you, even if you aren’t playing. Focus on that. Focus on tonight. Focus on having a good time with friends and teammates. Focus on practice tomorrow. Focus on the games this weekend.”

I sigh. “That’s a lot of focusing.” I chuckle. “So, focus on everything else. Got it.” Looking down at my watch, I check the time and see that I need to get back to the locker room. I turn on my heel and head back toward the door. “Thanks, Phoenix.

Just, if you hear anything?—”

“I will make sure you know. Now get fucking down on the field. Don’t make me trade you.” She smirks as she lets out a chuckle.

“You wouldn’t dare. Who else would get to drive you crazy on a daily basis?”

Phoenix shrugs. “Evans, Anderson, Davis...”

“Yeah, yeah.” I shake my head, smiling as I leave, closing the door behind me.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:45 am*

Her words bounce in my head.Focus.

Such a simple word. A word that has my stomach in knots and my mind whirling.  
And I can focus, but I am focused on one thing.

Finding Raelyn.

Chapter Nine

RAELYN

“Are you ever going to share what happened?” Ronnie pushes. “You can’t hide in yourself forever, and I can’t help you if you don’t ever tell me what happened.”

I stare at her, unsure of what to say. My hands twist in my lap as we sit at a table at a Denny’s on the strip. Our Everyday Value Slam sits in front of us. The smell of the pancakes and sausage instantly makes my stomach grumble in hunger.

Watching the butter melt on the fluffy stacks in front of me, I let out a long breath. “I wish I could remember. I wish I knew what happened, but I only get bits and pieces. Things seem real but dreamlike at the same time. I... I don’t even really remember myself, if that makes sense.”

She hums and nods. “Well, yes and no. Eat. While you talk, you need to eat,” Ronnie says as she bites into her scrambled eggs that she doused in ketchup.

I stab one of the sausages with my fork and slowly lift it to my mouth. Biting down,

the juices explode in my mouth, and I let out a small moan when I finally swallow it down. This is a treat for us. We have been stealing things from convenience stores to get us by, but we decided to splurge a bit this morning on breakfast.

Ronnie won't tell me how she gets the money; she just says the money comes from side jobs. I don't push or question it. Because right now, I'm enjoying pancakes with that money she makes.

I take a deep breath and move the scrambled eggs around my plate with my fork. "All I know for sure is when I was in that house. And even then, a lot of it is missing. He would drug me. Often. I remember waking up, feeling sore and dirty. Parts of me would hurt." Tears start to blur my vision. "But I can't remember who I am. Like, I have these images that flash in my mind, but I don't know what is true and what isn't. For fuck's sake, I thought I got away."

"What do you mean you thought you got away?" She frowns as she lifts her orange juice to her lips, peering at me over the rim of the glass.

"Before I woke up in the hospital, I thought I had run away. That a man ra—" I choke back on my tears and have to steady myself. "A man did horrible things to me, and that he left the door open, and I escaped. But then I woke up in a hospital, and I was told I was rescued from a fire."

Ronnie's mouth drops open. "Holy shit balls."

"And it felt so real. I could feel the guy on top of me. The smell of his breath." I gag at the memory. "I could feel the ground under my feet as I ran. But it was all a dream of some sort."

She nods, "So, how can you know what you are seeing is truth or a hallucination?" It's clearly a rhetorical question.

“Exactly.” I cut into the pancakes and take a small bite, savoring the buttery, fluffy food on my tongue. This pancake could be a hallucination for all I know.

“Um, are you eating pancakes without syrup?” Ronnie scrunches her face as she judges my eating habits.

“Yeah, syrup is sticky. Hard pass.” I wrinkle my nose.

“You are a strange duck.” She takes a bite of her eggs and chews for a moment. “So, you have no idea who this guy is who had you?”

“No.” I shake my head. “If I hadn’t been told I was in that fire, I would probably question if I was really there. I kinda question if the guy was real or if who I saw was real. I just don’t know. I don’t know if anything in that house was real. These images...” I trail off.

“And these images or things you see, what are they exactly? Besides the escape.”

I look around at the people sitting at their tables, talking amongst themselves. They laugh and eat as if there isn’t a worry in their world. Like evil doesn’t truly exist.

“I... I just see these black shadows. Their eyes. They are all looking at me.” I shake my head as my mind replays what it remembers of visions. “They hover over me. There’s a murmuring, but I can’t understand it. I don’t know. It all goes fuzzy.”

Ronnie stares at me, her face giving away nothing.

“What about the one you had at the shelter?” she asks.

My mind tries to replay the images from my sleep. Except I can’t remember all of it. “I remember I couldn’t move, that everything felt heavy. There was blackness, but



that's all I can remember." I chug my water, my throat feeling dry and scratchy.

"Damn. Well, look, you need to talk to me if you get a flashback or something. Maybe I can help piece together what is going on. I don't want you suffering alone. You aren't alone anymore, Raelyn. You've got me. Which, I know you haven't known me for too long, but I'm kinda cool and all." She smiles at me.

"I just don't know where I belong. I don't know where I fit. Everything I know or think I know, I can't even be sure is factual. It could be my head playing games with me." I frown and take a sip of my milk.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:45 am*

“Do you know what drugs the asshole gave you? What he used to keep you loopy?” She tilts her head to the side.

I shake my head, not wanting to tell her what he really gave me. “No. He called them my vitamins. That’s all I know. He didn’t give me a choice; he made me take them. And the few times I tried to fight it, he beat me so bad I was bruised and broken for what felt like weeks. Then he would beat the same spots, making it hurt more.” My lips wobble as I try to keep the emotions from flowing out of me. The lump in my throat threatens to spill over.

“What a fucking monster!” Ronnie’s jaw drops. “I want to find the fucker and peel his skin from his body and then roast him over an open fire.”

My eyes widen at her confession. “That’s... dark.” But maybe I kind of want to do the same thing.

She looks at me and then busts out laughing. “That was the least dark of the dark things running through my head.”

“Thanks for keeping it light.” I crack a smile.

We spend the rest of breakfast filling up on food and talking about our plans for the night. She tries to pull my focus away from my nightmares, encouraging me to think of other things. She got us a cheap room at a run-down place called the Nexus Hotel for a couple nights, so at least we will have a bed to sleep in for a bit. We decided to stay away from the shelters and brave the streets of Vegas.

While the shelters are nice, they felt too confining to me. Too many people, too many questions. And every now and then, we get a room in a run-down motel or hotel. It's a bed for the night. And sure, the room smells, and there is who knows what on the sheets, but it's a bed in a room.

At least it's better than sleeping on the street.

"Okay, so I'm gonna go do that job really fast, and then I will be back. Do you want me to pick up something to eat?" Ronnie asks as she packs her small handbag.

"Are you ever going to tell me what it is you do?" I mean, I'm not complaining at all. While this room is the absolute worst, whatever she does is letting us stay here.

Looking around, I take in the dirty beige walls that are across from me, a salmon-colored wall painted behind me, and the dingy bed I'm sitting on. The orange and pink comforter looks like it has seen better days, and there could be a science experiment on this thing.

Don't even start thinking about that.

The floor is tile, but the grout is black and stained. There are brown stains on the ceiling, which I'm sure are from leaky pipes, and don't even get me started on the cracks in the tub in the bathroom. But it has hot water, and it lets us shower. Beggars can't be choosers.

"I will be back in a couple of hours. Don't worry. Just keep everything locked up and watch some TV." She smiles at me, ignoring my question and heading out the door.

I get up and immediately look out the window, watching her get into a beat-up black SUV. I narrow my eyes, my mind turning with what she could be doing.

I watch the SUV drive off, and I slink back into the bed and turn on the TV. I flip through the channels, not really seeing anything that interests me. Turning it off, I lean back on the pillow, my eyes feeling a bit heavy. A little nap wouldn't hurt, and I will be fully rested when Ronnie finds her way back.

So, I close my eyes and let sleep take me.

“Well, I need you to watch her for a bit. I have to get on stage,” a woman decked out in a glittery, skimpy outfit says into the phone. “I know, Tom, but we need the money. So just deal with it.” She angrily punches the phone with her finger, ending the call. She huffs as she walks out the door past a big, burly guy.

I look back at the area in front of me. My makeup is eccentric, my hair filled with glitter. My heart beats wildly, nerves on complete edge.

“River! You're up next, so get your ass out here.” My eyes meet a slimy looking older man. I cringe as he smiles at me, his yellow teeth and chapped lips making me want to vomit.

There are voices all around me, but I can't make out the conversations. The music is too loud. Before I realize, I'm up on stage. The music starts up, but all I hear is the beat. My body glides toward it effortlessly.

My ass shimmies as my legs move me toward the pole on the stage. My body winds around the pole as the music plays on.

Suddenly, the music comes to a stop, and the lights go dim. I look back toward the back of the stage in confusion. Where did the music go?

Looking back at the crowd, my heart stops. All I see are their eyes. I can't make out who they are, but an endless sea of eyes stare back at me.

They stand up and start to come closer to the stage, and I try to scream, but no one can hear me. Nothing is coming out. I look over at the bar, but it's empty. Shaking my head, I start to walk back but fall on my ass.

When I look up, the black shadows are hovering over me, their eyes locked on me.

And I let out a blood-curdling scream.

“Raelyn! Raelyn! Wake up!” Ronnie’s voice wakes me, her hands shaking my shoulders. I shoot up in a sitting position, my breaths coming out fast. Sweat drips down my back.

She hands me a bottle of water, and I chug it down. My eyes dart all around me, trying to make sense of what is reality and what isn’t.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:45 am*

“What happened? What did you see?” Ronnie frowns as she studies me.

“River,” I gasp.

“You saw a river?” Ronnie scrunches her face.

I shake my head. “No. Someone called me River.” The images start fading from my memory. “I was on a stage. They called me River. The eyes were there.”

“Okay, okay. Relax. A stage. You were performing a play? Were you in a band?”

I shake my head. “No. There was a pole.”

She narrows her eyes at me. “Like a stripper pole?” I nod. “Okay, were you a stripper?”

“In the dream... I guess I was. I don’t know. It felt so real, but I still felt like I was outside of my body. I can’t explain it.”

Ronnie hums. “Maybe it was just your mind messing with you.”

“That’s all it seems to be doing these days. Fuck. I don’t know right from wrong. I feel like I’m losing it.”

“Stop that. You are not losing it,” she chides me. “Your mind is just trying to put the pieces back together. You will get there. We will figure it out.”

“Promise?” I look at her hopefully.

She smiles at me. “Pinky fucking swear. Now, I got you a cheeseburger with extra circle pickles and a shitload of fries, so eat something.”

I take the Styrofoam container and open it up to the smell of a delicious burger. “How was your job? Did you do what you needed to?”

Her face blanks out, and for a brief second, I can see the pain in her eyes. But she quickly recovers and smiles. “It did what I needed to. I got us a few hundred, so we’re good for a few days.”

I nod to her as I pick up a fry and bite into it. She clears her throat and heads over to her bed, where she pulls out her food and starts to eat.

Guess that is all we are going to mention about the job then. Whatever it is, I can’t tell if she hates it, or if it’s dangerous. Either way, between the two of us, we have some serious demons that are clawing their way up from hell.

The only difference is that she knows what hers are. Mine have yet to show their faces.

## Chapter Ten

### TRISTAN

Buzz.Buzz. The annoying sound of my phone tells me someone is incessantly trying to piss me off more than that almost loss we just had.

It was the fucking Salt Lake Seagulls, for fuck’s sake. The fucking Seagulls. They are one of the worst teams right now, and we almost blew a five-run lead on them. They

had the bases loaded with us up by one run; any base hit would have brought in a run to tie it, or worse, the winning run.

Buzz. Buzz. My phone rattles on the shelf. Internally, I flip off whoever that is.

Though I know who it is. And he's the last person I want to talk to.

"That was a nice save, Evans." Cameron gives me a friendly slap on the shoulder. But I turn and growl at him. I hate being touched or congratulated, and he knows this. He grins as he winks at me.

Asshole.

"Someone had to keep the Seagulls from making us a laughingstock. Wasn't gonna be any one of you fuckers." I turn back toward my locker, throwing on a clean shirt.

In the final inning, top of the ninth, with the bases loaded, a line drive was hit on the third base line. It was foul, but I threw myself sideways and caught that son of a bitch. Ending the game. Giving us our win.

And sure, I could have let it go foul, but then that would give them the chance to win the game. To get that hit or home run. Fuck that.

So, I won us the game by making that catch. I wasn't losing to the fucking pussy ass Seagulls.



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*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:45 am*

Buzz. Buzz. Mother fucker! I pick up my phone and see messages from the one person I don't want to hear from.

My father.

Assfuck:

Need to talk to you.

Good game, BTW. Get your ass down to home base.

Now, son.

Me:

What the fuck ever. Be there when I can.

With that, I let out a sigh of frustration and tip my head down as I sit on the bench in front of my locker. I hate my fucking father more than words can even begin to describe.

He is a casino billionaire who has more money than he knows what to do with. And when casinos got boring, he opened up a sex club. Well, it's a normal, typical club that has a hidden sex dungeon in the basement. You know, totally fucking normal.

And I was supposed to follow in his footsteps, like the good son. His only son. And I gave him the fucking middle finger on that one.

I don't feel like being mixed up in that shit and on my seventh marriage to whatever barbie doll is stupid enough to get involved with this family. I fell in love with baseball at an early age. That was always my escape, my freedom.

I have always felt more at home on that field than I did inside the mansion that my father built with his dirty fucking money.

Yes, dirty.

He has more politicians and people of importance in his back pocket than one should. His little club helps him with that. The sneaky and dirty shit he has gotten himself involved in runs deep. So, what he built, what he "worked" for, grew from bribes and deals.

And I want nothing to do with it. Yet I was always told I didn't have a choice. I would follow in his footsteps.

So, I turned to baseball. That has always been my out. Throughout my baseball career, he has told me many times that my "hobby" wasn't going to last forever and I would need to grow up and take on a real job.

Well, I showed him, sort of.

Because yeah, I made it into the major leagues. In fucking Las Vegas. The one place I wanted to leave, and I'm here under a goddamn contract. But I couldn't pass up on the offer.

Fucking, Vegas.

At least there is a revolving door of pussy. The benefit of living in a tourist town and being a professional baseball player. All the pussy I could ever want to tie up and

fuck. And yet most nights, I spend them by myself. But pussy is there if I want it.

“You coming out tonight?” Drew breaks me out of my thoughts, and I turn my head toward the sounds of his voice.

“No.” My voice is clipped with agitation.

“Dude, you have to. It’s a team outing! Team party!” Kayce says as he stands next to me. “Come on, man. You made the winning catch. We have to at least get you a drink.”

I look at him out of the corner of my eye. They know I don’t drink. For so many fucking reasons.

Kayce laughs, “We’ll get you a soda pop, grandpa. Don’t worry. Just a bubbly soda pop for you.”

Fuck this.

I throw my phone in the back pocket of my jeans and head toward the door of the locker room. When I get out there, there are fans and news cameras hovering and waiting for the team to come out.

But today, I have other things that I need to focus on, so I push past them and ignore their calls for me to talk about the catch. Coach will be pissed I didn’t do a presser, but I don’t fucking care. I ignore the screaming women who are ready to throw themselves at me just to say they slept with me.

No, instead, I head toward the man I hate more than I have words for.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:45 am*

I walk through Level Seven Nightclub, and it's pretty empty except for the workers who are getting ready to open the place up in a couple of hours.

The club is decked out in extravagance and lights. A giant snakeskin double helix hangs above the giant dance floor. Through the center of it, a glass chandelier, made to look like raindrops, hangs. A second-floor balcony wraps around the entire lower portion. This is where the special guests get to hang out and drop thousands of dollars in one night.

A DJ is on the stage working through some lighting and set issues prior to the night's opening. Before long, people will be elbow to elbow, drunk off their ass, and dancing to whatever annoying shit is coming out of those speakers.

I keep walking to the other side of the floor toward the employee only elevator. Once I'm inside, I enter my pin and take it up to the third floor. When the doors open, I walk out, turning to my right and seeing the whole club below me.

God, I hate this fucking place.

Shaking my head, I head toward the locked soundproof doors and let it scan my eye. It clicks, and I enter. There is only my father's office back here, but a reception desk is up at the front and a conference room behind where the desk is.

The office is empty, and at this time of night, that's typical. Making my way back, I get to his door, and I take a deep breath before pushing inside. God only knows what I will find behind these doors. But here I go anyways.

As soon as I walk in, I stop in my tracks.

Well, found his receptionist.

On her knees, with his dick in her mouth.

“Son! Sorry, I got bored.” He yanks the blonde up by her ponytail, and she lets out a screech. “Your sucking skills need work. Get the fuck out of here until you can learn to suck a dick like the slut I know you are.”

The blonde straightens her skimpy black dress and wipes her mouth with her finger. As she runs a hand through her hair, she turns and smiles at me. I stand there, emotionless. These bitches are just fucking my father thinking they can get some of the family fortune.

He would have them killed before that happened. They have no idea how dangerous he really is. What he controls and who.

When slut in training leaves, my father goes to the back credenza and pours himself a glass of whiskey. He then preps a second one, but the bastard knows I don't drink.

He walks over and hands me the drink before sipping on his. I take the glass and slowly move the drink in the air holding it off to the side of me. His eyes track every single one of my movements as my eyes stay locked in on his. My head tips to the side as I slowly start to pour the drink out onto the floor.

He rolls his eyes. “Fuck's sake, Tristan. You could've just not had the drink,” my father says as he knocks back his whiskey.

“You know I don't drink,” I say flatly.

“One won’t kill you.” He shakes his head.

I don’t answer him. He knows I don’t drink. Not a single drop past these lips. Ever. And he knows why.

Because the one night I did, the one night I got shit faced, my mother was killed. And I couldn’t be there to save her.

Because I was passed out drunk.

“What do you want?” I grate out.

My father sighs, “It would be nice if I could run the club with my son.”

“I don’t want anything to do with this cesspool.” I grimace.

“Not this one, The Pit under it.”

“That’s even worse.” I roll my eyes.

“Tristan, you are an Evans. You have the world at your fingertips. And yet you continue to play this little boy’s game. It’s time you step into your role as an Evans.” He sets his glass down and sits down at his desk.

“A little boy’s game I get paid millions of dollars a year to play,” I growl as I turn and head back toward the door.

“You took an oath, son.” His words make me stop in my tracks. “The society has been patient with letting this little tantrum you have been throwing, but they are quickly losing patience.”

“I took an oath when I had no idea what it was that I was getting myself involved with.” My entire body starts to vibrate in anger and rage.

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*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:45 am*

“Nonetheless, it’s an oath. And you know you can’t just leave the Society; that’s not how it works. You know there is only oneway out,” my father says from behind me. I can hear the smile in his voice because he knows he’s got me.

I let out a huff as my feet carry me toward the door. I need to leave before I do something I’ll completely regret. Like kill the bastard. And unfortunately, killing the bastard won’t grant me my freedom.

But he’s right. I know there is only one way to get out of my oath to the Society.

Death.

### Chapter Eleven

RAELYN

“They should be over here somewhere.”Ronnie points to a parking lot area ahead of us, looking for the mobile showers.

Over the last couple of weeks, Ronnie has been teaching me the ropes of living in Las Vegas. Well, living in Las Vegas when you actually don’t have anywhere to live. How to survive on the street.

We wander the cool casinos during the day and enjoy the nightlife once it’s cooler at night. She has become my shadow, and I am grateful for it. But right now, what we need are showers. Desperately.



There are so many nights I wake up from nightmares, or during the day when out of nowhere I become nauseous and end up puking my guts up. Not to mention that I feel like I am constantly under watch. The detox side effects are slow to go away. I still have the shakes and anxiety. My nausea hasn't lightened up at all.

She has made me more comfortable around her, so much so that I have opened up a bit more to her. I told her that I was kept by a guy, and I escaped. She knows that much. So she's dedicated herself to being my shadow. She has vowed to keep me safe.

There are good days, and there are really, really bad days. Days when my skin feels like it's crawling. Days when I cry and can't seem to move from the spot we find. Where my chest feels like it is ready to burst with a single breath. Some days I can't even think straight. My body feels numb yet ready to combust at any moment.

"There they are!" Ronnie exclaims with a smile on her face.

My thoughts halt as I break out into a smile as well, as soon as I realize I will be under some hot water and I will get to feel clean.

As we approach the mobile showers, there is a tent off to the side that a few people are lined up next to. We both approach the tent, but I walk cautiously behind Ronnie as we do.

"Hi there!" an older woman with her grey hair pulled back says as she fans herself.

"Sure is hot today."

"Yes, it is," Ronnie agrees. "Can we get a couple of showers?"

"Absolutely. The truck there has two right next to each other that are empty. Here."

She hands us each a bag with shampoo and soap, along with a towel underneath.

“Thank you,” I say quietly.

“If you head over there, Rebecca will let you into the bathrooms. And when you’re done, there is a food pantry in the building there; you can pick out some food and water for yourselves. My name is Nancy, if you need anything.” She smiles as she points over to the showers.

Ronnie and I nod and make our way over toward the showers. And I am relieved to be getting this. A hot shower will feel amazing, letting me feel more relaxed.

“Well, that’s awesome. We can shower and fill up our backpacks with some food and water before we head out for the night.” Ronnie bumps my shoulder with hers.

“How much money do we even have for tonight?”

She shrugs. “Enough. We will have to find a few more jobs here and there, but it should get us by the rest of the weekend. Look, don’t worry. Tonight we will look cute, and guys will buy us drinks.”

I shake my head. “I don’t know how I feel about all of this. Wh-what if something happens?”

“Look, you will be fine. I will be there with you; I won’t leave you on your own. You need to have some fun, feel comfortable again in your own skin.” Ronnie looks at me with a frown. “You can’t keep just existing in fear. At some point you will have to rise above the shit hand you were dealt and take back your life.”

I bite my lip as I take in her words. It’s easier said than done. There is nothing more that I want than to take back my life, but how can I? My memory is still blank. Bits and pieces filter in, but what I see scares the living shit out of me.

How can I take back my life when I don't even know if I want to know what that life was?

“What's this place called again?” I ask Ronnie as we walk down Fremont Street. The crowd seems to be the usual. People are jam-packed walking around, drinks in hand, as they turn every which way to take in the scene. Phones are stretched out as they take selfies with the lights or performers behind them.

“Throttle and Thirst. Do you have the room key in your pocket?” Ronnie asks. She was able to score us a deal on a room in a crappy hotel called The Queen of Hearts, but it works. Twenty bucks to have a place to crash and store our things for the night; it's better than sleeping on the street again.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:45 am*

We have tried going back to the shelters, but I just start to freeze when we get there. There are so many people there, and they can't ever guarantee us a room together, which means that I would be in a room with so many other different people that I don't know. So we decided that living on the streets was a better option for the both of us. And so far, it's working.

"Yeah, I have it. Just... Just don't lose me in there, please," I beg.

"Girl, I promise I won't. But you need to let loose tonight. Just let the night be fun, okay? I have been here before. The drinks are cheap, and the guys will buy them time and time again. You look hot and ready to mingle."

I look down at my ripped jeans and black tank top that shows off my midsection and says "Fuck around and find out" across the front. Frowning, I shake my head. "I hate mingling. Well, I think I do." Something about that sentence doesn't sit right. Maybe I didn't hate it before. Before I somehow ended up in that house. Maybe when I was whoever I was before.

God, I fucking need to remember.

"Trust me, a couple drinks in, you will be fine. This is all going to be fine," Ronnie assures me.

I let out a sigh. "Okay. Wait, I don't have any identification."

"You won't need it. This place doesn't card. Been here before many times. They know me, so they will let us drink. Besides, they can only card if you are buying the

drinks, and since we will not be the ones buying tonight, we don't have to worry!" She throws her arms up like I should have known that tidbit.

The crowds are out in full force tonight. Each performer is located in their five-foot circle trying to get the tourists to take a picture with them for money. Yeah, apparently that's a thing. Ronnie has shared with me that I just need to keep walking past them, that the moment I stop, they will hound and harass me for money.

Hard pass. Not that I really have money to give them anyway.

And my stranger danger detector is a bit on high alert these days. My paranoia is still strong, given everything that's happened.

The smell of cigarettes and pot assault my nose, causing my face to scrunch up. The music from the casinos and stores start to blend together as Ronnie guides us through the throngs of people. Most are already drunk off their giant drink they are carrying with them as they walk around.

When we finally do get to Throttle and Thirst, I let out a long breath. I can instantly start to feel a weird sense of both relief and anxiety. Like I want to be here, but a part of me wants to run.

I hate being split into two sides.

"Hey." Ronnie shakes me a bit. "Snap out of it. I've got you; you will be fine. Just stay close by," she assures me.

I nod and bite my lip. She grabs my hand and opens the door into the bar. Instantly, I'm hit with a thick cloud of cigarette smoke. I cough a little as my lungs are assaulted. The music from the band playing on stage is loud, and I wince at what it's doing to my ear drums.

“See? We will definitely be getting drinks tonight.”

I scrunch my face, trying to figure out what she’s talking about. When she nods toward the bar in front of us, I see all the eyes that are suddenly upon us. As we walk further into the establishment, they track our every move.

My skin feels like it’s crawling with ants from being under their stares. I try to shift my body to stand behind her, to hide myself from the eyes watching us. This was such a bad idea. We finally find a table and sit.

“Hey there, ladies. I have some drinks for you, compliments of the gentlemen there.” The bartender points to three well-dressed individuals. Three men who look to be in their forties or fifties, dressed in nice button-down shirts and slacks. They definitely stick out like a sore thumb.

Ronnie smiles at the guys and holds up her drink as a thank you. But I keep my eyes on her. “Cheers.” She clinks my glass and takes a sip. “Oh shit. This is Sex on the Beach. This is awesome.”

Reluctantly, I take a small sip. The instant the sweetness of the drink passes my lips, my head sucks me into another place and time.

“Oh my god! Tonight has been so fucking awesome!” the redhead girl next to me yells into my ear. Her back eyeliner is heavy, and her face makeup barely covers the tired bags under her eyes. She is skin and bones as a green corset wraps around her, and her black leather pants cling to her barely-there legs.

The sound of a hand clapping in front of my face startles me out of the blurry memory. “Hey! Earth to Raelyn? Snap out of it,” Ronnie exclaims.

“S-Sorry.” The memory lingers in my mind. Or at least, that’s what I think it is, a

memory. It feels so real, but the faces are blurry, and the vision is barely hanging on. I rub my temple as I try to shake out of it.

“You okay?” Ronnie frowns, taking another sip of her Sex on the Beach.

“I don’t know. I had a flashback, I think. Or maybe it’s my head playing tricks on me. But these flashes are so confusing.” I look down at my drink.

“Well, let’s forget about that and have fun tonight. Tomorrow, you can tell me all about it, and we can try to make sense of it all. Maybe we can get you a journal to write it all down in, like a place to keep track of all the memories or flashes you get so we can piece it together.” She looks around the bar.

I perk up. “Actually, that’s a good idea. Maybe I can figure out the missing parts.” I nod as I peer at the sea of people dancing. My eyes instantly meet a set of blue eyes that are staring right at me.

And I can’t break away.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:45 am*

His black hair is slicked back as he takes a sip of what looks like a bottle of water, his eyes never leaving mine. His arms are covered in tattoos under his black T-shirt. I watch his throat bob as he drinks, and I can feel myself heat up.

“Oh, he is insanely hot.” Ronnie’s voice breaks my staring contest with blue eyes. I turn my head toward her, and she smiles, looking at him. “Keep drinking, Mr. Sex on a Stick, you will need to stay hydrated for what Raelyn’s gonna do to you.” I let out a gasp as my mouth drops open, and she laughs. “I’m kidding.”

With my eyes wide, I shake my head. “Please don’t kid about that.”

She sighs and frowns, “You’re right. I shouldn’t. I know what you went through was something no one ever should. I didn’t think before I opened my mouth. I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.” I glance back down at my drink before looking back up at the blue-eyed mystery man. Except when I do, he’s no longer sitting there. My eyes dart all around the bar, except I don’t see him anymore. And a part of me is disappointed.

But I shake it off.

“Um, I need to pee. I’ll be right back.” I cautiously get up from the table and push through the crowd, weaving myself around the groups of people standing around. My senses are on high alert, but it’s a bathroom at a bar. This is something I should be able to do without a chaperone.

A little bit of normal in my chaotic life. A bathroom break.



When I make it back to the women's room, I push through the black worn door and enter the brightly lit restroom. It's small and cramped but surprisingly clean. I have been to quite a few bathrooms in the downtown area and a lot of them make you feel like you need a shower and a bleach spray down.

But beggars can't be choosers, so I have to deal with what I have. Besides, it's better than the conditions I had back at my kidnapper's house.

I head into an empty stall and quickly do my business. The music from outside the bathroom is muffled, but I can hear the song playing. As I walk over to the sink and a familiar song comes on, my heart feels like it's frozen in my chest.

Ugh, why do they keep playing this song? Over and over and over. It's so loud. And don't get me wrong, this is, well was, a great song, Renegade by Styx is a classic.

But I'm ready to rip my ears from my head. I lie on the cold floor, my body sore and stiff from the lack of movement. Yanking on my chains, the metal clanks along the floor. It doesn't have much give, but it provides a temporary relief from the soreness.

"Turn it off!" I yell, my voice hoarse. Not that anyone can hear me, not that anyone cares. I can barely see in front of me through the darkness. "Make it stop! Please!"

The song finally fades. Before it starts up again, I hear whimpers and sobbing around me. I know I'm not alone, but I haven't been able to talk to anyone since they started the music. Like they are purposely keeping us from each other.

"No more, no more," a soft voice pleads.

"Hello?" I call out into the dark.

But before the voice can answer, the music starts up again.

“No! No! Stop!”

“Hey, hey, are you okay?” A woman’s voice shakes me from my thoughts.

I look at the blonde in front of me, her eyes laced with concern. I try to respond, but I’m still frozen from the memory of whatever that place was, so I don’t respond. Instead, I turn and run out of the bathroom back to the table. I need to find Ronnie, tell her I had another moment, as we call them.

Ronnie isn’t there. Our drinks are still on the table, so I knock it back, trying to get rid of the dry feeling. I cringe as the alcohol hits my tongue, sending shivers down my spine. I shake my head, trying to fight the strong taste of the liquor.

Placing the glass back down on the table, my next mission is to find Ronnie, who seems to have wandered off. And I’m beyond a little upset that she did.

She was supposed to wait here.

My eyes scan the crowd, but I don’t see her. I look up over at the bar, thinking maybe she went up there to get someone to buy us more drinks, but she’s nowhere in sight.

I can feel panic start to bubble inside me. My hands wring together, as I shift from foot to foot. The drink starts to hit me, and a warmth comes over me.

Downing that drink was not a good idea.

My anxiety, which was ramped up a minute ago, is now slowly starting to subside. I make my way toward the other side of the bar, hoping I see her.

“Hey there, hot stuff. How about I get you a drink?”

I look up at the gruff-looking guy who moved into my path. I want to respond, but I am starting to struggle with that. The world around me feels like it's moving slowly yet faster than I can process.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:45 am*

I turn around to go the other way, but I feel disoriented. Lost. My body feels heavy.

How much alcohol was in that drink?

I feel a hand on me, but I am slow to react as I try to shake it off. Gruff McGee stands in front of me again.

“Hey, can you not hold your liquor? Maybe I should take you back to my place. Let you sleep it off.” His breath smells like pepperoni and cigarettes. I want to curl away from him, and I may be doing that, but I can’t tell.

My vision is tunneling, I feel dizzy. I need to get some fresh air. What was I doing? I was doing something. Why am I so tired?

My legs move. I’m not sure if I am doing that, or maybe I am floating. Why am I floating?

A sudden burst of cool air hits my face, and I feel myself take a deep breath. The sound around me... I can’t make out which direction it’s coming from or what it is. Is it cars? I think I hear people. Where am I going?

“Ronnie,” I think I say. It sounds like me, but I can barely hear my voice.

My eyes are getting heavy. My head feels tired.

“Shit,” I hear a voice say.

And then the darkness comes.

## Chapter Twelve

### TRISTAN

“Shit.” My arms reach out to the beautiful woman with whom I locked eyes the moment she walked into this bar. And now she is passed out in them.

Where the hell is the girl she was with?

Pulling out my phone, I send a quick text to my driver to take me back to our suite at the Encore. I place my arm under her legs and lift her up. I look around for a purse or something that she would carry with her, but the seats are empty. My phone buzzes in my back pocket, and I know that’s my driver.

I walk out to a Black Escalade parked right out front of the bar, and Kenneth, my driver, gets out and opens the back door for me.

“Everything okay, Evans?” He narrows his eyes at the woman in my arms.

“No. Either she had a shit load of pre-gaming elsewhere, or her drink was drugged.” I gently slide her in and buckle her before running to the other side and sitting next to her.

Kenneth jumps in the front seat and looks up at me in the rearview. “Was she with anyone? Do we need to wait?”

“She was with a friend, but that friend disappeared. Let’s just get her back to the room, and we can call Doc. Are the others back yet?” I ask as I look over at her. I pull her toward me, her head leaning on my shoulder.

Her lips make a pouty shape, and I can see a couple of light freckles on her nose as we pass under the streetlights. Anger flares inside me for whoever did this and for that friend who was supposed to watch out for her.

I shouldn't have taken my eyes off her. But I didn't want to seem like a stalker.

I guess stalker was the least of her worries and would have kept her from this fucking issue.

Running a hand down my face, I let out a sigh. I watch the strip start to come into view as we get closer to the Encore. Once we pull up to the valet and drop-off area, I jump out of the Escalade and run over to her side before Kenneth can even throw the car in park. I swing the door open and quickly unbuckle her, sliding my arms under her neck and legs.

Kenneth shows up beside me as I slide her out. "What do you need me to do, Evans?"

"Call Doc and have him meet me up in the suite, like now," I yell back at him as I waste no time getting her up to the room.

Thankfully, the doors are being held open as people see me carrying her toward them. I rush her inside and to the penthouse and suite elevators, setting her down as I reach for my wallet and hold it in front of the sensor. The doors immediately open. Picking her up, I carry her into the elevator.

When the doors open to the suite several floors up, I take her straight back to my room. I softly lay her in the bed and pull out my phone. There's a text from Kenneth letting me know that Dr. Asher Nichols is on his way over and that he will bring him up when he gets here.

I throw my phone back in my pocket and head out into the rest of the suite, looking to

see if the guys have come back from celebrating yet. Walking past the living room and heading into the media room, I see it's empty.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:45 am*

Blowing out a breath, I enter the kitchen and grab a couple of bottles of water before checking on the girl. Standing over her, I take in her soft features. Damn, she's tiny.

Her brunette hair has slight red tones hiding in it. She looks young, maybe early to mid twenties. Her skin is pale and looks surprisingly soft. She is absolutely stunning. I reach out and tuck her hair behind her ear which covers her face. The minute I touch her, I feel a warmth in my chest. And I immediately pull my hand back.

Who is this woman?

The elevator doors opening catch my attention as I crack open a bottle of water and take a sip.

"Tristan?" I hear Dr. Nichols' voice from the entryway.

Walking over there, I give him a nod toward the bedroom. We walk in, and he takes out a few things and starts to ask me questions.

"Did you find her like this? Did she drink too much?"

I run a hand down my face. "From what I saw, she had one drink. I had turned away for a few minutes, but I can't be sure."

"So, tell me what happened." He starts listening to her heart, and I wait until he finishes before starting.

"I turned to talk to a guy about the game. Ran to the bathroom to take a piss and went



back to the bar. Got stopped by some fans. When I turned back to see her, she was knocking back the rest of the drink. She started looking around, I'm assuming for her friend, but her friend wasn't there. Within like a few minutes, I started to see her sway."

"And you are sure it was just one drink?" He looks at her in concern.

I shake my head. "I don't know. But they weren't there long enough to have had more than one or two. She went to the restroom, and her friend disappeared. I really think it was only one."

"She may have been drugged, but I will have to run some tests." He takes some things out of a bag, and I instantly growl when I see a needle. "Relax, Romeo, I need to just take a bit of blood to run the tests to see what she was drugged with."

My nostrils widen as I watch him wrap a tie around her arm and then stick her with the needle. The bright red blood collects in the vials. When he finishes, he places a gauze pad and some tape where he poked her.

"When she wakes in the morning, she is going to be confused and groggy. Make sure she drinks plenty of water. As far as food, have her go slow. She could be nauseous and queasy." He starts to pack up his bag.

"Thank you. For rushing down here." I shove my hands in my jean pockets.

"Absolutely. Can I ask you a question?" Asher crosses his arms in front of his chest.

"Ask away, Doc." I shrug.

"Does she have a name? Do you know her from somewhere? Did she have ID or a phone?"

“No, no, and no.”

He tilts his head at me. “So, you just saw that she was drugged and picked her up to take care of her?”

I narrow my eyes at him. “I don’t owe you an explanation, but since I sort of like you, I’ll give you a brief one. She drank her drink, chugged it, and then, after a bit, I saw her start to sway. I rushed over, and she fell into my arms.”

Asher hums as he looks back at her. “Okay then. Well, let me know how she does in the morning. I’ll just plan on bringing some IV fluids over. That should help.”

He grabs his bag, and I walk him over to the elevator, where I punch in the code and he heads out of the suite.

Walking back into the room, I take a seat on one of the chairs near the windows. I stare out at the lights and the Las Vegas Strip. The flashes of the billboards and the lights from the cars driving up and down the street soothe me, and I let out a sigh. The off-white oversized sofa chair set is not as comfortable as it looks. But I sink into it and lean my head back. It probably doesn’t help that I’m six foot four.

Kicking my legs out, I fold my arms in front of me and let my eyes close.

Light shining in from the window stirs me awake. It takes me a moment to shake myself from my sleep. But the moment I realize why I’m in the chair, I jump up and check on the beautiful woman in my bed. She is still sound asleep. And I figure she may be for a while longer. I head into the bathroom to take a piss.

When I look at myself in the mirror, I realize how shitty I slept. I look like hell. Splashing some hot water on my face, I let out a groan as it burns slightly. After I dry off the water, I brush my teeth and put a comb through my hair.

I need a shower, but that will have to wait until I can make sure she's okay.

Voices from other parts of the suite draw me out of the bathroom. I pull out my phone and see it's after ten in the morning. Damn, I slept in.

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*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:45 am*

I head into the living room and see Drew, Kayce, and Cameron sitting around the table eating breakfast.

“What’s up, Grumpy?” Kayce winks at me, and I roll my eyes at him.

“Where were you last night? We missed you,” Cameron says as he bites into a piece of toast.

“I had things to do,” is all I give them.

“Well, you didn’t miss much. It was the usual. Drinks, chicks, chaos.” Drew sips on his coffee. I let out a grunt of acknowledgment as I pick up a bagel off the table spread.

The elevator doors open, and Asher strolls in. He offers us all a nod and a smile.

“Ken let me up. How’s the girl doing?” he asks, and internally I cringe at his words and the fact that I have yet to tell the guys about last night. And on cue, Kayce opens his big mouth.

“Girl? Did you bring home a girl, Evans?” Kayce jumps up. “Did you get laid?” He slaps my back, and I shoot him a death glare.

“She was hurt. I just happened to be there and brought her back here and called him,” I growl as I point to Asher.

“Is she okay?” Drew furrows his brows in concern. As usual, Drew steps into a

protective role. It's like second nature to this guy.

"Well, that is what I want to check on," Asher says as he steps closer. "She was definitely drugged. Ketamine."

"Whoa. Someone drugged her?" Cameron slowly stands from his seat. I nod in response.

A gasp has us turning our heads toward the sound. A frail and pale woman stands there, her eyes wide and her mouth wide open. Confusion passes through her as she takes in all of us staring at her.

"Holy fuck." Drew's voice draws my attention toward him, and I watch as he takes a step back away from the table. He looks like he has seen a ghost. And then he slowly steps closer to her, but stops when he reaches me, not wanting to scare her.

Her eyes don't leave his, and she watches his every move.

And then he breaks. "Raelyn."

## Chapter Thirteen

### RAELYN

The pounding in my head causes me to groan and shift. The feeling of softness under me, the warmth covering me, I almost don't want to move or wake up. It's like sleeping on a cloud.

But the fact that it's not a lumpy, shitty hotel mattress causes me to slowly peel my eyes open. The light hurts, and I squint, trying to see through the pain.

Where the hell am I?

“Ow,” I moan as the hammer in my skull pounds away at whatever is left in my head. The fogginess and confusion keep me from trying to figure out where I am. One thing at a time, though.

Slowly, I sit up and find myself in my clothes from last night. But I am in a strange bed. This definitely is not the bed of the hotel we were staying in. I swallow, and my throat feels like there are razors in it. I turn to my right and see a bottle of water sitting next to me. Quickly, I grab it and open it, taking a huge gulp of water and immediately regretting that.

Nausea suddenly hits me, and I try to blow out long breaths to calm it. The last thing I want to do is puke all over this very nice and probably very expensive bed. God knows I don't have two pennies to rub together let alone money to pay to clean or replace this.

I blink a few times, trying to get some moisture to my very dry eyes. When I finally focus, I gasp at the view in front of me. The panoramic view of floor-to-ceiling windows shows a beautiful view of the strip.

Even with the pounding in my head, the view draws me toward it. The blue sky shines through, the sun lighting up the room around me.

Holy fuck.

Wherever I am, whoever I am with, is definitely swimming in some cash. This is a premium view of the strip. Not to mention the size of this room and the décor.

The wall behind the bed is lined with wallpaper with a gold shimmer. The white shade headboard pops from the wallpaper. A dresser of some sort sits at the end of

the bed. It's a light-colored wood that has gold accents.

I get up to inspect it and find that there are no drawers on it. There is a button on the side, and I push it. The “dresser” comes to life, and the top rises up. Out of it, a TV pops up.

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Huh, okay. That is some fancy ass rich shit.

I shake my head and hit the button, and the magically appearing TV goes back into its mystery box. I run a hand through my hair and let out a sigh. I need to find Ronnie and figure out how I got here.

Because I don't remember much.

Voices from another room catch my attention. Men's voices. My body freezes in fear. My feet are cemented to the floor below me as I listen for his voice.

Has he found me? Did he finally find me?

Did they find me?

I need to get out of here. Quietly and fast.

Taking in a deep breath, I slowly let it out to try to calm myself. Stealthily, I creep toward the open door of the room and stick my head slightly out to see if I can see where the voices are coming from. The super fancy hallway decked out in sculptures and art is, thankfully, clear.

I start my way down the hall, the marble floor making my boots squeak under them. I wince as I try to walk slower and softer, so I don't draw attention to myself. To my right is a set of stairs that I am assuming go to a second floor. This place is very Richie Rich.



As I pass the stairs, I notice an opening to an elevator. That has to be the way out. But the opening to another room is directly across from it. And that's where the voices are coming from.

"Ken, let me up. How's the girl doing?" a deep voice asks. I creep closer to the other side, trying to see if I recognize any of the voices.

If the devil himself is here.

"Girl? Did you bring home a girl, Evans? Did you get laid?" a second voice asks and chuckles.

"She was hurt. I just happened to be there and brought her back here and called Asher." That voice. Chills run down my spine. Not in a bad way.

"Is she okay?" That... that voice I definitely know. Why do I know that voice?

I shake my head and start to try to figure out my way out of this place. As quietly as I can, I head back toward the elevator. If I can get it to open and close before they catch me, I can get out of here. But the next words out of one of the voices stop me dead in my tracks. In the center of the hallway.

"Well, that is what I want to check on. She was definitely drugged. Ketamine," the first deep voice shares. And my eyes widen at his admission.

"Whoa. Someone drugged her?"

My body turns toward the voices, and I see all of them standing there. I let out a gasp. Drugged? My eyes widen, and my mouth drops open. My mind tries to run through the events of last night, but I come up empty. I remember bits and pieces, but when could someone have drugged me?

“Holy fuck.” The voice that sounds familiar breaks me from my thoughts, and my eyes meet his. He pales as he slowly walks toward me, but I am frozen where I stand. He stops next to a giant of a man whom I suddenly have a memory of.

Those blue eyes.

The man who was watching me from the bar. My heart starts to beat wildly in my chest, and my breathing starts to pick up. My eyes go back to the man next to him as he studies me. His eyes lock on mine.

But then a single word sends my world spinning.

“Raelyn.”

“Holy shit! Is she okay, Doc?”

“Keep her legs elevated above her heart.” I can’t see anything, but I hear voices. Where am I? Wait...

My eyes fly open, and I see five faces. In a flash, an image of black shadows stands over me, and suddenly I can’t breathe. But I blink a few times, and the faces before me return.

“Whoa, whoa. Give her room. Back the hell up.” My eyes find the voice, and I lock eyes with him. His beautiful blue eyes that I can’t take mine off of. And the voice that brings me chills.

Memories start to flood back. That is the voice that took me from the bar. The man who stared at me like a stalker. My eyes widen at him. Oh my God, is he a stalker?

You aren’t anyone special.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:45 am*

“Hey there, Raelyn. I’m Dr. Asher Nichols.” My eyes break from the blue-eyed god to find the doctor talking to me.

And instantly, I get lost in the doctor’s eyes, beautiful green eyes with flecks of grey in them. He has his salt and pepper hair combed back to almost perfection, with white buzzed patches above his ears. His jaw and face are so well defined, with a smattering of a beard starting. But damn those eyes...

“Can we sit you up slowly?” the doctor asks as he holds his hand out toward me. I don’t reach out to his hand; instead, I push myself up. The doctor doesn’t try to help, but he watches me carefully, understanding I don’t really want to touch him. “There you go.”

“Here, she needs to drink something.” My eyes meet a muscular giant with black hair and emerald eyes. These eyes are more vibrant than the doctor’s. Jesus, these fucking eyes are going to be the death of me.

They almost were once.

I slam my eyes shut as I try to shake the thought from my head. My only focus needs to be getting out of here, then I can have my panic attack.

“Drink.” I look back up at the emerald-eyed man as he shoves the water bottle in my face. His voice is harsh, and he seems more annoyed than anything.

Someone must have pissed in his Cheerios.

“Take it easy, Cameron. Raelyn just passed out; let her make sense of it all.” My eyes find the man who knows my name. His blue eyes soften at the sight of me. Oddly, I don’t fear him. His blond hair is messy, his lips turned down. He looks sad. “You don’t remember me, do you?”

I study him for a moment, trying to place him with the few faces I can remember. His voice is so familiar, but I can’t remember a time I have seen his face before. I shake my head.

“Can you guys back away for a moment?” he asks the gigantic god-like men around me. With a nod, they all take a few more steps back. He kneels down to the floor to be more level with me. “My name is Andrew Spencer. You, however, can call me Drew.”

My mind still fights itself in trying to place Drew.

He bites his lip for a moment before continuing. “Do you remember that you were in a fire a few weeks back?”

Do I remember the fire? Not really. I remember escaping. I remember running and finding freedom. But then I was in a hospital, and was told I was in a fire. So, I shake my head.

Drew lets out a sigh. “Well, you were, and I was the one who got you out. I found you in that room, Raelyn.”

What the fuck? Is this real? Did he really rescue me? Did he really get me out?

“Yeah, I really got you out,” he answers as if he can read my mind. “I wanted to see you in the hospital, but by the time they let me go and were allowing you visitors, you had disappeared.”

“You got me out?” I whisper, my voice hoarse.

“I did. I got you to safety. The paramedics and firefighters got to work just as I was getting you out of the house.”

Without even thinking, my arms fly out and wrap around him. It throws him off balance for a moment, but he catches himself. He doesn’t wrap his arms around me, but he keeps me steady.

And then I let out a sob.

Tears and agony just flow from me. The pain and suffering I endured in that hell, the one I would have died in, he saved me from.

The place I wished for death in.

“Thank you,” I say through my tears. To be honest, I never thought I would leave that hell, my prison. I was fully prepared to die and to think I was moments away from that actually happening.

Until he rescued me.

“Is it okay if I touch you?” Drew asks quietly, and I almost gasp at the question. Fuck knows how long people took what they wanted from me, touched me when they wanted to.

I nod in response to his question, and slowly, his arms softly wrap around me. A warmth I have never felt before spreads through me. A comfort.

I’m not sure how long I cry on his shoulder, but I feel myself being picked up and brought elsewhere. I soon find myself on his lap, and I continue to get lost in my own

mind. Drew softly caresses my back and arm, telling me to get it out.

A bottle of water in my face startles me out of my thoughts.

“Drink.” It’s emerald eyes, Cameron. “You need to drink. Small sips.”

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Drew takes the bottle from him and holds it to my lips for me. Slowly, I let the cold water slide down my throat. When Drew thinks I have had enough, he pulls it back.

“Are you okay, Raelyn?” he asks softly.

My eyes meet his, and then I look up to find the rest of the men circling around me. A pit in my stomach starts to form, but I don’t know why.

“That broody one right there is Tristan.” He points to the man who is watching me like a hawk. His eyes lock onto me. The man from the bar... Tristan. “He rescued you last night from the bar. Do you remember what happened?”

Frowning, I shake my head. I just know that I was there, I was with Ronnie, and then I woke up here. “I... I was with my friend,” I whisper. My eyes stare at a spot on the wall as my brain tries to fill in the missing pieces.

“Someone put something in your drink.” His voice breaks me from my staring contest with the wall. Tristan narrows his eyes as I see him clench his jaw.

It’s then that I suddenly start to feel hot, and like I can’t breathe. My hand flies to my heart, which is racing like crazy. I jump from Drew’s lap and start to slowly walk backward away from the eyes.

All the eyes.

“She’s a pretty one.” Dark eyes behind the skull mask stare into me.

I struggle against the restraints holding me down. “Let me go, fucker!”

“Oh, she’s got a mouth on her,” another low rumbling voice says behind a mask.

“We can fix that.”

“Not too much. I want to hear her scream.”

A black ball of some sort is placed into my mouth, and a strap is buckled around my head. Did these mother fuckers just put a ball gag on me?

I scream through the gag, but I can’t form any words. I can feel the drool down the side of my face. With every ounce of strength I have, I try to pull against the restraints.

“Don’t fight it. This will be easier if you just let it happen. Bring out the initiates.”

Hands force me to my knees, and they hit the floor hard. I scream out in pain as tears well up in my eyes. Agony radiates through my body.

A hooded figure steps closer to me, but my eyes focus on the darkness ahead. My head is yanked back, and I close my eyes. A warm liquid drips on my face, and the smell of copper hits my nose.

With everything in me, I let out a blood-curdling scream over the gag.

“Raelyn!” A concerned voice brings me back to the present. “Raelyn, are you okay? Breathe, sweetheart. Breathe for me.” My eyes meet Dr. Nichols’ as he hovers over me.

“Is she okay?” I hear Drew’s voice behind him.



“Raelyn, you passed out again. I need to get some fluids in you, and you need to rest.” I watch the doctor’s lips move, and I hear the words, but my mind keeps going back to the vision.

“They will find me,” I whisper.

The doctor scrunches his face. “Who will find you? Who is looking for you?”

The rest of the guys come into my view as they look at me with confusion on their faces.

I look at Tristan, then at Dr. Nichols again. “The eyes. Always the eyes.”

## Chapter Fourteen

### CAMERON

“What the actual fuck was that?” I glance over at Kayce, and he just looks at me wide-eyed, an expression I’m sure matches my own.

“Dude, no fucking clue.” Kayce frowns, rubbing the back of his neck.

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We watch Asher carry her back into the bedroom, and Tristan follows right behind him, like a fucking puppy. This girl is a puzzle, and these fools act like they can fucking solve her.

This isn't fucking Wheel of Fortune.

Pushing past Drew, I head over to the buffet table where the coffee maker is, grabbing a cup and pouring myself one. No cream, no sugar. Black. Probably like my soul.

The minute the hot bitterness reaches my tongue, I let out a hum. I need the caffeine after partying last night. I was exhausted after playing all day. Thankfully, we don't have another game until tomorrow, so we have time to figure out what we're going to do with the crazy chick.

"I can't believe it." I turn toward Drew, who is running his hands through his hair.

Drew and I have always been close. Since the day we were brought on to the Mavericks. The two of us have a special bond, and as a catcher and a pitcher, we need to. I can tell when he is rattled, and he trusts me to call the pitches he throws. We read each other well.

Which is why I can tell he is out of his mind right now.

This fucking chick...

"What's wrong, Spencer?" I ask him.

“She’s here. The girl I pulled from that house. She’s really here.” He runs a hand over his face like he is still unsure if he is dreaming this or not.

I can assure him, he’s not.

I take another sip of my coffee. “She seems like a nice girl. Really has her shit together,” I say sarcastically. “Why are you getting yourself all worked up over her? You don’t know her.”

“Come on, Davis. She has obviously been through some shit,” Drew defends.

“Oh, that is fucking obvious. You need to focus on your game, not going and playing hero. You have a habit of getting yourself into trouble when you play Superman, Drew. And that will get you fucking killed one day.”

I shake my head at him. I get that he has a good heart, but all it’s ever done is get him in trouble. And almost dead.

“I’m not playing hero,” he snaps back.

I scoff. “Seriously? Do you want me to name all the times?” My eyebrows nearly hit my hairline as I challenge him. He knows I’m right.

Drew doesn’t get a chance to respond; Asher and Tristan come back into the room. Kayce, Drew, and I stare at them, waiting for them to say something.

“So, before we met our guest, I was telling you what she was on. Ketamine.” Asher puts his hands on his hips. “And now I can see it even more so.”

“What does that mean?” Kayce asks.

“Wherever she was, that was what she was being given. I had her hair tested.” Asher walks over toward the couch and sits down.

“Why would you test that for specific drug?” Kayce asks him.

He blows out a breath. “Because I had a suspicion. And unless you know to test for it, you won’t look for it. It’s not a normal drug to give for drugging someone, but it’s effective.”

“Effective how?” I narrow my eyes at him.

“It’s a hallucinogenic drug. She ran from the hospital, scared out of her mind. Paranoia is one of the withdrawal symptoms. That possibly could have been the catalyst for her leaving the hospital. Panic attacks, anxiety; this drug does a number on you. And after her hallucination just now...” Asher trails off.

“Fucker,” Tristan growls.

“And depending on how much she was given for how long, those effects can last a while.” Asher leans his head against the back of the couch.

“So, what do we do, then?” Kayce frowns.

“We need to call John,” Drew offers up.

Asher sighs. “This goes against all the professional bullshit, but we may want to wait on that. She’s skittish, and I have no idea how long her effects may last. She needs to just be watched closely. At least until she is more stable to tell us what is going on so we can get her help.”

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“So, we need to hire a babysitter?” I roll my eyes. “Great, we adopted a chick. Is there a daycare we can put her in when we’re playing?”

“Shut up, Davis,” Tristan snaps at me, fixing me with a glare.

“Well, Cam brings up a good question. How the hell are we gonna watch her? We travel, and with the games, I don’t think taking her on the road is going to go over well with Coach.” Drew surprises me with that.

“I can stay with her, and it’s probably best I do. Doctor and all,” Asher offers.

“She can stay at my house. There’s plenty of space, and she won’t feel so closed in,” Drew offers.

“Yeah, the most exciting thing you have going on in your life is playing hide and seek with a toddler.” Kayce laughs.

“Shut the fuck up, Anderson. You play tea party with her, and I know you have worn a tutu,” Drew shoots back.

Kayce shrugs. “I get snacks. Everyone loves snacks. And I look damn sexy in the tutu. Don’t be jealous because you don’t have this ass.” Kayce takes a hand and turns his ass toward Drew, rubbing it seductively.

I roll my eyes at these two. “Enough, children. We need to figure this stowaway problem out.”

“Yes, Daddy.”

“Fuck off with your shit, Anderson.” I flip him off.

“Enough,” Tristan barks. “Asher will watch her. We will keep doing what we’re doing. Focusing on the games and winning them.”

“What about her friend?” Kayce asks.

“What about her?” I raise my eyebrows.

“Well, we just can’t let her roam around thinking something happened to Raelyn.” Kayce peers at the guys one after another.

“Kayce has a point.” Asher nods. “Plus, chances of keeping her in one place and not running... well, it may help if we have the friend. Do we know where to look?”

“No. But we can probably ask her.” Tristan rubs the back of his neck.

“Let Drew do it,” Asher suggests.

“Yeah, hero boy, go ask,” Kayce teases, waggling his eyebrows.

Drew flips him off. “I will when she wakes up. In the meantime, all of you need to be a bit less... you.” He shrugs.

“What the fuck does that mean?” I narrow my eyes.

“She freaked out when you were all staring at her like she was a piece of meat.”

“She’s hot.” Drew throws his bottle of water at him, and Kayce catches it and laughs.

“Relax, pitch. I’m teasing.”

“All of you need to approach her more carefully. She has some serious trauma. I would like to get her to talk to someone, but in time. She needs to get comfortable with us first and know that she’s in a safe place. Then I can call a buddy of mine who can help with this.” Asher stands. “I’m gonna go check on her.”

He walks past and heads toward the room.

“Well, I guess that solves it.” I frown. “We will be glorified babysitters for the foreseeable future.”

“Cut it out, Cam. We’re helping someone,” Drew defends.

“Don’t let this affect your playing, Spencer. I am telling you now, you need to be fucking on your game,” I chastise.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got it. Everything will be as it has been.”

“Shit,” Tristan says as he pulls out his phone and grimaces.

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“What is it?” I ask.

“Asshole father is requesting my fucking presence.” He closes his eyes for a moment to gather himself, and then, without another word, he gets up and heads out of the suite.

Drew looks at me and then turns on his heels, heading into the game room off the kitchen. Kayce follows him; I’m sure the both of them are letting off some steam and relaxing before we head home. Letting out a sigh, I throw my head back.

Every bone in my body is telling me that this is a bad idea. That this chick is a bad idea.

But here we are, a bunch of dicks, going crazy over a mother fucking pussy.

### Chapter Fifteen

RAELYN

This may not be real life. There is a really good chance I am passed out somewhere, and I’m dreaming all of this. I’ll be honest, this is the better of my visions. I can never tell what’s real and what isn’t, but this... this I want to be real.

“You can stay here as long as you need.” Drew brings me through the front door and holy fuck, this place is beautiful. It’s like a Barbie Dream House, but less pink fluffy shit.



We walk through a huge front door into a foyer with beautiful wood trim and accents. The floor is a white tile flooring with specks of grey and black. I'm sure it's like high-end marble or some shit. Immediately across from the foyer is a room with a pool table in it. I hesitantly step forward and take a look around.

The floors change to wood flooring, and there is a giant flat screen television on the wall opposite me. A worn brown leather couch sits to my left, and French doors to my right lead to an outside area. And oddly enough, as manly as this room is, there is a giant crystal chandelier hanging above the pool table.

"Don't play Kayce. No matter what he says, he is a hustler and will take you for all you've got," Drew laughs.

"Well, thankfully, all I have are the clothes on my back. But thanks for the heads up," I say quietly as I fold my arms over my chest.

Drew hums. "Yeah, we need to do something about that. And I have just the person who would love to help. But we can talk about that fun later. Come on, let me show you the rest of the house." Drew holds his hand out toward the stairs that are to the left of the foyer. Slowly, I ascend the stairs and make my way into what I am guessing is the main part of this masculine Barbie Dream House.

The stairs have the same wood flooring as the pool table room. But the steps are surrounded by a glass railing and a large window that lets in the sunlight. When we reach the top of the stairs, we are met with a long hallway with openings on both sides. To my left is a beautiful living room decked out with white and grey furniture.

A white fireplace sits against the back wall with a giant flat screen over it. An entire wall made of glass doors stands behind the couch that opens up to the patio behind it. And when I mean opens up, I mean Drew can literally pull back the entire wall to open the whole living room up to the back patio.

To my right is a sitting room with a giant piano in the middle of it, and a dining room off the sitting room. Both of these rooms look like they are the rooms you aren't allowed to go into at your grandparents' house. They are pristine. Clean.

We head to the end of the long hall and turn left toward the living room. Across from the living room is a beautiful and very expensive kitchen. Holy hell, I would be scared to make a mess in this place. White waterfall countertops cover the two islands, with a huge fucking refrigerator to the right of the islands.

My eyes gravitate toward the stainless-steel stoves, plural, along the left wall. The exposed rafters in the ceiling and the exposed stone wall that lead out to another balcony contrast against the clean lines of the kitchen. Oh, and did I mention that the kitchen has a glass wall that can open completely to the outside?

This house is basically a Transformer.

"You thirsty?" Drew makes his way over to the gigantic fridge, opening it and pulling out a bottle of water. I nod, and he hands another one to me.

Slowly, I sip the cold water and let it cool me off. I fidget with the cap for a moment, unsure of what to say.

"Raelyn?" Drew says softly, and my eyes meet his. "I want you to be comfortable here. This is your home for now. You are free to use anything in the house, eat anything you want, watch anything you want. You haven't had it easy, and I think what I know is only a small percentage of the crap you have had to deal with. But I am here for you. We are here for you."

The "we" being him and his friends. It's strange to have someone be so nice, but the feeling isn't too mysterious. I know I have experienced someone offering me a safe place before, but I just can't remember what or when it was.

“Thank you. I promise not to get in the way.” I look back down at my water.

“You are never going to be in the way. You can stay here as long as you need to,” Drew offers, his expression sincere.

I can feel my emotion tightening my chest. I sniffle a bit, and it causes Drew to clear his throat.

“How about I show you where you’ll be sleeping?” he offers.

I nod and follow him down a hall past the kitchen. We reach a set of stairs, and he leads me to the second floor.

We stop at an open door right off the stairs. Another set of stairs is behind it.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:45 am*

“This is where my room is. The master suite is the entire top floor. So if you ever need me at night, just head up these stairs, alright?”

I give him a nod, and then he continues past the door to a hall that has multiple doors off it. We make an immediate left into a beautifully furnished room. Another crystal chandelier hangs from the center of the space over the huge bed.

“My mother picked out the chandeliers.” He purses his lips. “I had to make Mom happy. She said it adds a feminine touch.” He shrugs.

I let out a little chuckle, and my heart warms a bit to know he did that for his mother. I suddenly frown and feel a longing in my chest. Where are my parents? Why don’t I remember them?

Drew notices my discomfort. “Hey, hey, what’s wrong? If it’s the chandelier, I’m sure I can find something better for you.” He goes to reach out but stops short of touching me.

I don’t know how to explain it. How I wish I could remember who I was before all this, how I wish I knew if I had someone who loved me as much as his mom loves him.

“This is all so much. I was on the street yesterday, and today I am in the Barbie Mansion,” I murmur.

Drew’s hand goes to his chest. “Barbie Mansion? This is Ken’s bachelor pad. I’m offended.” His arms fly out beside him as his lips turn up into a smirk. I break out

into a smile and give him a slight chuckle. “It’s the chandeliers, isn’t it? The chandeliers give off Barbie vibes.” He shakes his head. “I knew I shouldn’t have let her pick anything for the house. Maybe some dishes or something. Damn light fixtures.”

For a moment, I get lost in his beautiful smile. I almost forget what I was thinking about before I insulted his Ken bachelor pad.

“I wish I could remember. It’s like the memories are there, yet so far in the back of my mind that I can’t reach them. I just want to know who I am. Where I come from,” I say quietly.

He pauses for a moment, taking this in. “Can I hug you?” Drew asks.

I nod, and he pulls me in and wraps his arms around me. Instantly, I feel an odd sense of being safe here. His hugs are warm and protective.

He whispers, “We will figure it out. Asher thinks your memory will come back the longer you’re off the ketamine. You will get patches of memory, but eventually it will come back. Thankfully, I think you are past the worst of the withdrawals, but the memory thing may take a moment. And we have John, my FBI friend, who is going to help you piece together what you remember. We will figure it out, I promise, Rae.”

Rae.

Rae.

Instantly, that name causes a flash in my head, and the world around me changes.

“Rae, sweetie, you need to do your homework.” I look over at the woman standing before me. Her red hair is in curlers, her face covered in some sort of beauty mask.

She stands before me in a plush robe.

“Ugh! I hate trig. Seriously, when will I use this?” I groan.

“When you become some famous architect and build me the mansion I have always dreamed of!” she chimes with a laugh.

“I’m not becoming an architect, Trixie. I told you I want to be an author.” I slam shut the book of nightmares in front of me.

“Look, I have a long night at the club tonight. Do your homework and get some sleep. You have school in the morning.” With that, she sashays away.

“You’re not my mom!” I yell at her.

“No, I’m not, but I’m a close second!” she calls from her room.

“Rae! Raelyn!” Drew’s voice pulls me from my memory. “What happened? You completely spaced out.” His eyes watch me carefully.

“I... I remembered something. At least, I think it’s something.” I bite my lip and shake my head. “It felt real. Like it really happened.”

“What? What did you remember?” he presses.

I shake my head. “Someone named Trixie. I don’t know who she was. But I knew her. I think. I don’t know.” I let out a frustrated sigh. “It felt familiar. The memory. Trixie.”

“Hey, don’t be hard on yourself. We will get there. Just write down what you remember. Eventually, the pieces will fit.” Drew rubs my arms. “What seems

confusing now will make sense eventually. Come on, let's get something to eat, and you can pick the movie. How does that sound?"

I smile and nod. He heads out into the hall, and before I follow him, I look back at my room. It's so beautiful. Much different from the hell I was in before.

If this is a dream, it's official. I don't want to wake up.

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In this dream, I can die happy and safe and not in the room made of nightmares.

### Chapter Sixteen

RAELYN

“Do you want any of this?” Kayce stirs the Alfredo sauce into the fettuccini noodles, and I am practically drooling. The cheesy buttery sauce with a hint of garlic hits my nose. The minute it does, my stomach growls. Kayce’s lips turn up. “I’ll take that as a yes.”

He walks over to a cabinet and pulls out a bowl for me. Then he takes the scooper thing and puts some in there for me. Steam wafts off the pasta, and I close my eyes and take in the aroma. He passes me a fork, and I don’t waste any time diving in. The minute the creaminess touches my tongue, I moan.

Kayce drops the pasta scooper, and his eyes widen. “That was the best compliment a chef can get. Also, please continue. Don’t hold back. Make love to that pasta, Rae.” He smirks.

I can feel the heat in my cheeks as I look back down at my pasta. Kayce chuckles at getting the reaction he did from me. He loves to cook and has been making sure I’m fed and not going hungry.

“Jesus, it’s pasta, not sex.” Cameron frowns as he walks into the kitchen.

“Fuck off, asshole. She loves my cooking.” Kayce flips him off as he takes a bite of



his pasta, munching happily.

“She’s a big girl. She can fend for herself,” Cameron scoffs.

He has a point. I don’t want them to feel like I’m taking advantage of them.

Suddenly, I’m no longer hungry. I push the plate away and get up to head to my room. The last thing I want to do is make it seem like I am asking them to take care of me. It’s quite the opposite.

“Look what the fuck you did. Goddamn it, you need to get laid. You’re a miserable cunt,” I can hear Kayce yell at Cameron.

I quickly head up the stairs and run into my room, shutting the door behind me and locking it to ensure I am left alone. It’s been a week since Drew brought me here, and it’s been nice to have a safe place to sleep.

I’ll be honest, this bed is way more comfortable than many of the other places I have slept with Ronnie or that room I was held in.

Ronnie.

I need to find her. I have no idea where she could be. I’m a little mad she left me at the bar. Or she disappeared long enough for me to get drugged.

Or maybe something happened to her? Maybe she was drugged too and wasn’t as fortunate to have a giant of a man come to her rescue. I rub my forehead. All of this is so much. It’s so overwhelming.

But being with all these men is a bit overwhelming, too.

Drew is a nice guy, and I oddly feel the most comfortable with him. Could it be some 'he saved me' sort of thing? I have no fucking clue, but he makes me feel at ease. He gives me space and lets me roam about.

Kayce likes to feed me. He's constantly cooking and putting food in front of me. He makes funny little jokes that I try myhardest not to laugh at. Though it's kinda nice to laugh. He seems to be the funny one in the group. And he talks a fucking lot.

Then there's Tristan. The complete opposite of Kayce. He's quiet. Tristan barely says much when he is around, but he's always watching me. His blue eyes just bore into me. He tracks me throughout the house when he's here. But he keeps his distance, sort of.

I walked into the kitchen needing some coffee the other day, and he already had a mug ready for me just the way I like it. I always know when he's watching because I get a little tingling feeling.

Asher has been, well, professional. He is constantly monitoring me and asking me how I feel. My answer is always the same. I shrug and tell him I'm fine. What else can I possibly tell him? That my mind is a mess and I feel like a little lost puppy? That I try to stay awake at night so the dreams don't come?

Asher has even mentioned that he would like me to talk to someone. I don't know what they are going to tell me that I don't already know.

That I'm fucking crazy. That I'm damaged goods.

And that leaves Cameron. What a fucking asshole. A complete and total ass fuck. He does everything to try and get the guys to hate on me.

Here's the kicker: I have no idea what I did to deserve that.

Though what I gather is that he and Drew are tight because he has to catch for Drew. I've heard him tell his pitcher that I'm a distraction. He constantly acts like I stole his puppy. But whatever, he can hate me for whatever reason he has. It is what it is.

The worst part? All of them are literally hot as fuck. Like, each one of them is right out of the pages of the spiciest of romance novels. They shouldn't be real. Yet here we are.

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A knock sounds at my door, and my eyes dart right toward it.

“Rae? Hey, it’s Kayce.” He quiets for a moment, and I can hear him shuffling behind the door. “Uh, listen. Don’t listen to Cam. He’s a dick.”

No shit. Way to point out the obvious.

“Look, I know you may not want to come out right now, but the food is in the fridge for you when you get hungry.” I hear him let out a sigh. “If you need me, I’ll be around. But don’t feel like you have to hide because Cam is a miserable bastard, okay? Just, I’m around, Rae.” With that, I hear him shuffle away.

Curling into my pillow, I let out a sigh. My body is fighting me on the one thing it needs. Sleep. Maybe I’m being overly dramatic because of my lack of rest and sleep. But the problem still remains that the moment I close my eyes, vivid dreams take over. Some of them so horrid that fear chokes the life out of me.

But eventually, your body shuts down. Eventually, it just can’t sustain itself awake anymore. And as much as I want to keep my eyes open, at some point my body wins out, and my exhaustion takes over.

Everything in me hurts. My stomach is eating itself at this point. I can’t remember when they last fed me. Hell, I don’t even know how long I’ve been in this cement hell.

They stripped me of my clothes and chained me to the floor. The cement is freezing. My body is in a constant state of shivering. I can hear the teeth clattering of the other

girls around me. That is when they aren't crying, screaming, or pleading for their life.

Parts of my body burn from the pain I've been subjected to. How did I end up in this predicament? I was out with Becca. We were at the karaoke bar, singing. I close my eyes tightly, trying to picture that night, however long ago it was.

We had the night off work, so of course we needed a girls' night out. Becca and I had just gotten to the bar and ordered our first drink.

My mind shuts down as a sharp pain radiates throughout my stomach. I cry out in pain from the stabbing feeling. My breaths shorten as I grit my teeth.

Footsteps echo somewhere in the darkness. I don't know how many people are coming toward the cages, but it's more than one. Laughter from the shadows rings out, and a shiver runs down my spine.

It's never a good thing when they come for a visit.

"Ah, here's the one I wanted to show you. She's feisty," the shadow says.

"Oh, I love feisty. I love to break them," a voice I have never heard before says as he steps closer to the bars. "I can break her in an hour."

The shadow laughs, "Good luck. We have been trying to for a while now."

"Fuck you, you bastards," I spit.

"See what I mean?"

"Oh, perfect. I'll take her," the creeper states.

“No! No! Leave me alone! I just want to go home! Please! Just let me go!” Tears roll down my face. My heart beats wildly out of my chest. Fear courses through my veins.

“Raelyn! Raelyn, wake up!” a voice stirs me from the nightmare, and I let out a scream. “Relax, it’s me. It’s Drew.”

My eyes suddenly focus on the man in front of me. I try to catch my breath, but my lungs feel like there is cement in them.

“Hey, hey, look at me.” Drew’s voice is almost a whisper. “Focus on me.”

My eyes meet his, and instantly, I feel more grounded. While my heart still feels ready to explode, I am starting to become calmer. I slowly try to breathe in time with his breaths.

“There you go, that’s it.” He runs his hand down the side of my face, and I lean into it instinctively.

His touch soothes me. Calms me. Until the images of my nightmare come back into focus.

My breath hitches, and he stops mid caress. “Talk to me, Rae.”

I close my eyes and take a deep breath. My skin is crawling, and I can still feel the concrete touching my skin. “I-It was so cold.” I lick my lips, remembering how thirsty I was.

“Wait, you remembered something?” Drew’s eyes widen.

I slowly nod. “I know it was a nightmare, but I remember it now. I remember the cement, the metal chains. I remember being naked and cold. There are still pieces

missing, but I remember that much.”

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“Okay,” he says softly. “Do you remember anything else?”

Biting my lip, I think back to what I saw. “Someone was going to take me.”

“Take you?” he clarifies.

“Yes. Like I was for sale or something.”

Drew’s eyes widen. “You were being trafficked? Holy fuck. Holy actual fuck!” His eyes stare into me for a moment before his mouth drops open. “Did I save you from the house of the monster who bought you?”

“I-I think so. I can’t remember the face from when I was in that cell. It was so dark. The voice sounded weird in my head, but maybe that’s just because it was a dream. I-I don’t know.”

“We need to let John know.” Drew starts to get up, but I pull him back down.

“No! Please! No more. Not right now. It’s all too much, and everything is so spotty I don’t want to be retelling this twelvemore times. I don’t know if it was real. It could just be my imagination.” I grab onto his arm and will him not to go running to his FBI friend.

“Okay, fine.” He lets out a long sigh. “But the minute you’re sure that it’s real, Rae, we need to tell him. This, what you went through? It’s serious.”

“I am well aware of that fact, Drew. But my head is a mess. It feels like some pieces



don't fit where my mind is putting them. I don't even know if that makes sense."

He nods. "A little. Asher said you may remember things out of order or jumbled up. The mind is complex. So, we will wait until you are absolutely sure you remember an actual moment or telling situation, and then we will go to John. Deal?"

"Thank you," I say softly. "Can you please..." My voice trails off. I feel bad asking.

Without hesitation or asking me to finish, he climbs into the bed next to me. "Of course. Is this okay?"

I nod. Drew wraps his arms around me and pulls me down onto his chest. His hand smooths my hair down, his heartbeat soothing me.

My mind tries to float back to the visions I've had. Trying to put the missing pieces together. But the calming effect of Drew is more powerful than the visions.

So instead, I embrace the feeling of safety. I embrace the calm. Because I am not naïve enough to think that any of this will last.

This is just the calm before the storm.

## Chapter Seventeen

### ASHER

These four are fucking idiots. I shake my head as I watch them argue about what to do with Raelyn. Well, it's really Drew and Cam fighting it out. Cam is anti-Raelyn. He's worried this is going to mess with Drew's game.

And I get that.

But this is Drew. And for as long as I have known him, seen him interact with people, this is who he is. He's a protector, a savior. He instinctively will protect people. I've seen him with Phoenix and her husbands. Even with those three guys around her, he still looks to protect her. It's just ingrained in his soul.

"She's getting in your head!" Cam slams his hand down on the counter.

"The hell she is! Dude, she was fucking trafficked. She was kidnapped and sold." Drew leans over and narrows his eyes.

"And how is that your problem, exactly?" Cam fires back.

"It just is. Because I'm making it my problem. She needs help and support!"

"When did you have time to join the police academy? Jesus fucking Christ! Fucking call John and get her the help she needs. We are not that help. He can find the guy. This is a goddamn law enforcement matter." Cam throws his hands up in the air in frustration.

"And I will when she's ready for that. But right now, she isn't. The best chance she has of her memories coming back is her being relaxed and in a safe environment. Everything up until now has been a shit show for her. She is scared, Cam." Drew frowns.

"I have to agree with Drew," I jump in. Cam shoots me a sour look, his eyes glaring at me. "For now, it's better to just let her heal with us looking over her. Once she remembers enough, then we can get her the help she needs. The facts are that they will interrogate the hell out of her. She could even decide to run."

"Jesus, all of you are just all about this chick. Not one of you is thinking straight. Fuck. Am I the only one worried about any of this? We have no idea who took her,

who did this. And yet, we are just welcoming trouble. I'm the only sane voice in this room," Cam scoffs. "What are we going to do tonight? Bring her to the stadium? We have a fucking game. We can't be watching her."

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“I already planned to keep her with me. She can be in the training rooms with me and stick close to my side,” I offer.

I’m there in case of an emergency, so as long as nothing catastrophic happens, there isn’t much to do. The trainers tend to make sure all the players are bandaged up prior to the game.

“I am sure Phoenix can show her around, too,” Drew says, and I nod. That’s actually not a bad idea. She’s been through trauma herself and could probably offer more comfort and understanding than any of us on the team.

“That actually would work. I can take her up to Phoenix once I show her around,” I offer.

“Whatever. You all are fucking pussy whipped over a girl you haven’t even fucked yet.” He turns to Tristan, who is his usual quiet self. “You surprise me most. You are always grumpy asfuck, and then you go play hero and rescue her from the bar and get us into this mess.”

“I’m not a heathen,” Tristan grumbles.

“Could ‘a fooled me,” Cam retorts, rolling his eyes.

“Enough, Cam. We will figure this out. No need to be a complete asshole about it. Just go home, don’t be here. Stay away from the girl if she bothers you so much. It’s that simple.” I shrug.

“Except it’s not. We are number fucking one. This is a distraction, and it can cost us our number one spot along with the World Series. It’s a downhill spiral. I need my team with their heads in the game.” He snatches his keys off the counter and stomps out of the kitchen and out of the house.

My eyes meet Drew’s, and he frowns. I can see the worry in his eyes. He is torn between going after Cam and trying to talk him down from the ledge and staying here and letting his catcher storm off and deal with his bullshit. He is going to need to make sure he’s focused tonight or else Cam’s thoughts on this Raelyn thing will prove true. And as if Drew knows what I’m thinking, he nods at me.

“I know, I know.” He turns on his heels, grabs his keys, and heads out to the stadium. And hopefully he’ll give Cam a kick in the ass or work it out with him. I pray it’s the latter. Tristan sighs and trails after Drew.

“Are you bringing her down, or do you want me to?” Kayce asks.

“I can bring her. Go on and get ready, I’ll see you down there.”

Kayce gives my back a quick slap and turns toward the door. I look over at the hall that leads to Raelyn’s room, letting out a sigh and starting my way up the short set of stairs and down the hall.

When I reach her closed door, I knock. “Hey, Raelyn, it’s Asher. Can you open up?”

I hear shuffling behind the door and the turning of the handle. Slowly, the door opens, and I see her poke her head out.

“Hey. How are you doing?” I ask her.

Her lips purse before she answers. “Fine.”

“Good. You ready to come to the game? I was going to show you around and then probably have you hang with me for a bit. Phoenix will be there too if you want to hang out with her.” I shove my hands in my pockets as I watch her.

“Um, okay,” she says softly. “That sounds kinda nice.”

“Phoenix is amazing, and you guys may even be able to head to the box to watch the game,” I offer her.

“Oh, cool.” She looks down at her feet.

“Are you ready to go now, or do you need a moment?”

She shuffles a bit back and forth. “Um, yeah, I-I’m ready.”

“Okay then, let’s head over to the stadium.” I gesture away from us and she cautiously leaves her room, closing her door behind her.

Raelyn has fight in her; she’s made it this far, survived this much. But something holds her back. I’m guessing it’s the unknown. It’s the spotty memory. It’s the fear of whoever took her still being out there.

I can see moments where there’s a spark in her eye and a bite to her words. But most of the time, she is reserved, and she looks like she is pondering the world around her, trying to put the pieces together.

I can see why Drew wants to keep her safe. And a part of me does, too. So I get his need to keep her here. It’s why I am pushing to make sure that happens. I have an instinct to want to watch over her, to shelter her from the bullshit she’s gone through.

And I will do my best to make sure she never suffers again.

We make our way through the stadium until we reach our destination. “This here is the athletic training facility. We are just going to pop in for a moment so I can see how the trainers are holding up,” I announce to Raelyn.

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She gives me a nod as I watch her shuffle from foot to foot. As we walk in, the room is busy with trainers and players making sure they are ready for the game. Grunts and laughter can be heard all around us. Rae's eyes dart all around, trying to take in the scene and the chaos in the training room.

"Hey, Doc." Taylor pops his head up from his computer. He is one of our athletic trainers.

"Hey, Taylor. How's it going?" I feel Raelyn move behind me, making herself invisible.

"Good, just getting ready to help Williams and his arm." He pauses for a moment and squints. "Who's that behind you?"

"Oh, this here is Raelyn. She is a friend of Drew's. I'm showing her around the stadium today and then going to take her over to hang with Phoenix." I turn around and see her eyes widen. Maybe this was a little too much. Her eyes flit to Taylor, and I turn back to him.

"Well, it's nice to meet you, Raelyn. Feel free to make yourself at home." His eyes travel up and down her body, taking her in, and I suddenly feel like I want to step in front of her and keep him from seeing her.

But I don't. Instead, I place my hand on her back. She does a slight flinch, but I don't move. Suddenly, she steps closer to me.

Having her this close, touching me, is sending an odd sensation through my body. I



want to pull her closer, feel her warmth. There's an odd feeling of wanting to rip Taylor's eyes out from his sockets and shove them down his throat for him to choke on, for even staring at her.

Fuck, that was dark.

Clearing my throat, I nod to Taylor. "I'm going to go take her to see Phoenix." At that, Taylor nods and goes back to his work.

"Hey, Dr. Nichols." My head turns toward Jake, one of the athletic assistants. His eyes lock immediately onto Raelyn. "And who is that pretty little thing?" he quips.

And there is that feeling again. Except this time, I want to cut his tongue out and shove it so far up his ass, he can taste his own shit.

Again, fucking dark. Jesus.

Raelyn stiffens beside me, and I know I need to get her out of here. "First of all, she has a fucking name. She's not a piece of meat. A little respect goes a long way. Second, none of your business now. Stay away from her," I growl as I turn, wrapping Raelyn closer to me.

We make our way out of the Training Facility, and I can feel her shaking beside me. The rest of the tour is going to have to wait. My need to get her somewhere safe is taking precedence.

Reaching the top floor of the stadium, we make our way over to Phoenix's office. I nod to her receptionist, Glenda, and she gives me a small smile and gestures for us to go in.

Opening the door, I quietly enter and see Phoenix sitting behind her desk. She looks

up and gives me a smile.

Over the years, being friends with Drew and working here, Phoenix and I have become good friends. Something I'm truly grateful for right now.

"Asher! Hey!" She bounces over to me and gives me a hug. "And you're Raelyn. I'm Phoenix. Would you like something to drink?" she offers kindly.

Raelyn looks up at me, and I give her an assuring nod, so she clears her throat. "Water, please."

"Sure thing." Phoenix heads over to a small refrigerator and pulls out a bottle for her. "Here you go. So, what brings you up here?"

"Do you mind if I talk to you in private for a moment?" I ask Phoenix.

"Absolutely." She nods.

We both walk to the corner of her office, away from Raelyn who sits down on the couch and stares at the floor.

"Is everything okay?" Her lips turn down as her eyes flit between me and Raelyn.

I run a hand down my face and let out a sigh. "No. Yes. I don't know."

"Wow, you sure are a ball of flustered," Phoenix cracks. "What's going on?"

"It's Raelyn. She... uh..."

"She's the one getting you all flustered." Phoenix smiles at me.

“Yes... I mean, no!” I can feel my face heat up.

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“Yup. That’s what I thought.”

“Look.” I let out a breath as I try to calm myself. “Can you possibly talk to her, keep an eye on her? That’s why I brought her up here. I honestly think she could use a friend. Maybe some girl time.”

She laughs, “Yeah, she can probably use a little less testosterone hanging around her.”

My lips turn up in a smile. “If that wasn’t so accurate, I would be offended.”

“Yeah, I can definitely spend some time and get to know her. Drew said she’s been through some stuff but didn’t elaborate.” She crosses her arms over her chest.

“Thank you.” I bend down and give her a hug, my giant frame engulfing hers. Then I head back toward Raelyn and crouch down in front of her. “Hey, Phoenix here is going to take you to watch the game. You are going to hang here with her for a bit and get some girl time in. Sound good?”

Her knee starts bouncing, and she looks over at Phoenix. “Sure.”

“Good. I will check in when I get a moment. But everything will be fine. She’s best friends with Drew. She is good people. If you need me, just have her give me a call, okay?” She gives me a slight nod.

I turn to Phoenix and thank her as I head out and back toward the training facilities.

And I fight every urge to go back to her and take her back to Drew's, where she's safe.

And that's when I realize how truly fucked I am.

## Chapter Eighteen

RAELYN

"So have you ever seen a baseball game before?" Phoenix asks me.

She is absolutely beautiful. Her fiery red hair cascades down her back, her eyes just as red as her hair. She wears a black leather dress that looks professional yet badass. The sleeveless leather hugs her softly, not too tight, but enough to show her curves. The dress flares at the bottom coming at mid-thigh, and she pairs the dress with some sleek black combat boots.

Phoenix takes a seat next to me on the couch but leaves space between us. My tongue darts out and licks my dry lips. My leg bounces up and down, and my hands wring in my lap.

"Please, don't be scared. I promise, you are safe here." Her voice is soft and calm.

"Thanks." I reach for the water and take a sip.

"I've known Drew since I was eighteen. He saved me when I didn't even know who I could trust. He was always there for me. Even in the darkest moments, he tried to protect me. So when I say you're safe, I mean it." She places a hand out between us, but doesn't touch me.

I nod. "He's been great, actually. And no."

“No?” She furrows her brows.

I hesitate before speaking. “I haven’t been to a baseball game before. Or at least, I don’t think I have. My memory is still missing things.”

“Yeah, I heard about that. Those memories will come back in time. Don’t stress yourself out over it. That won’t help.”

“I know. It’s just an odd feeling,” I offer honestly.

“What is odd?”

“That I feel like the truth is right there. The memories are sitting right there. But there is this mirror in my head, and all I am doing is staring back at myself right now at this moment. I can’t see through the mirror to the other side. Where I know my memories are.”

Phoenix hums. “I wish I could offer more help. I really do. But what I can offer you is a chance to stop staring at the person in the mirror and experiencing the outside world for a bit. Like getting to go see Drew play baseball.”

“I don’t know anything about the game. I think. I really don’t know if I have ever been to one.” I frown.

“Well, there’s no better time to see one than now! The Mavericks are number one right now, and Drew is on fire. Come on.” She stands up. “My husbands and I have a box for just us. We can watch the game in comfort.”

My eyes widen at her words. Husbands? As in... more than one? How does that even work?

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“Let’s go head up there now. I think the guys are there already. I can introduce you if you’re comfortable with that.” Phoenix stands up from the couch and grabs her phone off the desk, then saunters over toward the doors and looks back.

Slowly, I rise up from the couch and take small steps to where she stands. “Sorry. I’m just having a lot of trouble with all this new stuff.”

Her lips turn down. “I get it. You don’t know who to trust, who has your best interests. Who you can even let in to get to know you. One day, when you’re ready, I can tell you my story.”

“I... I think I would like that,” I admit.

“Good.” She smiles at me as she leads me out of her office. We wind around and walk through the back parts of the stadium.

When we finally reach a set of doors, two security guards stand on either side. They open the doors as she approaches.

“Jerry, Mike, this here is Raelyn. She is with the team and me, specifically Drew Spencer. Please see to it that she has access to anything she wants,” Phoenix tells them without skipping a beat.

“You got it, ma’am,” they both say at the same time.

We walk through the doors, and I see three guys laughing and standing by the window, and holy hell. If those are her husbands...

“Raelyn, this here is Daxon, Mason, and Colton. My husbands,” she introduces me to the men standing before me, and I am left speechless. They are all sexy as fuck.

Whatever mold they were cut from, they need to make more.

The one she calls Daxon is the first to reach me and extend a hand. My eyes widen at the size of his hand. Don’t they say something about the size of a man’s hand in correlation with the size of his peen?

My head turns toward Phoenix, and I am now trying to do sex math and wonder how she is still walking among the living.

Holy shit. Why am I thinking about Phoenix and her husbands’ sex life?

Ew. Stop it, Rae.

Daxon’s hair is black as night. His green eyes pop in contrast to the dark color. He is well over six feet tall, and his arms look like they are ready to Hulk out of his shirt.

“Hey there, Raelyn.” The tall blond one she called Mason stands in front of me, offering me a smile that would melt an iceberg. He extends a hand, and I take it. He covers mine with his other one and winks at me.

So, he’s hot as sin itself and a flirt.

Gigantor behind him comes over, or as his parents named him, Colton. He looks all brooding and sulky. He kinda reminds me of Tristan. He doesn’t extend a hand, instead just offering me a nod. His glasses give him a sexy but nerdy look, and his size gives him a “I will crush you with my pinky” feel. His eyes are a beautiful hazel, his brown hair styled so perfectly, it gives perfectionist feels.



I nod and try to offer a smile, but I am sure that my face looks horrifying as my mind tries to understand how this works. Literally, my brain is trying to understand how it is possible to be married to three very sexy, very strong men.

Do they have a sex schedule? Do they share a bed? My eyes widen for a moment. Do they have sex all at the same time?

Why are you still thinking about their sex life, Rae?

“This is a lot, I know,” Phoenix says to me, knocking me from my thoughts. Mason and Daxon offer me a smile, while Colton stares at me, like he is watching how I react to things.

“I, uh, I’m just overwhelmed with everything right now,” I say quietly.

“I completely understand. Just relax here and enjoy the game. I will make sure to take you into the locker room to see Drew after the game.” Phoenix gestures toward the couch-like seats in front of the window.

“Um, are you leaving?” I ask her.

She shakes her head. “Nope. I am going to sit with you and help you experience your first baseball game. And I promise I will explain how the whole three husband thing works.” She winks at me. The three hunks of man meat smile at the response.

I scramble to put together a sentence. “How... wait... I...”

She chuckles. “Your surprised look gave it away. It’s totally okay. The guys and I are very open and don’t hide away from our love.”

I nod, and she leads me toward the couch at the front of the giant window that looks

out over the stadium and field.

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I can see players on the field warming up. The Mavericks throw the ball around in their white uniforms with the black numbering and letters. Inside the box, televisions broadcast the field, and you can hear the announcers through it talking about the line up and the record of each team.

The three guys stand by what looks like a small buffet of food off to the side of the box. The walls are painted black with the team logo in red. An outline of a horse is drawn in. There are white shadows around the red to pop the logo.

Music booms from outside all around the stadium as people start to fill the seats. People can be seen dancing to the music, waving their blow-up baseball bats. Kids and some adults have baseball gloves with them, and I turn to Phoenix.

“Why do some people have their gloves with them in the stands?”

“Oh! Well, sometimes players will hit what’s called a foul ball, and it will go off into the stands.” She points to the bleachers out in the distance. “The people sitting out there, behind what’s called the outfield, hope to catch a home run ball.”

“Home run?” I crinkle my nose.

“Oh, Raelyn, I’ve got so much to teach you! Drew needs to just bring you to every game so we can hang. I will get you to be a baseball pro in no time.” She gives me a genuine smile. “A home run is when they hit it over that wall in the outfield. Then they can run all the bases, and when they get back to home plate, they get a run, or they score I should say. Sometimes there can be other players on the bases, and they all run in to score too. And if we’re really lucky, the bases are loaded when a home

run is hit, and that is called a grand slam.”

“That’s... a lot,” I admit, trying to piece it all together.

Phoenix laughs and nods. “There will be a pop quiz later.”

A laugh bubbles up from my throat, and suddenly, I feel more relaxed than I have in quite a while. Actually, that’s not true. I have felt this relaxed around Drew and the guys, too. Well, everyone except Cameron.

Sometime later, much later, the game ends, and I am in complete awe. It was fucking amazing. The Mavericks won, destroying some team called the Ducks or the Bucks? I have no idea. But either way, we destroyed them. And Drew killed it with his pitching, according to Phoenix.

Her husbands were pretty nice, too. They kept their distance, letting Phoenix and me talk and knowing I may be a bit uncomfortable with all the newness. And I am. So I appreciated them for that.

We make our way to the locker room, and I hesitate for a moment. Phoenix feels the hesitation and pulls me off to the side.

“Hey, you okay?” she asks softly.

“Yeah. I just, I don’t know. Something feels off, or weird. My head is messing with me.” I hesitate. “I may just be scared to go into a locker room with all of them.”

“Well, they aren’t running around naked right now, so all should be good. Coach will usually have a wrap up, and I come down to talk to the team to let them know how amazing they did. Then they do all the showers and stuff,” she reassures me.

I nod, and she leads me into the locker room.

The noise instantly assaults my ears, along with the sweaty man smell that attacks my nose. I crinkle my face and wonder how anyone can stand here for too long.

We walk further in, and I spot Drew. He gives me a big smile and waves both Phoenix and me over. Then he leans in and gives Phoenix a hug, whispering something in her ear.

“Hey, Rae. Did you get to watch the game?” Kayce appears from somewhere, and I turn to find him shirtless and sweaty.

My mouth instantly dries and drops open. And zero words form. And all Kayce does is laugh and wink at me. I can feel my face instantly heat up.

“Anderson, put some fucking clothes on.” My head snaps to Cameron, who scowls between me and Kayce. I swear I have no idea what his problem is with me, but he seems to hate me more than anything.

“Hey,” Drews voice pulls me back from the scowling asshole. “How was watching the game?”

“Uh, it was pretty awesome. I mean, I didn’t get most of what was going on, but it was fun to watch. You won, so that’s a good thing,” I admit.

“They were easy to beat,” Cameron grunts.

Suddenly, I feel eyes on me. A chill runs down my spine, and I turn my gaze towards a pair of piercing blue irises.

Tristan.

He studies me, not moving his eyes off me. I don't understand him. He's so quiet yet always there in your presence. I always just feel him around me; I get goosebumps along my skin, a shiver, and my heart races. His presence consumes my senses.

“Well, easy or not, we played hard and crushed them,” Drew adds as he pulls his shirt off.

And holy smokes, I realize I am in a room with men made of perfection. Drew's abs are so well defined. His arms, fuck me, his arms are big and muscular. There is an urge to reach over and just touch them.

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But I don't. Because that would be weird.

"You all did amazing. And I had fun teaching Raelyn the ins and outs of baseball."

Drew smiles at me. "Good. So now you can start coming to more games and cheering us on. We could use a good luck charm."

"Then we should leave her at home," Cameron mutters.

"Davis, I will make you take a line drive to the nuts if you don't cut the asshole behavior out." Phoenix narrows her eyes at him.

"Stop getting on Mom's last nerve, Davis," Kayce laughs.

Phoenix takes two steps over to him and slaps him on the back of his head.

"Cut it out, Anderson." Phoenix purses her lips. Then she walks over to the center of the logo and clears her throat.

I watch Phoenix stand there, tall, strong, confident. She talks to the team, congratulating them for their win, all their successes together. She looks fearless.

And I wish I was like her.

But I'm not. I'm scared, unsure, and all I want to do is hide. Being here, being around people, makes my skin crawl. Everyone stares at me, judges me. And I don't know what they want from me.

The only thing I am sure about is that I need to find my way home.

Wherever that may be.

## Chapter Nineteen

RAELYN

“Hey, Rae.” Drew knocks on the door to my room as he slowly saunters in. “What are you up to?” He’s dressed in a pair of jeans and a tight black Mavericks T-shirt. He runs a hand through his blond hair, his lips turned down in a frown.

“Hey, just reading.” I watch him carefully as he sits down on my bed.

“Whatcha reading?” he quips.

“Um, Kneelby Lily Wildhart.”

“Oh, is it any good?” he asks, raising a curious eyebrow at me.

I nod. “It’s amazing. Probably my favorite book so far.”

“What’s it about?” He stands at the side of my bed as he looks down at me.

And how do I answer that? How do I tell him about the spicy books I read? The dark bully romances, the reverse harem books, the stepbrother tropes? I can feel my cheeks redden under his stare. “Um, it’s a dark, spicy book.”

Drew hums and nods. “Spicy. Phoenix loves to read those.” He grins at me. “She could probably give you book recs galore. All the smut your little heart desires.”



My cheeks flush even further. “Noted. Um, did you need something?” I ask him as I place my Kindle, which Drew got for me to use, beside me.

He rubs his hands on his thighs.

My eyes widen slightly. He’s nervous.

Which in turn is making me extremely nervous. Is he kicking me out? Do I need to leave now? Has he had enough of my bullshit? Oh, fuck, I should have known this wouldn’t last.

“I, uh, it’s nothing. I, uh, just wanted to see how you were doing. Make sure you are still alive. You, um, have been locked away in this room all day.” He shrugs.

I can feel my heart start to race. He... thought I might kill myself?

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“Oh, fuck. No! I didn’t mean it like that.” He immediately falls into bed next to me, pulling me close to him. “I’m sorry, Rae. I didn’t mean to use those words. Shit. I’m so sorry.” His arm wraps around me, his other hand smoothing my hair.

It all feels so nice that I melt into him. It shouldn’t feel this nice. I should recoil, push away from him, yet all I want to do is bury myself deeper into him.

Even with all his muscle-y hardness, there’s a softness to him. My body instantly finds comfort in him.

“I know. It’s okay. I know you didn’t mean it.” I softly hum as his hand caresses my face. His thumb and finger grip my chin, and he forces me to look at him. Our eyes meet, and I can feel my body start to vibrate under his touch.

“Raelyn...” His voice is hoarse. His eyes look down at my lips. And before I can even stop it, our lips crash together. In a heated dance, our tongues work against each other, my body electrified.

His hands roam up the side of my body. They wrap around me and lay me on my back, his lips never leaving mine. I moan into his mouth as his thumb grazes my nipple under my T-shirt. My entire body feels like it’s been ignited. Goosebumps cover every inch of my skin.

Drew hovers over me and pulls back slightly. He says nothing, but I can see the question in his blue eyes. I nod, giving him all the permission he needs.

His lips join mine again, his arms boxing in my head. He slowly kisses down my

jawline and down my neck. He stops to nibble on my ear, eliciting a moan from my lips. My hips rise in response, and I rub against him, feeling how hard he is. Drew lets out a groan, and I feel his teeth sink softly into the side of my neck.

This feels wrong, but feels right. I should fight this, right? Why do I feel like I need to fight this? My body feels weird. His body on mine feels so good. His groaning is switching something on in me.

And then he turns feral.

He looks back at me, his eyes burning with a fire in them. Drew sits up and grips my shirt, but before I can get up to remove it, he rips it right down the middle. Like it was fucking nothing.

The cold air hits my skin, and instantly my nipples harden. My heart races as his eyes lock in, and then I feel his warm mouth sucking and teasing my nipple. I can feel his tongue swirl around it, teeth slightly scraping against it.

My hands weave through his hair as I pull softly on it. His hips move against me, and my entire body shivers in response. I'm in overdrive, overstimulated.

Drew switches sides and teases my other nipple in the same manner as the other one, only this time, his fingers find the one he just abandoned. He twists and pulls as he sucks and bites the one he has in his mouth.

"Fuck, Drew. Feels so good," I rasp out.

He pops off and gives me a seductive smile. "Oh, just you wait." He sits up and reaches back with one hand, yanking off his shirt like they do in the movies. Like the incredibly hot and sexy way.

And shit, it's making me drool.

He pushes off the bed and pops the button on his jeans, removing them in one swift motion. And I find that the man is completely commando under them.

Jesus. Fucking. Christ.

It's a beautiful sight in front of me. His body is finely sculpted, his abs very well defined, his V that leads to the promised land.

Oh, and that promised land is a sight to behold in itself.

It is fucking perfect.

Rock hard, it juts out in front of him. His hand wraps around it as he slowly strokes his cock. Meanwhile, his eyes sear into me, like he's trying to mentally devour me. I watch him take a single step back toward the bed, and his hands reach out and yank off my leggings.

And I'm fucking naked in front of Drew.

Without a single thought, I close my legs and throw my hand over my chest. My breathing picks up, and the cold air kisses every inch of my exposed skin.

"Don't you hide from me, Rae. Let me see what I'm about to drown in." Drew strokes his cock as he watches me slowly open my legs to him. He lets out a growl, and before I can even blink, he is between my legs. "Fuck, you are soaking wet. Tell me you want this, Rae. I need to hear your words. Tell me you want me to devour this beautiful pussy."

"Drew, please. Yes, fucking, yes." And before I can even get the last yes out, his

mouth is on me.

His arms slip under my legs as he pulls me more open to him. I hear Drew groan as he laps at my pulsing core. His tongue runs over my clit, circling it, and holy mother fucking heaven in a mouth. My body starts to tremble from the utter pleasure his mouth is bringing me.

“Oh God, Drew, that feels so fucking good. Please don’t stop,” I beg.

“Baby, I don’t plan on stopping until you are screaming my name, coming all over this cock.” Drew’s eyes meet mine for a moment before his focus shifts back to my needy whore of a pussy.

And needy she is.

I start grinding on his face as I feel his teeth scrape against my clit. He adjusts his arm, and I feel fingers start to push inside of me. I let out a groan as I clench around the wonderful intrusion.

I am so fucking close.

“Drew, I need to come. I’m almost there. Please don’t stop.” I shift my hips as I feel another finger slip inside me. I start to ride his hand and face, chasing the orgasm that I can feel building.

“What an interesting turn of events.”

My eyes shoot open to see Cameron standing at the door. I start to pull away from Drew, but he wraps his arm around my stomach, holding me in place.

“Don’t you dare pull away. He can either leave or join in,” Drew growls as he starts to thrust his fingers faster inside me, and my brain is so scrambled I don’t even notice Cameron has completely stripped, his entire asshole self on display for me.

“How does she taste?” Cameron asks Drew.

“I don’t want to come up for air,” he groans.

My mind can’t process the scene in front of me. Cameron squeezes the head of his thick and hard cock, letting out a hiss as he watches Drew bring me closer to the

edge.

“Drew, please.”

“Not yet, baby. I need you to be begging me to the point of tears to let you come.” Drew stops, and I let out a frustrated growl. He looks over at Cameron and nods. “Taste her for yourself.”

And apparently, you don’t have to tell Cameron twice. Because he is on me before Drew can finish the sentence. For a guy who can’t wait to get rid of me, he sure as fuck is enjoying my pussy like it’s a lifeline right now.

“Open up.” Drew suddenly appears next to me.

And I instantly open my mouth. He takes his hard cock and pushes it slowly past my lips. The salty taste of his skin causes me to moan around him.

He groans, “Oh, fuck, that is a warm little mouth. Fuck.”

Cameron’s mouth drives me closer to an explosion. His tongue twirls and teases my very sensitive bud. He sucks on it, moaning, making the vibrations drive me toward insanity.

I just need to come. Fucking Christ.

I’m so close. So fucking close that I can feel it right there. I go to reach down to wrap my fingers in his hair to keep him there, when he pops up and gives me a wicked grin.

“This pussy tastes like the addiction I needed.” Cameron looks from Drew back to me. “What’s wrong, dirty girl? Not happy with two guys having their way with you?”

Making you a needy little thing?”

I’d love to answer the asshole. But I have a dick in my mouth.

“Want to feel this cock inside you, baby?” Drew asks me as he continues to guide himself in and out of my mouth.

Again, I can’t answer because I have a mouthful of manhood.

So I do the next best thing and try to nod.

Before I know it, Cameron is next to me, and Drew is between my legs. My eyes flicker between them both, and before I can say anything, Cameron is shoving his dick down my throat.

“That’s it. Take it like the slut you are.” I flinch at his words, but I can’t stop. He’s unnecessarily cruel at the moment. And I can’t figure out why.

“You ready, Rae?” Drew asks as he lines his cock up, rubbing through my folds. “Your pussy is soaking wet. You love this, don’t you?”

I hum around Cameron as I feel Drew start to push inside me. And holy shit, it feels wonderful. I pop off of the dick in my mouth and wrap my hand around it as I turn toward the man pounding away between my legs.

“Drew! Oh my God, please don’t stop. I am so fucking close. I need to come. Please,” I beg. These two have been teasing me and bringing me to the edge, each time not letting me fall over. It’s maddening. “Fuck. Drew!”

“Bitch, suck this cock!” I turn toward the voice that is no longer Cameron’s. An ugly, sweaty man suddenly stands beside me.



*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:45 am*

What the actual fuck?

“Her mouth is fucking perfect. You were right. This little cunt is the perfect fuck toy,” the large, sweat-covered stranger tells Drew.

My eyes flit back to Drew, only it’s no longer Drew. It’s him. My captor.

No!

“Drew! Drew!” I scream at the top of my lungs, or at least I try to as the creep next to me turns my head and shoves his disgusting dick in my mouth. I gag, bile rising up with each thrust.

“She’s got the tightest cunt I have ever fucked,” my captor says as he starts to lower his body on top of mine.

I can’t breathe. He pushes inside me, over and over. Grunting, breathing heavily, muttering things. Tears spill over my eyes, and my entire body feels like dead weight. His breath reeks of stale cigarettes and whiskey.

Someone help.

Someone fucking help me!

The stranger next to me pulls his dick out just enough, and I let out a blood-curdling scream.

He found me. He fucking found me.

## Chapter Twenty

DREW

“Drew!” My name being shouted from Rae’s room has my eyes firing open and me springing out of bed. I immediately fly down the stairs heading for her room. I can hear her groaning as I get closer to her door.

But then a sound stops me.

A guttural scream comes from her room. I immediately push open the door and find her thrashing on her bed.

“Rae! Raelyn!” I raise my voice as I run over to the side of the bed. “Rae, sweetheart, wake up for me.” I kneel beside her, and her eyes fly open.

They meet mine, and she lets out another scream as she tries to scramble from the bed. She tosses herself off the mattress and crawls as fast as she can toward the corner of the room, where she wraps her arms around her knees as she brings them up to her chest.

My eyes widen in fear over what has her completely freaked out. I slowly walk toward her, but I keep my distance.

“Rae, sweetheart, whatever happened, it was a dream. I’m right here. I can help,” I offer softly. Her body is vibrating, and she is clearly shaken from whatever the nightmare was.

“It was you.” Her words barely come out. Her eyes won’t meet mine anymore. She

stares down at the floor as she starts to rock.

“What was me? Rae, talk to me. It was a dream. I promise you, nothing was real.”

She shakes her head. Muttering things, but I can't understand them. I pull out my phone and text the one person that I think may be able to help.

Me:

Hey. I need you. Rae is having a hard time. I can explain when you get here. But she had a nightmare and shut down.

Nix:

On my way.

About thirty minutes later, Phoenix walks in and sees me sitting on my living room couch.

“What happened?” Her voice is laced with concern, and she looks like she just rolled out of bed. And she probably did. It's three in the fucking morning.

I shake my head. “I heard her screaming my name, so I ran down to her room. When I got to the door, she let out this horrid scream, so I burst into the room, and she was thrashing in her bed. It was some kind of nightmare, and I tried to wake her from it. But... when I did...” I pause for a moment. Remembering how she looked at me. It killed me that she looked at me like I hurt her. “She lost it when she saw me.”

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Phoenix nods and hums. “Back there?” She points to where the rooms are.

I give her a slight nod. “Yeah. First door on the left.”

I watch Phoenix disappear down the hall, and I sit there replaying the scene over and over in my head. My entire body tenses as I think about the fear in her eyes. She couldn’t get away from me fast enough.

And that killed me. Shit.

I walk into the kitchen and open the refrigerator, pulling out a beer. Popping off the top, I take a long swig, letting the bitter cold taste slide down my throat. Placing the bottle on the counter, I pull out my phone and text the guys.

I’m not sure if any of them are up, but I’ll at least let them know what’s going on.

Me:

Hey, some shit went down with Rae. She had a nightmare and freaked out when I woke her up from it. Phoenix is here now, to try and calm her down.

Doc:

On my way.

Kayce:

Shit. Is she okay?

Me:

I don't know. She looked fucking terrified.

Cameron:

Could be seeking some attention. Let her just sleep it off.

Kayce:

Cam, you're a fucking asshole. She had a nightmare.

Cameron:

She's just trying to make you feel sorry for her, and it's working. You guys are idiots.

Me:

Enough, Cam.

Cameron:

Whatever, man. I'm going back to sleep. We have practice tomorrow. Unless the house is burning down, don't bother me.

I place my phone down on the counter and shake my head. Cameron and his issue with Raelyn are starting to get under my skin. There's no reason for it. She's an innocent girl who was put in a shitty situation. I'm not doing anything different than I would for anyone else.

I'd never do this to someone he was trying to help.

And maybe that's the difference between him and me. He wouldn't help someone else. He wouldn't put himself out for someone who needed help. He is focused on his career, himself. Which is fine, he's allowed to do that, but it's starting to put a rift between us. And that's not a good thing.

About twenty minutes later, Tristan, Kayce, and Asher roll in. Phoenix is still with Raelyn, I'm sure helping her through whatever she saw in her dream.

"Dude. What happened?" Kayce frowns as he walks into the kitchen and takes a seat on the stool at the island.

I shake my head, not even knowing how to respond. "I... she screamed. She yelled my name, and I ran down there. She saw me and got scared." I rub my chest at the thought of her face again.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:45 am*

Tristan purses his lips, stepping over to the fridge and grabbing two bottles of water. He says nothing as he walks past the three of us and heads back in the direction of the bedroom.

I open my mouth to stop him, but Asher holds up his hand to keep me from saying anything. Once Tristan leaves, Asher turns toward us.

“He has some weird connection to her. I’ve noticed how she relaxes with him around. I have a feeling it has to do with the night he rescued her from the bar. So let him see if he can help calm her in his Tristan ways.”

“Yeah, I’ve seen that too,” I admit as I take another pull from my beer.

A few minutes later, Phoenix comes into the kitchen, and she lets out a long breath. She frowns as she looks at me, as if debating what to say.

“What did you get out of her?” I cock my head to the side.

“Whatever she saw, which she wouldn’t go into detail about, you and Cam were in it. So when you went into the room, she thought she was still dreaming. But whatever happened in the dream, it wasn’t good. She won’t tell me, though. And I’m not pushing her.”

“No, don’t,” I agree. “What do I do? I mean, I don’t want her scared of me.”

Phoenix nods, weighing her words. “Yeah. I think you just need to give her some space. I think she may be slightly embarrassed by her reaction to you, and add in

whatever she was dreaming about... well, she's feeling a lot right now. Though, oddly enough, she seems comfortable around Tristan." She furrows her brows.

"Yeah, we can only assume it's from when he rescued her from the bar. Because that grumpy fucker never makes anyone comfortable." Kayce grins.

"How was she around you?" Asher asks Phoenix.

"She almost looked relieved to see me."

Asher lets out a hum. "You going to the practice stadium tomorrow?"

Phoenix nods and scrunches her face, trying to figure out where Asher is going with this. As am I. "Yeah, I am. I have somethings I need to handle in the morning. Plus, I wanted to watch the practice." She shrugs.

"You should come pick her up and bring her with you. Get her out of that room and her mind off whatever has upset her," I offer.

"Took the words right out of my mouth." Asher smiles. "She would benefit from that. I would take her, but I have a few errands to run tomorrow."

"And obviously she doesn't want to be anywhere near me right now," I sigh.

"Drew, don't take it personally. She is dealing with so much right now." Phoenix rubs a hand up and down my arm. "She will get there. But she needs to talk to someone. See if she can work through this mess. You know that helped me after all we went through back in the day."

"She's got a point. Maybe we need to look for a head doc for her." Kayce shrugs.



“A therapist,” Asher corrects, raising a brow at him. “They have actual job titles.”

“It’s three in the morning. My brain doesn’t care about job titles. It’s sleepy. Words are hard.” Kayce snorts.

Ignoring Kayce, I say, “I’ll call around and find her one.”

“Actually, I know a woman who can help,” Asher offers up. “She actually just moved to the valley. She’s setting up her practice. I know her from college.”

“Okay. Then let’s get her in there. The sooner we do, the sooner we can help her through this better than we have been. Because it seems like every time we take a couple of steps forward, it’s ten steps back. And this is definitely a fuck load of steps back.”

Everyone nods in agreement as I rub the back of my neck. The stress of all this is starting to get to me. Maybe Cameron has a point. Maybe this is going to mess with my game.

No, I decide. It’s not going to. Because when I step out onto that field, my mind is clear as fucking day. It’s the only time it is. I have complete and utter focus. It’s me and that strike zone.

“I’m going to go take a room downstairs. Wake me when it’s time for practice.” Kayce stands from the stool he was sitting on, stretching his arms.

“You have an alarm on your phone, dick.” I point to the phone in his hand.

“Yeah, but just in case I sleep through it. I’m tired. Didn’t you hear me say that a few minutes ago? Me sleepy.” Kayce walks over to Phoenix and gives her a kiss on the cheek, then turns and heads toward the downstairs bedrooms.

“I’ll take the room next to hers,” Asher offers. “This way I’m close, too. Though I’m sure Tristan isn’t going to leave her side tonight.” He gives Phoenix a hug and heads back toward the bedrooms.

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“I should go, too. Raven has been on a ‘get up early and not let mom sleep in’ kick. It’s super fun. I totally recommend all the kids.” Her tone is sarcastic as she rolls her eyes.

“Well, thank you for rushing out here.”

She comes up and hugs me. Our relationship is super strong after all we’ve been through together. I know she will always be there for me, and I will always be there for her.

“You know you can always call on me. Forever here for you, Drew.” She smiles at me. “I’ll swing by in the morning and come get her.” Phoenix grabs her keys from the counter and looks back at me one more time with a small smile. She knows how hard it is that I feel like I can’t help Raelyn. I feel powerless.

Soon, I’m standing in my kitchen alone. I run a hand down my face. I’m exhausted, and yet my mind is running a marathon.

I need to call John to see if he has gotten anywhere with her case. I need to call a therapist for her, get her to see if opening up will help her remember things. And I need her to not be fucking scared shitless of me.

Like I said, I have a fuck ton to do.

I throw my beer bottle in the trash and head for my room. Part of me wants to walk over to hers to see if she is okay with Tristan. But I know she is, and I know that if she sees me, it may set her off again. I don’t want that for her.

So instead, I trudge up the stairs to my room. Keeping my door open at the bottom of the stairs so I can hear anything if something happens. When I get to my bed, I throw myself onto it with a huff.

I try to steady my breathing as I close my eyes. But all I can see when I close them is the terrified look on her face. I flip myself around on my back and stare up at the ceiling.

Thank God tomorrow is only a practice. I mean, Coach will still have my ass if I'm shitty, but at least it's not a game.

I watch my ceiling fan spin above me. Unless this is going to hypnotize me to sleep, I resign myself to the fact that I will not be getting any rest tonight.

I let out a sigh.

Tomorrow will be a long fucking day.

## Chapter Twenty-One

RAELYN

"How are you feeling?" Phoenix asks me as she takes a sip of her water.

"Um, still confused," I answer honestly. "It's all still right there. And when I woke up this morning, seeing Drew..."

"You relived it." Phoenix frowns.

"Yeah. And I logically know it's not true, but in that moment, in that dream, I felt it." I look down at my hand twisting in my lap. "Asher and Drew brought up seeing a

therapist today.”

“And?” Phoenix tilts her head toward me.

There is something about Phoenix that I just relax around her. Like she’s a long-lost sister or something. She is easy to talk to, and I know she’s safe. She’s mentioned that she went through trauma when she was younger, and maybe that’s why I feel comfortable around her. I know she understands my hesitation, my fear.

I even feel more comfortable with Phoenix than I did with Ronnie, and that has me very confused. Because I spent so much time with Ronnie. And I miss her. But also, she left me, and I was drugged. The whole thing confuses me. I need to locate her, but I know trying to find her will be like trying to find a needle in a haystack. I need to know what happened. Where she disappeared to, and if she’s even okay. That’s the other worry, that she disappeared because something happened to her.

Not like I can do anything about it.

I bite my lip and let out a breath. “I don’t know. Part of me is scared out of my mind that I will open up a can of worms.”

She hums for a moment and looks out onto the field as the guys run their exercises. The sounds of the ball cracking against the bat ring out around us.

“Now, understand I am not telling you this to make you more fearful. But my therapist ended up being my stalker and rapist,” she admits to me, and all the blood leaves my face.

My eyes widen at the admission. I’m not sure what she is trying to get at with that bit of info. It definitely doesn’t make me want to talk to anyone.

“Before you freak out, hear me out,” she adds. I nod and let her continue. “I’ll give you the footnotes version. And one day I’ll tell you everything when we have time to go through it all. Honestly, sometimes I think it could be a fucking series of books with what I went through back in the day.”

She lets out a small chuckle but then steels her face.

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“My mother killed herself. And I found her. My father was already dead. I had no one, except an aunt I had no idea even existed. She put me in therapy to deal with the death of my parents, the finding my mom in a tub. And even because I was in a new school. And at first, it was nice to talk to someone.

“But it turned out he wasn’t really a therapist. Long story short, he was the brother of a mobster. He kidnapped me and tortured me. Raped me.” She pauses for a moment and steadies herself. Then she clears her throat. “I eventually got out. By burning the place and him to the ground. And after all that, I feared talking to anyone after it was all over.”

“Holy fuck,” I whisper, almost unable to believe it.

“But my husbands, well, they were my rocks. Mason would go with me to the sessions. He would sit there with headphones on if I didn’t want him listening in. I eventually became comfortable talking to someone. Someone who was qualified and an actual therapist. And I know Asher knows this person personally. So, you would be in good hands.” She reaches over and grabs hold of my hand. “Get the help. Get it out. Let those demons go.”

Her phone rings and cuts us off, and she reaches into her pocket and pulls it out.

I turn back to the practice as she holds her conversation. I watch as Drew stands on the mound, talking with Cameron. As Cameron finishes up, he heads back behind the plate and stares up at where I’m sitting.

We are the only ones in the stands at the moment. It’s just a practice, so it’s not hard

to spot me. But his look. The thinning of his eyes at me. It sends shivers down my spine.

“Shit. I need to go check on something. I will be right back. Promise.” Phoenix stands up, her face remorseful.

“I’ll be fine. Go. Be boss lady.” I wave her off, and she nods as she takes off toward the top of the steps.

When she finally disappears through the concourse, I turn back toward the practice. I watch as they run around and throw from one player to another. I have no idea what they are doing, but the coach keeps yelling at them, so they must need work.

Suddenly, I have the urge to pee. Which makes sense with all this water I have been guzzling down. It’s fucking hot out here. Vegas weather isn’t fun. Even in the shade. I watch as the guys form a huddle around their coach, and I figure now is a good time to go to the bathroom and get more water.

I get up and head up the short flight of stairs through an opening to the concourse and concession area. I follow the sign to the right that says restroom and head that way. I walk for a minute, and I find the women’s restroom, but it’s closed.

Well, shit.

Making my way around the stadium, I look for an open restroom. There is a weird feeling surrounding me as I walk through the concourse.

It’s a ghost town, with very few lights on. It’s eerie walking through here. There is this weird sense that I feel a presence behind me, but I turn around to see that no one is there. I continue walking, trying to shake that feeling. I finally find a bathroom that I think is on the complete opposite side of where I was. But whatever, I need to



fucking pee.

I head inside and go to the first stall I see. I go about my business and stand up and button my jeans back up. The toilet flushes, and then suddenly the lights go out.

My blood runs cold. Shit.

I open the stall door to complete darkness. Well, double shit. You would think the timer on these lights would last longer than a few minutes.

I feel around for where I remember the sinks were when I walked in. Slowly, with my arms out, I wave them in front of me, looking to feel anything. A wall, the sink, another stall. As I step forward, I eventually run into what feels like a flat surface. Reaching out further, I find the faucet. I let out a sigh and try to see in the dark as I wash my hands.

After I finish, I slowly move along the counter to see if I can find a hand dryer or paper towel dispenser. When I get to the end, I can't feel anything, so fuck it. I wipe my hands on my pants. It's Vegas, it will dry the minute I step outside.

As I wipe my hands on my pants, I hear the door I came through shut and a click.

"Um, hello?" My voice shakes as I call out, fear suddenly taking over me. "Um, anyone in here?"

My breathing starts to pick up, and I can feel my heart racing in my chest. This has got to be a joke. A mistake. Someone didn't realize I was in here with the lights off.

"Hello?" I call out again.

And then I hear it.

The sounds of someone breathing. My stomach drops at the realization that I'm not alone. And whoever is there is between me and my only exit.

Fuck.

I slowly try to see through the dark. Why are there no emergency lights on? There should be lights that come on!

I hear the squeak of their footsteps as they walk in the direction of me, the sounds getting louder with each slow step. For every step they take, I take one back.

I reach out, trying to find a wall or something to use as a guide so I don't run into anything. I'm also hoping I can grab onto something that I can use to defend myself.

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No such luck.

My heart is beating so loudly I can hear it in my ears. The hair on the back of my neck is standing on end. I'm a rat trapped in a maze with god knows who else.

A realization hits me then. Is it him? Is it my captor?

My back hits a hard wall, and I realize I'm so very fucked. I have no way out. I open my mouth to say something and realize I can't. It's like my voice is frozen.

It's dark, but the room starts to feel like it's spinning. I let out a whimper, and I can feel tears start to pool in my eyes.

This is where I die.

The steps get closer to me, and then suddenly I can feel the body in front of me. Heat pours off the figure before me. A hand wraps around my throat, and I instantly start to claw at the hand and arm.

But it's useless.

All of my fight leaves me the moment I see the face in front of me. A skull mask. The white of the eyes behind it. It's then that I realize the black cloak that they are wearing.

It's the figures from my nightmares.

Only, this isn't a nightmare. This is actually happening.

"P-please," I squeak out in a whisper with the hand still wrapped around my throat.

"We will always find our property," a distorted voice comes from the figure in front of me. "Satanas libertus est."

My eyes widen even more when I realize I have heard that before. It's part of a chant, but I have no idea what it means. And I don't think I want to.

The hand around my neck pulls me forward, closer to their face. "See you again, soon."

And with a tight grip around my neck, I am forced back against the wall. All I remember is a sharp pain in my skull before the darkness takes over everything.

## Chapter Twenty-Two

### TRISTAN

I run a towel down my sweaty face. It's hotter than hell out here. Fuck, the one thing I hate about Vegas is the damn heat. Double fuck, I need a shower.

"Wanna hit the strip tonight?" Kayce jumps up and down excitedly. "Bring Raelyn out for a little night out on the town. Dinner, drinks, some good old gambling shenanigans!"

"Such a waste of money to gamble," Cameron grumbles from beside me.

"I win money, you ass," Kayce defends.

“Oh yeah?” Cameron turns toward him. “And how much have you lost?”

He rolls his eyes. “Whatever. I still win some.” Kayce shrugs as he flips off Cam.

“Vegas wasn’t built on winners, dick bag.” Cameron pulls off his shirt and plops down on the bench, removing his cleats. “What a fucking waste of money.”

“Dude, what the fuck is your problem?” Drew steps up to Cam. “You have been a complete fucking asshole for weeks now.”

Cam has been completely off for a while now. I’ve been watching him just flip out for no reason, getting angry at the team, at Drew. Something is definitely wrong with him.

Of course, this all started when Raelyn came into the picture. Doesn’t take a genius to fucking see what is in front of us.

But his reasoning for hating her, or being mad that we are helping her, falls flat. We are still winning our games. We are still crushing it on the field. Something deeper seems to be going on inside his head.

“What the fuck is my problem?” Cam stands up and goes toe to toe with Drew. I look at Kayce and shake my head. These two need to get it out. “How about let’s start with you babysitting the charity case? You know nothing about her! Yet you just let her into your fucking life.”

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“She needed help,” Kayce argues, and I give him a stern look to tell him to shut the fuck up.

“All of you defend that girl like she is something special. Guess what? She’s not. She’s trouble. She is nothing but fucking trouble, and she will bring you all down with her.”

“How the fuck do you know? You don’t even talk to her. She’s lost, Cam. She doesn’t remember a lot, and she doesn’t have anyone she can go to. Why are you so against helping someone? It’s not as if she’s staying at your place and keeping you from getting pussy every night. So why do you care?” Drew’s voice booms through the now quiet locker room. The rest of the team watches the battle that is brewing between their catcher and pitcher.

Cameron sneers, “No, she’s at your place, and you are just hoping to sink your dick into her.”

“Watch it, Anderson. You’re crossing a line,” Drew growls.

“That’s rich. I’m crossing a line? Funny you should say that. Where was she, Drew? She was a prisoner in a home that was up in flames. That’s not some family get together. She was kidnapped and stored there. You think whoever had her is going to just let her run free?”

Drew’s fists squeeze at his sides. “Exactly why until she can remember what happened, she has a safe place. Be a fucking human, Cam.”

He throws up his hands in exasperation. “Then let the police deal with it. That’s not your job.”

“They are dealing with it! And she is staying safe with us while they figure out what the fuck happened!” Drew yells.

“She’s another one, Drew. She is someone else’s problem that you are making your own. One that doesn’t just affect you.” Cam blows out a breath. “She’s a homeless nobody. Are you that desperate for her homeless pussy?”

The minute pussy leaves his mouth, I see Drew’s eyes widen and his arm start to cock back behind him. Before I can get to Drew to pull him away, he swings at Cam, knocking him to the side. Kayce and I sprint over to the two of them, who are now on the floor, fists in the air.

“Hey! Stop it! Spencer, calm the fuck down! Someone help me separate them!” Kayce tries to wrap his arms around Drew to pull him back, but Drew swings his arm back, hitting Kayce and knocking him to the ground.

Mother fuckers.

“What the fuck is going on in here?” I hear Phoenix behind me before I can step in to help split them up. Both Cam and Drew freeze when they hear her voice.

“And now mommy’s gonna ground you two,” Kayce groans as he rubs his cheek from where he got hit.

Her head turns toward Kayce. “You will get a head slap for that, but first I want to know what the fuck is going on in here? Where the fuck is Coach Bertelli?” Phoenix steps over to Cam and Drew. She looks up at me. “Where the fuck is Bertelli?”

I shrug. “Somewhere around here. He left the field to take a call about ten minutes ago. So, no idea.”

“Separate right fucking now. You will both come see me after you get dressed. I want to know why the fuck you two are at each other’s throats.” She places her hand on her head and lets out a sigh. Then she turns to Drew. “Is Raelyn waiting somewhere around here?”

My stomach instantly drops. “What do you mean is she here?” I growl.

“She’s not here?” Phoenix’s head snaps to me, and she suddenly looks panicked. “I...”

Drew scrambles to stand. “Why would she be here? She was with you, wasn’t she?”

“I had to take a call. I was gone for maybe fifteen minutes, and when I went back to the seats, sh-she was gone. You all were back here, so I thought maybe she met you back here.” Phoenix takes out her phone and starts texting.

Without any more information, I turn and immediately run out of the locker room. I have no idea where I’m supposed to look for her, but I just know I need to find her.

Running out and headed for the concourse, my head swivels, looking for any sign of her. Nothing. The concourse is empty, not even security is seen. Sprinting past, I run into Asher, who has a confused look on his face.

“Hey, what’s going on?” He cocks his head to the side and narrows his eyes. “Tristan?”

“She’s missing,” I offer as I push past him.



“Fuck!”

I feel him next to me as I run down the concourse. I see him pull out his phone and text while he runs.

“She’s not in the training rooms. Phoenix is having Colt check the security cams.” He shoves his phone back into his pocket.

I come to a stop, feeling completely hopeless given how big this place is. We have no idea where she would have gone. Or why.

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“Did you check the restrooms?” he asks.

I shake my head. “You take the ones up there; I will take the ones this way.”

Asher nods and takes off running.

But that’s when I see her pulling herself out of the restroom about fifty feet from me. And she’s covered in blood.

“Asher!” I scream and I take off like lightning toward her.

Footsteps pound behind me, or that could be the blood rushing through my ears, the anger of what I see in front of me.

I. See. Red.

Her body is barely able to stay up as she uses walls to hold herself steady. Blood covers her hair, matting it to her head. Her skin looks pale. What the fuck happened?

Her eyes meet mine, and she instantly drops to the floor. I don’t make it in time to catch her, but I slide into her, instantly trying to wake her.

“Rae, sweetie, open your eyes for me. Asher!” I call out, not realizing he is running up to us.

“Okay, okay, let me see her. Call Phoenix and the guys and let them know we found her, and we need to get her to the hospital.” Asher looks at me, but I don’t want to let

her go. “Move, Evans. I can’t assess her if you’re hovering over her. Let me do what I need to.”

Reluctantly, I shift away, but not too much. I pick up my phone, and I text the guys and Phoenix my location and tell Phoenix she needs an ambulance.

“Raelyn, honey, I need you to open your eyes for me. I need you to tell me where it hurts. Can you tell me what happened?” Asher starts feeling for a pulse. “It’s strong, that’s good.”

“The eyes,” she murmurs. “He saw me.” Her words trail off into mumbling. Her eyes are still closed as she winces in pain.

“Whose eyes, baby?” I run a hand down her face, but she flinches from the soft touch. I immediately pull my hand away. She doesn’t answer, just whimpers to herself.

My eyes meet Asher’s, and we are both filled with nothing but concern and confusion. She has mentioned the eyes to me before. He furrows his brows at me and shakes his head. I can see him trying to make sense of what she said.

I hear what sounds like a herd of elephants, and I can only assume it’s Drew and the others.

“Holy shit!” I hear Drew scream as he runs faster toward us. “Raelyn, oh my God. What the fuck happened?”

“Looks like she was hit over the head with something. And there are marks and redness around her neck. Looks like whoever it was had something around her throat. Possibly a hand.”

A rumble rips from my throat at the notion that someone tried to choke the life out of her. Someone touched her. Hurt her.

I look around, and Drew slips in beside her. Asher, too. Kayce stands over her, running his hands through his hair and pulling on the ends. Cam is nowhere to be found.

Of course not. He can't be bothered.

Within a couple of minutes, paramedics are on scene and getting her ready for transport to the hospital.

My phone buzzes in my pocket, and I pull it out and roll my eyes as soon as I see who it is.

Assfuck:

I need you at home base.

Me:

I'm busy.

Assfuck:

Who the fuck do you think you're talking to? This is non-negotiable. Get your mother fucking ass here.

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Me:

Fuck. Off.

Slipping the phone back into my pocket, I follow the paramedics out to their ambulance. Phoenix finds out which hospital they are going to, and I walk toward my car once I know.

Cam is still MIA, and I still want to pummel his face in. The fact that he can't be a decent human being and just help Raelyn pisses me off. And he doesn't see what is right in front of him. The one thing he is scared of.

And it won't be Raelyn that makes it come true. It will be him.

He will be the one who rips apart this team.

She's innocent in all this. She has no one to count on, and as we have seen today, people can still hurt her. All we have tried to do is to keep her safe. Just until we can get answers and she can remember things.

And even keeping her from danger, we are failing at it.

I clench my fists and punch the side of my SUV. Pain radiates through my hand. We were right there, and she still got hurt. We were in the same fucking building. I wasn't there to save her. I wasn't there to make sure she was out of trouble. And someone hurt her.

There is no way I will be leaving her side now. You couldn't pay me enough to turn and walk away. Not until I know that she is safe. Not until I know who the bastard is who took her.

I will make him pay. Just like I will make whoever hurt her now pay.

I will find whoever did this.

And I promise, I will fucking destroy them.

## Chapter Twenty-Three

### TRISTAN

"How long have you been here?" a nurse asks from beside me. Her raven hair is pulled back into a ponytail. She has on scrubs covered in hearts, and the pink color of the scrubs stands out compared to the dull bland room of beige around us.

"I'm not leaving." I look back at Raelyn in the bed, staring lifelessly out the window, her eyes never moving. A permanent frown mars her beautiful lips.

A couple hours ago, local police came in and took her statement. John, Phoenix's friend from the FBI, came in to do the same. Well, not officially, as he put it. He doesn't have jurisdiction right now, because it's at the local level. That doesn't mean he's not looking into it on his own time.

"You'll never get him to leave," Drew says as he walks in. "So just let him be."

The nurse hums in disapproval but says nothing more as she checks Raelyn's vitals. Good. Because Drew is right. I'm not leaving.

“Rae?” Drew slowly approaches her. “How is she doing?” He looks between me and the nurse.

“She is a bit catatonic. But she should come out of it once the shock wears off. Her head wound was thankfully not that bad. But the doctor will come in and fill you in.” The nurse types something in the computer and then leaves.

A few seconds after she departs the room, Kayce and Cameron come in. I groan at the sight of Cam. I know he doesn’t want to be here, so I don’t know why he bothers to show up.

“What’s the verdict?” Cam asks.

I watch Raelyn as Cam speaks. She flinches slightly at the sound of his voice. She told me her nightmare had Cam in it, but she didn’t go into specifics.

I held her until she fell back asleep. Letting her cry on my chest, trying to calm her shaking. I have no idea why she feels comfortable with me or why I feel drawn to protect her, but that’s what’s happening. And I’m not fighting it.

“We’re waiting on the doctor,” Drew states with a shrug.

“Do we know anything?” Kayce asks softly.

“Thankfully, the hit to the head wasn’t bad. But that’s kinda all we know.” Drew runs a hand down his face. “Her state right now is that of shock. She should come out of it soon.”

Kayce comes over to the bed. “Hey, Rae, doll, it’s Kayce. You’re gonna be okay. I promise to cook you whatever you want when we get you home. I will even let you win a game of pool.”

“Only one game?” Drew smirks.

“I have a reputation to uphold.” Kayce shrugs.

“Home,” she says so incredibly quiet, you almost don’t hear it.

“Yeah, baby girl, home.” Kayce rubs her hand comfortingly.

She shakes her head. “That’s not home.”

Her words cause my eyes to widen at the revelation, and so does everyone else’s. Does she remember something? Holy shit, she remembers something. On instinct, I stand up, waiting for her next words.

“Rae? Where’s home then?” Drew keeps a hand on her leg, softly stroking it.

She’s quiet for a moment as if she is thinking hard on her answer. But then the words come out effortlessly. “New York.”

Drew’s head snaps to mine. Our eyes meet. She is starting to remember. But she’s not from Las Vegas, so how did she get here? Was she out here visiting? Vacationing? Did she get trafficked all the way from New York?

“What else do you remember, Rae?” Kayce studies her. “Talk to us.”

But she just shakes her head. Either she doesn’t remember, or she doesn’t want to talk about it. But before we can push for any more answers, the doctor comes in.



“Raelyn, how are we feeling?” he asks kindly, rolling up the sleeves of his white coat as he assesses her.

She doesn’t answer him. She just continues to stare out the window.

“Can you tell us what happened?” Drew walks closer to the doctor.

“Well, first, I’m Dr. Chamberlin. And you four are?” He raises his eyebrows.

“Her family,” I grunt out in response. I’m not in the mood for policy semantics.

He doesn’t look like he believes that, but he lets it go. “Hmm. I see. Okay, well, Raelyn, can I discuss what happened with ‘your family’?” Raelyn gives him a slight nod.

See, asshole? Her fucking family.

“So, the wound on her head wasn’t that deep. Head wounds tend to bleed more, so they look worse than they are. She will probably have a pretty bad headache for a few days, but we will give her some meds to help with the pain. The bruising around her neck should fade over time.”

“When can she leave?” I cut in.

The doctor hesitates. “Well, you have to watch her. She does have a concussion, so someone will need to monitor her and watch for signs that it’s getting worse or something has changed.”

“We will.” I nod to the doctor. “When can she leave?” I repeat my question.

“I can get her discharged soon. I take it she will be going home with you?” He peers

at me, but I glance at Drew.

“Home,” she whispers like she’s putting a wish out there.

“Yeah, we will watch over her. We have the team doctor coming over to help make sure that nothing gets worse,” Drew offers up.

“Okay. I will get the paperwork ready to get her out of here.” Dr. Chamberlin nods and heads back out the door.

My phone buzzes in my pocket, and I internally groan because I know who it is.

Assfuck:

You’d better be here by 8. Don’t make me come and get you.

Me:

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You would need 7 guys to even try to contain me. So good luck with that.

Assfuck:

I don't need 7 guys, I need one bullet that will end your baseball career. Which is something I probably should have done years ago. 8, son. Don't be late. Or else.

I don't bother to respond. He is giving me no choice but to show up at the club. Fuck me.

"You okay?" Kayce tilts his head to the side as he studies me.

"Sperm donor wants to see me at the club."

"Need backup?" Kayce offers.

I shake my head. The last thing I need is to let Kayce fall into my father's crosshairs. "No. You focus on Rae." I look down at my watch and see that it's already six. I need to head home and shower before I head to the club.

I stand up and walk over to Rae. She slowly turns her head toward me.

"I will see you back at Drew's, okay?" I assure her.

She nods and then turns back to staring out the window.

I have no idea what my fucking father wants, but whatever it is, I can guarantee it's

some bullshit. Nothing good ever comes from a meeting with that sorry bastard.

Not a damn thing.

“You’re late,” my father bellows as he sits behind his desk. His office is minimalist at best. All black furniture with red accent walls. The furniture is multipurpose. There are “O” rings in strategic places to be tied to. It’s essentially a cave for whores to sneak into and get used by him. What a father figure I have.

I look up at his black hair slicked back. Like he is part of the mob. My jawline is very similar to his, and I hate that I can see him when I see me. His suit is all in black, neatly pressed. To anyone else, he looks like a well-dressed man. To me, he’s a complete fucking slime ball piece of shit.

“I show up on my time, not yours.” I narrow my eyes at him, crossing my arms from where I stand across from him.

“Sure, son. I’ll let you think that. Just know I’ll make sure you realize your mistake.” It’s a threat. But these days he doesn’t scare me. If he takes me out, he takes me out. Doesn’t mean I won’t go down without a fight.

“What do you want?” I grit out.

My father laughs. “What? I can’t just want to see and talk to my son?”

I don’t bother responding. Because we both know that isn’t what he wants.

My father takes a sip of the amber drink in front of him. Then he looks down at his lap, and I instantly know what he’s looking at. “You can go.”

Before my eyes, a small brunette woman pops up from under his desk. And that

shouldn't surprise me, yet here I am with wide eyes watching her straighten her black dress as I hear a zipper sound come from where my father is sitting. My stomach turns at the sound and sight before me.

The woman who has visible red marks on her knees clears her throat and wipes around her mouth. She gives me a flirty smile as she walks toward the door to leave. Does he have a revolving door of mouths for these blow jobs?

I grimace at the thought of her thinking she even has a chance that I would go anywhere near her with my cock. I wouldn't go near her in a hazmat suit.

My father lets out a sigh and stands up. He takes a moment to adjust his black slacks and grabs his drink. Slowly, and with a calculating look on his face, he walks to the front of his desk. Leaning back against it, I watch him take another sip from his drink and then set it down.

"You have your initiation into the circle in three weeks."

"Wait, what?" My body tenses. The last thing I want is to be a part of the Society.

He glares at me, his eyes boring into mine. "You heard me. You will finish your initiation into the Society. It has been dragged on for long enough."

"The fuck I am. I've told you this before, I want nothing to do with your little boys' club." I clench my fists, my anger starting to boil over.

He lets out a little chuckle. "A little boys' club? That's cute. I don't think you understand how far our reach is. Take, for example, how suddenly a third baseman for a Vegas baseball team suddenly gets benched for having drugs in his system."

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“What the fuck are you talking about? I don’t do drugs. And I’m still playing. Your make-believe story is just that.” I narrow my eyes at him, but my heart is racing in my chest.

“True. It hasn’t happened... yet. But don’t think I don’t have people in the right places that can make that little story a very real one. Look, son?—”

“You may be my biological father, but I’m not your son,” I cut him off with a scowl.

“You can’t fight who you are. As I was saying, son, none of this has to happen. You can take your rightful place in the Society and carry on the legacy. I think you will find you have been missing out on a whole world of opportunities at your fingertips.”

“So, you’re just gonna blackmail me into this?”

“Well,” he says with a shrug, “it’s not blackmail. Think of it as merely a suggestion.”

“That I have no say in or I lose my baseball career to false allegations,” I growl.

“Oh, it won’t be false, son. Those tests will positively show your drug use. If I have to tie you up and drug you myself, I will make sure you never play the game ever again.” His face reddens, and I can see him gritting his teeth.

I wouldn’t put it past him. While I have never wanted anything to do with the Society, I do know they have a wide reach. And my sperm donor is a fucking asshole who will do anything to get his way.

“But look at it this way, with no baseball career, you can now run this club with me. This town. The Society.” A creepy smile stretches across his face. “You took an oath, and it’s time for you to uphold that oath.”

“You are a fucking asshole,” I seethe.

My father just laughs. He grabs his drink and heads back over to his chair, slowly sitting down and not breaking eye contact as he does.

“I may be an asshole, but I’m the asshole who holds your world and your life in his hands. So choose wisely, son. We can do this the easy way, or the hard way. Either way, you will do as you are told.” He gives me a sinister smile.

In that moment, I realize I’m royally fucked.

I say nothing, just get up and head for the door. The need to beat him to a bloody pulp races through every vein in me. For now, I need to get space between him and me.

There aren’t many people I trust or can turn to. But there are a few. And now I will need to let the guys in on this part of my life.

That is, if I have any chance of escaping it.

I may not have much choice but to take my place in the Society. But maybe they can help me find a way to get out of it.

What’s that saying? If you can’t beat them, join them?

I think my only way out is in.

Chapter Twenty-Four

DREW

“Where is she?” Kayce comes waltzing into the living room.

I brought her home from the hospital a couple of hours ago, and Kayce had to go take care of something before he could get back here. Tristan hasn’t been heard from since he left the hospital abruptly.

And Cam... well, Cam said he just wanted to go home and watch a movie. Such a helpful prick he’s being right now. But that seems to be the usual lately.

“She is in her room. I need to check on her in a bit and make sure she is staying hydrated. Make sure she’s okay.” I rub the back of my neck. My stress levels have reached an all-time high after all this. I’m on edge. I’m thrown back to my Darkwood days when shit was happening to Phoenix.

To when we almost died.

Maybe Cam was right. This is affecting me more than I’m admitting to. But even if it is, I can’t just let her go. I don’t know why, but I just feel like I need to protect her.

“Can I go check on her?” Kayce asks hopefully.

“Sure. Bring her another bottle of water if you could please.” Kayce nods at me and heads into the kitchen before going to check in on Raelyn.



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My phone vibrates on the coffee table, and I grab it to see that it's Tristan.

Tristan:

Where are you?

Me:

My place. Everything alright?

Tristan:

Not fucking at all. I will explain when I get there.

Me:

See you when you do.

“Hey, you’ve got that look on your face,” Kayce says as he comes back into the room.

“Huh? What look?”

He frowns. “That thinking hard and concerned look. Your face gets all scrunchy and wrinkly. It’s not cute. And you are way more handsomer than that.”

I throw a throw pillow at him that he catches. “Asshole. ‘Handsomer’ isn’t a word,

you idiot. Besides, Tristan messaged me. Something is up, and he's on his way over."

"Did he say what it was?"

"Nope." I pop the 'p' as I speak.

"Ah. Okay, so then more fun. Awesome. We need more bullshit in our lives. Should we get Cam here?" Kayce picks up his phone, preparing to text him.

I hold up my hand. "No. Let him be for now. I'm still pissed at him for his attitude lately. We can fill him in once we talk to Tristan."

"You two need to work that shit out. Both of you are grown ass adults who are letting a woman get between you. Now, I get it, Raelyn is fucking special. To all of us. Well, except for Cam, but you need to fix that issue between you two. It's starting to affect the team."

I nod. "Yeah, I know. But he needs to come to an understanding that I am not going to abandon Raelyn until she is stable enough on her own. She went through something horrific. Unless she tells me to back off, I'm going to be there for her."

"I get that. I feel the same. But he is really angry about something. Talk to him. Find out what is bothering him. God only knows what he's mad about. Maybe he's jealous?"

I scoff. "Of what?"

"Dude, I don't know. You two need to have girls' night and kiss and make up."

I roll my eyes and throw another pillow at him which he easily dodges. "Whatever. He needs to apologize to Rae for his behavior," I grumble.

“And I’m sure he will. But you two need to work in tandem with each other, and right now, you two are completely working against each other. That won’t fare well with the team dynamic or on the field.”

Before I can answer, I hear the telling footsteps of someone coming up the stairs. Tristan comes into view, and I can see the stress and worry etched on his face.

“Hey, you okay, man?” Kayce asks Tristan, furrowing his brows.

“No. Not even close. I, uh, need to talk to you two. Well, all of you, but we can start with you two.” Tristan runs a hand down his face. I hear another set of footsteps coming up the stairs, and I half expect it to be Cam, but it’s Asher.

“Hey, how is Raelyn?” Asher looks around the room, his eyes instantly narrowing at the three of us. “What’s going on?”

“She’s fine, but Tristan here was just about to share with the class something that seems to be bothering him.” Kayce smiles.

“Sit,” Tristan tells Asher, ignoring Kayce.

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He nods and takes a seat on the sofa next to me.

Tristen looks at all of us before letting out a long breath. “My father is part of an organization. A secret society, you could say. He threatened me today with my initiation into the society.”

“I’m sorry, what?” Kayce scrunches his face and lets out a chuckle. “Your dad wants you to join his secret club? Is it like a poker night or something? Is there a secret handshake and stuff too? Do you post a ‘no girls allowed’ sign on the club tree house?”

I let out a sigh. “I’m pretty sure this is much more serious than that, Kayce. Otherwise, Tristan wouldn’t look like someone stole his puppy.”

“He always looks like someone stole his puppy. It’s his permanent asshole face.” Kayce throws a hand toward Tristan as if to prove his point. He opens his mouth again, but I hold up my hand in his direction and turn my attention toward Tristan.

“Why does he want you as part of it? What does this... society do?”

Tristan clears his throat. “Nothing good. They are made up of politicians, corporate billionaires, people of power. The fact that I am even telling you this isn’t good. For any of us. But at this point, what choice do I have? He owns me. They own me.”

“But why does he want you in it?” I ask again.

“Because it’s my birthright or some shit like that. I was supposed to follow in his

footsteps. Take my place among the elite.” He shrugs.

“Just tell him no,” Asher offers up.

“I can’t and yet I did.”

“And?” Asher presses.

“He threatened my career. Said I would never be able to play again. I’d fail a drug test or whatever. He would even go so far as to injure me to a point where I would never be able to play again.”

“He can’t do that,” I argue.

Tristan lets out a small chuckle. “He can and he will.”

“So, let’s go to the cops or to John. We can’t just sit around and let you be part of this death club.” Kayce shakes his head and jumps to his feet. “He can’t just threaten to take away your career, your life.”

Tristan shrugs. “He can, actually.”

“Calm down, Kayce.” Asher motions for Kayce to sit. “If this ‘society’ is as influential as Tristan is saying, chances are there are people in there that make sure it stays under the radar.”

“That’s the thing.” Tristan clears his throat. “This isn’t a small society; the Black Skull Society is a very large group of people all over this country. The power it wields, the influence it has, it’s not to be fucked with.”

Fear creeps down my spine. My memory of the trouble from the Luciano Mafia

family and the problems they caused us in our Darkwood days comes to mind. I suddenly feel nauseous. The web they strung was so deep into the school, and the city.

I had no clue about it until I was knee deep in the shit. I shake my head and try to clear the thoughts of my nightmare and look up at Tristan.

“Then what the fuck are you gonna do?” I ask him.

“What choice do I have? It’s why I’m telling you all about this. I don’t have a choice in this matter. This has been in the works since high school. My life will belong to them, and if I want to continue to play ball, I need to play their game.”

“How did this society come about? How did your father get involved in it?” Kayce asks.

“As far as I know, their origins come from a dark and clandestine group from the medieval era. They were hidden deep within the catacombs of Europe. Originally formed by a cult of disillusioned nobles, occultists, and outcasts, their belief in the devil’s power as a force of liberation has evolved into a global network of corrupted elites.”

“I’m sorry, did you say they believe in the devil’s power?” Asher’s eyes widen.

Tristan nods. “The Black Skull Society believes that Satan represents true freedom, liberation from moral and societal constraints.”

“Are you quoting from their recruitment flyer?” Kayce scrunches his face.

“It’s drilled into us.” He shrugs.

“Okay, but then what do they want? What is their end goal?” I frown, wondering why and how this is even possible. How something from so long ago could still be around to wreak havoc on lives. How come they weren’t stopped centuries ago?

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“The Devil’s Plan,” Tristan says without a hint of emotion.

“What the fuck is The Devil’s Plan?” I shake my head.

“The Black Skull Society believes that the world is in a state of stagnation, ruled by false religions, governments, and oppressive systems. Their ultimate goal is to create a world where the Devil’s teachings reign supreme, and individual will is the highest authority.” Again, Tristan repeats this as if he is reading it from a book.

“We can’t let you join this fuckery,” Kayce tells him with a frown.

“Too late.” Tristan runs a hand down his face. “My only way out is in.”

“Why are you telling us all this? If this is as dangerous as you say it is, as it seems to be, why tell us? Surely, that has to be like the dumbest fucking thing to do,” Asher asks.

“Yeah, it does put you all at risk.” Tristan nods.

“Dude, what the actual fuck then?” Kayce throws up his arms.

Tristan holds out his hand to try to calm him down. “Because if something, anything happens to me, you all know the truth. All of you know it wasn’t whatever lie they came up with; you know it was the Society. And I needed you all to know the truth before I try to dismantle and take them down.”

I can’t help but stare at him. “I’m sorry, I think I just took crazy pills. Did you say



while you dismantle them?”

Tristan nods. “Yeah, I did. It’s the only way I will be free. Dismantle or death.”

“Death?” Kayce’s voice goes up an octave.

“Yeah. You can’t leave the Society. The only way out is death.”

“Wait, but how do you plan on dismantling it?” I frown.

Tristan shrugs. “No idea. All I know is I will have to do it from the inside.”

“Fuck.” Kayce pulls on the ends of his hair.

“Tristan, this is so beyond insane and dangerous, man. They could kill you.” Asher shakes his head.

Tristan looks at each of us before opening his mouth. “I know.”

## Chapter Twenty-Five

RAELYN

It’s been a week since the attack at the practice stadium. And I have had one of the guys with me at all times. Even the asshole, Cam, who happens to be with me today.

I pull out a book that I’ve been reading, *The Secrets We Keep* by Lily Wildhart.

Yeah, I may have a slight obsession with her books.

The name of the game is distractions. My memories are slowly starting to come back

to me. They are flooding my head. I know these aren't dreams anymore. I remember living these moments, knowing people, feeling safe in my home.

Home.

Vegas isn't my home. But New York is. New York is my fucking home. I know where I came from.

What I am still fuzzy on is how I got to Vegas. I remember walking the streets of New York. I remember the cold, bitter winters, the snow, and holiday decorations. I remember Central Park and hanging out there to soak up the sun.

It's as if the hit to my head knocked something loose. Someone pressed play on all the movies stored in my head.

I have started to feel more like myself. I am starting to remember who I am, where I came from, what I did in my life before I was with the kidnapper.

Before all the pain.

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And I haven't shared those memories with the guys yet. Honestly, I'm still trying to sort them out. The dreams still don't make sense, and the images and visions I have in them still have not surfaced as actual memories.

A sigh from the man who wants to see me pushed off a building interrupts my thoughts, and my eyes dart toward him.

"I'm sorry, is my silence annoying you?" I narrow my eyes.

"No, me babysitting an adult who is capable of taking care of herself is," Cameron sneers.

"Please leave if I am keeping you from your anger management meetings," I fire back.

"Anger manag— Listen, I am only doing this because the guys are my life. You are an inconvenience. For some reason, Drew has a boner for you. Though, I'm sure once he fucks your whore pussy, he will quickly realize the error of his ways."

Setting the Kindle down, I slowly stand up and saunter over to where Cam is lying on the other couch. I lean over him, his eyes watching every move I make.

"Aw, is that why you hate me? Because you play for the other team and are secretly in love with Drew? Or because I won't let your shrimp dick near my pussy, ever?"

Before I can pull away, Cam grabs me and has me flipped onto the couch with him now hovering over me. He lets out a growl as he grabs my hands and places them

above my head.

“Let me ask you something, princess.” He grinds his hips into me, and I suddenly realize my error. He leans his head down, his lips grazing my ear. “Does this cock feel like a shrimp dick?”

No. No, it absolutely doesn't. Fuck.

I shake my head, still in shock at his dick rubbing against my very sensitive core, my brain malfunctioning with each movement.

Why am I letting him do this to me?

A small fear starts to build in me, and my heart starts to race.

He immediately stops. “And just so we're clear, I don't fuck guys. And the only reason my dick won't ever be inside you making you scream my name, is because it doesn't like used, slut pussy.”

“Hm, and yet you will fuck any little thing screaming your name after your game. Maybe you're the whore. Man-whore,” I sneer back.

“I can get all the pussy I need. Yours is not one I want or need.”

I let out a laugh. “And yet here you are with me, grinding your cock against me. And let's not lie. That thing's as hard as stone. So, I'll ask, who's needy?”

With a frustrated groan, Cam pushes off me and stomps away to the game room.

Good. Fuck off, asshole.

I close my eyes for a moment, and my body won't stop vibrating from his touch. And at the same time, his body on mine made me sick to my stomach.

Why? Why is my body torn on how to react? Why is it even reacting like it wants more of it?

I can't stand the ass!

Grabbing my Kindle and the phone Asher bought me, I head toward my bedroom. I need to cool off. My interaction with Cam has my body feeling like it's ready to combust.

Out of anger or sexual tension, I'm not sure.

With my phone in hand, I scroll through the music app Asher put on it. I find one of my favorite bands, In This Moment, and set it to play from its playlist of songs.

The grey tile is cool to the touch as I walk across it, and it's a hard contrast to the fluffy black bathmats that are strategically placed by the sink and in front of the shower. The white countertop jumps out against the dark cabinets.

There's beautiful blue irises in a glass vase next to the sink, adding a pop of color. On the other side of the sink are a couple of blue candles that I can tell have never been lit before, sitting on a black tray.

I reach into the large tiled shower and press the buttons on the side to start the water. I turn it up, making sure it's super hot, because I like my skin to practically melt off. I need to wash away my interaction with Cam.

He confuses me so much. I don't understand his hatred for me. I mean, I get it, he wants me gone. And as soon as I can leave, I'm out of here.

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Slowly, I strip off my clothes and throw them in the hamper inside the walk-in closet right off the bathroom. I turn to look at myself in the mirror, and I don't know what I expect to see. There are dark circles under my eyes, my hair is flat and dull. I look tired. And honestly, I am. My body is exhausted, like remembering all these things has just worn me out.

The shower starts to steam up the bathroom, and I let out a long breath and step inside. The minute the hot water hits my back, I instantly relax. The pulsing of the water makes the tension in my shoulders fade away, the heat calming my mind.

I reach over to the little alcove in the wall and pull out the shampoo that Drew got me. As I lather it on, the floral scent hits my nose. I let out a hum as I continue to massage my scalp. When I finish, I tilt my head back, letting the water cascade over me, rinsing away the suds.

My mind starts to turn as the water pours over me. There's an odd comfort I find here. Maybe it's the nice house, or it could be the guys. Well, minus the asshole who is Cam.

Logically, I should want to go home. I shouldn't want to be locked away here. Okay, I'm not technically locked away here. And last time I went on my own, I was attacked. Just to fucking go to the bathroom.

Maybe I have Stockholm Syndrome. Is that possible?

No. Because I'm sure if I asked to go back home, Drew would help me get there.

But something is keeping me from wanting to jump onto a plane and head back there.

And I don't know what that is.

Thoughts of the interaction with Cam just a few minutes ago start to flood my mind, and I can feel the pulsing between my legs. My hands slowly move down from my neck and graze over my nipple, causing a small moan to escape my lips.

Why does that asshole have me so needy?

My fingers slowly slide down between my breasts, softly leaving a trail of goosebumps even under the hot water. As my fingers descend, they follow the water flowing off me, down my stomach, slowing slightly as I pass my belly button.

I bite my lip as my fingers dip lower and slide through my pussy, eliciting a groan from me. My clit pulsates as I circle the tip of my finger around it, teasing it. My entire body is already on edge from the teasing that Cam did to me on the couch.

I work my finger through my slit and push it slowly inside me, tightening around my finger as I slide it in and out. Even in the shower, I can feel how wet I am as I drip around my hand. My breaths come out fast as I take my thumb and rub my clit as I finger fuck myself closer to a much-needed orgasm.

I turn around to face the wall to brace myself as I continue to pump my finger in and out of my drenched pussy. My eyes spot the detachable shower head, and a shiver runs down my spine in excitement.

Taking it off the mount, I hit the button, and the stream starts to flow through the head. Warm water shoots through the openings, and I push another button to change the pressure and spray type. I find the massage spray, and a thrill shoots through me.

Reaching down, I apply the spray of the water along the slit of my pussy until it hits my clit. My eyes widen at the pressure and the euphoric feeling coursing through me. I reach down and spread my lips apart, angling the spray to directly hit my sweet spot.

The pulsing water against my clit causes me to groan, my body vibrating from the intense pleasure. Trying to chase that finale, that crescendo of my orgasm.

It's so close, the release I need. I can feel it start to crest as my muscles tighten. My breaths come out fast, moans slipping through between them. I don't even care if anyone can hear me. This feels so good, and I can't stop.

I need to come.

While lost in my race to the finish, the music switches to the next song in the list, and Sex Metal Barbie comes on over the phone.

My body freezes, and my chest tightens. I drop the shower head, and it falls against the shower wall. Panic surges through me. This used to be one of my favorite songs by In This Moment. And then my mind is assaulted with a memory.

"Chanel! You are on stage in ten!" Jeff's voice rings out behind me.

I turn and look at him. "Got it. Busy out there yet?"

"Packed. So give them a good show. We have a group in here, and they look like they have a lot of money to burn. They are to the left of the stage. Give them your best shot." Jeff pushes his glasses back up his nose. He is the owner and manager of Ruby's, a strip club here in New York.

He's not a bad guy, but he's a strip club owner. He looks grungy, like he always



needs a shower. He always smells like the club, cigarettes, and cheap perfume. His clothes are disheveled, like he rolled off a shitty couch and came straight to work. And I'm sure if he had hair, it would be greasy and gross.

But either way, he gives me good shifts dancing, which I make pretty good money from.

I look in the mirror and spray my face with setting spray. Those lights get hot, and dancing around a pole isn't as easy as it seems. The last thing I need is my makeup melting off on stage.

I put one last spritz of hairspray in my hair and take a look at the final product in the mirror. My cat eye liner, my dark eyeshadow, and black lipstick portray my very goth look. Standing up, I adjust my skull corset and thong. I fix my tits in the corset, for when I tear away the openings in the front to expose them.

"You're up, Chanel," a voice booms from the doorway.

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I see the security guy, Trey, standing in the doorway. He gives me a nod, and I head toward him, hearing my music start up, the beginning of Sex Metal Barbie by In This Moment.

As I step on the stage, I start my routine. Moving to the music, losing myself in the sensuality, the rhythm. As the music kicks in, I find the pole and start twirling around it.

Right as the chorus fades out and the music ends for a moment before kicking back in, I lean up against the pole with my hands on my chest.

The men in the front are throwing money onto the stage. I turn myself toward the special party, I can barely see them with the smoke and lights. But I can feel their eyes on me. At the beat of the music, I rip open the corset along my breasts, letting them free from their cage.

With that single act, more money flies onto the stage. Watching the special guests, I drop to my knees and seductively crawl toward them. All five of them come into view.

And then I see him.

I let out a scream.

He was there. The guy who took me was there. I remember his face as clear as day. He was watching me.

“Rae!” Drew’s voice yells out from my room. In a flash, a figure is standing before me in the bathroom.

I look up to see Drew’s panicked face. He opens the door and shuts off the water, grabbing the towel off the bar of the shower door. He leans in the shower, wrapping it around me.

It’s then that I realize I’m on the floor of the shower.

Somehow, I go from the bathroom to my bed. My body starts to shake, and I’m not sure if that’s from the cold or the realization of my memory.

He was in New York. The monster who took me.

“Rae, baby. Look at me.” Drew’s voice has my eyes snapping to him. “Talk to me. Tell me what’s happening. What happened in there?”

My lips tremble as I speak the words I have been keeping to myself. “I remember.”

Drew lets out a gasp. “Y-You remember? What do you remember?”

I swallow hard over the lump in my throat. “Can I get dressed first?”

“Shit. Yeah.” Drew helps me up, and I cautiously walk into my closet.

After throwing on some clothes, I return to my room. “Um, can we do this out in the living room where there’s more space?”

“Sure. Yeah, wherever you are comfortable.” Drew leads me out toward the living room, and I see all the guys there. Shit.

Tristan takes a few giant steps toward me as he looks me over. He lets out a sigh when he sees I'm okay.

Asher helps lead me to the couch, wrapping an arm around my shoulder. "Let me get you something to drink," he offers.

"Here. A Coke Zero for you." Kayce steps in before Asher can, handing it to me and then sitting down next to me on the couch.

Cam, of course, sits at the kitchen counter, messaging away on his phone. He looks annoyed and bored.

So sorry my problems bore you, asshole.

I look out at the table in front of me for a moment before making eye contact with Drew. "I remember where I'm from. I-I'm starting to remember a lot of things before I was taken. The kidnapping is still a blur. But I know it happened, obviously."

Everyone stays silent for a minute, until Kayce speaks up. "Okay, I'll bite. Where are you from?"

"New York." I let out a sigh. "I lived in the city. I-I remember going to school there, Central Park, my life before, and I even remember working and partying. I remember a lot of it."

I look up and see Cam roll his eyes, but I ignore his bullshit.

"Did you have a family? People who may be looking for you?" Asher rubs my back comfortingly.

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I look down at the ground. “I don’t know who my biological parents are. I was taken in by a woman who found me in a homeless encampment. Or at least that’s what she told me. Her name was Jessica. She also went by her stage name, Trixie.”

“She could be looking for you.” Tristan purses his lips.

Shaking my head, I frown. “No. I doubt it. Once I started stripping and got my own place, I pretty much didn’t hear from her again.”

“Ha!” A laugh from across the room draws all of our attention. I look up and see Cam bent over in hysterics.

“What’s so funny?” Drew turns around with a glare.

Cam smiles like the cat that got the canary. “No one else finds it just hilarious that our little princess here was a stripper? She was literally a whore for a living!”

“Fuck off, Cam.” Kayce stands up, fists clenched at his sides. “And for the record, not a single one of us found that funny at all.”

“Well, that’s odd, considering you’re the funny man of the group. I figured you would find humor in her being an actual slut and pussytizing each and every one of you assholes.”

“Get out,” Asher growls from next to me. Asher, who is usually calm and level-headed, looks like he wants to rip Cam a new one.

“Of course you take her side. Look, just ship her back to New York, and we can get on with our lives. She can go back to selling her pussy, and we can get back to playing ball.” Cam shoves his phone in his pocket.

“A slut?” I seethe. “Are you that upset that I won’t fuck you that you are resorting to calling me a slut?” I get up from the couch and stalk toward him.

Cam crosses his arms over his chest and leans back against the counter, offering me a faint smile.

“My pain, my life, is not something for you to tear apart and joke about. I was drugged. I was raped. I have no fucking clue how I landed out here. But me being up on that stage? Dancing? I never, ever touched any client in that place.” Tears start to pour down my face. “I didn’t ask for any of this. I didn’t ask for this life.”

“Rae.” Drew comes up behind me. His hand softly touches my shoulder. “You don’t owe him an explication.”

“Let her give me her sob story. It won’t change my mind. She was on the streets, and you idiots took her in like she was a lost puppy. Look at her. She’s living it up in here.” Cam shrugs.

“Shut the fuck up, Cam. You are insufferable right now. Is your heart completely black? She just figured shit out a bit and you are acting like she’s become a squatter in my house. I’m perfectly happy with her staying as long as she wants.” Drew turns back to me. “Like I said, you don’t owe him anything.”

I shake my head. “No, I do. Because he needs to hear this. I didn’t choose this life, Cam. I didn’t ask to be kidnapped and held captive. Every minute of the day I am scared out of my mind. And that incident in the bathrooms confirmed my fears. And you sit here and laugh at me? You sit here and make jokes about my pain? Why?”

Cam doesn't say anything. He just stares at me.

"You sit here and joke that I'm a slut, a whore. Except you are missing one key piece of information, Cam."

He frowns. "And what's that?"

"It's really hard to be a slut, to be that whore you think I am. When before I was kidnapped, I was a virgin."

## Chapter Twenty-Six

### KAYCE

And just like that, Rae drops that bomb. The look on Cam's face says it all. He is grinding his teeth together as he fists his hands at his sides. He wants to snap back with something, but there's apparently a bit of decent human still in him as he holds back and bites his tongue.

In a huff, he pushes off the counter and storms out of the house. See ya, fucker. Cam really needs to cut the shit and get with the program. Raelyn is here for as long as she wants, and we will protect her.

It's what I couldn't do for my mother.

Closing my eyes for a moment, the image of my mother smiling at me is right there. God, how I miss her. She was so loving, so caring, and always looked out for others. But when she disappeared, when she was taken from me, my entire world was turned upside down.

At the time, as an eight-year-old, hearing that your mom was missing was

devastating. But then finding out years later that yes, she was missing, but she was also murdered, guts you. I never gave up looking for her. Never.

Even though my grandparents kept me involved in baseball and school activities, I used whatever time I could to look for her.

It was why when I was a senior in high school, I discovered that her body was found, and I was devastated. She was sexually assaulted, and parts of her skin were burned. Whoever kidnapped her had tortured her, her body riddled with cuts and bruises.



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And from the time she was murdered to when her body was found, she had just been killed, according to reports. She was alive that entire time, until she was killed.

And they never found her killer.

For the longest time, I blamed myself. She was getting off work early to come see my little league game. If she hadn't left work early the day she was taken, maybe she would still be alive. She would've gotten to see me play professionally.

I would have taken care of her like she had taken care of me.

Maybe that's why I'm protective of Raelyn. Why I will go to the ends of the earth to take care of her and make her comfortable. To help her in her time of need.

And why it angers me that Cam has been a total asshole to her.

I want to beat him to a bloody pulp.

"Are you okay?" I hear Asher ask her, and I turn to look at Raelyn.

"Um, yeah. No. I don't know," she stammers as I walk into the kitchen.

"Do you want to rest?"

"No. I need to get out. I need air. I need space. I'm feeling confined," she offers honestly. "I-I feel conflicted."

“What do you mean?” I hear Drew ask her as I take a deep breath.

When I glance back at her, Raelyn runs her fingers through her long brown hair. “It’s like two of me live inside my body. I want to run and hide, ignore the world, hope no one sees me. But the other half, my actual self, is fighting to get back. With my memories coming back, I feel more like my old self. It’s conflicting. It’s suffocating. I need to get out.”

“Then let’s go out.” Tristan stands up. “We can go to the nightclub.”

“The nightclub?” Raelyn repeats, face scrunching in confusion.

“Level Seven,” I respond, and all eyes turn to me. “Tristan’s family owns it. Probably a good place to go. We know the security there, and it’s a safe club. We can even get a private booth.”

“Level Seven...” She hums for a moment. “That name sounds familiar. But I don’t know where I’ve heard it before.”

“It’s pretty popular out here,” Drew answers, glancing between us. “Maybe you heard one of us mention it.” He shrugs.

“Possibly.” Raelyn bites her lip. “Can we get something to eat first?”

“Absolutely. I know of a good restaurant near it.” Drew smiles.

“Vertigo?” I reach into the refrigerator and grab a bottle of water.

I hear Drew call over from the living room to confirm, “Vertigo.”

“What kinda food is there?” Raelyn tilts her head to the side when I walk back over.

“Sushi,” I answer her. One of my favorite foods of all time.

She squints for a moment. “I’ve never had sushi before.”

I chuckle. “Well, you are about to have the best sushi in the world for your first time tonight.” I offer her a wink.

“Guess I’d better go get ready.” Raelyn turns on her heels and heads toward her room.

Once she leaves, I look at Drew. “Dude, what the fuck is with Cam?”

“I was just gonna ask the same thing,” Asher says, leaning back on the couch with a sigh. “His reaction is over the top.”

“He’s pushing her away,” Tristan grunts.

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“Yeah, that much is obvious, but why?” Asher runs a hand through his hair.

Drew furrows his brows in thought. “He doesn’t like change. His focus has always been baseball. Not settling down, not family, nothing. Just baseball. Having Raelyn here is a huge change. And he just can’t deal with it.”

“So, he’s what, pushing her away so she will leave? Get tired of his shit and piss her off enough that she just vanishes?” I knock back the water, finishing off what was left in the bottle.

Drew lets out a sigh. “Yep. Pretty sure that’s exactly what he’s doing. Except I think despite her fragile state, Rae is a lot stronger than any of us realize.”

Let’s hope so. Because I don’t think Cam is going to go soft on her anytime soon.

“Wow.” Raelyn gasps as we walk past the bar on the outside of Vertigo, which is packed with people. The bar is decked out in wood planks. A huge tree sits in the center of the bar, where the tree grows and hangs over it all.

“Just wait. The inside of this place is a trip.” Drew holds out his arm and waits for her to cautiously wrap her arm around his.

The restaurant is shrouded in these large structures that explode out of the floor and loop over us, some turning intotables and a sushi bar for people to sit at. The orange color stands out from the wooden tables and chairs, a stark contrast to the dark floors. Blues and whites painted on the arcs add a splash of color.

“This place is... wow.” Raelyn looks up at Drew in awe.

He smiles at her. “Wait until you taste the food.”

Once we sit down, we order some oysters for the table and pick out several rolls to share between us all.

“How you doing. Rae?” Drew looks over at her. She is sitting between him and Tristan as Asher and I sit across from them.

“I... uh, I’m fine.” She looks around the restaurant, fiddling with the straw of her Coke Zero.

“What’s wrong?” Drew places a hand on hers.

She blows out a breath. “It’s hard to explain.”

“Try me,” he offers.

“I-I don’t know if it’s still the confusion I have or if it’s real, but I constantly feel like I’m being watched.” She takes a sip of her drink, her hand shaking slightly.

“Well, a lot of people stare at this sexiness, so they are staring. At me.” I give her a wide grin and waggle my eyebrows while flexing my muscles.

She snorts. “Well, you can think that, but I feel it even when I am at the house. And I know that may sound silly, but I just feel the eyes on me all the time. No matter where I go. And maybe it’s just all the stuff I have been through. Maybe it’s a bit of paranoia with the situation. I just still feel so uneasy with just... existing.”

Her lips turn down as she looks down at her hands in her lap.

“Rae, it’s kinda understandable that you are feeling that way.” My lips turn down as I watch her struggle with the everything she is feeling.

“I’ll kill whoever it is,” Tristan grunts out.

“No death is needed,” Drew deadpans at Tristan, then turns to Raelyn. “We won’t let anything happen to you,” he assures her.

She shakes her head. “You couldn’t stop the attack in the bathroom.”

He hasn’t told her yet. I look at Drew, and he purses his lips and shakes his head at me. I do everything I can to keep quiet. All I want to do is open my mouth. I should just tell her. Fuck this waiting bullshit.

Fucking asshole needs to tell her.

But of course, he’s not going to. The letters come for her, and we don’t have a clue as to who they are from. We can only speculate that they are from the guy who took her, but they give nothing away. We need to get them to John. We need to tell her that the monster who took her may be lurking in the shadows.

But instead, we sit here, not saying a word.

Instead, we sit here and just keep a closer eye on her, keeping her with one of us as much as possible.

Instead, we just pretend that all is hunky-dory. And it is far from honky-dory.

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“Look, we won’t let that happen again,” Drew tries to assure her.

He can’t guarantee that. She was under our nose, and it happened. She has a right to feel as she does. And I thought we could keep her safe, and every bone in my body will fight to keep her safe. Fucking everything. But even I can only do so much.

But I can’t guarantee it won’t happen again.

Raelyn goes to open her mouth, but just then the waitress appears with our food. She sets down countless rolls ranging from Rainbow to Volcano to Snow Crab and more. Even Raelyn looks impressed, taking in the sea of colors on the plates.

Drew stares at me, and I know he is silently begging me not to say anything.

So, I don’t. I keep my very pissed thoughts to myself.

The truth of what Raelyn needs to know.

I shove a roll into my mouth, barely tasting the spicy tuna and crab. I don’t think this is the way we should be handling the surprise we got.

But I got vetoed.

And I have a feeling that veto is going to be a problem for us all.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

## RAELYN

The music booms all around us as we walk past one of the many bars throughout this club. Level Seven is packed with bodies dancing, grinding, and moving to the beat of the music. The club is lit by crazy flashing lights all around it. The vibration of the music can be felt through the floor.

There is still a sense that I'm being watched, but in this crowd, that has to be impossible. I constantly feel the hairs on the back of my neck raise, and on instinct, I want to cower and hide.

God, what the fuck is wrong with me? I shake my head and try to get myself to focus on the world in front of me.

Tristan leads us through the club. I look up and see a giant thing hanging over the dance floor, weaving in and out of each other. Like two snakes or something. There is a balcony that wraps around the upper level of the nightclub, so that those above can look down on the dance floor. And I realize quickly that we are headed up to the second floor.

A hand grazes my back, and I look up at Tristan who is walking beside me. His slight touch sends warmth to even my covered skin. Kayce bought me an outfit for tonight, a cute leather skirt with a draped collar top that is open in the back.

For the first time since I can remember, I actually feel sexy. Almost powerful.

That is, until I get the feeling that eyes are on me.

We walk up the stairs, with the guys all flanking me. Tristan and Drew are on either side of me, with Kayce and Asher behind me.



A thrill runs down my spine as my body reacts to being around them. In such a short period of time, I just get turned on being in the same room as them. I do everything I can to hide my reaction to them, but I vibrate whenever one comes in the room.

Apparently, I'm a slut for these men. But after what Cam said to me, I can't help but feel ashamed.

When we finish climbing the stairs, we get ushered over to the corner of the room that is roped off. We have a whole section for ourselves and even our own private bar with a bartender. There are lounge areas scattered throughout the space, with the bar against the wall. A low light from the back wall helps illuminate the space, but the lights from above the dance floor truly allow you to see the private area.

"What would you like to drink?" Drew takes my hand in his as he leads me over to a curved couch with a table in front.

The minute my skin touches his, it feels like tiny little sparks ignite between us. I suck in a breath at the contact and try to keep my eyes forward. But I look up at his blue eyes and forget where I'm even at in this moment.

"Hey, Rae? Sweetheart? You okay?" He frowns at me.

"Huh? Oh, yeah," I yell over the music. "What was the question?"

Drew laughs and leans down with his lips close to my ear. "What do you want to drink?" His voice comes out deep and sends goosebumps along my skin.

"Uh, a, um, Bloody Mary," I croak out.

Drew pulls back and smiles, his eyes boring into mine. Without another word, he nods and walks over to the bar. I sit down on the couch, and Tristan and Asher plop

down beside me. Tristan places a hand on my thigh, and I don't know if it's a sign of possession or protection.

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Fuck it. Doesn't matter.

Whatdoesmatter is I feel Asher's arm around me, his fingers twirling around my hair. Chills run down my spine with each soft touch. My body reacts to them, betraying me in every way, burning me from the inside out.

I'm surrounded by them. My heart is pounding inside my chest. Is it hot in here? Or is it the two massively sexy men sitting next to me, possessively?

Like, look at her and die, possessive.

I need space. If I don't get it, I will die of asphyxiation, because I cannot breathe around these men. So I turn to Tristan and say, "Um, I'm gonna go look down at the dance floor."

He nods and removes his hand from my leg. And suddenly, I miss the warmth of his touch. Internally, I chastise myself and move toward the lights and music below us.

Bodies flood the floor, jumping up and down, grinding and moving against each other. The club is alive with people, all here to have a good time. And for the first time in who knows how long, I let out a long breath.

A breath of freedom. A breath of normality. A breath of life.

As my memories flood back to me, I feel like I am starting to finally come back to life. The old me. The true me. It's refreshing not to feel like I am stuck inside my own mind. I feel clearer than I have in forever. My mind is free.

My eyes find people going in and out of a door toward the back of the dance floor, and I watch for a while as I try to figure out what they're doing. My curiosity piques, and there's a part of me wanting to know what is behind there.

"Hey, you doing okay?" Drew comes up from behind me as he hands me my Bloody Mary.

I take a long sip of the spicy drink, and when the peppery mix hits my tongue, I let out a hum only I can hear over the music. "Yeah, I'm fine. Just trying to take all this in."

"Is it overwhelming you?" he asks, brows creased with worry.

I shake my head. "Well, no. I mean, like Cam said, I'm a whore. I used to strip and dance around a pole. So lights and loud music are my thing." I shrug, suddenly feeling bitter.

"Fuck what Cam said. He's a cunt." He lets out a sigh. "Look, I don't know what his deal is. And I'm sorry you have to keep getting the shit end of whatever is up his ass. Hopefully, the guys and I can talk some sense into him."

I shake my head. "Please, don't. He doesn't like me, and I feel the same way about him. So just let him go. Let him hate me. I won't be here much longer anyway."

"You're really thinking of leaving?" Drew frowns.

"Well, yeah. Then I can get out of your hair."

Drew leans in closer to my ear. "Rae, you are not in our hair. I, we, like having you around. I like waking up and seeing you in the mornings or saying goodnight to you. Watching you read on the couch or even trying to cook in my kitchen."

My entire body breaks out in goosebumps. For a moment, I lose my breath, but I quickly recover.

I clear my throat, trying to steady myself. “Well, I am sure you want to be able to bring home women and have your bachelor pad back without the intrusion of some homeless chick there.”

Drew pulls back for a minute, and I see the smile stretch across his face. He leans in again, his voice deep but loud enough for me to hear. “There’s only one woman I want, and she already lives there with me.” He grins as he turns and heads back toward the guys on the couch.

Well, holy fuck.

I blow out a breath as I try to process whatever the hell that was. Was he flirting with me? Was he teasing me? That was a joke, right?

My eyes dart around the club and back toward the doors. Something about those doors has sparked my curiosity. I bite my lip as I continue to watch people walk through them after getting past security.

And then I see her.

The blonde with the small frame. The one who helped keep me sane for weeks. Ronnie.

I need answers. I need to know what the hell happened. Where she went, and why she left me at the bar. She was supposed to protect me. I’m so confused as to what happened that night. Like I said, I need answers.

Without even thinking, I take off running out of the suite and down the hall. I think I

hear the guys yelling after me, but I don't stop. I hit the stairs and practically fly down them as I watch her go through the doors.

“Ronnie!” I yell out, but there is no way she has heard me over the music.

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A hand wraps around my arm, causing me to immediately turn and smack the face of the last person I would ever want to. Tristan.

His eyes blaze with something. Fury? Lust? I can't tell. "Oh. Rae, baby, I'm going to assume you didn't mean to do that, but now I have an urge to throw you over my knee and pay it back ten-fold. Make that tight little ass of yours nice and red."

My body quivers at his words. I can feel the heat rise in my cheeks as his eyes bore into me. Yeah, I shamelessly want to be thrown over his knee with the promise of that. Why does that make me so hot and turned on? I shouldn't want that, should I?

Fuck. I need to revisit this later.

"What are you doing, Raelyn?" Asher yells over the music, approaching us through the crowd.

"My friend! She went through there!"

"The girl who was with you at the bar?" Tristan asks.

I nod. "Yeah, so let me just go through there and see her."

Tristan looks at the guys, and they have some kind of silent conversation with themselves.

Then Tristan turns back toward me. "No."

I yank my arm out of his grip. “No? Fuck you. You don’t tell me what I can and can’t do.” I turn and head back toward the door. Again, Tristan yanks me back to him.

“That’s two,” Tristan says.

“Huh, you can count. Congrats. Let me go!” I yank away from him again. “What’s behind there? What is it that you don’t want me to see? Is Ronnie in some kind of trouble?”

Drew steps up to me. “Rae, I need you to listen. Behind those doors... it’s not nice. It’s not dangerous, but it’s not a good place for you.”

I put my face closer to his. “I am a grown ass woman. I have been through hell. Who the fuck are you to tell me what is best for me?” I challenge.

“That’s not what I’m trying to do. And you know that.” He bites his lip. “It’s very sexual back there.”

I let out a laugh. “What? This club has a secret sex dungeon behind those doors?”

The guys fall silent. And it’s then that I know I hit the nail on the head.

“She’s in a sex club?” My head whips back from them to the door and back to the guys. “I need to get to her! Now! So you either come with me or fuck right the fuck off! What’s it gonna be?”

“Let’s go,” Tristan grunts as he tilts his head toward the door. “Stay close to us.” I can see him grinding his teeth with the way his jaw is moving. He is not happy at all. “Oh, and that’s three.”

I start to retort to his idiot counting, but I’m interrupted by the security guard saying



his name.

“Mr. Evans. Nice to see you again. Would you like your usual room? I can call down there for you,” a bulky man dressed in an all-black suit with an earpiece in his ear asks Tristan.

“No. We will just be enjoying the festivities,” Tristan responds.

What festivities?

The security guard says a few other things to him that I can’t hear, but he nods to Tristan after whatever Tristan tells him, then lets us past the doors.

Once we cross the threshold, it’s an entirely different feeling. We enter a hall that is very clinical, very sterile looking. The lights are dim, but the walls are all white and bare. At the end of the short hallway is an elevator.

The guys surround me, with Tristan and Asher next to me and Kayce and Drew behind me. The doors slowly open to the elevator, and we all pile in.

“Um, what are the festivities?” I cautiously ask as the elevator starts going down.

Kayce offers me a sly smile. “Oh, you’re about to find out. I think you will be pleasantly surprised. It’s pretty... engaging.”

I frown at his non-response. That doesn’t answer my question at all. I look at Drew, who just offers me a shrug and a smile. They all have been here before and know what I am walking into.

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“Just remember, kitten, you wanted to go here.” Tristan peers down at me.

The elevator stops and the doors open. I am not in any way prepared for the scene in front of me. Kayce and Tristan pull me out of the elevator, and I’m frozen in place.

What the actual fuck is this?

All around me it is the complete opposite of the club above us. People wore clothes up there. As skimpy as they were, they still wore clothes. But down here, there are people walking around completely naked. Some are strutting around in leather getups, some in their birthday suits or lingerie.

There are men and women on leashes. Collars around some necks. Ball gags in their mouths, or other instruments that keep their mouths open. As soon as my eyes break away from the nakedness around me, I look around and my mouth drops open.

This is a sex club.

A mother fucking sex club.

Holy shit.

My head snaps to Tristan. But he looks around the room and remains emotionless. He grabs my hand and leads me deeper into the club. And everywhere I look, my eyes widen with what I am seeing.

There’s a large room off to my left, and people are gathered there. A bar sits against

one wall, while people sit on couches or tables, and well, let's call it socializing.

And by sitting, I mean fucking and performing sexual acts on each other. There is one woman who is lying on a table as men around her kiss, lick, and feast on her. One has his head between her legs, eating her pussy, while another has his cock shoved down her throat. The others stroke themselves as they kiss and suck on her skin and nipples.

Holy shit, I'm drenched.

Tristan continues walking deeper into the club, and my head whips to the right. There is a room with half walls around it, and people are standing outside the room looking in. My curiosity gets the better of me as I pull back a bit on his hand and try to peek into the room.

My eyes widen at the scene I see before me.

There are several apparatuses being used. One that is a giant X against the wall, one that looks like a bench where the woman is bent over and cuffed to, among other things.

My eyes flit to the man cuffed to the X, and I watch intently.

"It's called a St. Andrews Cross," Tristan says in my ear before giving my earlobe a little nibble, causing me to moan.

My eyes don't leave the cross. I watch as a woman dressed in a full, tight leather ensemble pats the guy on the cross's cheek. She says something to him, and he nods, mouthing words I can't hear.

She picks up a leather strap and brings it down on his thigh. He tilts his head back, but not in pain. His eyes close, and I can hear him groan. She brings it down against

the other thigh; the sound of the crack on his skin can be heard over the music playing around us.

Why is this turning me on?

A hand rests on the back of my neck, and I shiver from the touch. “You wanna be the one on the X, kitten?” Tristan rumbles in my ear.

And. I. Feel. It. In. My. Lady. Bits.

Further down, there’s a crowd around a man and a woman. The man is tying rope around the woman in a beautiful and intricate pattern around her body. I stop and stare as I watch them.

They look peaceful, even with all the noise and music around them. They look like they are lost in each other. The woman has her eyes closed, and the man says something in her ear. She nods and responds.

He reaches around to her nipple and pulls on it, stretching it. Her mouth drops open in ecstasy, and her head tips back. Even from here, I can see the pure pleasure on her face.

Holy fuck, this place is turning my panties into a slip and slide.

“Are you feeling okay, sweetheart?” Drew leans and asks.

“I-I don’t know,” I stammer.

Drew turns me around to face him, and I have lost all sense of space and time at this moment. Electricity surges through me from his touch. My entire body ignites from the need I feel inside me.

“Do you need our help in easing that ache, sweetheart?” Drew runs a hand down my cheek.

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Do I? Do I need to find that release from being wound so tight?

Yes. Yes, actually, I do.

My words are lost. Nothing comes out. But I nod. All I can do is nod.

Tristan leans in and kisses my neck. “Good girl.”

Holy fuck.

### Chapter Twenty-Eight

RAELYN

Tristan leads us down a hallway of the underground sex club, where doors align along each side of the walls. He is typing something on his phone, then looks up.

Each room has a number on the door with a black skull below it. He stops at a door displaying the number thirteen. On the keypad, he punches in a code, and we enter a giant room that has me stopping the minute I cross over the threshold.

The room is dark, but red lights align the baseboards, making the walls glow. Giving just enough light to see what is in the room.

Most of the items that were in the play areas are here. A giant X, or St. Andrews Cross, sits against the wall. Along that same wall is a whole bunch of whips and toys hanging from hooks. There are benches and chairs scattered all over the room.

Contraptions with restraints. I swear my eyes are bugging out.

And to the left of me is a giant bed. Black sheer curtains hang from the posts, and the bed is covered in a white bedding set. Soft lights hang from the top of the canopy, giving a little light to the bed.

Hands wrap around my stomach as I feel a body pressed against my back. “We will take it slow. If we do anything you don’t like, your safe word is red.” Drew’s voice sounds in my ear. “Do you understand, sweetheart?”

Wait, I need a safe word?

“Yes, you do,” Tristan responds, and I realize I said my thoughts out loud. “There are four of us.” He gives me a knowing look.

“We aren’t going to use the heavy stuff right now, but it may be overwhelming with all of us. We just want you to know you can stop us at any time.” Drew kisses along my neck before grabbing my hips and turning me to face him. “Do you want me, us, to stop?”

My eyes get drawn to Asher behind Drew, who is looking at me like he wants to eat me. I turn my head to the right and see Kayce and Tristan next to each other; the both of them have fire in their eyes as they watch my every move with Drew.

Fingers grip my chin and turn me back to face Drew. “Do you want to stop, Rae?”

Do I? Or do I want all the sex with four amazingly hot and sexy beasts of men? Do I want to completely lose myself in them? Maybe have an orgasm or ten? Be completely fucked into oblivion?

Yes. Yes, I fucking do.

“Don’t stop.” As the words leave my mouth, Drew’s lips descend on mine, and I can taste the liquor he had before we came down to this place. One of his hands reaches down and grabs my ass, while the other wraps around the back of my neck as he steals my soul with his mouth.

I feel a hot body come up from behind me, pressing against me. My skin starts to heat up from the presence. I feel like every nerve ending in my body from my head down to my toes has been lit like a fucking firecracker. We are five seconds into this “choose my own adventure” and already I’m in sensory overload.

“Be a good girl and lift your arms up, kitten.” Tristan’s hoarse voice in my ear causes me to moan into Drew’s mouth as his lips continue their assault against mine.

But I’m a good girl, so I do as I’m told.

Slowly, I lift my arms up, and Drew pulls back, allowing Tristan to slide off my top. And because I’m sans bra, the fire in their eyes blazes even more.

Drew steps back again and starts to unbutton his shirt. Asher takes his place and crushes his lips into mine. He tastes sweet, yet his kisses are anything but.

Asher growls into my mouth as he nips my lower lip. He peppers my jaw with kisses before making his way to my neck, where I feel his lips softly kiss me before he bites my skin, causing me to gasp.

“I will leave my mark on you, baby doll. But I will go easy on you tonight.”

My heart practically leaps out of my chest as the quiet and reserved Asher does a one-eighty. Asher steps away and walks over toward the bed. Tristan pulls my back toward his front.



He tips my chin up and locks eyes with me. “Are you doing okay, kitten? You look flushed,” he chuckles.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:46 am*

Am I doing okay? Well, I'm still breathing at this point, so I would say, yeah.

But all I can do is nod. Words fail me.

"I think she's lost the ability to speak," Kayce says as he walks up to me. His hands reach down to my skirt. "I think this needs to go, don't you, angel?" Before I can answer, my skirt is around my ankles, and I am standing there in only my black thong.

Kayce grins as he stares at me in nothing but my underwear. My verywetthong, because holy fuck.

He grips the sides of my face as he brings his lips down on mine. Teasing me with his kisses, almost pulling away with each kiss. I let out a little whimper as I try to feel more of his lips on me. But he just keeps giving me the littlest taste of him.

I feel his hand leave the side of my face and slowly travel down between my breasts, leaving my skin scorching hot with his touch. His lips hover over mine as he reaches right at the band of my thong.

"I wonder how wet you are, angel. Are you soaking wet right now?"

I swallow. "Yes." My words come out all breathy.

Kayce just nods to Tristan, who turns me around. He picks me up and wraps my legs around his waist. I fold my arms around his neck, and we start moving. Suddenly, I am thrown into the air. I let out a yelp as I hit the bed and bounce.

In front of me are four insanely sexy men. I watch as Tristan starts to pull his shirt over his head in that sexy way that no guy should be able to do, but somehow he can.

Holy hotness.

My eyes widen at the view of the men in front of me. All of them look feral, like they want to devour me. And who am I to stop them?

“Sweetheart, tell me you still want this,” Drew says from the front of the bed. I nod, but he shakes his head. “Words, Rae. I need your words.”

“Y-Yes, I want it. Please,” I almost moan out.

I’m so wound up that I don’t even realize I’m rubbing my legs together, trying to get the littlest of friction at my core. That is, until Drew grabs hold of me and shakes his head.

He spreads my legs apart with a smirk. “Someone is a little needy. We will take care of that for you.”

Kayce and Asher come up on both sides of me. Asher kisses me as Kayce peppers kisses down my neck. I feel kisses running up my leg, and I open my eyes to see Drew slowly easing his way to my core. And oh my God, I need that fire stoked right now.

I buck my hips up slightly as he gets closer. He lets out a little chuckle, his fingers grazing over the little fabric that is covering me, letting out a growl.

“She is fucking soaked.” Drew rips my thong off me, and before I can even react to that, I feel a tongue lick straight up my slit to my clit. I moan in Asher’s mouth.

“I think her eyes just rolled back into her head.” Asher pinches my other nipple.

Remember I said sensory overload a few minutes ago? At this point, all circuits are fried.

Life at this point does not mother fucking compute.

My mind tries to focus on every touch and every feeling I am experiencing. But I can't just focus on one thing. Asher's lips move from mine to my breast, softly biting and pulling on my nipple before pulling away slightly.

I look down, and my hands instantly grab hold of Drew's hair. His tongue teases around my clit. His teeth nip at it, giving it gentle kisses and blowing on it. I try to pull him deeper into me. My need to come is overpowering me; they have me so worked up, I just need to find my release.

"Not yet, sweetheart," Drew teases me.

I open my eyes to see him pulling away, and I let out a whimper. "Wait, please." My voice comes out all hoarse. "I need?—"

"Oh, I know what you need, kitten." Tristan steps up between my legs. "On your knees. Let me see that beautiful ass of yours."

My mind slowly processes his words as I feel Kayce and Asher pull away. Instantly, I lose the heat from their bodies on mine. And apparently, I haven't moved fast enough, because Tristan reaches and grabs my hips and tosses me over like I'm nothing.

Then I feel a sharp pain on my ass as his hand comes down on it. I let out a yelp, and I can instantly feel myself getting wetter, if that's even possible.

"Hey! That hurt!" I look back over my shoulder as I adjust myself from being tossed

around like a ragdoll by him.

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“You loved it,” Tristan growls. And before I can lie and say that I didn’t, his hands are spreading me open and he’s pressing his tongue against my slit, plunging into my wet hole, and I let out a groan.

Holy fuck me. Wait, they’re already doing that.

My eyes are closed as I take in the complete feasting Tristan is having on my pussy. He groans as his mouth works me to the edge again. My heart starts racing, my breathing picking up.

“Tristan, please. I’m so close. Please let me come,” I beg.

As soon as the last word leaves my mouth, he pulls back, and I growl at him.

“What the fuck?” I turn back at him in time to see his hand come down again on my ass. “Ow!”

“Oh, that’s nothing compared to what I want to do to you, kitten.” His hand slowly pushes up my back until he wraps his fist in my hair. He pulls, causing my head to tip back. “Now, Asher here is going to sit down in front of you. I want to watch you wrap those beautiful lips around that cock of his. Understood, kitten?”

“Yes.” I try to nod, but his grip on my hair keeps me from doing so.

“Good girl.” I shudder at his words as he slowly lets go.

Asher leans in and kisses me, his lips eager to devour me. He pulls back and crawls in

front of me, spreading his legs around me. His cock is on full display, hard as a fucking rock.

“You okay to do this, babydoll?” Asher asks me.

But I don’t answer him. Instead, I reach out and wrap my hand around his cock and bring it toward my mouth.

The minute my lips touch him, he lets out a guttural groan. “Fuck.”

“That’s it, angel. Take as much as you can.” Kayce comes up beside me, his hand going to my head, gently following my movements. My eyes flit toward him, and I observe him slowly stroking himself as he watches me take Asher. “God, you look so beautiful right now.”

I feel a hard cock press against me, and my heart starts to race. Is this going to actually happen? Fear starts to take over me. My body starts to shake. My mind instantly flashes with a memory.

I’m naked. On display, on my hand and knees, my arms and legs cuffed. My head lies against the hardness of the altar before me. There is a hood over my head, but I can see through it.

The metal cuffs cut into my skin. I try to pull on them, but there’s no give. It’s cold, and my entire body shivers. The room is barely lit, but there are torches around the altar that allow for light in the room. The air is thick with the smell of something burning.

Incense, maybe? I’m too foggy still. I look to my right and see what I think are carvings in the walls. But I don’t know what they mean.

I blink a few times. My eyes start to focus more, and I lift my head slightly. Several hooded figures stand before me. They wear black skull masks, their eyes piercing through me. They are chanting something over and over.

“Satanas...” I think is what they are saying with other words after it, but I can’t make it out. And I have no idea what it means. But they keep repeating it over and over.

“Let me go! Leave me alone and let me go!” I scream over them, yanking at the restraints holding me. My knees dig into the top of the altar, and pain shoots through me. I scream, but no one cares.

I feel a warmth spread all over my ass and back. I turn to see one of the hooded figures slicing his hand and the blood dripping all over me.

I let out a deafening scream at the horror of it all.

Another one steps up and does the same, and then another. I can feel bile rise up in my throat, the feeling of the blood coating my skin starting to cause a wave of dizziness. I feel like I’m ready to pass out. My breaths come fast and hard, my fists curling as I try unsuccessfully to yank at the chains again. Fear courses through my body.

“You will now and forever be mine until the day I discard you,” the voice of the man who would be my captor says behind me. “In this sacrifice, Satan, hear us,” his voice booms.

“In hoc sacrificio, Satanas audi,” the others around me chant.

“Offered, in darkness, our life, to dominate,” he speaks again.

“Oblatus est, in tenebris, vita nostra, ad dominandum,” the voices again chant. And



I'm guessing they are repeating whatever he is saying in whatever language it's in.

“From blood, our strength, to victory, through this pact.”

“Ex sanguine, fortitudo nostra, ad victoriam, per hoc pactum.”

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“Blood and power, in union, Satan, grant us your power.”

“Sanguis et potentia, in unione, Satanas, da nobis tuam potentiam.”

These fuckers are chanting to fucking Satan. Believing that somehow the devil gives them some sort of power. Someone needs to pass around the fucking meds.

The creep behind me starts rubbing my back, and I can feel the wetness. And that is when I start to dry heave. The asshole is spreading the blood around.

Then my body freezes at the touch of something behind me.

No, no, no.

This man is going to force himself on me.

No! He can't! I'm a virgin! No! He can't take that from me! Tears roll down my face, and in that moment, I pray this has all been a dream.

But the reality is, it isn't.

Someone lifts up the hood, letting my mouth free. For a moment, I think they are going to take it off. But I am wrong once more.

In one thrust, what was my choice to give has been taken.

Stolen.

Vomit crawls up my throat, and I begin to expel whatever contents were in my stomach. The movement makes me sick, the feeling of his body touching mine, making me gag. I want to burn every inch of my skin.

I continue to dry heave as he grunts behind me. I want to scream, but I am too stunned to do so.

“In Satan’s name,” my rapist says behind me.

“In nomine Satanae.”

And then with a grunt the disgusting asshole finishes and lets out a sigh. I feel him step back, and I let out a wail of a cry. I feel so violated, so gross. My body has no energy left in it to even fight. I still dry heave between sobs.

Two masked men step up to me. I look up in time to see a needle coming at me.

I open my mouth to let out a scream, but the darkness hits me before I can.

And I can only hope that death has taken me.

## Chapter Twenty-Nine

### ASHER

I saw her space out before anyone else did. I saw her become lost in herself. Her hand stopped stroking me, thankfully her mouth wasn’t on my cock as she slammed it shut. I held up my hand and yelled “red” at everyone.

Everyone stopped in their tracks.

Whatever was happening in her mind, she was experiencing it full body. Tears started falling from her eyes. I immediately pulled up out of her position and wrapped my arms around her. She was shivering.

“Get her clothes and then get some throw blankets or something we can put over her,” I bark out. Her eyes stare across the room, glazed over. She’s muttering something, but I can’t make out what it is.

Tristan looks at me, and I hold up my hand toward him. “This isn’t on you. Something triggered this in her. But it wasn’t you.”

He shakes his head and runs a hand down his face. He doesn’t say anything, but I’m not sure what he could say.

“Do we need to take her to the hospital?” Drew comes over and drapes a blanket over her.

“We need to get her home,” Kayce says as he collects her clothes.

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I nod. “I agree. We need to get her somewhere comfortable. She may freak out when she comes out of it. Everyone get dressed, and then Tristan, I need you to switch places with me so I can dress.”

“No.” He shakes his head as he starts to put his pants back on. Shit. He’s shutting down.

“Evans, you didn’t cause this,” I assure him.

“Yes, I did.” He throws on his shirt and shoes and storms out of the room.

I let out a sigh. “Kayce?”

“Yup. Go, let me have her.” He sits next to me on the bed, and I gently pick her up. He wraps his arms around her and pulls her into him. “I’ve got you, angel. I need you to come out of it. Please.”

As I finish throwing on my shoes, she lets out a scream and comes out of whatever catatonic state she was in. She looks at Kayce and instantly pushes away from him, scrambling off the bed and then falling off it.

Her eyes are wide, and tears have soaked her face. “Wh-where am I?”

“Raelyn, you are with us. We are at the club,” Drew says softly. Her head whips to him, and I can see her chest moving fast. If I don’t get her to calm down, she is going to hyperventilate.

“No, I was there.” She looks down at herself. She’s in a shirt we were able to get on her.

“Rae, baby, where were you?” I cautiously ask.

Her eyes snap to me, and I watch her blink a few times. I start to see her coming back to us as her breathing slows. Her head swivels between all of us, and then around the room. She brings a palm to her head, and she cries as she sits there.

“Sweetheart, why don’t we get you home?” Drew slowly approaches her.

“Yeah, angel. Let’s get you home where we can get you showered and you can sleep. I think tonight has been a bit much.” Kayce, who is now dressed, walks up beside her.

She looks up at him and lifts her hands toward him. Kayce helps her up, and she pulls the shirt down that she’s wearing.

“I’m crazy. Certifiable. The voices,” she mumbles as her eyes stare down at the floor.

“You are not crazy, Rae,” Drew reassures her.

She starts to bounce back and forth on her feet, whispering to herself. Lost in her own mind. I walk over to her and tuck a finger under her chin, lifting her head so her eyes meet mine.

“Whatever you just relived doesn’t make you crazy, it makes you a survivor,” I tell her. She softly nods, but I can still see the fear in her eyes. I can see her trying to process what she saw and her reality now.

“Um, I... I don’t know where my clothes are,” she says softly.

“Here.” Drew walks up with a pair of black sweatpants. “Club keeps these extras in each room in case clothing gets ruined.”

“You don’t have to talk about it now, but when you’re ready, we’re here to listen,” I offer to her.

She shakes her head, and I know it’s not a conversation that she wants to have at the moment. But I wanted to make sure she remembers that she can talk to us.

“Tristan, where is he?” she asks quietly, her eyes searching around us when she notices he’s not in the room.

“He went to get the car,” Kayce lies, but she nods as she accepts that answer.

She bites her lip, and I see her start to slip back into her head. “Hey, Rae.” I place a hand tenderly on her shoulder. “Come back to us. Let us get you home.”

She steps into me and curls herself up against my body. I instinctively wrap my arms around her.

Whatever that was scared the shit out of her. I can only hope that she tells us what she saw. The last thing we ever want to do is cause her pain or induce visions of her trauma. She was finally starting to feel comfortable, happier, and more at ease. And this absolutely may have set her back.

I look down at her and frown. She looks like another piece of her soul died.

And I’m not sure how many pieces of her soul she has left to survive through all this.

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“She’s sleeping in my bed.” Drew walks into the kitchen, finding most of us there.

Tristan stands at the patio doors looking out over the city. He is in his own head right now. I get up from the island and, with my hands in my pockets, I walk over to him.

“Hey,” I say as I stand next to him. I am not even sure he hears me until he offers me a grunt. “Look, Evans, you didn’t hurt her.” He doesn’t respond to me. “She had a flashback. Something we did triggered it. And there is no way to know what happened to trigger it. She will have to tell us when she is ready, so we know what not to do.”

“She was fine, until I went to go fuck her.” He wipes a hand down his face.

“She also had my cock in her mouth and Kayce was helping her head go down on it. Drew had just finished eating her pussy. We could have just all overstimulated her,” I try to assure him.

He doesn’t say anything for a moment, and then he takes a sip of his beer. “I’m supposed to protect her,” he mumbles.

“And you did. Man, you stopped the minute I held up my hand before I even called anything out to stop. You, I am sure, felt her tense.” He nods at my words. “So you were protecting her. You didn’t continue.”

“She was so frightened. She was scared that one night, but this? This was different. This came from the depths of her mind. And whatever it was scared the fucking shit out of her. What the hell is haunting her?” He throws back the rest of his beer. “She



has ghosts we can't see."

I let out a sigh. "That's the thing about ghosts: they are invisible except to the person who sees them. Her ghosts are in her head, and until she lets us in, until the trust is there, we have to be patient."

He lets out a hum and continues to look out over the Vegas Valley. I am sure he's trying to think of ways to fix this. Fix her.

That's the thing, though. Until she lets us into her head, until she lets us see those ghosts, we are fighting blind. All we can do is wait for her to fall so we can catch her before she hits bottom.

I mean, there are four of us. Well, five if Cameron gets his shit together. All of us should be able to be that support she needs to get through this and let us in on whatever happened to cause her this trauma.

And I thought we were making headway, but tonight was too much for her. We shouldn't have gone into that sex club. That was too much. We should have insisted that we go back to the room we had booked at the club.

Another thought hits me. She mentioned she saw her friend. Ronnie, I think her name was. Maybe if we find her friend, we can help get her to open up or at least make her feel like she's not surrounded by testosterone all day long. Maybe we should bring Phoenix in and get her to spend more girl time with her.

I run a hand through my hair. I need to be honest with myself. None of this is probably even going to come close to helping. I turn and look at the guys talking in the kitchen. Tristan, I am sure, has made his way up to Drew's bed to watch over her.

At the end of the day, she needs to come clean and talk to us. Let us help her get the

help she needs. And I don't know if she will ever feel safe enough for that. And why should she?

So far, there has been no one in her life whom she's been able to truly trust.

And that's why she keeps her ghosts locked up tight. Because she doesn't know what will happen if she lets them loose. She doesn't know whom she can trust with them. She would rather just disappear and never have to face it all again.

Become a ghost herself.

## Chapter Thirty

RAELYN

"You sure you don't want to come to the game tonight?" Kayce asks as he finishes cooking up some food for me.

The guys have been up my ass for the last week since the club debacle. I haven't told any of them about it, and I don't plan on it. I'm fucking broken.

But I do have a plan.

I have a plan to get out of here. To head back to New York. To try and find my life before all of this happened. Because I don't need to be a problem in their lives anymore.

I overheard Cameron and Drew having it out yesterday before they left for a game. Cameron found out about what happened at the club and began berating Drew for falling for my "golden pussy". That he walked right into my trap to get a comfy life of anything I wanted with a rich cock to do my bidding. Or some shit like that.

I don't want a fucking penny. I don't want to be anyone's burden.

If I can find Ronnie, sell this phone and some of the clothes they bought me, I can get enough money for a bus ticket back to New York. But I need to find Ronnie, which is no easy feat. But I did see her at the club, so I know she goes there. So maybe I can get lucky with her being there again.

Right now, I just need space from the guys. They hover over me. Kayce is constantly cooking for me. Drew is always checking in on me. Tristan just stares at me, watching every move I make. And Asher is always asking how I'm feeling.

The only one who doesn't give a shit is Cam.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:46 am*

And I almost like him for that.

Almost.

“Rae, the game will go late tonight. But Kayce made sure you have enough food, and if you need anything, John’s number is in your phone. And Phoenix’s. Call them if you need anything while we are playing. Oh and make sure to arm the system.” Drew stands next to me while I sit on the couch.

“Yeah. Okay.” I pick up my Kindle and try my best to get lost in a book. But I am too distracted by everyone hovering over me.

“I can have one of Phoenix’s husbands stay here, maybe I need to get someone here to stay with you,” he sighs as he rubs the back of his neck.

“So you have the state of the art alarm system installed, one that could wake Mars if it went off, and yet I still need a prison guard?” I scoff.

He shakes his head and groans. “No, that’s not what I mean by all that. I just want to keep you safe. None of us will be here to watch over you.”

“Like I’m in a prison.”

“Fuck. No, I’m sorry. You are right, this place is safe. I... I just worry.” He bounces back and forth on his feet.

“Nothing to be worried about with me here in this castle.” I let out a long breath.

“Okay, look, change of subject. What are you up to, today?”

“Just reading.” I don’t look at him when I respond. The air is thick, and it’s hard to breathe. The room feels stuffy. And I am getting antsy to start setting my plan in motion.

He hums and then turns and heads into the kitchen. My gaze follows him, and I see Tristan staring at me.

“Do you mind not staring at me like a creeper? It’s starting to get on my nerves,” I spit.

“Too bad,” is all he gives me. And continues to watch me. This fucking guy...

Apparently, from what I’ve overheard, he blames himself for what happened. And as much as I want to tell him it wasn’t him, it was the assholes in the masks, and I don’t want to have to talk about it.

“Have you talked to John yet?” Asher asks me.

“Jesus fucking Christ! What is with the inquisition? Stop asking me questions! No, I have not talked to John. Why would I talk to him? So I can talk about my freaking out? Does he need to know I was naked on a bed with four guys? That I had a cock in my mouth and was about to take another one from behind? Is that what you want me to talk to him about? That I’m a fucking slut?” I explode.

“That’s not what we are asking.” Drew starts to come toward me again.

“Stop! Leave me alone! I need to breathe. You all are up my ass twenty-four-seven. Newsflash for all of you: I have survived on my own for this long. Even through the fucking shit I went through.”

What I want to say is, I survived and yet was ready for death. That if death came for me, it was a welcomed end to the shit life I was dealt.

Instead, Drew had to rescue me, and here I am.

“Rae—” Kayce steps around the counter.

“No! I’m done. I want to be alone. Please. Just leave me alone right now. Stop breathing down my fucking neck.” I grab my phone and Kindle and take off toward my room, locking the door as soon as I am inside.

And finally, I can breathe.

I take a deep breath, feeling like the weight of them all is finally lifted from me. The air is less stuffy. I just need them all to leave for their stupid game.

While I wait, I lie in bed and try to rest my eyes. This has all been exhausting. My head is killing me. I let out a sigh and sink into the bed.

Once they leave, I can get ready and go seek out Ronnie.

I know she will be able to help get me back home.

While I know I don’t need their money, Drew’s cash is coming in handy right now as I pay a taxi to take me back to Level Seven. When I return to New York and start stripping again, I will send him every dime I use.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:46 am*

So, I guess I temporarily need his money right now.

I look up the number for a taxi and book a ride. I'm not dressed in anything too revealing or sexy. Just a lacy black top and a pair of ripped jeans. I'm not there to enjoy myself. My purpose is to find Ronnie. It's a long shot, but one I'm hoping pans out.

An hour later, I am pulling up at the club. There is a line to get in, but it gives me time to scope everyone out and come up with my next move if I can't find her here.

When I finally make it inside the club, it's packed with bodies thrusting themselves on each other. Others are gathered around tables, drinking and laughing. There are some in booths making out with each other.

When we were here last week, I saw her walk into the sex dungeon. A shiver runs down my spine as my mind flashes back to the events that took place down there. It was hot, so goddamn hot. All of them touching me and kissing me. It was beyond euphoric. Beyond erotic.

And then I had to go remember my time in that evil fucking place. The time when my captor took my innocence. Made me his.

And everything came crashing down around me.

I find an empty spot along the wall, one where I have a good visual of who is going in or out of the sex club.

For two hours I stand there, and my feet are numb at this point. My head is pounding from the combination of the lights and the god forsaken music.

Seriously, it's not my cup of tea.

I look down at my phone to see that it's after midnight. I also see that I have missed calls and texts from the guys.

Kayce:

Hey, we just finished the first game of the double header. Checking in to see how you're doing.

Drew:

Did you eat? Take a nap?

Kayce:

Okay, second game done. It will be a while before we get back home. We have to do some press tours.

Asher:

Rae, it's been a few hours and no one has heard from you. Please answer.

Drew:

Raelyn! Just respond so we know you're okay.

Tristan:



Raelyn?

Drew:

Fuck, we are really worried now. We are on our way home.

As I finish reading the messages, Tristan's name pops up on my phone. I let it go to voicemail, knowing if I immediately send it there, they will know I rejected their call. This way they absolutely know I am avoiding all of them. I slip my phone back in my pocket and turn to look out at the club.

Still no sign of Ronnie. Shit.

And I know it's a needle-in-a-haystack situation. Just because she was here before doesn't mean she will be here tonight. But I have to try and at least find her.

"Hey there." I was so lost in my thoughts that I didn't see the guy standing in front of me come up.

He's short, well, taller than me but definitely shorter than the guys. Maybe five-ten at the most. His dark hair is greasy and messy, and I almost vomit in my mouth from the smell of his rotten breath.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:46 am*

Breath mints, man.

“Hi. Not interested. See ya later,” I respond as I look back out at the club.

He leans closer, and I immediately go on high alert. His warm breath of rot gets close to my ear.

“Aw, don’t be like that, sweetie. I just want to buy you a drink and see if we hit it off. You are beyond sexy.” He looks me up and down, and it takes every ounce of control I possess not to just deck him in his slimy, oily face of grossness.

“I said not interested. So back the fuck off.” I push farther against the wall, and then I realize my mistake.

His body comes closer to me, almost boxing me in. His arm lifts above my head as he places it against the wall. I can smell his body odor, and bile rises in my throat.

“How about you be a good slut and just let me fuck you? All you women are the fucking same. Such fucking teases. Come here all dressed up looking for sex but then won’t give up the fucking pussy. You are all cunts.” He spits as he talks, and that’s what finally does it.

Everything from my stomach climbs up my throat, and I projectile vomit all over him. His eyes widen in surprise, and his face twists in disgust.

“You fucking puked on me? You cunt!” he screams over the loud music. I don’t wait to hear any more. I immediately take off and head toward the bathroom.

I walk in and beeline for the sink, running my hand under it to turn the water on. I gather some in the palm of my hands and throw it on my mouth and chin, trying to get the remnants of my encounter off my face.

Scooping some water in my hand, I slurp it up and swish it around my mouth to get the taste out. I do it a few times until I am sure it's gone.

Other girls around me are just doing their makeup thing and talking about whatever guy they are trying to get laid with. I pull my phone out and see that I have another twelve missed calls from the guys, so I just turn it off.

Reaching over to the paper towel dispenser next to me, I grab a couple pulls off it and dry my face and hands. I brace myself after tossing the paper towels, my stomach still a bit queasy.

Stress seeps into my shoulders. I just need to get out of here. I need to leave Las Vegas and return home to New York. I can get back to my life. Well, the life I had before everything went to shit.

“Raelyn? No fucking way!” The familiar voice has my head snapping toward it. No fucking way is right.

“Ronnie? Oh my God!” I stand there in complete shock that she's standing right in front of me, considering I've been looking for her all night. “What... how... here...”

“I can't believe I finally found you! I have been looking everywhere for you, woman! You disappeared from the bar that night, and I was losing my mind!”

“I-I know. Someone spiked my drink. You were gone, and I sat down and drank my drink, and next thing I know is I woke up in this strange hotel room?—”

“Oh my God! What the actual fuck? Are you okay? Did something happen to you?”  
Her eyes are as wide as saucers as her eyes start to water.

“No! Nothing happened. This random guy actually saved me and took me to sleep it off. Which I know could have been scary, but in reality, it was the best thing to happen. I was safe and taken care of.”

She lets out a long breath. “Oh, thank fuck. We have so much catching up to do.”

“Hey, why don’t we get out of here and go back to where I’m staying? I can fill you in on everything. We need to talk about everything that happened that night. I even have my memory back.” I smile. “Well, most of it.”

“I was just going to say, you seem so different. I love this. I love the new, well, old you. Yeah, um, give me like five minutes to just finish what I was doing, and I will meet you out front. Sound good?” She bites her lip.

I tilt my head and frown a bit. She has always seemed so standoffish and always avoids telling me what she’s involved in, but I nod. “Sounds good. See you outside.”

At this point, she could be selling drugs, and I wouldn’t care. I’m just glad to have her back in my life. She helped me when I needed it most and made sure I was taken care of. And now we can catch up and I can tell her who I really am, where I come from, and where I actually belong.

I follow her out of the bathroom, and she nods toward the front door. I smile as I walk that way. She disappears into the crowd. I turn on my phone to pull up the Lyft app to get a ride back to Drew’s house.

She is going to freak when she sees that’s where I have been staying.

As soon as my phone powers on, message after message pops up. Voicemails vibrate my phone as they come through. All of them have been trying to call me. Even a text message from Cam the asshole.

Cam the Asshole:

Dude, you need to call these guys. They are ready to put out fucking search parties and it's really annoying that they are acting like this over you. So do us all a favor and answer your fucking phone.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:46 am*

Or maybe you finally left, in which case good riddance.

See? An asshole.

I roll my eyes at his message. He can't ever just be nice to me. He can't wait until I leave, and I can't wait to get away from him.

I am lost in pulling up my Lyft app when a voice growls my name, and my heart literally stops as I look up. Drew, Asher, Tristan, Kayce, and Cam are all standing there on the sidewalk staring at me.

Fuck. I am fucked.

### Chapter Thirty-One

RAELYN

“Holy shit! You have been staying here? I'd never leave!” Ronnie's mouth drops as we walk into the living room of Drew's place. She spins in circles as she tries to take it all in. “This place is amazing! Oh my God! Look at this kitchen! I can't cook, but I would fucking learn how to! Or at least burn everything trying.”

I smile as I watch her eyes widen and she touches every surface she can. She then walks over to the couch and throws herself across it. I let out a little laugh.

But my attention is pulled when someone clears their throat. My head snaps to Drew, who is not looking very amused at the moment. Shit.

Ronnie stops herself and sits up on the couch, suddenly looking uncomfortable.

“Do you have any idea how worried you had us?” Kayce jumps in. “How freaked out we were that something had happened?”

Cam rolls his eyes. “She was out partying all night. She doesn’t care. She was just out to get more dick. Because apparently all of yours wasn’t enough. It’s the slut in her.”

Ronnie gasps at Cam’s words. “Dude, Chad. What the fuck?” she comes to my defense.

“That’s just Cam being Cam,” I sigh, crossing my arms over my chest.

But Ronnie isn’t backing down. “Just look at her. Does she look like she was out patrolling for dick? No, she wasn’t. And if you had listened to her and me talking on the way back here, she had seen me at the club the other day and came back to look for me. So if anything, she was looking for pussy.” Ronnie shrugs as I cough at her words.

I muffle a laugh, and Kayce does the same. He smiles at me. “I like her.”

“This is utterly ridiculous. The four of you can’t see it. She remembers things. Send her back. You all just ran around like puppy dogs to find her. She’s no longer needing any of your white knight abilities. Send her back home and be done with this shit. Fuck.” Cam runs a hand through his hair, and I watch him, suddenly seeing that it’s not anger fueling his rage.

It’s fear.

But why? What is he scared of? Does he think I am going to take them away from the game? Or is it that I was a stripper, and it’s a bad look on them?

“Rae,” Asher says softly, “we were just very worried something happened. With what happened at the club, your mental health was of concern to us. Not answering, well, it scared us.”

“Wait, what happened at the club?” Ronnie frowns, glancing between them and me.

“Nothing,” everyone but Cam says in unison.

She lets out a laugh. “Sure. ‘Nothing.’” She uses air quotes.

“Look, how did you even find me?” I ask them, narrowing my eyes.

“We tracked your phone,” Drew admits, and my mouth falls open in shock.

No words come out for a moment as I’m stunned at his honest and upfront confession. My eyes flit between them all, unable to process what I just heard.

“Why? Why would you do that?” I shake my head in disbelief.

“To keep you safe,” Tristan says without missing a beat.

“How? By keeping me locked up here? By keeping a leash on me?” I snap.



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“That’s not what we were doing, angel.” Kayce steps forward, but I stand up with my fists curled, and it stops him in his tracks.

“No? Then what was it? Please, I would love to hear this.”

Drew sighs. “We were worried that if something happened to you, we wouldn’t be able to find you. After what happened at the practice stadium, we didn’t want to risk it.”

“So, youBig Brotheredme? You couldn’t even talk to me about it? Maybe, I don’t know, ask me about what you want to do and get my consent?” I look at Ronnie, who is now biting her lip watching this all go down. “You are always watching me, always keeping me locked up here...” I trail off my words and tilt my head to Ronnie for her to follow me.

“Wait, Raelyn, stop,” Asher pleads.

I turn on my heels and face them all. “No, I won’t stop. Let me ask you all this question: What makes you any different than the monster who held me captive in that house? He controlled everything I did.” I turn to Kayce in disgust. “What I ate and how much I ate.” Then I look at Drew. “Kept me locked up and under his watch twenty-four-seven. So what? It’s a nicer house, so I should be thankful that I am now your captive?”

I don’t give them a chance to answer; I walk back into my room with Ronnie trailing behind me. I slam the door and lock it, letting out a long, shaky breath before falling back on my bed.

“Are you okay?” Ronnie asks, her voice hesitant.

I don’t answer her for a moment, but then shake my head. “No. Not at all.”

“I’ve never seen you so vocal. Girl, I don’t know what these guys did to you, but you are like a whole different person.” She sits down on the bed next to me.

I blow out a breath. “It’s not the guys. This is me. I remember it all. I remember every fucking detail.” I run a hand down my face.

Her eyes widen. “Wait, really?”

I nod. “From my kidnapping to the dungeon of horrors. Though I don’t remember much of the house itself because he kept me pretty drugged.”

“You need to tell me what happened, Raelyn. Maybe we should go to the police.”

I shake my head. “No way. I just want to get home. Besides, they have an FBI friend who hasn’t done jack shit with anything. In fact, I haven’t heard from him in weeks at this point. So, it doesn’t matter.”

“Can I ask how you were kidnapped? Like what happened?” She frowns as she fidgets with her hands.

“My memories have been jumbled up until now. At times, I saw my kidnapping in different places or with different people. It’s only recently that I can be sure that this was what happened.” I rub the back of my neck.

Ronnie sits there and stares at me for a moment. “Okay, so your brain was scrambled eggs for a bit. Confusing different parts of the memories. So, then what actually happened?”

I blow out a long breath. “I had just gotten off work. I was a stripper. That entire day, something felt off. But I’ve had those days before. Just usually meant there would probably be some creep who would try something at the club in a private room.”

The memories flood back as I talk to her, and I have to hold back my tears.

“Chanel, you got a private dance requested!” Jeff yells at me.

“I’m off for the night. Tell them to pick someone else.” I shoo him away.

“He is offering five times the normal rate.”

I stop dead in my tracks. “Wait, what? Are you serious?” Jeff nods his head, and I stick my black-raven wig back on. “Well, I could use the money. Guess I’m working some overtime tonight.”

“I knew you wouldn’t say no.” Jeff smiles.

Trey nods to me and leads me through the crowd. The odor from the cigarettes and the smell of sweat stink up this place. Smoke fills the room, and the lights flash all over as I follow Trey through the club.

When we reach the private rooms, Scott, another security guy, gives us both a nod and opens up the red curtain.

We stand outside room six. I take a few deep breaths. No matter how many times I do these, they are not my favorite. Many times, the clients get touchy feely. And the no touch rule still stands even in the private dance areas.

“I’ll be right outside. You have the clicker, right?” Trey asks me. The clicker is a little button that I have clipped inside my wig. It’s not noticeable, but it’s wirelessly

connected or something to a red light outside the room.

Trey stands out there, and if there is anything that goes wrong, I press it, and the light will go off, letting him know I need his help.

“Thanks, Trey.”

With that, I walk into the room. The lights are dim, and music is already softly playing as the client waits. He sits on the couch, his arm draped lazily over the side. Just sitting there like he owns the place.

His black hair is slicked back, and his suit looks expensive. What the hell is he doing here in this hellhole of a place?

Well, I guess everyone needs to get their rocks off somehow.

But he’s paying me, so I couldn’t care less.

My music starts up, and I start dancing. I’m about five feet away from him. Slowly, I roll my hips to the music, running my hands up and down my body, giving him my best seductive moves. There is a pole close by, so I grab on to it and swing around it a couple of times before slowly and sensually walking closer toward him.

As I approach him, I can see the sharpness in his jaw. His eyes look black as night as he stares at me, studying my every move. A sinking feeling in my stomach starts.

He doesn’t look like he is enjoying this or that he was here to enjoy this.

Without warning, he holds up his hand and tells me to stop. I stand there, my arms at my sides, unsure of what to do. His eyes rake over me, and my stomach turns. Then he smiles, and his gaze just doesn’t leave mine. It makes me so fucking uncomfortable.

Then he waves me away. He dismisses me. Without a second thought, I rush to the door and immediately slam it shut behind me. I take off towards the dressing room with Trey behind me.

“Chanel, you okay? Hey, did something happen?” He places a hand on my back as we walk through the club and back to the dressing room.

When he gets me to my mirror, I let out a breath. “No. Nothing happened.”

His face twists in confusion. “Oh, then why did you run out of there if nothing happened?”

“Because nothing happened. He had me stop dancing and then just stared at me. It felt like he was eyeing me for hours. And then he waved his hand and dismissed me.”

Trey’s face scrunches. “That’s... weird. I’m gonna go see if he left. Then I will walk you to your car.”

I shake my head. “I’ll be fine walking to my car. I’m sure he got his rocks off in whatever weirdness that was. But thanks for checking to see if he left. Let me know, and then I’m headed home.”

I’m busy taking off the thirty-six layers of makeup when Jeff comes in with a white envelope. “Here. Your take from the private. Trey told me. I’ll make sure they don’t come back.”

“No worries. It was weird, but we work in a strip club. There is weirdness everywhere.” I stuff the envelope in my purse and open my little safe to grab my tips for the night. “See you tomorrow, Jeff.”

“See ya, girly. Be careful getting home.”

I gather up my stuff and head out the back door, toward the alley. My car is right around the corner, and it keeps me from having to go through the crowd of people in the club to get out.

As I start my way down the alley, a van pulls in, slowing to a stop. I slow my walk, waiting for them to realize it's a dead end so they'll back out and leave.

But they don't.

Instead, they flash their brights at me. I put up my hands to try to block the light. I see two figures get out of the van and start heading toward me.

My legs instantly turn back toward the door I came from in a sprint. My heart's racing, and everything is moving in slow motion.

I never make it to the stairs. I never get a chance to scream. Hands grab me, a sharp poke in my neck has me taken aback, and a hood is thrown over my head.

Instantly, my legs become rubber. I start to lose control over my body. I can feel myself starting to fall, but then I realize I'm picked up and being thrown over a shoulder.

My body is tossed into the back of the van. The door slams shut behind me.

It's the last thing I hear before my body gives in to the drugs, and my world turns black.

Chapter Thirty-Two

TRISTAN

## Page 91

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We are down by three runs. How the fuck are we down by three to the New York Wildcats? They are the second to last worst team in the league. How the fuck are we losing to these assholes?

Spencer and Davis aren't on the same fucking page.

When the pitcher shakes off every pitch the catcher is calling for, and throws what he wants, it's bound to give up hits. Then everyone else has forgotten how to throw the ball, catch it, or make a fucking out. I swear every throw to Anderson at first has led to him jumping or having to stretch like fucking Armstrong.

But here we are, bottom of the ninth. Bases loaded, and Anderson is up to bat. We need to bring these runs in. We need a miracle Grand Slam.

The team is up on their feet here in the dugout. Spencer is icing his shoulder. I've been watching the closing pitcher, and he loves throwing to the inside.

"Psst. Anderson," I call him over.

"Yeah, what's up?"

"Inside. He will throw one outside and everything else is inside. He favors it. First one outside to catch you reaching. Then inside for the rest." I nod to him.

"Thanks man." Kayce rolls his shoulders and steps up to the plate. I can see him let out a long breath as he looks back at the catcher. And then he gives him a wink.



I chuckle because that is such a dick move. That is such a Kayce move.

He readies the bat, and the pitcher sets. The Wildcats' pitcher looks over at the runner on third and quickly glances at the one on first. He winds up and throws outside.

"Strike!" the ump yells. Oh, did I mention this was also a reason we are down three runs? This umpire sucks a bag of dicks.

"Come on, blue! That was way outside the box!"

"Get some glasses! That wasn't anywhere near the strike zone!"

The team yells out at the bad call. But I just watch Kayce. He turns toward the umpire and catcher and fake yawns, putting his hand up to his mouth. I let out a chuckle.

He's egging them on.

He sets up at the plate again.

The pitcher waits for his catcher to give him the sign for what he's going to throw and nods. He sets and looks over at third then back at the plate. He throws, and Anderson jumps back, the pitch almost hitting him.

"Strike two!" the umpire yells.

And Coach about loses his shit. He storms up toward the plate, and the umpire and him go at it. Coach sends a parting shot and walks back to the dugout, mumbling to himself.

Anderson turns toward the dugout and winks at me. This cocky son of a bitch. I see him turn and face the catcher and saysomething to him. The catcher flips off

Anderson and shakes his head. Anderson gets himself set behind the plate.

I watch as the pitcher goes through his routine and throws. The sound of the crack of the bat has my heart stopping. I watch as the ball changes trajectory and flies in the direction of left field. It slices through the air, and our eyes track it as it goes higher and higher. Like the air is carrying it away from us.

My eyes widen as I watch it head toward the stands over left field. I hold my breath, praying it keeps going. The left fielder runs back, watching the ball as he goes. The ball starts to drop, and the left fielder jumps with his glove stretched out.

I swear the entire stadium has gone silent.

The ball sails right over the glove and into the stands, where fans fight over it. And the entire stadium erupts in cheers as Anderson rounds the bases after hitting a Grand fucking Slam.

Holy shit. I let out a breath. We just won by the skin of our teeth.

Anderson rounds third, and we all sprint out there to meet him at home. Someone brings the water jug, and after he crosses the base, the water gets dumped on him.

After all the high fives and handshakes, Kayce and I are walking back, and he gives me a sly smile.

“What did you say to the catcher?” I ask him.

“I called each pitch before it was coming down the plate. I said that I knew he was gonna throw the first one outside. Bam, outside. So, next pitch told him I knew it was coming inside. When I set up for the third pitch, I asked him if his pitcher actually knew how to throw straight over the plate. Or if he actually just sucked enough that

he had to get lucky that the ump makes bad calls.”

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“So, you suckered him into one over the plate.” I laugh.

“Right in my fucking wheelhouse.” Kayce grins a mile wide as he claps me on my shoulder.

When we make it back to the locker room, I take a seat on the bench in front of my stuff and let out a long breath. I roll my shoulders and try to release some of the tension from how stressful that game was.

We pulled it off, sure. But the bullshit between Spencer and Davis is starting to mess with the team. A self-fulfilling prophecy, so to speak.

Fuck, I’m so tense. I get up and start stripping off my gear. I need a hot shower and a massage. Maybe I should go see Asher about my arm. I wince as I move it around. It’s sore, and I think I pulled something when I was making a play at the bottom of the fifth.

Grabbing my phone, I head next door into the room where the trainers and Asher’s office are at. When I walk in, I see Asher talking with Drew and doing arm motions with him. They look a bit tense with their conversation. I slowly make my way toward them.

“You need to work your shit out with Cameron. It’s doing exactly what he said it would do.” Asher rubs Drew’s arm.

“It’s only happening because he isn’t communicating with me. He purposely called shitty pitches and set up in the wrong spots. He did this, not me!” Drew defends.

I let out a huff, and they both turn in my direction.

“If I have to hear it from you, I’m gonna lose it.” Drew shakes his head and tips it back, closing his eyes and letting out a groan.

“Maybe you should hear it from everyone,” Asher offers.

I stand there with my hands on my hips, not saying a word as I study the both of them. Neither of them is saying what they’re truly thinking.

They can’t let her leave.

We all think that. Well, all of us except Cam.

“Maybe there’s a way to set her up at her own place. You know, give the girl her own space.” Asher shrugs.

“She wants to go home, back in New York,” I grunt, running a hand down my face.

I hate it. Every bone in my body wants to pull her close and keep her safe. Yet the logical side of me knows that isn’t possible.

She doesn’t want to be here. We are keeping her here. Are we really any different than the asshole who kidnapped her? And that gets me thinking...

“Hey, have you heard from John?” I frown as I look at Drew.

He shakes his head. “Actually, no. Haven’t heard from him in weeks. Maybe he’s working a case or something.”

“But have you told him about Rae remembering things?” Asher presses.

He nods. “Yeah, messaged him. Called him and left voicemails. Even emailed him. But he’s been busy.” Drew bites his lip as he rubs the back of his neck.

“I wouldn’t think this would be something he would put off,” I say uneasily. He would want to break this case wide open. Find the guy who did this to her.

Something isn’t sitting right with me.

When I make it back to my locker, almost everyone is in the training rooms talking to press, or taking a shower. There are a few of us still in the locker room getting dressed.

Looking up at the top of my cubby, I see a black envelope. Instantly, I freeze. My throat tightens, and I can feel my heart race.

I pick it up and turn it over to see a skull on the front with the Latin phrase *Satanas Libertus Est*.

Satan is freedom.

A chill runs down my spine. It’s the Society. The Black Skulls.

I swallow over the lump in my throat. They aren’t giving me a choice anymore. My father made that perfectly clear. I never wanted this. I can’t be part of this.

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But I don't have a choice.

I'm a dead man if I try to run.

\* \* \*

The Black Skull Society's dimly lit chamber, also known as The Pit, is a place where morality fades into the shadows and the air is thick with dread.

The walls are lined with ancient stone, darkened by soot and age, and adorned with macabre tapestries that depict the Society's twisted history and the rites of initiation. Flickering candlelight casts long, distorted shadows, creating an atmosphere that feels alive with whispered secrets and unfulfilled promises.

In the center of the room stands an altar, rough-hewn from obsidian stone, its surface glistening from the flicker of the candlelight.

Surrounding the altar are several members of the Society clad in dark, hooded robes that obscure their identities, their faces hidden by skull masks. Each holds a ceremonial dagger, its blade glinting ominously, ready to perform the dark pact that binds them to the Society and their infernal master. The Devil himself.

The rest of us, the initiates, stand in a circle around the altar. My heart is pounding in my chest as I breathe in the stale air. There are four steps in our initiation; the first two were taken back when we turned eighteen. The Temptation and The Trial.

We are lured as new recruits with the promise of wealth and forbidden power. Those

of us who are heirs are told about the Society once we learn to talk. Our fathers ingrain it in us so that when they tempt us, we immediately give in.

Once we are lured into the Society, we are thrown into trials. They are brutal initiation rites. From rape, to framing people in the most heinous of crimes to take them out, and even our own humiliation.

In college, we take the other two rituals. The Dark Oath and then the Blood Pact. The Dark Oath is done after the initiates survive the trials. They swear their unholy oath to Satan and the Black Skull Society. That, as a member, you will carry out whatever is asked of you by the Society. Without question.

The Blood Pact is the final step. No one ever talks about it. I have no idea what it entails, but if the other steps are any indication, it's not puppies and rainbows.

It took everything I had to convince my father to let me postpone the last step. And since he sits on the Council of Shadows, he was able to convince the others to allow me to delay my initiation.

The postponement ends now, I guess.

Looking at the initiates around me through the openings of the skull mask I'm wearing, I am sure there are some that are filled with fear.

If I could see their faces, I'd bet they are pale and ready to throw up. Then there are probably others who are twisted with anticipation. But we all realize the darkness we are about to embrace.

Above us sits a heavy iron chandelier, the candles in it burning, the air thick with the grotesque proceedings that are about to take place.



One of the members of the Council of Shadows steps forward, and the room falls silent around us. As the figure draped in their black robe starts to speak Latin and the words echo through the chambers, my heart thumps away in my chest. Fear grips me.

I don't want to do this.

The figure proceeds with the ritual, the Council of Shadows standing there watching the initiates take their last rite into the final initiation process. Once completed, they are officially members for life in the Black Skull Society.

The words mean nothing to me, of course. I can barely hear them over the sound of my heart beating anyway. I am so lost in my own thoughts that I don't notice when one of the hooded figures steps up to me and hands me a blade.

Clean, pristine. Never used.

And my blood freezes.

I try not to let my hands shake as I grab it from the hooded figure.

Their voice booms through the foreboding space, "To prove your loyalty, it is required for all those who wish to become an elite member of the Black Skulls Society to bind themselves to Satan."

I watch them bring a hooded figure in a white robe into the chambers. My mouth goes dry as I realize exactly what the last step is.

Death. Or more specifically, murder.

The figures who brought them in, The Shadow Keepers, push the figure forward and kick in their knees, making the captive fall to the ground. A grunt from that person

lets me know it's a man.

“Step forward and claim your place among us,” the figure next to me says.

I try to slowly calm myself as I take each step, walking up to the white hooded figure. My hand grips the hood over their head, and I hold my breath as I yank it off the poor soul under it.

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And that's when I freeze.

My eyes meet those of someone I have come to know and trust. Someone who has helped us. Someone who means the world to Drew.

Agent John Steele.

My eyes widen as I look at the man whose face is battered and bruised, but I can still tell who it is. His lips are dry, and I know they probably have not been feeding or hydrating him much.

He looks at me through my mask, and I want nothing more than to get him out of here, but I would never make it. Hell, we would never make it. The only way out for him is death.

By my hand.

"Do it," he whispers. He has no idea who I am, but his words tell me he knows he has no way out. That he has accepted his fate.

"I'm so sorry," I whisper for only him to hear as I bring the blade up over my head before swinging it downward. It slices through his chest, sending blood splattering over both of us. I can see the second the light goes out in his eyes.

Bile rises in my throat, and I have to do everything I can to keep it down.

I just killed a man.

And not only just a man, but a man I knew personally. A man I trusted.

My grip releases on John, and his body slumps over. Blood pools below him. Latin phrases are being said around me, but I have tuned out what they are saying. All I can see are his eyes. The life that faded from them.

All I can do is try to keep breathing and accept my fate. I killed Agent John Steele. A man who was like family to Drew and Phoenix. A man who was helping us to protect Rae.

I just sold my soul to the Devil.

### Chapter Thirty-Three

RAELYN

Apparently, Cameron got the short stick. After the game, the others had things to do, and Phoenix had to cancel our get together because her daughter Raven wasn't feeling well. So Cam had to babysit me.

Which leads us here, to Pancho's, a Mexican restaurant in Downtown Summerlin. As we sit here at the table, surrounded by the colorful walls, the brick floors, and greenery, I take a small sip of the margarita I ordered. They have the best ones here, or so I'm told.

The margarita tastes like a lime with a tart and zesty kick. But that tartness is balanced by the sweetness of what I'm guessing is the orange liqueur that it stated on the menu and the earthy, slightly spicy notes of tequila. The salt on the rim just enhances all the flavors, making me hum as I savor it.

My eyes flit up to Cam. "I'm sorry you have to spend your time with me. I know I'm

a diseased being you would rather throw to the wolves than be around me,” I say as I take another sip. The alcohol gives me a bit more courage to tell Cam how I really feel. “Not like I ever did anything to hurt your sensitive man feelings, but whatever.”

Cam lets out a sigh and runs a hand down his face. He grabs his beer and takes a quick pull off it, then looks at me. “I don’t think you are diseased.”

“Then why do you hate me?” I question.

He pauses. “I... I don’t hate you.”

I let out a laugh and throw my head back. But before I can respond to his bullshit, the waitress comes over with our meals. She sets down my Ensalada de Carne Asada, and I instantly start to feel myself salivate over the aromas of the meat. Large flat iron steak flanks greens, sauteed fajita, and sliced vegetables.

It looks so good that I put on hold my response and dig in before she even gets to set down Cam’s taco salad.

With food in my mouth, I snark, “I didn’t take you for a taco salad type of guy.”

He raises one eyebrow as he looks up at me, his fork in midair. “And what type of guy did you take me for?”

I hum for a moment. “A burrito type of guy.” I shrug.

“A burrito?”

“Yeah, big, bulky and full of shit.” I smile sweetly.

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Cam lets out a groan and shakes his head at me. “I don’t hate you, Rae.”

“Then why the fuck are you such an asshole to me? Why do you hurt me with your words? Why do you feel the need to put me down?” I spit back, digging into my meal.

“Because you need to leave.” He stares at me, his eyes boring into me with such an intensity that I have to look away so I can feel like I can breathe.

“I want to leave. But I just don’t know where to go right now. How to get back home.”

He takes a bite of his food. “Don’t go home. Go anywhere else. But just leave.”

“Cam, that makes no sense. Why can’t I go home?” I scoff.

He shifts uncomfortably in his chair but doesn’t look at me. He lifts up his fork and takes another bite of his taco salad. Suddenly, my food and drink don’t look as appealing.

“Cam, what the actual fuck? What does any of that mean? You don’t hate me, yet you tell me to leave and not to go home? Please make sense!”

“You need to fucking leave. Get the fuck out of Vegas. Go find another pole to go grind your ass on and take money for it like the whore you are. I don’t care where you go, just get the fuck away from us and this city! You are nothing but a pest and a problem for us. You have caused more harm than good.

“We almost lost the game today because of you. You infected every single one of those guys with your slut ways. I will give you money; no amount is too much to make you go away.” He pushes away from the table and throws money down before storming off.

My cheeks turn red from the utter embarrassment of his words and him leaving me there at the table. The waitress comes over moments later, and her eyes say it all. Pity.

“Are you okay? Do you need anything?” She frowns.

“I-I’m fine, thank you. I’m sure he left enough to cover the bill.” I grab my purse and phone and quickly try to exit the restaurant.

As I push through the heavy wooden doors, my eyes start to search for Cam’s Lincoln Navigator. My eyes go to the parking lot that it was supposed to be in, the spot we left it in when we got here, and it’s gone. Now in its place is a Tesla Cybertruck.

Did he leave me here? My heart sinks.

I start to walk through the parking lot, scanning it, thinking maybe I had the spot wrong. But when I end up in front of Dillard’s, I turn and look back at Pancho’s and dread sets in.

The asshole left me here.

I let out an audible groan and stomp the ground in complete and total frustration. The fucking asshole took off and left me stranded. I pull out my phone and pull up my Lyft app. I punch in that I need a ride back to Drew’s and wait for the car to come and get me.

One thing is extremely clear: Cam is right.

I need to get the fuck out of here.

When I get back to Drew's house, it's quiet and empty. Lights are on in the kitchen, so someone was here at some point. I immediately run toward my bedroom. When I get there, I flip on the lights and see a white envelope on the bed. I approach it cautiously, but then I see the corner of money sticking out.

Picking it up, I open the envelope wider and see what looks to be thousands of dollars sticking out. Well, I know who this money came from.

Fine. He wants me gone? I'll go.

I realize one small problem is that I have no luggage to pack my stuff in. I press my palm into my forehead. Drew. He may have something in his room.

Quietly, I push my head out of my doorway to listen for any sound or any indication that Drew is here. But the house is dead quiet. So I carefully walk a few steps toward the stairs that lead up to his room. I start to tiptoe up and then chastise myself for sneaking around.

No one is home, Rae! Stop being stupid.

Once upstairs, I locate his closet and try to see if he has anything I can use as luggage. On the floor in the corner is a black duffel bag. Shit's gonna have to do.

I quickly grab it, thankful it's empty except for a baseball glove. Taking the glove out, I place it on one of the shelves. I notice that the front of the bag has a DW logo on the front with ravens. At the bottom of the logo, it says Darkwood Academy. I remember Phoenix telling me they went to school together there.



Running back down the stairs, I head back into my room and pack a few items of clothes. I have no idea where I'm going, but if I can pack at least a week's worth, it should last me until I get where I'm going.

Once I pack my toiletries and clothes, I pull up the bus schedule. The first available is at six in the morning tomorrow to Dallas. That will have to do.

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I don't have a choice but to buy it online with Drew's credit card because I don't have an ID. So paying cash at the station isn't an option. But I quickly realize that effort is futile as I will need an ID to even board the bus.

Fuck, fuck, double fuck.

Ride share. Maybe Lyft can take me at least far enough away. I start looking up places around Vegas and see a city called Boulder City. That should work for now, and then I can figure out how to car hop my way to Dallas. Then maybe home.

I set my alarm for eight, knowing Drew will get up at seven and leave for the gym. That gives me enough time to get my stuff, get a Lyft, and get the fuck out of here.

I get up and make sure my door is locked. I don't want to talk to anyone right now. I need to plan how to get a new phone and get out of here without Drew's card. I may have to use it to at least get to Boulder City, and then I can figure out how to get into Arizona.

I climb up on my bed and let out a sigh. The only home I have known was with a woman named Trixie who took me in. I was left alone as a newborn and she took care of me. She raised me when she didn't have to. She never gave up on me, and she always treated me as if I was her own. And yet, I gave up. I gave up in that house with that man. I was ready for life to just end.

There was nothing more that I wanted to do but die.

Tears form in the corner of my eyes. I felt comfortable here. The guys gave me a

sense of calmness in my chaotic life. I almost felt normal. But I am ruining everything for them. I'm causing a division between them. My problems are seeping into their lives and creating havoc I don't mean to cause.

So I just need to go. Get the fuck outta dodge.

Maybe I'll find normalcy elsewhere. My eyes get heavy as I sink into the bed. I let sleep take me with the hope that when I wake, I will have the strength to get through this new chapter in my life.

My eyes flutter open. It's pitch black in my room. I look over at the clock on the nightstand and see that it's two in the morning. I let out a breath but then freeze. A strange sense comes over me, like I'm not alone. I can sense eyes on me.

My breathing quickens as I try to adjust my eyes to see if I can see anyone in the room with me. My door is shut, but I can't tell if the door is locked in the dark. I go to reach for my phone, but I notice that it's gone.

Before I can react, a body is on top of me and presses me back into the bed.

I go to scream, but a hand wraps over my mouth. With every ounce of strength in me, I try to fight them off. Whoever it is, they are too strong, too big for me to even get them to move an inch off me.

Tears fall from my eyes as my breathing starts to become a struggle with the weight on top of me.

A growl rips from the person's throat, and I freeze. "I told you to leave. I gave you a chance to leave." My eyes widen at the voice. "Why didn't you listen to me? You needed to run. I'm so sorry, I tried to protect you the only way I knew how."

Green eyes come into focus, and the last face I would ever expect to see is hovering

over me. Why is he doing this?

My heart races, and I struggle again against his body. But a sharp poke in my neck stops me and makes me yelp.

The green eyes start to go dark in my vision, but I call out his name to save me from whatever he is doing to me before my world goes completely dark. One final plea.

“Cam!”