



Kohl King

Author: *Lucian Bane*

Category: Erotic, Romance, Paranormal

Description: KOHL KING

He was made to guard a Queen. Now he burns for the girl who replaced her.

Kohl King has just been severed from the only woman his powers were ever meant to protect. His bond—ripped. His purpose—unclear. His rage—barely contained.

Then comes Jaxi Juniper.

A reckless artist with untamed emotions and an unshakable glow that makes his every defense splinter. She's human. Mortal. Not his. And yet his powers tether to her like she was built for them.

He's been ordered to guard her, not touch her. To keep her alive, not crave her. To cloak his divine form, even when her dreams already whisper of what he is.

But she doesn't walk—she collides. And obsession takes root in the place where sacred duty used to live.

Now, as the hidden war for cultural control erupts around them, Kohl must make an impossible choice:

Protect her from the world—or protect the world from what he's becoming with her.

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Chapter One

The card we were shown is a Glass Card.

In six hours, its details will shatter and be forgotten.

Kildare and Kaos must go immediately.

I will guard the Queen.

The Heavenly King will know the assignment upon arrival.

Kross had spoken the words without pause the moment Raviel left. An order sealed in iron and dropped into their minds by the archangel Raviel. No code to trace. No second copies. Just one moment of clarity, burned into the body for six hours.

Kaos sat in the passenger seat of the rented pickup, pondering what kind of battlefield would require such a card. Nebraska. The state they were driving to. The state belonging to the continent he dangled in pieces on. He listened to the tires mow down asphalt on a road that seemed endless and without purpose. Frozen trees lined the way beneath a sky of dead gray. The color of breath between here and there, between nothing and something.

Kildare drove without a word. When their triune bond had been whole, his silence spoke volumes. Now, everything between them existed in body language that required dissecting. No more shared instincts. Not with him, not with Krave, not with Reuban. And not with his Queen. There remained only the piece of himself he didn't

understand. Kross. And his Lust and Rage. Both warring inside him. Seeking a target to unleash on.

Kaos focused on his immediate dilemma. Him and Kildare were required to hide their true form beneath a human cloak. Something Kildare was no doubt familiar with in his eternal existence, but for Kaos, it was utterly foreign. And he had exactly fifty minutes to master whatever functions he could of his vessel and hope the job didn't require maneuvers he didn't yet possess.

All food for his Rage. Along with the oath that remained. Protect a Queen that was no longer his. There was nothing to resent. Nothing to kill. Nothing to annihilate. There was only the power to do all three, the desire to see it done, and the cold reality of knowing it wouldn't.

The truck turned off the road where black, broken trees lined a graveled lane. At the first curve, a house came into view. With every ounce of his limited knowing, he knew a shift was coming. One that brought his flailing Lust and blind Rage to salivating attention.

The truck settled onto loose gravel before the engine cut. Kaos eyed the trees circling around them, bent and brittle. He turned his gaze to the house ahead, leaning into a slope of a hill. While waiting for the Heavenly King to know what needed knowing, Kaos tracked the curve of the earth where the shadow of a barn disappeared behind the house.

Kaos glanced at Kildare the second he sensed the air shift with something. He studied his breaths, the tension in his body, the set of his jaw. His shoulders were locked into place as he kept hold of the steering wheel.

Finally, his chest filled with a deep breath, low and leveled, his hands lowering to his lap. "Interesting." He angled his gaze at him, the usual blood-red now a muted dark

crimson in his human form. “Seems we’ll be operating a business called Trojan Horse Corporation.”

Kaos picked up mild wonder and awe.

“It’s a private sector of cultural intelligence. Narrative warfare and influence inversion. And our function is counterinfluence through immersive creative disruption. The company will be funded through aligned sources, embedded under deep blackout protocols.” He finally glanced out the windshield, something on his lips adding mischief to the data Kaos collected. “Our cover identities activate upon contact. At that point, I’ll become Kade King, and you’ll become Kohl King. Brothers and founders of the corporation.”

He propped his elbow on the door, making eye contact again. “Trojan Horse specializes in fighting the rapid spiral of something greater than moral decay.” His mouth spread with a smile that hid what caused it.

“What could be worse than moral decay?”

He added raised brows to his grin. “Removing one’s ability to choose.”

The ruby in his eyes flared and Kaos turned his gaze to the home with this new data.

“Interestingly enough, Trojan Horse is already a real firm with impressive results. Our primary subject—the one in this house—is Jaxi Jane Juniper. Female, age twenty-six. Survival-based artist. Orphaned at six, system-raised, no guardians, no family claims. No professional history outside shelter work and urban outreach.” He added a deep breath. “She lives alone above a defunct bakery in Lincoln and visits her family residence—this place right here—on the weekends.”

“What’s the directive here?” Kaos asked, ready to get to that.

“To give her a business proposition. Her gifts match Trojan Horse’s needs—intuitive instruction, grief-based recovery encoding, natural pattern alignment and high-response emotional frequency output. She isn’t trained, she’s instinctive. Hard to track and trace. And the moment she accepts the proposal, she becomes our most viable asset that will be transferred to Trojan Horse headquarters — a secure five-mile compound, two hundred miles due east. Extraction by air. Helicopter arrival set for two hours.” Kildare turned toward him again. “Your job is to stay with her until retrieval. Keep her covered. Anchor her until transfer is complete. No transformation. No exposure. If you must shift into your true form — she must not see it.”

Kildare opened his door.

“Wait,” Kaos called, searching for the correct words required to proceed. “Define no transformation. And no exposure.”

He eyed him for a few seconds, weighing his questions. “Your true spiritual form,” he said. “Don’t show it. And if you must use it, don’t let her see it.”

Kaos opened his door, getting shoved in the face by the cold wind. He eyed the house looming again. “I don’t possess the same abilities I once did in this form.”

“Yes,” Kildare said with unspoken understanding. “But whatever is required of you, will be gained.”

He spoke it like a being who’d existed for eons. And Kaos believed him like a being who existed barely two breaths.

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Kaos' boots landed hard on packed dirt. Sharp, pissed wind shoved at the hollow spaces inside him. He let it. It could aid the slaughter in progress till everything was numb.

He made his way to the two-story frozen ghost. Wood gone gray... but not from rot. The lines were straight, and the trim held. But whatever purpose it once had, no longer mattered.

They climbed lopsided cement slabs, encountering the first signs of this female they were to secure. Metal sculptures twisted from scrap reached with bodiless limbs. A warning or greeting? Maybe both. Near the wrap around porch, shards of glass winked with early morning light, hung in patterns that mocked symmetry just enough to bother the eye.

Near the steps, wire wrapped the banister in looping symbols. Kaos paused. Not wire. The illusion of it. Dark lines had been burned into the wood, a sneaky attack on his dull human perceptions.

The steps on the porch took their weight without a single complaint. At the door, Kildare raised his fist and paused a breath before giving three, controlled knocks.

Kaos watched the door as wind whipped, snatching the air from his lungs as it went.

The latch clicked. The door opened.

Bright green eyes landed right on him with a look of expectancy. He held her stare, not bothering with his peripheral sight while her gaze poured out with data. Like a

book spilling its details right into his brain. He sought to define the draw of her brows and startled part of her lips.

He was somehow familiar to her. That's what her look meant.

"Forgive our early intrusion," Kildare said, his words tearing her eyes from his. "My name is Kade King. This is my brother Kohl."

Kohl. Right.

He took in her outfit, a full body apron made of drop-cloth covered in layers of secret color schemes she kept even from herself. Beneath it he spied a white gown, like she'd rolled out of bed and onto a canvas of wet paint.

"I've dreamed of this."

Kaos lifted his gaze, finding hers on him again, digging for answers he didn't have. Not yet.

"Hopefully that's a good sign," Kildare said, stealing her gaze back. "We run a firm called Trojan Horse that deals in narrative reconstruction, cultural targeting, and creative architecture. Your name reached us through people we trust. But it was your work that told us where to go."

She tilted her head a little as if she were putting together a puzzle.

"You reach people," Kildare said. "That's what matters to us. We believe you can do more and are here to offer something built with you in mind."

She regarded Kaos now, or Kohl. He was her second pressing puzzle. She took a step back and opened the door wider with a little nod and urgent, "Come in. I'll put on

tea.”

Kaos stepped inside behind Kade. Heat met him at the threshold, and he spied a cast-iron stove in the corner of the room, flickering low.

Woodsmoke layered the air—soft, dry, clean. Beneath it ran wax, ash, and something else that didn’t give up its name.

“You look like you’ve come a long way,” she said from in a kitchen that seemed to serve more as an art studio. “You can sit, or you can stand. I won’t take offense either way.”

Her voice carried clarity. Each word delivered with purpose already set.

A wide table filled the center of the room—solid, scarred, built for use. Tools and materials covered its surface in quiet arrangement. Leather, wire, cloth, paint. Everything within reach.

She crossed to the stove, turned the dial, and reached for a kettle resting beside it. “All I have is lavender tea,” she said, turning on the tap and filling the kettle.

“Sounds perfect,” Kildare said, surprising Kaos.

She set the kettle on the stove and pulled three mismatched mugs from a shelf above the counter and placed them on a cloth pad. “You came to offer something,” she said, turning and leaning against the counter, tiny hands laced in front of her. “Go on then.”

Kade adjusted his stance. “Well, we’re targeting cultural collapse. Strategic isolation, division just thick enough to blur truth. All engineered, sustained and effective.”

She crossed her arms tightly, her gaze digging in like she searched for her place in the game. “And what kind of impact are you aiming for?”

Kade charged in with, “Change. At the very root.”

Kaos timed the tap of her index finger on her arm. “How exactly?”

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“Many fronts. One mural work exposed a corrupt city council and forced a full investigation. A performance piece redirected grant money to the communities it was stolen from. A short film pushed a turnout in three school districts, flipping a vote.”

Her eyes narrowed. Focus locked. “That actually happened?”

Kade nodded once. “It did.”

She studied the air between them.

They both watched her.

“I always go with you,” she announced, turning to the whistling kettle. “In the dream that I have.”

Kade glanced at him, his brows popping once as Kaos returned his attention to the girl, trying to recall what came next. She had to accept the offer first. Officially. Which required her to know it. Fully.

She poured water into three cups as he also wondered over her dream confession. “So, I accept,” she said without turning. “As I stand here and pour tea for the two men that feel more like family than complete strangers.”

Kaos struggled to name the feeling assaulting him, finding that only shock fit.

“We are more pleased than you can imagine,” Kildare assured like a man who’d wagered exactly this. “Would you like to know the job details?”

The kettle returned to the stove with a soft clink. “Not really,” she mumbled with no care, walking over their two cups. “Careful, it’s very hot,” she warned softly as she held them out. “Your company is exactly what I’ve been praying for,” she announced with a smile. “I’m very excited to be a part of such a... soul stirring revolution.”

Kaos carefully took the cup from her, his instinct to touch for necessary information flexing through his fingers that barely brushed hers.

A current arced between them, some of it static electricity, some of it not. But it was felt both ways judging by her sharp, barely audible intake of breath before she turned.

“On behalf of Trojan Horse Corp, we are honored by your acceptance and trust. The only thing remaining is my duty to formally inform you of what happens next.”

“Alright,” she said, back near the stove, leaning against the counter with her cup at her lips, watching and waiting.

Kade launched into the details with gusto and Kaos tuned in, needing them again as well. “To begin, your acceptance initiates immediate protection protocols. The nature of our work—and the impact it generates—poses significant risks. We engage with systems that affect high-level economic and political interests. These entities have the means to eliminate resistance without notice. As such, you’ll be placed under full security detail. Kohl will remain with you from this point forward and will personally accompany you to your new quarters at Trojan Horse Estates two hundred miles east of here. From there, we’ll introduce you to the full Trojan Horse team. You’ll have space, budget, and full operational support. Your name stays on your leases, your records stay intact.”

She gave her first sign of alarm. Finally. “Two hundred miles?”

“Yes ma’am,” Kade said. “And anything here you wish to bring, just make a list and

we'll arrange for it to be delivered to your new apartment or studio.”

She held her cup before her chin with both hands, index finger tapping as her gaze meandered around the room. “Alright, then,” she surrendered with sudden clarity and smile.

Even without his power intact, Kaos could see the truth behind her submission. Stupidity wrapped in smiles. Like the world hadn't proven to her its appetite for blood. Her every gesture and word—thick, untrained, soaked in a dense, brainless glow humans called hope. It was nauseating. And he couldn't stop watching it. Or needing to crush it.

Jaxi stuffed her two suitcases to the brim with clothes, her heart pounding from the sheer effort of holding back screaming squeals of excitement. And fear and shock.

It had happened. The dream had happened. And she'd said yes! Even when yes wasn't really the obvious answer! Why would she do such a reckless thing? She was at the cliff and he asked her to jump and she did! She just jumped like a lunatic! Didn't let herself think because dear God, she knew wherethatled, it led to her being a spinster and living alone at twenty-six.

Now, all there was to think about was what the dream had actually meant. It was the single safety net because she'd had these vision-dreams all her life and they'd come true enough times to at least know they were legit. And she was sure this one was exceptionally legit which brought her to the only thing that needed sorting—the meaning of it. The meaning of these two, beyond beautiful men bearing ominoustoo good to be true flags. More like too beautiful. Both of them!

Eeeeeeeek! She bit her lower lip and stifled the squeal in her throat. One of them could

be hersoulmate. And there wasnothingwrong with hoping it! There was no fretting. She'd jumped from the cliff without thinking and there's no turning back.Let the colors show themselves, let the moment paint the picture, let the canvas breathe! Hands off!

She snuck her way back to the living room, biting her knuckle when she saw he was still there. The dark one. She'd painted them long ago the first time she'd dreamed them. Mr. Kade was surely the light one and Mr. Kohl was surely the dark. She sucked in a breath. Kohl even meantblack!What did Kade mean?

She angled her head, watching him stand like a statue before the window, hands in his black slacks. Oh, my, whathair. So thick and shiny and... black. So Kohl. Like his eyes. No, not like his eyes. They were dark but there was a color in them. She was dying to see him in proper lighting to see what it was.

Her hunk oflightflowed through her like a perfectly mixed pour medium of vibrant colors. And her dark hunk flowed through her like... well, he didn't flow at all, he was more like... a lump of clay covered in oil. You just wanted to get your fingers on it and dig in, feel it all up and down and around till it revealed its well-kept secrets.

She jerked back into the hallway when he turned. She tiptoed her way back to the bedroom for one last look around. Holy smokes, this was all about to become her past. Her entire life.

Stop thinking!

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She snapped to attention and grabbed her suitcases, hauling them to the door where she forced herself not to stop, not to turn, not to look, not to see.

Forward.Forward motions only.

The second Kade left, their reckless art-beacon lit up the spiritual stratosphere requiring Kaos to somehow cover the blinding mess. But without being part of her, he couldn't create a shield, and to become part of her required his Lust or his Rage. He wasn't about to let Lust attempt anything with this one.

Rage it was.

"I'm ready!" she announced behind him.

Kaos pulled dark fury from the severed places inside him and coiled it into a surgical weapon. He turned and walked over, stopping before her upturned face, watching the power enter her spirit like a blade sinking into water. He stared into her eyes, following it in, ensuring it filled every crevice before locking it down with ruthless, silent finality. Nothing could trespass without consequence now. He could track her through the power itself—no more need for his dulled human senses.

"Are you okay?"

Her pulse suddenly brushed against the inside of his Rage and every part of him flinched. He held her green gaze, unable to pull out fast enough, the Rage inside him

clamping down, sharpening his focus till it cut.

He shifted his weight and broke the stare. “They’ll be here in fifteen minutes,” he said as he returned to the window.

Her slow, measured breath filled his ears as his mind moved along the strength of the connection. He ran into a spill of reckless excitement—hers. Too fast, too bright, skimming the edges of his mind.

Her attention shifted and Kade’s face surfaced. A flicker of admiration. Her focus turned to him then. Kaos stilled. The pull was heavier. Messier.

He quickly erected a second wall, this one inside himself, blocking her noisy humanity from the work zone. He listened again then took in a measured breath at encountering silence.

Lock down complete.

Chapter Two

The helicopter blades beat above them like a war drum pounding the sky. Kaos sat still, knees wide, back straight, one hand resting on his thigh, the other—trapped in her death clutch. Both her hands strangled his like a life line while her pulse rapped against his skin, soft but frantic.

He kept his gaze forward, anchored on the horizon, but shifted the weight of his power. He eased the wall apart, the thinnest seam of spiritual access to measure her instability.

The entry point exploded like a paint bomb. He flinched inside at the yellow panic, the purple laughter. Blue dreams too big for her body, thoughts that bounced like

marbles in a metal tin. One rolled past him—Does he like hot sauce? What if he's vegan? Is this a military thing? Will I have to do pushups?

She inhaled too deep and imagined the entire helicopter plunging. Then came a scene of her rescuing him. Dramatic. Heroic. Unnecessary.

Kaos blinked as another image followed—her wondering if his eyelashes were real. Then came an entire spiral about whether he used conditioner or just had naturally blessed strands.

She shifted in her seat. Her knees touched his. She didn't notice.

Inside her mind, three squirrels were named after spices and had a job running her inner filing system. One wore glasses. One cursed. One sang. Loudly.

He narrowed the crack and the volume dropped while the colors remained. Bright. Reckless. Free.

A slow flush of red curled through the connection—shame. Embarrassment. Her panic that he might feel her inner chaos. Her worry about being too much. Not enough. And somehow both at once.

She squeezed his hand harder. Her head turned. She looked up at him.

He stayed still, gaze locked forward. Rage curled tighter inside him, coiling away from the light but unable to pull free.

Her gaze shifted back down and a wave of relief rolled out. Then came another blast of curiosity—Is he an assassin? Does he smell like cinnamon? Is it a sin to want to lick his jawline?

He closed the wall. Fast. Hard.

But the scent of her stayed in his head. Wildflowers. Wet stone. Strawberry wax. His hand twitched. She held on tighter.

Another thought slipped past the barrier before it sealed.

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If I die right now, at least it was beside him.

Kaos shifted his grip, fingers adjusting inside hers. The Rage inside him stilled. Not gone. Just...listening.

The helicopter pitched slightly. Her shoulder bumped his and she apologized inside her mind, then repeated it three times in three different languages.

He didn't move. But he didn't let go either.

The ride leveled, hum steady beneath them. Her grip didn't ease. Kaos kept his hand still, his Rage a quiet coil, his mind holding distance.

He'd closed the wall. He didn't trust what lived behind it.

She startled and the wall cracked open wide. The wind rocked them sideways, just enough lift to make her jolt, her body lean fully into him. A sharp gasp. Then a muffled laugh. She clutched his hand tighter.

"Oh God," she breathed, voice shaking. "If we go down, tell my plants I tried." She nodded to herself. "They'd want closure. Especially the cactus. Name's Edgar. Very clingy." Her words came fast. "You ever ride one of these before? Of course you have. You've probably jumped out of them. On fire. Holding a puppy." Her eyes widened. "You look like the type."

He held his tongue still.

She sighed. “Figures.”

The wall slipped open again, and in came her mind. A fucking carnival. Hot pink thoughts twisted around chartreuse daydreams. Purple dripped down memory frames of his mouth. Those lips. Good Lord, did they come with insurance? How is that even legal? Bet he doesn’t even try to be that hot. Probably wakes up glowing.

Her hand shifted. Her thumb brushed his. She felt it. Yup. Yup. That’s illegal. Entire hand feels like sex and apocalypse and something I’d ruin my life for.

She tilted her head, studying his jaw now. He probably tastes like dark roast and fury. I’d take that caffeine hit straight to the ovaries.

Kaos narrowed the crack when his Lust quirked an envious brow.

But her thoughts still streamed through like spilled ink. Kade is hot too. But like... lemonade and justice. This one? Her gaze shifted up. This one is whiskey and war.

His Lust watched closely. Felt her thighs tense through the seat.

If I had to die underneath one of them—wait, no. If I had to LIVE underneath one of them—

The Rage inside him growled and he slammed the wall shut.

Silence.

He stared ahead while his Lust prowled restless.

Her breath slowed. Her grip loosened half an inch.

Turbulence hit and she flinched so hard her shoulder slammed into his.

“Oh my God, oh my God,” she breathed, closing her eyes, back to strangling his hand. “Probably just the pilot doing that thing. What’s it called? Oh right. Attempted murder.” Her nervous laughter filled the space. “Sorry,” she muttered. “I babble when I’m panicking. Or happy. Or bored. Or alive.”

The wall cracked open again with a full color flood. Fear slammed through first. Not fear of death. Fear of dying before I get to know what that mouth tastes like.

Kaos exhaled carefully through his nose.

What’s wrong with me? Nothing. I’m fine. Just human. And doomed. Holy thighs, he’s probably a god. Or demon. Or both. Demon-god. Sex demon-god. Okay now you’re spiraling. Paint it out. Paint it out.

Kaos stood stone still inside himself as she mentally painted his hands in charcoal, his mouth in gold leaf, his shoulders in black oil smears. A mixed media shrine. A six-foot sculpture of his back muscles made from twisted rebar and melted crayons. A stop-motion claymation erotica starring his jawline.

Kaos clenched his hand when Lust pushed harder at his pores. She took it as comfort.

God I like him. I like him way too much. I’d let him rearrange my furniture. And my spine. Preferably at the same time.

The barrier bent under the weight of her need. This wasn’t just lust or awe. It was something richer. Deeper. A need to matter. To be seen. To hold something impossible and call it hers. And there was a fluctuation of guilt and shame, and no hesitation where it should surely be.

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And color. Always color.

The copter dipped again and she gasped, turning her face into his shoulder without thinking. “Sorry,” she whispered, eyes wide.

Kaos let the wall stay open a moment longer. Long enough to feel her wonder. Long enough to feel himself unraveling inside it.

Kaos hadn’t moved for ten miles. His body stayed fixed, left elbow anchored against the door, right hand resting over his thigh like a loaded trap. His gaze never left the windshield. Not the driver. Not the window. But her. The loudest thing in the vehicle even when she wasn’t speaking.

She tried to be quiet at first. Gave it a good five minutes of pretending to enjoy the scenery. Then the nudges came.

“Do you think they’ll give me an art room?” she asked, voice light, hopeful. “I mean, they probably will. Right? Feels like a place that would have space for that.”

He held his jaw closed but she smiled like he’d answered.

“Yeah, exactly. Even if it’s just a small one. I can make do. I’ve worked out of closets. Once made a whole exhibit in a bathroom stall. True story.”

She crossed her legs the other way, rested her hands in her lap, and tried again.

“You don’t really talk much, huh?” She turned slightly, putting herself in Lust’s peripheral sight. “That’s fine. Mystery’s good. People talk too much. Not you, though,” she said with a snort and chuckle. “You probably only speak when it matters. Like... ‘the enemy’s dead’ or ‘duck.’”

He let his eyes shift. Just enough to see the curve of her cheek when she smiled at her own nonsense.

“You’re not laughing, but inside I feel like you think that’s funny. Or maybe you’re annoyed. Or both. I can work with that.”

She turned back to her window.

His eyes moved closer.

“Do you ever get tired of being the strong, silent type? Like, just once, do you want to break character and be like, ‘Jaxi, please stop talking or I’ll throw myself from the moving vehicle’?”

Kaos breathed in. Held it. Then let it go. Slow.

“Okay real question—if you had to live in any movie for a year, which one would it be? I’d pick something super colorful. Like a Wes Anderson film. Everything organized but slightly unhinged. You’d pick something violent, I bet. Probably in black and white. No soundtrack. Just slow-motion explosions and betrayal.”

Her foot tapped once against the floorboard. A small, restless beat. The kind you didn’t notice until it synced with your pulse.

“You’re judging me right now. I can feel it. You’re thinking, ‘Why won’t this girl shut up?’ And I get it. But also—maybe you’re secretly impressed. That I keep going.

That I'm still talking, even while you look like you're deciding where to bury my body."

She paused. Pressed her lips together. Then laughed softly.

"That's fine," she allowed. "You'd probably do it artistically. Like, leave a note carved in bone. Very classy."

Kaos kept his eyes forward, but inside, his grip on his Lust and Rage frayed with every word. She was filling the space like a force of nature. Painting the silence. Sculpting his responses out of thin air. Holding both ends of the conversation like it was a duet and he was just the instrument.

"I'll shut up now," she said.

But she didn't.

"Unless you like it. Do you like it? You can blink once for yes. Or just keep staring into the void like it owes you money."

Her laugh came again. Quieter this time. Almost shy.

"I think you're probably brilliant. Not book-smart brilliant. But battlefield-brilliant. Like you see everything. Catalog it. Weaponize it. I bet you've already figured me out. Every weakness. Every strength. Probably know what I look like naked just from my posture."

Kaos closed his eyes. Not because of her words. But because of the way her truth hit harder than her jokes. And because he didn't know what she looked like naked and this had his Rage boiling to avenge that ignorance, while his Lust sharpened the blade.

She breathed out slowly. “I talk too much when I’m nervous. You know that by now. But it’s not just nerves. You’re just... really hard to ignore.”

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Lust snaked around his muscles and bones.

“I’m gonna keep talking until you say something. Or at least flinch. Or maybe you’ll combust.”

Rage tracked her racing pulse.

“That would be exciting. Hope you do it without fire though—I’ve got flammable hair.”

Kaos finally turned his head, just enough for her to see the slow narrowing of his gaze.

She stared back. Eyes big. Blue. Brimming with amusement and wonder and the kind of chaos he’d once called home.

But that home was gone.

“You push for conversation like it doesn’t come with a price,” Kaos said, opening that wall inside him as he anchored his gaze in hers. “So maybe I’ll shove my fingers past your lips...” Her mouth opened with a soft inhale as he allowed his gaze to move there. “....drag them along your tongue... like a promise.” He raised his eyes back to hers, his Lust and Rage burning through his veins. “...and fuck your mouth until even your silence knows who it belongs to.”

She didn’t blink. She couldn’t. Nothing on her face moved at all. She stared right at him like she hadn’t heard a thing. But she had heard. Every word. He’d placed them

in every single egg inside her quivering ovaries.

She turned her face to the front. Then looked out of her window. Gave a little shrug like she was still thinking about birds.

Kaos faced his own window and opened the wall between them.

Oh my fucking God. Okay. Okay. That was... okay. Don't react. Don't flinch. You flinch, he wins. You blush, he wins. You pass out, he wins twice.

A smile claimed the corner of his mouth.

Was that real? Did that just happen? Is that legal? Was that a spell? That was a spell. He saw me. He saw me. He actually looked and saw me. Do not smile. Do not melt. Do not imagine it. Too late. You're already imagining it. His hand. That voice. That weight. That stare.

Be cool. You're fine. You're just... in a vehicle with the most beautiful man in the universe and he just said that to you and you're breathing like a pig in a paper bag.

Kaos closed the wall when a rogue urge to laugh hit him. He took in a breath, rage curling tight around the want she put in him.

She stayed angled toward the window, body still, but her pulse beat against the air like a drum too loud to ignore. His Lust reclined in satisfaction, relishing her glowing silence. She'd been burned clean through... and she never wanted the fire to stop.

Kaos leaned back against the door, jaw locked, hands flexing once, then twice. He had no name for the sensation clawing up his spine. He only knew one thing with certainty. He should never have spoken. Because now he wanted to finish what he started.

Jaxi stood in front of the cottage, still trying to remember how to breathe like a person whose mouth hadn't just been the subject of a threat she now desperately wanted fulfilled.

She'd kept it together. Somehow. Through the meet and greet, the introductions, the smiling, the nodding. She even remembered some names. Maybe.

But now that she was here—actually here—alone with a forest behind her and cottages all around, she could feel it again. His words. Still in her mouth. Still echoing.

“For you, and for your temporary assistant until your permanent one arrives,” the nice lady said, both hands sweeping toward the cottage like it was a prize on a game show. Sheryl. Head of something. Beautiful, confident, probably very good at her job—and very into Mr. Tall, Dark, and Verbal Destruction.

But who could blame her?

Kohl didn't say a word the whole walk-through. Not one. Sheryl tried though. Oh, how she tried. Her voice got softer every time she addressed him. Lower. Suggestive.

“And this door here is in case of emergencies,” she murmured, aiming herself at him like he was the emergency.

Jaxi looked around like she was part of the tour. “Very nice,” she offered, because someone had to say something besides inhale and ogle.

Sheryl barely blinked in her direction.

“And if you need anything at all,” she added to Kohl, “each residence has a list of all the numbers you could possibly want or need. Mine’s under...” Something. Jaxi missed it. She was too busy watching Kohl absorb it all like a wall absorbs impact. No reaction. No shift. Just intensity.

Boy oh boy, the look all her efforts got her. He was pure silence. A thunderstorm that didn’t break. A temptation that didn't blink.

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Jaxi bit back her grin. She should be offended for her. She was surely not. If he'd spoken to her, she'd have been offended. Since he was Mr. Frost Bite with her.

Up until he shoved his fingers past my lips and roped my tongue with only words.

"I'll be in my residence," Kohl suddenly said, his voice a thunderclap straight to her pulse. His eyes locked on hers. "Keep your phone with you at all times."

Oh. Mercy. There was that voice again. She nodded, probably too fast. "Yes sir," she murmured, like he'd just issued orders she hoped came with restraints.

And just like that, he was gone. Vanished into his half of the house like he hadn't wrecked her breath, her thoughts, and her entire concept of acceptable foreplay.

"Well, and that actually concludes our little tour," Sheryl announced with a polite smile, already turning for the door.

"Are you sure you don't want tea?" Jaxi called out, trying to sound normal. Civilized. Like she wasn't moments away from melting into a carpet of hormonal paint splatter.

"Oh, thank you honey, but I've got tons of work waiting for me still. Rain check!"

Jaxi stood in the doorway and waved. "Thank you, Miss Sheryl," she called after her, then muttered under her breath, "See you on the next rainy day in never."

She shut the door behind her and let the grin finally explode. A real one this time. Giddy. Unfiltered. Possibly unstable.

Then she whispered to herself, voice cracking with awe and disbelief, “What just happened?” Her knees nearly buckled all over again.

Chapter Three

“How long is soon,” Kaos demanded into the phone, his voice tight, heat laced beneath the surface.

Kildare chuckled, sharp and amused. “Why? Are you late for some life I’m not aware of? Or is she too difficult to babysit?”

“It’s a straightforward question, Seraphim. Why is a being like me babysitting this... human avalanche of emotional rainbows?” He lowered his voice, the words scraping his pride. “She has needs I cannot meet.”

“Oh?” Kildare pushed, his voice all teeth now.

“Read my mind, Seraphim,” Kaos bit out.

A pause. Then a sharp hiss. “Seems I can’t yet,” Kildare admitted. “So how’s the threat situation?”

“I had to create a shield with my Rage. And that plugged me into her thought parade. Which required a second wall.”

“Have mercy.”

Kaos growled at the humor layered under his brother’s voice. “Her smile presses against the barrier like heat. Her optimism is crawling through the cracks like vines trying to bloom in blood.”

“Thankfully, you’ve got god powers over your Rage and Lust.”

“Powers, yes. Control?” Kaos whipped his head around at the knock on the door.

“She’s fucking knocking. I have to go.”

He hung up and dialed her number.

“Uh, not sure how to answer the phone,” she called from outside the door. “That’s why I’m here. Sorry.”

He stormed to the door and opened it, snatched the phone from her hand, and lifted it in demonstration. “This.” He handed it back and shut the door, dialing her number again.

“Hello?” she answered brightly.

“Good.”

“I did it!” she cheered.

“Is that all?”

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“Uhhh, yes, I think so. Oh,” she added, “I was wondering if you wanted to join me for dinner, I’m cooking—”

“I’m fasting. Goodnight.”

He hung up and redialed Kildare, pacing.

“All good?” Kildare asked.

“How long until my replacement?”

A pause. “Uhhhh... well. There is no replacement. It was just for optics.”

Kaos’s rage coiled so fast he had to hang up before the phone shattered in his hand.

Another knock.

“I’m so very sorry,” she called. “I think I locked myself out.”

He opened the door and found her arms crossed, face tilted in that sheepish way that somehow kept crawling under his skin.

“Where’s your phone?”

“It’s in the... house,” she said, rubbing her arms and shivering.

“I can’t unlock it if it’s not here.”

She frowned. Then gasped. “Not my phone! I’m locked out of the house!”

He stared at her for three seconds then made his way to her apartment. At the door, he took hold of the handle, pulled in a microscopic thread of rage, and shoved with his shoulder.

Fuck. The door snapped clean from the frame.

“Oh my God!” she gasped. “I didn’t mean—I should call—”

“No,” Kaos cut in, leaning the door against the wall like it had offended him. “Go to my apartment. We’ll call tomorrow.”

“I can just lock my bedroom door if—”

“You’ll stay in my apartment,” he said, tone final. “I’ll stay here.”

She glanced around, froze, then cursed. “Shit!” She sprinted to the kitchen. “Just—let me turn this mess off. I ruined it.” She spun the stove knob off then turned and disappeared through a doorway. “Just getting clothes,” she called.

The barrier he’d erected created a blur of her again. He closed his eyes, thinned it slightly. Her sadness hit like cold breath. Disappointment. Bitter and pointless.

Was it the food?

“I have food,” he called, hating this odd need to fix something he hadn’t broken.

“Thank you,” she replied, her warmth dragging claws through his restraint. “I’m not really that hungry.”

She reappeared, an entire suitcase in hand.

“It’s for one night,” he reminded.

She paused mid-step, like the words had hit her in the gut. She set the suitcase on the floor right where she stood then dropped down and yanked it open. She ripped things out in handfuls, a flash of black lace summoning his Lust.

She stood, arms full of clothes, breathing hard. “There. One night’s worth.” Her eyes met his, clear and cutting. “Does that make you feel better, Mr. Kohl?”

He stared.

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She stepped toward him, mouth tight, eyes lit with defiance. “Now’s a good time to stop bullying the tiny girl half your size.”

Her challenge set off a pulse behind his fangs. He tore down the barrier and dove into her.

She hit his power like fire, emotions curling up around him like smoke and sugar and something darker underneath. His body locked as he went deeper. The air changed. Heat twisted with sweetness. Sharpness with surrender.

He slid his tongue along his teeth and tasted her conflict. Not dark. Not innocent. Filthy and clean. His cock throbbed. His Rage whispered for control. His Lust whispered for clarity.

Then he felt it—her fear. But it was no match for what she craved. Raw need. Unfiltered.

“My apologies, Miss Juniper,” he said, forcing his gaze from hers. “This job is new to me. Forgive my ignorance.” He dropped to the floor and began folding her clothes with surgical focus.

“I... I can do that,” she said softly, kneeling beside him and snatching the clothing away from him while clutching her clothes in her other arm.

He let her. The wall still down, her thoughts danced in color and contradiction. She wanted to hide. She wanted to be seen. She didn’t want him to see and yet absolutely did.

A black piece from her bundle slipped free.

They both reached.

He was faster.

He gripped the fabric, intent on handing it over. But something old and possessive jerked inside him. He refused to release it.

She grabbed for it and his hand snapped closed over hers as if she'd triggered a snare.

She froze in his grasp as her scent hit him like fuel on an open flame.

"Let... go," she whispered, her voice bleeding with need for the opposite.

He released her.

She bolted.

He stood slowly, still holding the lace. It wrapped through his power like a brand as he contemplated her reaction. It wasn't sin. It was shame tangled with being seen and fear of what he saw. And terror of rejection. He paused at the final clue. Her arousal. It was so potent it couldn't hide.

He returned to his apartment, lace still in hand, Lust prowling in his groin. He sat and followed the tether between them. She was in his bathroom.

The lace lay in his palm, fingers curled around it.

He lifted it to his face....

Inhaled slowly....

Absorbed....

Warmth and life. And the breath of a hunger so deep it scarred. And shame. Woven in the silk. Traces of neglected arousal buried in the fabric. He breathed it, tagging every layer. Recorded every confession. She was like a child with a tear in her spirit. Lost in the woods, dropping crumbs of herself. Not realizing something dark and terrible followed her. Gobbling each cry for help. Feeding his own starved appetite. Building an eternal meal plan.

He slammed the wall back up and stood, sliding the lace in his pocket. He made his way to the kitchen and opened the fridge, roaming his gaze over items, realizing he lacked particular skills. What had she attempted to cook?

“You push for conversation like it doesn’t come with a price—so maybe I’ll shove my fingers past your lips, drag them along your tongue like a promise, and fuck your mouth until even your silence knows who it belongs to.”

Fuck the night.

He pulled his phone out and dialed Kildare. A being who didn’t need to eat but could.

“Yes,” he answered on the second ring, his tone sounding urgent.

“You have updates?”

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“Do I have updates,” he muttered, grunting then releasing a breath. “Sure. Our beloved Earthly Kiss Ass King is enjoying life while we perform actual work.”

“We?”

His breathing stalled for a second. “I know you think I’m preening in some mirror while you’re hanging out at the resort with your human paradox, pitch black feelings all hurt.”

“Fuck you, Seraph,” he muttered, glancing over his shoulder for signs of the tiny fleshling. “I don’t care what you’re doing or if you’re preening anywhere. I just need to know if you can cook.”

“Cook?”

He headed for the back patio. “What’s going on, Seraph,” he demanded quietly, shutting the door behind him. “Are those angelic tears I hear?”

“You’re the one crying over babysitting a tiny human, brother.”

Kaos stepped outside and walked down the steps. “Come say it where I can see you. Hot pants.”

He laughed quietly and took a deep breath. “I’m sitting on top of a three-story building, tagging demon mules. What about you?”

“Just trying to cover the asset without touching it.”

A pause and then a testy, “And that’s hard?”

“It’s an explosion of messy.”

“Hm.”

“What does that sound mean, Seraph? I can’t read your ruby mind anymore and don’t care to guess.”

“It means you may have to get your precious hands dirty, Dark-Fuck-Lord. You’re to cover this asset. That means she stays purehearted, untouched, and focused on the job—being a creative artist.”

Untouched.

“Define untouched.”

“She’s in her prime, she’s beautiful, and she’s a target for human demons. Your job is keeping them away from her.”

“You do remember what I am?”

“I know what you have control over. So, exercise it.”

Kaos sat on the steps drawing in a breath of the cool evening air. “Why take that risk?”

“A question for Raviel, not me.”

Kaos tasted the meaning in his tone. “So, you agree it’s a risk.”

He scoffed lightly. “Putting you over a female after having your soul ripped from one? Just a little, yes.”

He considered that. “Maybe it makes me the least risky.” The fantasy fell from his lips, burning his ears with envy.

“Don’t be arrogant,” Kade said. “It makes me the least risky. I’m the one who had to rip our souls from our chests. The only difference is, yours was shiny and new, mine was...”

“Decrepit?” Kaos offered before his ruby stepbrother could get any more dramatic. “I can’t remember what the bond felt like,” he confessed, the words equally hollow.

He got a quiet, low, “I remember it partly.”

Kaos raised his gaze to the sky, finding it filled with a million diamonds. He murmured, “Like a thing you know but didn’t experience.”

“Something like that,” he said on a breath that hinted of eternal fatigue.

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“I angered the little human,” Kaos said, ready to change the subject.

He gave a low chuckle. “And you want to say sorry with food?”

No, he wanted to say sorry with pleasure. “She has to eat.”

“And she can’t cook?”

Kaos grinned a little as he stood, angling his head toward the patio. “She locked herself out of her apartment and burned her food.”

A long, dramatic sigh. “We could rotate jobs, I guess,” he suggested.

The genuine offer translated as pure threat that required crushing. “I surely can’t be trusted around things I’m allowed to kill,” Kaos considered. “But... it’s difficult to guard an asset when you don’t really know the asset.”

“You’ll have to make do with a general shield,” he warned lightly.

“I am.”

The silence spread then thickened. “What do you want to say to me, Kohl? I’m still burdened with certain knowing abilities.”

Kaos figured as much, but to what degree? Not mind reading, fortunately.

“Ignorance isn’t always bliss,” he said, deciding not to share more.

“Well don’t I fucking know it,” he assured. “See you soon.”

Kaos stared at the phone when he hung up, turning his focus to his forbidden dilemma of soft silk. It would help if he knew more about humans. He’d only known his Queen.

The Queen. No longer his. And yet... he was still hers. Shattered pieces of a vengeful being. Orbiting the one who’d breathed life into his soul. The one from which he’d tasted humanity. It was just enough to make him crave it with every fiber of his heart.

And loathe it with every ounce of his Rage.

Jaxi stared in a love-struck daze at the clothes she’d yanked from her suitcase in her blind anger. She was staring into his eyes again in her mind. She’d known they were special and had tried so many times to see why and how they were. But she’d only gotten a few seconds here and there, enough to make her need to see so much more!

She held her hand against her chest, recalling the feeling of his warm, strong fingers, imprisoning it like a helpless bird. While he stared right into her eyes! Her breath slowly left her as her heart pounded in her chest. Pools of passion and fury. And his mouth. Glory in heaven his beautiful, perfect, mouth. She’d almost kissed him. Kissed him!

She returned to the memory of his decadent gaze and how it burned right through her. “You push for conversation like it doesn’t come with a price—so maybe I’ll shove my fingers past your lips, drag them along your tongue like a promise, and fuck your mouth until even your silence knows who it belongs to.”

She wanted those words tattooed across every inch of her body in invisible ink only

she could see. But... had he meant it? Honestly... even if he didn't mean it, he'd said it. And those words were alive and breathing in her soul. They were hers to do whatever she wished and she wished to hallucinate that he did mean them. That he lusted for every inch of her the way she did him.

She pressed her fingers to her smiling lips. He was so very cold and walled off and angry. Furious. Her joy ebbed with careful curiosity. Why was he? That's what she desperately wanted to know. His rage acted like a hook in her chest, pulling her to him. Making her want to excavate and discover this dark, terrible secret he harbored. He was like a madman. A murderer. A psychopath. And she wanted him more than she'd ever wanted anything. To unwrap the layers of pitch black until she reached the colors that hid beneath.

She sucked in a huge breath, remembering. He had her panties! Oh God! Oh God, what did he do with them? How would he return them?

She escaped her fantasy, breathless, focusing on the clothes then snatched them up. Maybe she'd picked them on purpose. Maybe she was still at that cliff, thinking of jumping. She grinned at imagining it. Jumping right on her horribly mean, beautiful bodyguard.

He would probably insult her or... smack her. Or worse—quit!

Treachery. She'd rather be smacked.

She should cook him something for... for trying to be nice. That's what he'd done at the end. He'd come to his delicious senses.

Miss Juniper.

Yes, silly Miss Juniper. That's how he saw her.

Once he got to know her, he'd see she was not silly, not even a little. She was something else. Something he'd never imagined before. The exception to the rules, the special occasion. She was a raging phenomenon. That's what she was. She was not silly.

Jaxi's heart nearly exploded in her chest at finding her fantasy bodyguard sitting at the island. "Good," she gasped, hurrying to the fridge and opening it. "I was about to go looking for you." She began pulling food out and setting it on the counter. "I was a bit rude to you and thought, you know, the night is still young and not lost if we don't allow it to be. I'm not a chef or anything," she said, avoiding his eyes lest she fall into them and make a love-struck fool of herself. "But I can wield a spatula as good as anybody." She pulled one from the jar of cooking utensils and waved it in the air, demonstrating.

He sat with his forearms on the counter, studiously investigating the meaning of her freak show.

She continued on, determined to paint the moment with all the colors present. Curiosity, fear, joy, excitement. And lust wrapped in mystery. "I'm really surprised at how well they stocked these fridges," she said, keeping the tone easy and conversational, something he either knew nothing about or hated. Maybe both.

"I don't eat."

She paused, egg carton mid-air.

"At night," he added. "Usually," he further added.

She continued on her mission, her guts a-churning at that little addendum. "At night, huh," she mumbled, getting mayonnaise and lunchmeat next. "Statements like that

will get the otherworldly police after you.”

He continued watching her—least her peripheral said he was. “Otherworldly police.”

She gave him a glance and grin. “What planet are you from? I never did ask.” She pulled a stick of butter from the pack, finding his digging gaze all over her.

“Earth,” he answered finally, his sincerity making her laugh.

“You’re funny,” she said, unhooking one of the pans hanging above the stove. “I knew you were hiding good stuff.” She found the cabinet with spices and tiptoed in her indecent sleep shorts to peer at the shelf.

“Always too short. I need a stool,” she complained, glancing over her shoulder, finding his gaze exactly where she’d hoped. Her heart pounded when his stare remained locked on her butt, a hard edge to his features that could’ve been mistaken for anger. But there was something else, something that defined the look. It was hungry. And it burned all her private parts till they tingled and ached.

She blindly took things from the cabinet and transferred them next to the stove.

“Why do you think I come from another planet?”

His tone matched the look she’d seen. Deep. Thick. Hot.

She realized in that second that he was the one. He was the one she’d give her virginity to.

“What are you looking at?”

Her breath froze at realizing she was staring at him. She swallowed. “I was... your

eyes,” she went with, tearing her gaze away. “You might be hazardous to cook around,” she realized, turning on the stove.

“Why?”

Why. This was good. He was talking. Trying. And seemed genuinely clueless. But it was a legitimate question. One she’d usually never have an issue with answering. It was why she was still single. No man could tolerate her honesty. “Many reasons,” she began, smearing butter onto the skillet.

“How many?”

How many, not what reasons. Interesting. But that was the difference with him. There was no arrogance or falsehood, all brutal honesty, like it’s all he knew or was trained to be. “Why don’t we count them together,” she suggested with a smile, opening the carton of eggs and cracking one into the pan. “First reason: you’re drop dead gorgeous. How I’m standing here and not dead is an abstract painting in impossible motion. And two,” she hurried before she lost her nerve. “You’re like an addictive puzzle I want to figure out which requires me to look at and examine closely which is...bad manners outside of my work.”

“I don’t care where you place your eyes, Miss Juniper.”

She nodded, cracking another egg into the pan. “You sound very genuine and sincere and yet,” she murmured. “I hear much more, the same way I see much more in colors, and taste much more in textures, and feel much more and smell much more than most ever will or do. And yet, with you, I’m running into... barriers that are locking me out.”

She lightly sprinkled salt, casting a glance up and finding him laying into her with that hot, hungry stare.

“Tell me what you can see? Human.”

Human. She giggled on that one. He was playing now, and that was good. A crack in the ice façade. “I can see a man who has a lot to hide. Many secrets he’s holding that make him...very angry. More than angry. Furious,” she corrected, a smile twitching on her mouth as she peeked at him.

Chapter Four

Lust wound its way around Kaos’ vocal cords, forcing him to stifle it. His little paradox stood there, poking every inch of his powers with her words. And now her body was in on the assault. With every exchange, he realized there was something exclusive about her. And this difference was... threatening. But how, in what way, and why? And who was threatened? Her or him?

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Surely her, his Lust and Rage assured.

The urge to step away and call Kildare hit him with a startling force. And then came the knock on the door.

Her gaze snapped from his and his powers torpedoed to the intruder on the other side of entrance.

Kildare.

Kaos raked his eyes down her body then froze on her pussy. A possessive growl ruptured his lungs at the outline of her delicate petals under the white clinging material. Now he needed to spin her around and compare which provoked his Lust more, her pouty ass or delicate pussy. He remembered he had her panties in his pocket. Which meant she had none.

Another knock.

Fuckingseraphim.

“Get dressed,” he ordered.

Her instant obedience marked something in his blood as he made his way to the door. He paused then opened it four inches, getting met with Kildare in Kade form, brows raised with suspicion.

“What,” Kaos demanded quietly.

“Something told me you might need assistance.”

“With what?”

“I think you know.”

Stupid Seraph. “I know very few things with you, dear brother.”

“Not with me, with you.”

Kaos opened the door and pushed Kildare back when he thought that meant enter. He stepped outside and shut it. “Explain it plainly to the black-blooded moron.”

“You cannot touch her. Not while you’re working.”

The sudden loophole tilted his head. “You’re implying I can while not working.”

“You can’t use that power without creating a flare.”

“I can shield.”

“Not that, you can’t.”

He didn’t understand. “Why not?”

“The same reason we had to sever. She won’t be able to hide it.”

Another loophole that put his Rage and Lust racing in stupid circles. Kildare’s pained look kicked against his Rage. “You have a solution you want to share, Firefly?”

“Well, I don’t, but Kohl might,” he said carefully.

Kohl. Kaos stared at him. “Is there a reason you can’t just come out and fucking tell me?”

“It’s really something you have to figure out,” he informed quietly, raising his brows more, like it might turn him into a genius.

“What does Kohl have that I don’t?” Kaos asked, getting Kildare’s eager nods.

“Good question,” he encouraged, watching him.

“I’m fucking Kohl,” he muttered, wanting to strangle him.

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“No,” he said quietly. “You’re Kaos. Kohl is your alias. Your human alias.”

Kaos paused at the careful stress he put on human.

“We have to use that to stay undercover?” Kildare further hinted.

It finally came to him. “So I can touch her. Just not with my power.”

Kildare grinned. “You’re still a genius.”

“You’re mocking me,” he marveled darkly. “I don’t know anything about being human and yet I’m having to guard a female one.

Kildare palmed his shoulder, fingers digging in. “Consider this training. And she’s the perfect teacher.” He gave an exaggerated wink right at him as Kaos tried to figure out what this scenario with her would look like in reality.

“No power at all,” Kaos double checked.

“Only the power of human intuition.” Back to hinting.

Kaos realized, “She has nearly angelic intuition.”

He leaned in then paused before muttering, “And so do you.”

A final hint. Which Kaos understood. He’d use only the abilities a human had. And he’d let her teach him. Passively. Which could take...

Kildare gave a sympathetic groan. "As your best, favorite brother, I'm going to give you a little gift. One I'm allowed," he assured, like Kaos cared about his rules. "You ready for it? It's coming like a download. Matrix style."

Before Kaos could ask what matrix style was, his being jolted with the sudden dump of knowledge. Kaos breathed through the onslaught, his brain cataloging everything rapid fire. When it was done, Kaos realized he had a lifetime worth of strange data.

"I only gave you a decade," Kildare said, shocking Kaos. "But it's enough to keep you from sounding like you're literally from another planet. You're welcome but you owe me."

Kaos searched all his new knowledge and realized what he lacked.

"I left that part empty so you could fill it with experience," he explained, giving him another wink that felt like an eyelid assault.

Flaming cocksucker. "You gave me all this useless human bile and not a single thing regarding this female?"

He admonished with a pointer finger at him. "Three things. You used the word shit, which is part of your updated vocabulary. You now have basic food recipes you can build on. And you have a lexicon of this generation's jargon. I gave you enough to get you going, a push on your bike without training wheels."

Kaos examined said jargon, perplexed. "Is this another version of English?"

He answered with a wry grin. "Welcome to the end of mankind." He performed his signature molestation, hand firmly gripping Kaos' shoulder. "I'll call you tomorrow and see how you fared. Try to relax and enjoy the ride."

Kaos watched Mr. Wink and Pat stride off. He paused before going back in, sending his power through the link to find her. Still in the bedroom. His bedroom. The term good girls suddenly hit with enough lust to bring him to his knees in orgasm. He doubted it was his generational download that informed him it was exactly what he needed. A mega, factory reset climax. Only without the influence of his power and the soul-anchor it came with. That attachment could never happen again. Ever.

He entered and locked the door, using only his ears to try and learn what he could while making his way back to the kitchen area. Eyeing the ingredients she'd taken out, his basic cooking knowledge launched ideas for most of it.

"Is the coast clear?" she called from the room as he paused with the urge to wash his hands. A human vulnerability. Germs.

Did his body come with those?

"It is," he called back.

She stepped out of the hallway and he paused at seeing she hadn't changed. Because she wanted him to see her. In every way she could be seen.

"Sit," he ordered.

Necessary etiquette popped into his head.

"Please," he added, eyeing the smile it brought to her lips while his Lust took measured notes.

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“Are you cooking for me?”

She liked that idea.

He sorted through the jargon in his head, settling on, “I’m going to try.”

“So, what are you making me?”

He turned on the stove and set it to a medium flame. “I’m going to attempt an omelet,” he announced or warned.

She sucked in an excited breath, folding her arms on the counter. “Is this your first time? It’s my first time.”

“It is,” he confessed, feeling like honesty would always be critical with her.

“This is great,” she praised, her tone begging his Lust. “It’s my first time to have a beautiful man cook for me.”

He nearly used his powers to discern how true that was as he searched the cabinets for the required items.

“A man has never cooked for you?” He found it hard to imagine. But not hard to hope.

“Hmmm, two have. But neither were beautiful.”

Beautiful. He was suddenly hungry for everything but food as he gave in to a partial smile, fumbling one of the mixing bowls he found.

“You probably get told that all that time by your many girlfriends?” she fished as he put his bowl on the counter.

“I don’t have a girlfriend. Or a wife,” he added, recalling that relationship status also. “What about you?” he returned, wanting to hear her talk about how available she was.

She sighed and propped her cheeks in both palms, elbows on the counter. “I’m twenty-six years old and honestly thought I’d be married with children by now.”

Interesting. Why the rush? “Why aren’t you?”

He opened the carton of eggs and took one out, peeking at the softness of her face and the contemplation in her brows.

“Because I never found the right one.”

“No?” he echoed, feeling the easy flow of communicating.

She shook her head. “Because I’m terrible at deciding things,” she explained, dropping her hands. “Do you know, I once painted a wall six times in a month because I couldn’t decide on a color?”

He realized smiling seemed easier and wondered if it was part of that human data download. “I did not know this. Process of elimination is a legitimate form of decision making.”

“Mmm...” She wrinkled her nose with a headshake. “More like I have a color disease. Or a choosing disease. With color,” she clarified. “I can’t seem to settle on

one in anything. I choose, yes, but every choice is second guessed, like a little... mental itch I have to scratch.” She suddenly tilted her head the other way, peering at him.

He was suddenly sorry he’d committed his clunky human faculties to something besides absorbing this moment. A bright, generational idea hit him. “What if I take you out to eat?” The moment he said it, he realized he lacked several things to make that possible. A vehicle. The ability to drive. And money.

“Oh my God, that would be amazing!” she gasped, locking him in tight to the offer. “Like a date? I haven’t been on a date in forever. It doesn’t have to be a date,” she hurried. “It can just be an outing with a friend. Unless you want to carry out your threat...” Her hands covered her face. “I did not just say that out loud.” She dropped them, revealing her happy smile, skin nearly red. “I would love a date. A dinner I mean.”

Fuck, he was double locked in now as his Lust spilled over and Rage plotted opportunities.

He’d have to make a call to King Ruby Cube. “Get dressed in something less... lethal,” he said after a struggle between era-choice words and straight up accuracy.

“Lethal?” she laughed, hopping off the stool. “Are you saying this outfit is dangerous?”

“It is,” he assured, locking gazes with her.

She widened her eyes. “You’re being serious,” she muttered, still smiling. “I’ll take that as a compliment?”

“It’s just a fact,” he said, not ready to admit his growing obsession. And her outfit

was lethal to the unfortunate soul belonging to the eyeballs that dared feast on her.

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She shrugged and her smile brightened as she spun and headed for the door. “Well, I’ll take it,” she said as she headed for the door. “As a fact, as a fable, as fury and folly.” With every step, her plump ass blew teasing kisses, and his Lust packed all of them in his cock.

“Wait,” he called, making his way to the adjoining door and unlocking it. “Through here.” He opened it and she strolled her way over, her joy lit up and locked on him.

She stopped before him and stared up.

He stared back.

The proximity brought an explosion of human chemicals, all demanding his powers to taste and discern.

He resisted.

“You’re protecting me?”

The question was simple and yet his Lust and Rage clashed in his mind over the answer. I was created to protect what’s mine. Are you mine? Or are you a fleeting fantasy? “It’s my job,” he said, opening the door for her.

The roll of her eyes as she went in said his answer wasn’t safe—it was stupid.

Then his gaze lowered to her ass and everything that might matter no longer did. The longer he stared with his human gaze, the more urgent the chemicals churned,

creating something that felt like an emergency. One that demanded immediate, precise actions, and zero words. From him. And only him.

She glanced back, catching him in mid-Lust-Rage again. She smiled and decimated the brief fear that had risen in him. He studied it, realizing it wasn't just a smile. It was an invitation. To follow.

His muscles loaded with obedience then locked up at the buzz of his phone in his back pocket. His gaze devoured every second as she slowly turned and took that smile with her. But the invitation remained. Trailed behind her like fire and dreams.

He realized his breaths trembled in his chest as he slowly shut the door to the temptation. He wasn't ready for that fire. Not in his human form. Not yet.

He pulled the phone from his back pocket and headed for the patio, looking at the screen. Kildare. How was he showing up right at the wrong time if he couldn't read his mind? Once outside, he dialed him back.

"My Darkling," he answered.

Kaos launched into his dilemma. "I asked her if she wanted to go to dinner when it became clear my pathetic human faculties weren't capable of two tasks simultaneously."

"Ahh," he mumbled. "Which was to cook and to?"

Kaos felt his little probe right in his Rage. "And to juggle my human dysfunctions."

He laughed outright at that.

"Without dropping everything I'm juggling."

“Oh fuck, you’re fun,” he breathed.

“Or knowing what the fuck I’m juggling. Are you sure I can’t use my power for anything?”

He gave a ragged groan. “Nothing intimate, nothing sexual.”

Fuck. “So nothing.”

He sputtered barely. “Are you saying everything is intimate and sexual with her?”

He paced on the patio, sorting through the human mess inside him.

“If there’s a doubt, then it’s a no,” Kade informed. “You can’t take that chance. You do this as a human, or you don’t do it at all.”

Kaos’s legs went rigid at the threat. He held his jaw shut when his Rage and Lust fought to set the seraphim straight.

“You can do it.”

“I don’t want your encouragement. I just want to know how I’m supposed to take her on a date with no vehicle, no driving experience, and no money.”

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His sigh held a fat grin. “Big Brother’s got you covered there,” he said airily. “And to be sure, the Kings donotdrive. They’re chauffeured. I’ll text you the name of your personal driver. He has everything you need—money, wheels, and all the time you want. Let him be your Alfred. Like in Batman?”

“I know what it means,” Kaos said.

“So where are you taking her?”

He froze at yet another human folly. “I have no idea.”

“Your driver will. But you’ll need to know so you can dress accordingly.”

Right. Humans varied their fashions for different occasions. He entered the apartment again.

“Just go casual. Something that fits in with whatever she wears,” Kildare advised, his joy like a rash on his nerves. “Unless she dresses formal, then match her.”

Kaos glanced toward the adjoining door, briefly considering asking her directly. “Noted. Anything else?”

Kildare’s chuckle filled the silence. “You’re asking me for dating tips now?”

Kaos tightened his grip on the phone. “I’m asking for operational guidelines.”

“Operational,” Kildare echoed with a grin. “Operational guideline number

one—relax. Operational guideline number two—enjoy yourself. Operational guideline number three—remember that humans talk about themselves when nervous. So, ask questions. Let her do most of the talking. That’s a direct order from your commanding officer.”

His jaw worked against the urge to hang up. “Anything else? Commander?”

“Just don’t break anything you can’t fix. Especially her.”

Kaos’s eyes narrowed. “Nothingornobodywill break her. Especially me.”

“Just remember what you’re capable of. And that tonight, you’re just Kohl. No more, no less.”

He forced himself to thank him then ended the call, his mind already shifting into next-step. He turned at the soft knock on the adjoining door and made his way to it, slapping away his spiritual discerning powers and locking onto his human instincts. His pulse raced as he opened it, then tripled at finding Jaxi, smoothing the fabric of a soft, flowing floral dress to her knees, face lit with tentative wonder on him.

Kaos followed the sensual caress of fabric along her beauty. Delicate and fragile. A single flower standing in a field before a storm, looking right at him with hope and hunger.

Beautiful.

“Better,” he said, forcing said storm inside him to step aside for the little flower.

Her sunny smile broke through. “Thank you! I wasn’t sure if it would be too simple.”

“Simple suits you,” he muttered, turning before she could see the chaos she created in

him with just her eyes.

She entered and sat on one of the living room chairs like she belonged there.

“I’ll only be a minute,” he said, heading to his room, digging through the clothes provided. On his second pass, he paused, frowning. Nothing seemed right. He regarded what he wore, deciding it was neutral enough not to clash with... pink and purple blossoms.

He retrieved his phone and saw a new message from an unsaved number: Good evening. I’m Fredrick, your chauffeur. Heading your way now. I’ll text you when I arrive.

Kaos saved the contact under “Fred” and made his way into the living room where Jaxi sat at the edge of the seat inspecting the décor. Her forearms rested on her bouncing legs, hands clasped, fingers wiggling.

He barely remembered to use only his human instincts to read her. Nervous. The itch to check his answers with his power was disrupted by his phone buzzing in his pocket. He paused, pulling it out: Your car is ready, Mr. King. I’m parked near the back entrance.

He pocketed the cell and found Jaxi looking up at him from where she sat.

“Our ride is here,” he said, diving into her blue eyes as she stood.

“Ride?”

He slid his hands in his pockets, gaze lowering to her mouth. “The Kings don’t drive,” he said, watching her perfect plump lips spread in a smile.

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“So you’re a Mr. Fancy Pants?” She hooked her arm in his, and he stiffened at the unexpected physical touch. “Oops,” she whispered, jerking it back. “Sorry, I need to learn boundaries.”

He mentally stumbled for what was appropriate to say. “I’m not accustomed to... touch,” he said, remembering to be honest with her. She was the first female that wasn’t...her. “But I don’t mind it. From you.”

Her curious look slowly melted as she hooked her arm back in his. “Well, that fixed that,” she said softly, filling him with her giggle that felt like tiny angel wings made of glass.

Kaos opened the back entrance where a sleek black sedan waited, engine humming with a suited man holding the rear door open.

Kaos gave a nod of acknowledgment to him then allowed her to enter first.

She slid in with a soft gasp, hands smoothing her dress as Kaos followed and settled beside her. Fredrick shut the door gently, circled to the driver’s side and climbed in.

The car pulled forward and a few seconds later, the partition separating them lowered halfway, revealing a clean-shaven host with calm eyes in the rearview mirror.

“Good evening, Mr. King. Ms. Jaxi. Any preference on where you’d like to dine tonight?”

Kaos hesitated. He glanced at Jaxi, who lit up at the question but waited for him to

answer.

He looked back at the mirror. “Recommend something,” he said.

The driver nodded once. “There’s a private rooftop bistro about ten minutes from here. Quiet. Romantic. Secure.”

Kaos gave the barest nod. “Yes. That will do.”

The partition began to rise again.

Jaxi leaned toward him slightly, grinning. “A rooftop bistro? You really are Mr. Fancy Pants.” Her eyes sparkled with something soft. “And romantic? Is that part of the mission, or are you improvising?”

He turned his head slightly, his voice low. “Improvising. Poorly.”

She chuckled, hooking her arm in his again. “I think you’re doing pretty good.”

Kaos drew in a breath, filling himself with her scent. She’d added something to her skin. Something soft and floral, like her skin and dress. “You smell like...”

“Crap,” she gasped. “Is it too strong?”

He looked at her and their gazes locked in the darkness. “A bouquet of sin,” he finished quietly.

She didn’t gasp or laugh this time. She lowered her gaze then looked out her window. “And you smell like... an angel of redemption.”

Kaos studied her profile, his instincts to touch her becoming sharp. “I’m not an

angel,” he said, sneaking in the confession. He realized he wanted her to know the truth about him. About all of him.

She returned her face to his, filled with her smile. “You are,” she assured lightly, as if her belief made it so. “An angel who needs to learn how to live a little.”

Kaos stared at her. “I’m trying.”

Jaxi bumped her shoulder lightly against his. “And I’m here for it.” She patted his hand on his thigh. “I’ll see that you learn to fly.”

Kaos let the moment breathe until her eyes left him for the window. “I’ve only ever guarded one woman before you.”

Her face returned, brows lifted. “Seriously?”

He nodded once.

She leaned forward slightly. “Okay, now I’m curious. Was she royalty? A criminal? Some kind of cosmic VIP?”

Kaos’s hand slowly curled into a fist on his thigh as he sorted through various descriptions. “She was a special girl.” A lot like you. “She was bonded to me. But my presence became a threat.”

Jaxi’s brows lifted slightly. “Bonded? Like...”

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“Like a contract,” he said, not wanting her to think marriage even though it was technically that exactly.

Her expression settled a little before getting curious. “Protect her from what?”

He stared ahead now. “From me.”

Her silence finally drew his gaze to her confused one. “My presence became dangerous,” he further explained.

“To her?”

“Yes.”

“But you were guarding her.”

He realized he was back to that bond. “We were connected,” he said carefully.

Her head tilted, more confused. “How, exactly?”

Yes. How exactly.

“Actually, don’t tell me,” she said quickly, swiping the air with her hand. “I might get jealous.”

She said it like a promise, and he immediately longed for it.

She gave a soft chuckle. “You’re really not going to answer that, huh?”

He glanced out the window, tapping his finger against his leg.

She let out a playful groan. “Okay, next question. Was she prettier than me?”

This fucking humanity.

He turned slightly toward her, weighing the words. “She was... exceptionally unique.”

Jaxi blinked, then drew back with a mock squint. “Let me guess. Star-crossed lovers? She fell for her silent protector, and it all went up in flames?”

Kaos searched for an exit out of the topic. “You would never guess right.”

“Try me,” she nudged, half-grinning. “Enemies-to-lovers complicated? Or like, she tried to stab you, and you still made her coffee?”

Kaos shifted slightly, the weight of her question stretching between them as he faced her.

She arched a brow. “So, definitely not breakfast. Noted.”

Kaos leaned back slightly, tracing her silhouette in silence. “You’re not pretty.”

Her smile faltered, breath catching.

“You’re beautiful,” he added, letting the truth land without defense. “A universal difference.”

She blinked, her jaw dropped a little. “So... I’m... prettylikeher?”

“Galaxies apart. She’s nothing like you, you’re nothing like her.”

She wrinkled her nose, suspicious. “So that means what? She was a star system and I’m... the houseplant?”

Kaos watched her in silence for a moment, taking in the wild softness of her. “No,” he said quietly. “You’re something that earth painted... to seduce heaven.”

Her jaw dropped open just slightly, blinking at him in silence.

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He looked out the window again. “That’s what I meant.”

She didn’t speak, and neither did he. His hand flexed once on his thigh before his voice cut the quiet.

“Did you touch them so freely?”

Her brows pulled together. “Touch who?”

“The men in your life. Did you touch them the way you do me? Without restraint. Without invite.”

She stiffened a little, face coloring. “Oh. I—sorry. I’ll learn to keep my hands to myself.”

“You didn’t answer my question.”

She hesitated, then gave a quieter, more sincere, “No. Definitely not.”

He let the truth settle between them before adding, “You have questions for me. I can have questions for you?”

She nodded slowly, something playful lighting in her eyes. “Fair is fair. Why did you want to know?”

He studied her, watched the way her gaze flicked between his eyes and mouth. “I’m curious about you.”

“Because of your job?”

“No.”

“Because you’re just nosy?”

He considered the term. “No.”

She leaned closer with a teasing whisper. “Because you’re obsessed with me?”

He weighed his words carefully, realizing their power. “Curious about what’s mine to care for.”

She blinked, then frowned. “You mean your job.”

He turned his head, eyes narrowing slightly. “No. I mean with the girl who walks like temptation dressed in skin. Who laughs about secrets I’m supposed to chase, and touches like she already owns me.”

She turned toward him again, tucking one leg under the other as she studied him. Her lips parted slightly, gaze dazed and fixed on him. “Do you practice those lines in the mirror, or do they just fall out of you like magic?”

He didn’t flinch. “I’m learning.”

“Learning to speak human? Or angel?”

He studied her. The way she smiled, talked, filled the silence. It reminded him of a time in death—trapped, drifting, losing self—until a voice reached him. A queen’s voice. Rambling and endless and alive.

Like Jaxi's.

But where the Queen's voice had tethered him to something beyond himself, Jaxi's seemed to tether herself to him.

"Something like that," he said, turning to the window when their stare became a burning torment. A prison where he wanted to kiss her with his soul and never stop.

Chapter Five

The car slowed.

Kaos leaned forward as they turned into the alley, his eyes narrowing. The moment the tires stopped, he sent his power out—scouring a mile in every direction, slicing through walls, rooftops, signals, and intent.

Petty criminality was all he found. Low-grade surveillance. Two weapons carried without discipline. Nothing that posed a real threat.

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As he exited the vehicle, his gaze flicked left, then right, power folding back behind it. He looked at Jaxi and gave a short nod.

She slid out with a quiet, “Thank you,” already looking up at the building.

Inside, the host gave a polished nod and gestured toward a private elevator.

Kaos let Jaxi step forward first, then reached out—his hand landing at the base of her spine. A claim disguised as guidance. A point of contact to track her every move. She didn’t flinch. Didn’t question it.

His power swept again—narrowed this time. Targeted. He found warm bodies three floors up. Surface-level curiosity. Two distinct hunger patterns. Male. One seated. One mobile.

He stepped into the elevator beside her, hand still at her back until the doors closed.

“Fancy pants, indeed,” she murmured, adjusting her bag on her shoulder, eyes flicking to the mirrored walls.

He had no answer as the elevator ascended. He discreetly removed his hand from her lower back only to return it the second the door opened. He guided her out, scanning the table placements, wall structure, staff positions. Lanterns cast low light across the rooftop, the air filled with the smell of expensive wine, cooked meat, and something sweet—her hair, he realized, rising above it all.

Kaos directed her to the table with the best view of the elevator and stairwell. His

etiquette data informed him to pull her chair before she could reach for it.

As she sat, his gaze landed on the far table, finding the lone male already watching her.

Kaos took his seat opposite her, adjusting the angle to intercept both access points and cut off one of the men already watching her.

Jaxi's gaze swept the rooftop. Her smile bloomed big till her tiny nose wrinkled. "This feels like the last ten minutes of a rom-com," she whispered, her voice giddy. "Just before somebody makes a really big confession."

Kaos processed the term—romantic comedy. Patterned emotional spectacle. Scripted vulnerability.

"You don't think so?" she asked.

"I've never seen one."

Her grin widened. "Of course you haven't."

The server arrived and placed menus before them along with water.

Jaxi ran her fingers along the edge of her napkin. "It's weirdly nice. Being somewhere like this."

"Romantic?"

She raised an eyebrow. "Didn't think you were listening."

"I was." So much more than you can fathom.

That softened something in her, but only for a second. “Why is that strange to you?” she asked. “You don’t think love can bloom somewhere like this?”

Kaos kept his eyes on her. “The only love I’ve seen was forged in fire. And sacrifice.”

She tilted her head, amused. “Sounds like you dated a landmine.”

He realized this was her way of asking for details. Cute crumbs of hunger, dropped right at his feet. He kept his eyes on her. “She was the Queen I was assigned to protect.”

The air froze between them as her smile faded with the pull of her eyebrows. “Wait... she was an actual queen?”

Kaos scanned the rooftop, his sigh discreet. “Not by title. Not the kind you’d recognize.” Why did he keep bringing the Queen into their conversation?

Because she’s all you know and have.

“Then what kind?”

“She carried something sacred. Power that couldn’t stay hidden. Power that threatened others.”

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“And you... protected her.”

He lowered his gaze to the table, ready to just tell her everything and get it out of their way. “I still do.”

“But you’re not with her.” Her hand curled around her glass. The change was subtle—shoulders tighter, posture more exact. Her tone softened, but it was calculation.

“The bond we shared made her visible to our enemies,” Kaos said. “Severing the bond kept her safe.”

Her lips parted slightly as she inspected her water. “Yes. That bond. What was it like, exactly? How does a man like you bond with a queen?”

Kaos studied her, his powers pushing against the barricade he’d put up while he human’d his way with her. She was still dropping crumbs, but they were no longer cute and little, they were chunks of need so potent that she forgot to hide it.

Honesty is critical with her.

“It was constant,” he said quietly. “Her presence never left me. I never had to reach for it. It was always there.”

Her expression shifted—curiosity touched with something deeper.

“And you... felt what she felt?”

“Yes.”

“Was it hard to let go?”

He locked his gaze on hers. “Very. But it was always about what she needed.”

Jaxi looked at the skyline now. Her posture eased but not fully. She picked up her glass with careful fingers and took a slow sip while he tracked the small changes—breath slowing, gaze focused on anything but him.

His powers again begged in his pores, needing to measure her temperature and pulse, learn what she folded down inside herself. But he resisted. Silently beckoning her to show herself to him.

“I’ve been kissed,” she said, eyes still fixed on the skyline. “Just never under fireworks.” The words came plain, without decoration. Without armor.

Kaos tracked the weight behind them. Her voice was steady, but something in the delivery pulled his attention tighter. She lifted her glass again, slower this time.

“That’s how I always pictured it,” she said quietly. “When it mattered.” She stayed focused on the rim of the glass. Her tone dimmed near the end as she adjusted the water in her hands again, once, then twice. But it solved nothing.

The image formed in Kaos’s mind—her standing under skyfire, waiting for someone to offer a moment she’d never claim for herself. To be seen. Chosen. Measured. And somewhere in her silence, she had already determined she wouldn’t be.

His focus sharpened as something unstable pulsed beneath his skin. “That kind of moment,” he said, voice low, “isn’t given.”

Jaxi looked up, eyes locking on his.

“It’s taken,” he said. “By someone who sees it and decides it belongs to them.”

She held still. Her pulse ticked faster beneath the skin on her neck.

Kaos leaned in slightly, his voice quieter. “You’re still waiting for it to be offered.”

The server appeared beside their table. “Do you know what you’d like to order?”

Jaxi jumped, hand jerking just enough to rattle her glass. “Oh! Wow—yes, sorry! Didn’t even see you sneak up. Stealth mode. Love it.” She laughed once—loud, breathy—then buried her face in the menu. “Okay, um... let’s do the goat cheese flatbread, for sure. And the—ooh, the arugula salad with figs. Yes. That. Love figs. And arugula’s spicy, right? That’s fun.”

The server nodded once. “Would you like to add a protein to the salad?”

“Sure. Chicken. Grilled. No, wait—salmon. Unless chicken’s easier. Or, like... standard? Whatever’s normal.”

“Grilled chicken it is.”

“And wine,” she added, waving at the empty space in front of her. “Whatever red you think pairs well with mild goat cheese and awkward tension.”

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The server nodded and turned to Kaos.

“Ribeye,” he said. “Medium rare. Roasted vegetables. One glass of dry red.”

The server gathered the menus and left.

Jaxi adjusted her napkin with too much focus, folding it like precision could erase the last thirty seconds.

Kaos remained still. Her recovery wasn’t complete—just redirected. The chatter, the movements, the shifts in tone all carried data. He continued to collect, watching her hands, the pace of her breath. The tension still held in her posture. Pressure had opened her. The clarity that followed gave him a sharper view.

He liked her this way. Exposed. Focus scattered, movements drawn from instinct, not design. Without his power, this state gave him what he needed—unfiltered access and answers.

He tracked this break to its source—the Queen. The bond. That word had shifted something in her, changed her voice, her movement, her everything. The fracture carried the shape of loss—like something had been ripped from her hands before she knew she was reaching for it.

He froze when the word came to him. Jealousy. Possession. A reaction when something valued drew attention from another source. He’d felt it once—with the Queen. But it hadn’t come in pieces. It had entered like fire. Sacred. Consuming. Sharing her had warped everything inside him. Rage fused with worship. There was

no separation.

But... this felt different. Jaxi hadn't claimed anything. Her reaction rose from absence, not protection. No territory marked. No claim disrupted. Just the shock of craving something that suddenly became unreachable.

If jealousy could exist without the kind of possession he'd had, then it lacked structure. It moved without pattern. That made it unpredictable. Able to change.

Kaos shifted his weight, one hand curling around his glass of water. He needed to open her up again. To be sure. "You pictured the fireworks. What else did you picture?"

Jaxi blinked, seeming caught by the softness in the question. She looked at him briefly, then dropped her gaze. "I don't know. It was just... a moment. One of those things you make up when you're young. Standing under all that color. Someone pulling you in close. Everything goes quiet. Like something important finally sees you." She gave a soft laugh. "Sounds silly now."

"It doesn't," Kaos said.

Her fingers adjusted her napkin again, as if that could undo the words.

"There's nothing small about wanting to be seen," he continued. "Wanting the world to stop when it finds you." He kept his voice steady, but inside, the edge drew close. Her phrasing gave him the opening he needed. Her moment. Her fantasy. Her desire to be chosen.

"She had moments like that," he said. "The Queen."

Jaxi looked up, her mouth still held in a halfway smile that no longer matched her

eyes.

“She burned too hot sometimes,” he said. “The power built until she couldn’t carry it. Then she passed it to me.” His words moved quiet and clean. “She used breath. And skin.” A pause. “She used everything.”

Her hand shifted, knocking her glass. Water spilled across the table and down her lap. She stood fast, chair legs dragging against the floor. “I need the bathroom.”

Kaos stood with her. “You’re not permitted to leave without me.”

She turned hard, her voice sharp. “Right. Because I’m a job.” He followed her pace as she stormed away from the table. “I’m not your Queen,” she said, not looking back. “I don’t need to be recharged or restored or whatever holy crisis she went through. I’m fine.”

He closed distance. “Jaxi.”

She took the stairs, her words trailing behind her like a trail of blood. “I don’t collapse under my own power, I don’t require divine touch therapy. I’m not some chosen receptacle for your sacred energy transfer.”

“Stop.”

She hurried faster. “I don’t want your training or your protection. I’m not some cracked container waiting for your hands to fix me—”

He caught her before the next corner, one hand gripping her arm, the other braced beside her head. He pressed her back against the wall, his body anchoring hers in place.

“Don’t move.”

Her breath rushed past his neck. Her skin burned against his hands. His power surged through the point of contact, drinking in every signal, every fracture, every need.

He touched her waist, her ribs. Felt the shape of her breath. All while her heartbeat fed directly into his restraint.

She stared up at him, lips parted, chest rising fast.

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His mouth hovered just above hers, breath aligned, pressure building. He traced her shoulder, the edge of her neck. Every point of contact widened the current. Her body gave him more than her words ever had.

A sound escaped her throat. Soft. Shattered.

Then he remembered the hallway camera. The listening devices shaped like art.

His body tensed. Hands pulled back. His chest stayed close, but the connection broke. “This isn’t the place.” He stepped away fully, the air between them buzzing, charged with everything that needed finishing.

Human etiquette offered one word. “Sorry.”

She blinked, fire still rising in her eyes. Her mouth opened, then shut again. “No need for divine escort.” She shoved past him. “I’ll scream if I need soul surgery.”

She vanished around the corner.

Kaos followed, yanking down the wall between them. His power flooded in and formed anchor points in every molecule she possessed. It wasn’t protection protocol, it was something deeper. Something wired through power and obsession.

She entered the bathroom. He stopped just outside. Posted. Present.

He drew a breath through his teeth. Jealousy shaped every step she took, every word she threw, every glance she refused to give. She carried it sharp. Raw. Complete.

Now he had proof. And it plugged directly into his Lust and Rage in a way he hadn't expected. It hit him like sustenance—clean, high-voltage, poured straight into the core of him. The emotion moved through him like fuel, like a current he was built to run on.

Rage responded first—tight, coiled, territorial. Lust followed close behind, slower but heavier, dragging need through every inch of his skin. The combination didn't spread. It locked.

She hadn't touched him. Hadn't offered anything. But her jealousy had. And the purity of it—undiluted by shame, unspoken but violent—fed something in him he hadn't realized was starving.

He reached inward and opened the battlefield. His power traced along the edges, searching for an entry, a door that allowed him to see every inch of her without her seeing him.

His Lust and Rage deposited the answer like a war hammer in his blood. In her dreams. In your true form. Her instinct rendered in motion, her spirit without human filters. Nothing impure, nothing touched by defense or misdirection. She will speak through sensation, and you will learn every inch of her without interference.

The bathroom door opened hard, striking the stopper with a metallic thud. Jaxi stepped out fast, hair pushed behind her ears, mouth tight.

"I'm ready to go."

Kaos straightened from the wall, falling into step beside her before she could say anything else.

"I'm no longer hungry," she added, voice clipped.

He didn't press. "Good. You need a proper night's rest."

She stopped short and turned to him. "Did you just say that to me like I'm a cranky child?"

He stared at her. "Yes."

She slapped him. Quick. Sharp. Right on his jaw.

His power surged.

She breathed harder.

His Lust flared and he caught her wrist before she could step away, grip firm enough to lock her pulse under his fingers.

Her eyes widened for a half-second.

Kaos leaned in. The growl rolled up his throat, low and slow. His breath shook in the space between them. "Do that again."

Her expression didn't falter. "I'm not afraid of you."

He waited.

She stepped closer. "I've had blank canvases more intimidating."

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He released her wrist with precision, letting her skin slide from his grip like a line being cut. The corner of his mouth twitched once. But nothing was funny. This was darker. Something patient. “I’ll call the car.”

“I can walk.” Jaxi spun and headed for the main lobby.

He followed casually, keeping two feet between them. Her jealousy still rolled off her in sharp, clean pulses that he tracked like blood trails.

“Is this how you protected your queen? Hovered like a plague?”

“I took what she couldn’t carry,” he said, happy to continue the elaboration.

Jaxi scoffed. “Right, right. So you held her hand and fed her soup. Rubbed her temples while she whispered sacred mantras?”

“As I said—through intimacy.”

Her glassy laugh cracked the air. “Of course. How spiritual of you.”

They reached the exit, and she burst through it like a bullet. “Is that how you kept her functioning?” She marched to the vehicle that waited right outside the door. Fredrick opened the door just in time for her to dive right in.

“Thank you, Fredrick,” Kaos said, climbing in. “Take us home.”

Jaxi sat pressed into the door while Kaos moved to the center of the seat, wanting to

be as close to the erotic madness as he could get.

“Just so you know, I’m not sleeping in your apartment,” she informed. “I’d rather sleep in a grave.”

“Fine,” he said. “But wherever you sleep, I’ll be there.”

She snorted. “Let me guess. For safe sleeping. Like safe sex. You’re like a human condom.”

“I block bad decisions and seal the heat in.”

“You’re such an elite dick.”

He let his powers roam freely now. “If you’re trying to anger me, just know it’s having the opposite effect on my professional cock.”

Her mouth opened. Then she turned and shoved him—hard. “You’re disgusting.” She turned to the window, jaw locked. “I don’t want to be anyone’s holy burden. I don’t want to be measured like a cracked container with divine leakage.”

Kaos was back to tracking the rhythm in her words. She wasn’t spiraling. She was burning. Controlled. Composed. But burning.

“I’m not trying to fill some sacred vacancy,” she continued. “You can take that part and give it back to whatever altar you came from.”

The shake in her breath danced in his blood.

She exhaled. “You think I’m angry because you gave something to her.”

“You’re angry because I allowed her to need what you’ve claimed.”

Jaxi’s expression fractured for a half second. “In your dreams, jackass.”

Kaos remained still, eyes on the street ahead, his powers locked on the pain wrapping her breaths.

The vehicle slowed next to their apartment and Jaxi threw the door open and stepped out, heels cracking against the pavement like warning shots.

“Thank you Fredrick,” he muttered, climbing out.

“Anytime, Mr. King,” he said as he pulled away.

Kaos followed the heat of her jealousy. It was tight, brutal and seething. It fed his system like fuel, stirring something volatile and brutal in him. He wanted every drop of it.

She entered her apartment through the broken door and Kaos followed, his steps deliberate. She walked straight to her bedroom and stopped at the doorway, one hand gripping the frame.

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“I’m going to need privacy,” she warned, her breaths sharp, mouth tight.

Kaos stepped right up to her, and she retreated into the bedroom. He followed, closing the door behind him. Then locking it.

“What are you doing?”

“It’s the only door that still secures,” he said. “Unless you’d prefer we stay in my apartment.”

Her eyes narrowed. “I’d rather sleep inside a collapsed tunnel.”

“Then I’ll stay here,” he said.

She grabbed a pillow off the bed and tossed it on the floor. “Then you’re sleeping there.”

Kaos looked at it. Then at her. “I’ll sleep in the bed. With a barrier. To ensure you don’t molest me.”

Her jaw locked in fury and fear.

Kaos didn’t smile.

But he burned.

Chapter Six

Jaxi closed the bathroom door and braced her hands on the counter. Her breath hit the glass in short, uneven bursts as the silence outside the door pressed in harder than his voice ever had.

He was in her room. He'd be in her bed. And she had no more venom left to throw at it.

Her chest rose and fell like it didn't belong to her. Every breath caught in her throat, tight like she was choking on her own heat. Her reflection didn't help. She looked like someone caught between a fight and a collapse—jaw tight, eyes rimmed in frustration, skin burning in places she couldn't cool.

He was going to sleep beside her. Not across the room. Not behind a wall. In the same space. On the same mattress. In the dark.

And she was out of fury to stop it. She didn't want him near her. Except she did. She didn't want him watching her. Except she wanted to know if he did. She didn't want to feel anything. Except her skin kept reminding her that he existed.

The heat of what he'd done got under her clothes, into her lungs, into places anger didn't reach. And now she was alone with it. No paint to fling, no brushes to smash, no canvas to beat on. And no room left to lie about it.

She gripped the edge of the sink harder. Closed her eyes. Tried to think of something—anything—that didn't feel like him.

Jaxi shoved off the sink and paced once. Then again. And again.

She slapped the sink with both hands and leaned into the mirror.

She took from me what she needed. Through breath. Through skin.

What a fucking line. What a perfect, holier-than-everyone line. Like the Queen floated. Like she bled rose water and moaned in riddles.

She could see it now. The divine light. The whispered prayers. Kaos with his hands placed just right while sacred wind blew through the curtains.

“Fuck off,” she muttered.

He probably thought it was honorable. Ritualistic. He probably bowed when he touched her. He probably lit candles and chanted before sliding in.

She scoffed and turned, still pacing. “Congratulations, you were a glorified charger with a dick.”

But it wasn’t funny. And it wasn’t helping.

Because he’d given himself to someone. In a way Jaxi didn’t even understand yet. And now he was here. Sitting in her room. Clean and silent and made of exactly what she didn’t want to want. And all she could think about was how she wasn’t the first.

She shouldn’t care. She didn’t want to be first, second, chosen, or sacred. She didn’t want to be some Queen.

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So why did it feel like something had been stolen straight from her chest?

She finally climbed into the shower and stayed in till her fingers wrinkled and her knees wobbled. She turned the water off and stared at nothing.

She dried off slow. Put lotion on her legs she didn't plan to show. Combed her short hair twice. She flossed. She changed. She folded the towel, unfolded it, then folded it again.

Maybe he'd fallen asleep. Maybe if she waited it out, the weight in her chest would let her breathe again.

She pressed her ear to the door.

Silence.

The weight in her chest didn't move.

Kaos was there. Just like she'd once wanted. Same room. Same mattress. Same air.

She reached for the doorknob. Her hand stalled.

This wasn't about him touching her.

It was about what it would feel like if he didn't.

She opened the door. Steam spilled out behind her, but the air in the bedroom sat flat.

And he sat on the far side of the bed, shirtless. Elbows on his knees. Back curved forward, spine a sculpted line drawn in tension. Beautiful pale skin wrapped perfectly over muscle, shoulders set hard.

A row of pillows ran down the center. The barrier. She barely registered it.

Her eyes caught on his back and her throat tightened. She moved before she could think too long. Fast steps. No sound. Blanket up to her neck before her body even settled. She turned toward the wall, arms locked tight around herself.

Her chest refused to rise steady.

“If I wanted to take something,” he said, quiet behind her, “you wouldn’t have reached the bed.”

She swallowed. Flicked her tongue over dry lips.

“You’re real proud of that spine, huh.”

It landed weak. Off rhythm. And too late.

Just like her.

The floor was cool beneath her feet.

Stone, polished to a shine too perfect to belong anywhere real. Her breath didn’t echo, but she felt it—tight in her throat, drawn low into her lungs like it didn’t need to leave.

Where was she?

She followed the stretch of the ceiling where windows glowed with light that didn't belong to any sky she knew. And impossibly high. The light bled down in soft columns, pale and maybe holy. Or maybe wrong.

The air suddenly pulsed around her like it had a heartbeat.

She turned. And he was there.

Not a man. Not a monster. Something between a god and... maybe a weapon—sculpted from white stone and black fury. Wings rose behind him like cathedral walls, black with veins of red threaded through the membrane. Horns crowned his head, claws curled from his fingers. And those eyes. They burned straight through her without blinking.

She didn't move. She didn't breathe. Her pulse forgot how to beat.

He stood still, like he'd been carved into the world first and the rest of it had come after. His gaze didn't ask. It commanded.

Where was her fear? Her dread?

She stepped forward, slow, breath shaky.

Her body didn't scream in warning. It reached.

Every nerve hummed as her foot met the floor again. Her chest pulled tight with heat. Her skin prickled with want.

Still, he didn't move.

“Come to me, little fleshling.”

Her knees buckled.

The voice settled inside her like gravity. Every muscle in her body tensed, then loosened in surrender. She sucked in a breath that didn't fill her lungs. Her skin flushed down to her toes.

She stepped forward. Once. Then again.

His head slowly tilted as he watched her. Gaze pulling her in slowly. She didn't fear him. She wanted to touch him. She wanted him to touch her. To know what it felt like to stand close to something that shouldn't exist.

His hands moved to his waist and in one graceful move, he ripped off the inky black robe covering his lower half.

Her breath froze.

Her body froze.

Her eyes froze.

Right on the massive penis that levitated with its own pulse. It felt like a judgment, aimed right at her. A verdict.

And still, she didn't fear.

She came closer. Every part of her naked. Every inch of her exposing truth.

The first command still echoed in her blood. Kaos remained still, gaze devouring every inch. Every shift. The glow of her skin. The silk of her breasts. The heat and hunger that tightened her nipples.

She didn't recognize him. But her need matched what she gave Kohl. That was all he required.

Kaos moved his eyes slowly over her, watching the data in real time—breath held too high in her chest... thighs drawn tight... pulse stammering under flushed skin... heat blooming across her collarbone in waves.

Her silence crept toward him as Lust circled low, sharpened by restraint. It studied the set of her mouth, the hesitation in her hips. The way she pressed her legs together like it might hold her intact.

Rage tracked deeper. Marking the vulnerable places. The pulse fluttering at her neck.

The softness of her belly. The delicate moan trapped in her throat. His power didn't want seduction. It wanted control.

Kaos stepped forward, shifting the pressure in the air. He spoke, pushing his voice through her, slow and low. "You wonder what I am." He took another step, his wings stretching higher, wider behind him. "I am the shape your ache reaches for." He wrapped his fingers around his cock with his next step. "The being that your fear never knew to hide from."

Her gaze remained locked on his phallus, mouth parted with trembling breaths.

"You chase the source that longs to ruin you."

Another step. Another stroke along his cock.

"You seek that which will utterly destroy you."

Two more steps put her within his wing's reach. They lowered, hovering inches around her naked body. "That which will complete you."

He inhaled deep—her pure scent, tight, frightened, ready. "I am your ruin." He swept a wing against her calves, and she collapsed onto it with a gasp.

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He lifted her before him. His human delicacy. With his other wing, he expanded her throne. “I am your restoration.”

Her eyes locked onto his and he drew her deep into himself, their heat colliding in the space between them. “You ache to be understood...”

He lowered his gaze to her parted lips. The line of her throat.

“To be devoured...”

Her chest trembled.

He reached with one clawed hand—white and inhuman—pressing his palm against her jaw with exact pressure.

She gasped. Her skin warmed beneath his touch, pulling his restraint tight.

He tilted her face up, watching her mouth open more, breath ragged against his fingers.

Her throat made a low sound, something caught between a whimper and a moan.

His wings lifted her higher. Closer. Her every ragged breath beckoned him. Her silky nipples tight with a desperate ache, commanded him.

He inhaled her again. Slow. Deep. Every secret. Every unspoken need. Every filthy, human longing she buried under laughter and joy. Beneath pain and rage. On color

and canvas.

He pressed his healing Lust into her skin through his palm. A slow, consuming monster that devoured darkness. Freeing light in its wake.

Her breath hitched under his power. A sound followed—half-muffled, tight. She tried to breathe again and failed.

He brushed his thumb across her lower lip. Her mouth opened wider and a soft noise spilled out. A needy hum, raw and unguarded.

“You want to be chosen so violently,” he whispered, black claws gliding over the silky swell of her breast. “And have it mark your skin forever.”

Her thighs pressed. Her breath turned to sound again—higher this time, more fragile. Her chest rose fast and shallow.

He lowered his mouth to her throat. Ran his tongue across her pulse.

The press of her tiny nails against his wings tested his restraint. Her moans flowed, too desperate to hold back now.

Kaos closed his hand around her jaw, bringing his mouth to her ear. “I’m going to take you apart,” he whispered, grazing her neck with his pulsing fangs. “One fear at a time.”

Her breath caught sharp between them, and Lust surged in a slow, spiraling current, wrapping around her.

He pulled. Her lips parted again with a sound. Fragile. Wanting. Beautiful.

He moved his palm over her stomach, receiving her gasp against his neck. Soft and hungry. His nails entered the soft triangle of hair, bringing the bite of her nails in the skin of his wings.

He muscles rippled with Lust at the urgent tilt of her hips. “Yes,” he breathed on her breast, opening his mouth as two fingers slid between her folds and parted her heat.

With a growl, he claimed her nipple, the scrape of his fangs on soft silk causing his wings to tremble.

His lips and tongue sucked broken cries from her. His fingers—slow and firm against hot, wet flesh—commanded sharp moans.

He moved to her other breast, dragging his fangs over the tender peak. She arched with a choked gasp and opened her legs. The eager, wide submission claimed his cursed bones.

He entered her heat with two fingers, slow, gently. Her hips jerked once. Then again. Begging. Pleading. Boiling his powers.

He tugged at her breast with his teeth, and her passion collided with his Lust, desperate hands clutching his hair.

He moved his mouth to hers, hovering just above it. Their breaths entangled like dancing flames. He stared deep into her eyes while learning every silky secret of her womanhood.

“Please,” she blasted against his mouth, her hands clutching his wrist, pulling, writhing. “Oh please.”

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He took her mouth with a violent kiss and shoved his fingers to the bottom of her. Her cry pierced through his restraint, and he smashed his palm against her clit, taking her first orgasm with a dark vengeance.

“Fall for me,” he commanded around his lashing tongue.

The orgasm broke through her, swallowing her surrender, devouring her scream. Her hips jerked, her voice cracked, her walls clenched hard around his fingers, dragging him in, riding it, needing more, needing everything. She shook. Her head spun. Tears stung the corners of her eyes. And still—his hand never left her.

A second wave surged, his fingers curling, flexing, occupying space no one else had been allowed to hold. She breathed hard. Shallow. Open-mouthed. Eyes half-lidded and flickering.

His voice moved through the shell of her body. Low. Calm. Complete. “That was your first truth.”

The voice in her head whispered all the things she wasn’t supposed to want—to be touched like a secret, to be taken without hesitation, to be handled like something worth breaking open.

He gave her that. And he was giving it again.

Heat spiraled into her spine. Her lips parted. Her breath hitched hard. She reached for

him, fingers finding his forearm—stone muscle beneath heat.

He was back at her mouth with his otherworldly breath, burning her lips and tongue. He pressed, he dragged his fingers through her, calculated Lust spreading through her core. She shook. Her legs trembled. Her body betrayed every wall she'd ever built. Her body pulsed around his fingers—two deep, precise, angled up. His palm curved into her heat. The heel of his hand pressed firm against her clit again, rolling just enough to keep the fire constant.

She gripped his forearm harder. Her breath choked out in half-moans and broken exhales. His hand moved like it belonged there—owning her.

His voice dropped into her ear. “This is where you lie to yourself.” He pressed deeper, dragging upward inside her until she cried out—high, involuntary, shamefully full. “Right here. Where no one ever earned access.” His wrist rotated, subtle, steady.

She whimpered.

“You said you didn’t need it. But your body’s begging before your mouth can catch up.”

Her head fell back. Her spine arched. Her thighs clenched and trembled and opened again, trying to outrun the pressure and stay in it all at once.

“You think I care if you come fast?” he growled at her mouth. “I built this world to take your finish again and again.”

Her mouth opened. Nothing came out. The sound she made hit his throat and bounced back into her body. She felt it in her chest. Her sex. Her spine.

Her muscles pulled tight. Then tighter.

He didn't change rhythm, but held her in the burn. The veins in his massive wings felt like molten honey caressing her back. Pulsing like a million burning kisses worshipping her skin.

Kaos felt the shift ripple beneath his palm—the shallow catch of her breath rising fast. Lust pressed forward, ready to flood her. Rage prowled close behind, eager to mark what it already claimed. He held both at the edge, letting the pressure build.

He leaned close, breath grazing her lips. He kissed her once—slow, full. Another kiss, deeper now, coaxing her mouth open.

Her hands clenched against him.

He kissed her again, lips brushing like a vow. Her moan met his tongue. She writhed beneath him, skin damp, chestarching with every breath she couldn't control. Her voice spilled out in half-shaped thoughts, tangled in moans. Then he felt the cold slice of her guilt and confusion. The buried loyalty to a man who hadn't touched her. Who hadn't earned her.

But her body knew who had.

"I'm dreaming," she whispered. "This isn't real..."

Kaos moved his mouth to her throat. Bit it softly. Sucked her breath out of her as she arched beneath him.

"This is more real than anything you've ever begged for."

She whimpered. Her hips rose. Her voice cracked.

“I want it. I want you.”

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He pressed his cock against her entrance—hot, hard, slick with her want—and held still. Just enough friction to make her cry out.

“You want him,” he growled, voice low against her ear, “but you will burn for me.”

Her hands clutched at his back. Her mouth opened, but no words came—only a desperate, choking gasp as she rocked her hips up again.

He held steady. Let her grind against him. Let her take. Let her claim.

Kaos’s jaw clenched with the Rage curling under his ribs. Lust swirled through her skin and back into him—echoing the need he planted there. She would wake up with it buried in her scent, in her thighs, in the guilt that would crawl across her chest when she looked at Kohl. And he’d feel it. He’d see it. He’d smell what Kaos had done. Because she chose him.

Her breath caught again. Her voice barely formed the words. “You’ll... be my first...” Her hips surged, her mouth opened wide. “I don’t care that you’re a dream. I don’t care what this is. I want it.”

She devoured him. Tore into his mouth like it was oxygen. Clawed at his chest like she needed to leave proof.

Kaos pushed into her—slow, deep, burning for everything she gave, everything he was allowed to take in a dream. He dragged every thick inch through her heat, pulsing around him with a promise she couldn’t keep. Her walls clamped down with every breathless cry she gave, every tremble of surrender shaking her frame beneath

him.

He watched with all his being as she broke apart—watched the war between guilt and ecstasy detonate behind her eyes. Her voice fractured, desperate and raw. Her legs locked tight around his hips, nails scoring down his back, carving her choice into his skin.

That was the moment it hit him.

The claim.

It roared through his bones, flooding every corner of his being with her submission. Not from some divine appointed duty, or from logic, but from a deep, aching, eternal need. And it belonged to him.

He thrust deeper—harder, sharper, stripping breath from her lungs as he pinned her to an edge she couldn't crawl back from. He gripped her thighs, spreading her wider, driving into her with everything he was forbidden to have.

The pleasure rose, vicious and fast. Rage curled around lust, both snarling, both demanding, both poised for detonation. He found her mouth again and sealed all of it with a kiss, with a final slam of his cock, deep and tight. His brutal release pulsed hot, a guttural growl tearing through his chest.

And she took it. Moaning, arching, grinding against him like she was begging to be marked deeper.

Kaos didn't move. Didn't breathe. He stared down at the dream of her—face flushed, lips parted, skin damp with devotion. He felt it spill out of her spirit like perfume. A heat that didn't belong to her alone. It was his. It had his name on it. And she would carry it now, through every breath, every motion, every night she woke up aching for

something she thought wasn't real.

It wouldn't trigger spiritual alarms. No one would trace it. The power belonged to human fantasy and harmless dreams.

But not to him. The taste of her would live in his mouth. A hunger he'd never escape. And never wanted to.

Kaos pulled out slowly, his breath ragged, eyes locked on the dreamscape as it began to blur at the edges. Her hands reached for him—whisper-soft, murmuring things she wouldn't remember.

He stared down at her, the last pulse of heat draining from his cock, and gave her the only thing left. "You'll forget," he whispered, kissing her brow. "But I won't."

The dream dissolved around him—leaving her soaked in a bond she wouldn't see... and him burning in one he couldn't break.

Chapter Seven

The ache woke her. Sharp. Deep. Centered low between her thighs and pulsing up through her belly like an aftershock.

She shifted under the sheets and gasped. Her skin was on fire. Every nerve buzzed. Her nipples ached against her shirt.

Holy hallucinations.

Her eyes fluttered. Bedroom. Morning light. Her bed. She glanced down. Tank top. Boy shorts.

Alone.

She sat up fast. Kohl.

The smell of food hit her, and she kicked her way out of the sheets. Then froze.

Her hand flew to her mouth. Black wings. Huge. Holding her. His heat, his mouth on her neck, claws trailing over her skin! Oh God, that voice—thunder wrapped in thick smoke. “Fall for me.”

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She panted as more flashes came. His fingers inside her. His mouth on her breast. Her cries. Her surrender. Her body shattering in his hands.

She strangled the sheets. It was just a dream. Just a dream.

But her thighs trembled, remembering every inch of him. Her pulse raced like he was still inside her. Her skin begged for the friction to never end.

Her stomach tightened. Kohl was in the bed! All night!

Her eyes darted to the door. Did he...?

No. He wouldn't.

Would he?

Her mind scrambled. Had she moved in her sleep? Moaned? Reached for him?

She pressed a hand to her chest, feeling her heart pounding. Had he touched her?

Anger flared, remembering their fight.

What are you doing? You want him! You were pissed he gave himself to somebody else!

No. No, that's not the only reason she was pissed. He'd rubbed it in her face, and that was unforgivable.

And now it was ripping her apart all over again.

Her mouth twisted in disgust—at him, at herself, at the burning low in her belly that wouldn't go away.

She squeezed her eyes shut, swearing softly under her breath. Then swung her legs over the edge of the bed, her skin humming with phantom sin.

She'd had real dreams before--like crazy real-- come true real--but this... this was not that. Not at all.

So, what was it? A manifestation of her deepest, darkest, buried obsessions? Had she conjured up a Kohl that wanted her and dressed him like the devil he was acting like?

Another gasp. What if she had moved and moaned in her sleep? And he'd heard?

She stormed to the bathroom, needing cold water. No, she needed a cold shower. And then she'd have to face him. There was no getting around that.

Kaos managed to multi-task in his human vessel, filling the air with the smell of butter and eggs while Lust replayed Jaxi's glorious undoing from every angle. He still had her cocooned in his powers from the night before. Now that he was spiritually connected to her, he had every reason to use his trueform when he could. Kaos understood jealousy and obsession infinitely.

But his human's take on the topic was altogether different. Not in its passion but its needs and desires. It didn't want to share. At all. Even when watching her sleep, touching her while she lay saturated in the aftermath of Kaos, kindled a rage in his human side much like his spiritual one. Only it was without power to act. A futile

rage. Like an infant version of his spirit form.

Kaos wagered once Kohl tasted her, his obsession to have her at all times in both forms would weaken his jealousy and allow their addiction to merge as one.

The bedroom door opened, and he tracked the cadence of her walk.

Time to learn if she remembered anything. Rage and Lust had insisted he etch their binding eternally into every part of her. And he'd agreed. Then erased it anyway.

If he failed to block her memory, it was out of his hands and officially in Kade's. But why shouldn't she remember? It was a dream. She had plenty of those she remembered. Which is why they were the perfect place to hide in.

She stepped into the kitchen with a gentle sway, her movements quiet, slightly guarded. "Something smells good," she said, voice soft with sleep.

He weighed her tone. It was more of a polite offering than a real comment. "I decided to cook for you."

She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear as she eased onto the stool, putting her hands in her lap. "I see that," she said. Quick smile.

He set her plate in front of her, then met her eyes. Flashes hit without warning—her lips parted beneath his, her body writhing under his hand, the sound she made when he bit her throat. He broke the connection and turned to the stove. "You sleep okay?"

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She reached for the fork, but her fingers hesitated on the handle. “Yeah,” she said, eyes fixed on the eggs. “I think so.” The uptick in her pulse plucked against the link anchored in his cock. “One of those weird sleeps where you wake up kinda... tired.”

She took a quick bite, her shoulders moving—tight, then looser. He watched her chew, slow and methodical. She reached for the glass of water, took a sip, then set it down precisely.

She hadn’t lied. But she hadn’t told the truth either.

Kaos leaned back slightly, wrapping his voice in calm restraint. “You remember any of it?”

Her hand remained on the glass for a second. Then she took another bite. “Bits and pieces,” she said, eyes still on the plate.

“One of those dreams that sticks with you, even if you can’t explain why.”

Her tone stayed even, but a flush rose along her neck—subtle, warm. Kaos realized he wasn’t digging out answers because there was something intoxicating about letting his human vessel unwrap her like a gift. Layer by fun layer.

He studied the blooming color on her skin, felt Lust shift quietly beneath his skin.

“Sounds vivid.” He picked up his fork, let it hover. “Was there color? Sound? Feeling?”

She gave a small shrug, eyes still on her food. “Felt like a painting I forgot I made. Familiar, but only in flashes.” She took another bite, slower this time.

Still hadn’t lied. Still hadn’t told him the truth he wanted.

“There was a lot.” She cleared her throat lightly. “The kind of things that don’t explain themselves.”

Kaos let the words settle, mapping her phrasing against every sound she made in the dream. He organized the food on his plate with the tip of his fork. “The kind that lingers. Leaves something behind. A mood. A mark.”

He took his first bite, eyes on her. “I didn’t sleep much either,” he added after a beat. “The dreams you had kept me up.”

Her fork stopped halfway to her mouth. “What do you mean?” she asked, curiosity slipping out before she could stop it. Her gaze dropped to the plate, and she shifted her grip on the fork then lowered it.

Kaos reached for his glass as the memory rose without warning—her lips parted beneath his, slick with need, whispering into his mouth like it belonged to her. “You sure you want that answer?”

She dragged her fingers along the edge of her napkin, eyes flicking to his, then away. She gave a soft laugh, skin flaming with all the answers he wanted to hear from her perfect mouth. “I’m... not sure now.”

He took a slow sip, then set the glass down. “Let’s just say it made it very... hard to sleep.”

Her breath hitched. She reached for her water too quickly and nearly knocked it over.

When she lifted it, she held it steady, stormy blue gaze locked on the rim. “You should’ve woken me,” she whispered, voice fragile and bare.

Kaos held still, listening to the truth folded inside her shame. He leaned back slightly. “Why would I wake you from something you clearly wanted?” He kept his voice low, unhurried. “Craved, if I go by the heat in your gasps... the ache in your moans.”

Her eyes snapped up, sharper now. “Now you sound like a voyeur.”

Kaos tilted his head, holding her gaze. “A voyeur watches. Uninvited. Passive.” He reached for his glass again. “That wasn’t this.” He sipped then licked his lips. “I might as well have been in the dream. The sounds were... familiar.” He let the pause stretch, just long enough for the memory of her rooftop jealousy to flicker across his thoughts—tight, possessive, perfect.

He set the glass down. “Very similar to the ones my Queen once made.”

Two seconds, then water hit him in the face—sharp, cold, thrown with full force. She stood in one swift motion, chair dragging behind her. “Don’t you ever compare me to your stupid queen,” she said, voice cracking with heat. Her hands shook, her breath came fast as she stared him down.

Kaos let the water drip from his jaw, unmoving. The corner of his mouth curved—slow, precise. His beautiful angel.

He wiped the water with the back of his hand, gaze steady. “You drew the comparison the moment you felt threatened by her.” He stood slowly, closing the distance one measured step at a time. “But don’t worry,” he added, voice lower. “Whatever happened to you in that dream got me harder than my Queen ever did.”

She stepped right up to him, brave, fury bared. “I’m really glad my first time was

with a being more beautiful than this world can bear,” she said, voice calm but cutting. “And I’m especially glad you got to watch from the sidelines... while he took me apart—and everything in my world with it.”

The words hit like a lightning strike. His Lust coiled in his chest, Rage flared so bright it blurred the room behind her.

There it was. The gift he’d been unwrapping. And it was devastation to his human vessel and rapture to his spirit.

He smiled. Slowly. “Next time,” he said, breath thickened, “I won’t stay on the sidelines.”

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She didn't move. Her pupils remained wide, jaw set like it was the only thing keeping her steady.

Kaos watched the rise and fall of her chest, the flush still blooming high on her skin. "You have a meeting in thirty minutes," he murmured, fighting the urge to touch her.

She blinked like the words hit her from somewhere far off. "Shit," she remembered, turning and vanishing down the hall.

Kaos's spirit seethed with need while Kohl's body threw a jealous tantrum, furious that it hadn't been him in her confession. Such a strange state of existence he was in. Two lives. Two bodies. With identical obsessions and identical rages to protect it. And the only reason he didn't flick the human obstacle aside was because he couldn't. Not if he was going to have her at all times. In both forms. With every appetite he possessed.

But wondering what she would feel and taste like on the tongue of this humanity he was imprisoned in held its own treasures he craved to have.

He listened as drawers opened, fabric flung, and curses spilled under her breath. Kaos still stood where she left him, silently celebrating. That dream would always live in her now. Her ache now had shape. And her possessive fury clutched it closely. He'd marked her spirit. Branded her breath. All that remained was getting her to give the same thing to Kohl.

Jaxi stepped outside and the wind met her first—cool across her skin, useless against the heat still rolling through her body. Everything clung to her like a mixed-medium-pour, right on her skin. The dream, the man now stalking behind her, their voices, mouths, the weight and glory of one body pressed into hers and the agony and longing for the other. For Kohl, for the way he watched her like he already knew what lived under her defenses—what she craved, what she'd give if someone ever reached far enough. The one shadowing her while her skin remembered someone else. That truth pulled like a blade through her chest.

He'd looked her in the eye and said it—harder than my Queen ever did. No shame. No hesitation. Like the dream had belonged to him, too. And maybe it did. Maybe it had always been him.

The air shifted around her—folding his presence in closer. She kept her eyes forward. Her body already tracked him—just behind her left shoulder, close enough to touch, close enough to want.

The path ahead curled clean between stone and clipped grass. The building at the end looked like it had no interest in greetings—Trojan HQ didn't do welcome. It sat in the landscape like a steel verdict.

She walked toward it with her spine tight and her senses wide open. Boots on stone, wind in her coat. Phantom heat rising off the man behind her in waves that caught her breath every third step. Somehow his silence followed her closer. Pressing. Each footfall too measured and perfect.

The scent of him suddenly caught on the breeze—clean, dark, sharp as war ash. It wrapped around her lungs and refused to leave.

The building came closer and his image cut through the glass like a shadow built to walk through walls. Black on black. Calm on the outside. Eyes nearly black

too—except for the red, glinting low and mean, like embers that refused to die even after the fire had.

He looked calm. Too calm. A still surface trying to convince the world it had no teeth underneath. But he was also her rear guard. A strange, comforting distraction she couldn't stop wanting to stare at.

She reached the main entrance and pulled the door open. Cool air washed over her as she stepped into the front corridor—polished floors, quiet lighting, and a silence built into the walls.

This part of the building didn't make noise. It wore specs and listened with a quirked brow.

Ahead, a second door waited. Beyond it was the meeting room if she remembered correctly.

She paused at the threshold, hand on the glass handle.

Voices hummed on the other side—soft, focused. The kind of tone people used when making decisions about things they didn't plan to reverse.

She felt him behind her. Close. Still.

She wanted to say something. Maybe something small. Just enough to anchor herself before walking into whatever this was.

She turned toward him. And forgot every word.

His gaze caught hers the second she faced him—dark, unreadable, fixed with that impossible stillness that felt less like restraint and more like something waiting to

snap. His eyes, black near the edges, gleamed with those low red flecks—alive, watching, wanting something it would never voice.

She stood there, locked in the prison. Her lips parted, but nothing came out.

His jaw ticked once. “The door,” he murmured, his soft tone surprising her.

Her stomach pulled tight. She turned back without a word and his hand closed around her other wrist, pulling.

She faced him, breath lodged in her chest. His eyes lowered and locked on her mouth. Her pulse scattered. His fingers closed over her jaw, soft, hot, like his focus on her lips.

She closed her eyes, unable to see him so close, so beautiful. His finger moved slowly, firmly at the edge of her lips, drawing her light gasp.

“A smear.”

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His touch left and her brain sputtered. A smear?

“Like a child that can’t color in the lines,” he added, the soft words meandering through her body.

She froze, realizing what he meant. She spun to the glass door, staring at her reflection, breaths too fast now. She looked back at him. “Is it okay now?”

He took his time answering, spending too many seconds staring at the job. “Perfect,” he finally said.

The praise hit her hormones like a shockwave, obliterating all her focus.

“Allow me,” he said, reaching for the door.

“Wait!” she shot out quietly, holding a hand on the glass, the other on her chest. “Let me... have a moment to... focus.”

She drew a slow, deep breath through her nose, closing her eyes when he stared at her with that fire in his eyes. Fury? Want? Obsession?

Only in your dreams, little girl.

She emptied her lungs, slowly, evenly. Drew another breath the same, then repeated, hearing his own huff of impatience.

Her anger snapped. “I’m sorry,” she whispered sharply. “I’m not blessed with your

ice-cold self-control. I'm a little more human than you."

Something flickered in his eyes and he gave the sexiest half smile she'd ever seen. God, it made her want to... kiss him! He was too much!

She yanked open the door, ready to jump into anything to escape the inferno before her. She stepped into the room and caught her breath. The space stretched long, the walls brushed with steel and slate looking panels. A single black-glass table ran through the center like a blade, designed for making decisions.

Five people sat already. Still. Watching.

Kildare stood near a screen at the front, backlit by movement and color. A mug balanced in one hand while calm rested on his shoulders, sharp around the edges.

His eyes found hers and the space between them clicked into something else. His focus didn't weigh her down, it lifted her slightly—like she was something that had already passed inspection.

"Miss Juniper," he greeted, holding her gaze one second longer than necessary before turning back to the faces at the table.

She nodded at him and removed her coat, hanging it on the back of the chair near her and sat without looking at anyone. She glanced back to find Kohl standing near the door, already folded into the shadows. Arms crossed, posture easy. Like he was in a battle with silence. Whoever moved first, lost.

Jaxi faced forward, placing her hands neatly in her lap, lacing her fingers.

Kildare stepped away from the screen, the light cutting off behind him.

She unlaced her fingers.

“This is Trojan Horse,” he said. No flourish. Just the name. “We don’t drop bombs. We don’t change laws. We don’t fight power with power.”

He looked at each of them.

“We reverse engineer seduction.”

Jaxi’s brain perked up at that. Reverse engineer seduction. That was way not what she was expecting out of his mouth.

“We go after a system that taught a generation to trade their will for ease, their conviction for comfort, and their ability to think for speed.”

He paced once, slowly, like the words needed space to breathe.

“This isn’t about belief,” he continued. “It’s about architecture. About how humanity’s wiring got rewritten.”

He tapped something on the table console. The screen behind him shifted to three clean columns.

“Reflex is the new weapon. Ours, and theirs.” He turned back to them. “They use saturation. They use speed. Endless emotional reward, messages dressed in a thousand colors, all built to bypass the brain and flatter the appetite.”

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Jaxi straightened, one hundred percent intrigued now.

“The endgame isn’t control.” His gaze landed on her, locking her breath. “It’s addiction. To stimulation, to self.” His eyes settled on the face next to her. “They don’t need anyone to agree. They just need them to stop asking why.”

Jaxi’s hand rose, more instinct than choice.

Kildare caught it with a nod.

“Who’s behind this?” she asked.

He rested his palms on the glass table. “Something systemic. A network. It doesn’t post—it plants seeds. It doesn’t trend—it spreads. It knows exactly what it’s feeding, and where it hits deepest.”

She didn’t look away from him, but his words tightened her chest. Like a moment you realize you’ve been standing in something you didn’t see.

She halfway raised her hand again.

“Miss Juniper,” he acknowledged, sliding his hands off the table.

She focused on measuring her voice, darting a glance toward Kohl. “May I ask what my purpose is here?”

Kildare stepped to the edge of the table. “You’re not looped,” he said. “You haven’t

been patterned. And with your gifts, that makes you rare.”

He gestured to the screen.

“These are three emotional payloads designed to work the same way theirs do—but with one difference.” He glanced at her. “They carry a shift.”

She watched closely, feeling now like she should’ve brought something to jot notes.

“We’re not trying to teach. We’re trying to redirect the loop—using the same tools: speed, pleasure, familiarity. But with a thread that tilts the trajectory, just enough to crack the algorithm.”

“And you want me to... rate them?”

“Sort of,” he said. “We want to see where they land in someone untouched. If they make something move. Tilt. Catch.”

She nodded, resisting the need to look back at Kohl.

“If none of them do—then we go back in. Make them sharper. Until they slide in as quiet as everything else already does. And leave something behind.”

His stare got pointed on her.

“You’re here to help us build the kind of message that rewires without permission.”

Chapter Eight

Kaos walked beside her, the meeting still echoing behind his ribs. She had watched all three payloads without flinching, named them ineffective with that maddening,

soft finality of hers—like she was discussing the seasoning on a plate instead of psychological warfare. And Kildare had agreed. No, not just agreed—he'd been pleased.

She'd dismissed weeks of calibrated strategy, and the man leading it had smiled like he couldn't wait to see what she'd do instead.

On top of this, she moved through the day like her body hadn't been broken open in the night. Kaos ached to repeat it while Kohl burned to be chosen. And now, walking beside her, she moved like neither version of him had touched her. But she had touched all of him.

Now, he was fixated on the lightness of her walk. Not flippant—unguarded and open. Like the weight of the meeting hadn't settled in her bones yet.

She was talking again. Something about the light, the way the clouds moved like slow dancers. The strange, gold warmth bleeding through the chill. Her voice hopped frequencies like she couldn't quite stay on one station—didn't know she was supposed to be burdened.

He watched her through the corner of his gaze, looking for the shape of this immunity Kildare mentioned. Whatever had spared her from the digital rot infection didn't feel like protection with her. Closed off from the loop, yes—but maybe just as closed off from the thing that should've replaced it.

His eyes drifted past her shoulder, then lower. Just enough to imagine the shape of her. The warmth of her thighs, the way her shirt moved like it didn't belong on her skin. Lust hit Kohl. Clean, violent. Human. It slammed into his core with no divine buffer—no sacred filtering, no spiritual absorption—just raw, biological fire surging through flesh made to feel it.

He exhaled too sharply, a sound caught between restraint and need. A low growl tore free.

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She froze mid-sentence and spun toward him, eyes lit with something too sharp to be fear. “We’re doing this now?”

He stopped inches from running her over.

“Alright, spill it,” she snapped, then quickly took a step back. “I could feel you staring me down in that room, judging me with those abysmal stabby orbs of yours.” She gestured wildly, arms slicing the air. “Why not give it a voice and lay it out? Or give it wings and let it fly? Or hell, give it a cliff to fuck off of!”

She breathed hard, brows lifted like she dared him to respond.

“Do you even know where you’re going?”

She blinked once. Not confused—highly offended. “Yes,” she clipped. “I’m going to my art studio to get what needs getting, so I can give what needs giving. I figured with all your recording skills, you already knew that.”

“I did,” he said flatly. “Along with the thirty-two times you adjusted your ass in the chair and the way your foot tapped when Kildare leaned in, and the breath you caught—once—when the screen flashed column two.” He stepped closer. “And the man opposite you scratched his neck when you stood, watched your waist, then dropped his gaze after seven seconds.”

She planted her hands on her hips like she anchored a planet. “Alright,” she snapped, cheeks flushed. “You forgot one.”

She stepped forward, eyes sharp. “Kildare. Posture that doesn’t bend, shoulders like steel and a voice that never needs to rise.” She bravely leaned in even closer. “He doesn’t need to do anything to own the room. He breathes—and the room makes space.”

The heat in that sentence slammed both sides of him in the gut. He was seconds away from punishing her mouth with his when eyes went big and she looked down at herself. “Oh no! I need to change!” She spun in the opposite direction and shot out, calling over her shoulder, “This is not what you wear when meeting a muse for the first time. I look like a brochure!”

He stalked after her, Lust and Rage going over punishing options the entire way there. She vanished into the house while Kaos paced on the porch, blood vibrating with heat and wrath as his powers zipped through walls and found her mumbling voice and... fuck, she was naked.

Memory crashed in, her mouth on his, the arc of her body, the tremble in her thighs when she begged the dream to keep going. And her world shattering cry at his first thrust and her moans when he stayed.

He moved to the edge of the porch, a bomb ready to detonate. Restraint coiled in his spine, sharp and full of iron teeth. Inside, she changed clothes. Just that. Not some ceremony. Not a contract. But somehow, her nakedness was exactly that. His mind said it meant nothing, but his instincts knew it meant everything. Rage and Lust didn’t want to fuck her. They wanted her vow. They wanted her loyalty. They wanted the proof that what happened in that dream had planted itself deeper than she knew.

Her steps through the apartment moved in his cock and blood and the door opened. He turned as she stepped out and struck a pose like she was daring the universe to judge her. “Try not to fall too hard,” she said, voice light but steady. “I dress for gods, not mortals.”

He stared as she stood there like a paradox painted in human form. An oversized shirt splattered in years of color got knotted at the waist with half a care. Striped pajama pants shoved into combat boots like she'd fought with the closet and won. A crooked bandana crowned her head, tilted like a flag raised by the wrong army. Two brushes gripped like weapons, a belt slung loose over her hips, all crowded with useless tools she wore like armor.

His gaze made it back up, landing on her grin that was too wide, her stance too proud. She looked fucking absurd and she looked like revelation. The contradiction caught his breath mid-pulse. Rage fell still. Lust dropped its claws. Every part of him—instinct, ruin, reverence—paused in awe. She hadn't dressed to impress him. She hadn't considered him at all. And somehow, that made her divine.

He stepped forward, steady and exact, until only a breath lived between them. He didn't look at her boots, didn't acknowledge the shirt or the riot of color she wore in defiance, he only looked at her.

“Good thing I never claimed to be mortal.”

She blinked. He watched it hit her—the shift behind her eyes, the way her mouth parted, suddenly remembered him in places she hadn't consciously placed him.

He didn't move. Didn't press. He let her feel it, waiting to see what she'd do.

Kaos didn't turn and walk away, Kohl did. Without a word, he just headed for the studio like that was the only place he'd ever intended to be. And he didn't need to look back to know she was following, he could feel it in the air—the eager clump, clump, clump of her steps, the way her energy caught on his like a thread pulled through rough cloth.

Soon she ran ahead of him, done with her near revelation and on to more relevant

things like art. She paused at the door of the small building, her gaze roaming over the frame like she was already making a list. “I hope it has string,” she murmured. “The strong kind, not the fake kind. And some brushes that haven’t been ruined by rage. Maybe wire. Maybe something odd, like a cracked mirror or a ball of old keys. Something with texture.” Her fingers hovered near the handle. “I really, really hope there’s a big table with burn marks. Like somebody made fire on it and didn’t regret it.”

She swung the door open and ran through it like she’d been caged for years. Before Kaos could take a full step inside, her boots pounded the floor, arms thrown wide, voice rising like some half-wild hymn to freedom.

“Oh my God, look at this light!” she shouted. “Kohl! Do you see this?! This is actual daylight!” She spun, fast, nearly slipped, didn’t care. Her hands grazed the edge of a long wooden countertop, and she let out a delighted gasp.

“Stone! It’s not that fake stuff—it’s real! And the stove—oh yes, gas burners! You hear that?” She flicked the knob, clicked it twice, grinned like it lit her up from the inside. “That’s the sound of real culinary power!”

Kaos stepped into the main space. He didn’t speak because there was no room in the air for anything but her.

She vanished down a hallway. Cabinets opened. A door slammed. Water ran for a second, then shut off. “Bathroom!” she shouted from somewhere around a corner. “A tub! With a ledge for candles! And the towels are burgundy! Not hospital white. I swear this place has personality.”

She returned at a jog, short hair fluffed by her wrecking ball energy. She moved to the center of the space, where a massive worktable dominated the room. She stopped, stared at it. Then jumped up like it had challenged her. She rolled across the top

dramatically, limbs flailing like a dying fish.

Kaos arched a brow.

She flopped to her back and let out a sigh that was half howl. “Absolutely unshakable. I love this thing.”

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She hopped to her feet and broke into a ridiculous jig—knees high, arms flapping with exaggerated rhythm. “Look at this! You could build an empire on this table!”

Then, without warning, she jumped off.

Too fast. Too high.

She landed wrong, arms pinwheeling, boots skidding across the floor as she thudded on the tile.

She burst out laughing, completely unembarrassed.

Kaos took a breath that didn’t fully make it into his lungs, watching her roll onto her back, still laughing. She sat up and looked around like she'd forgotten why she fell in the first place.

“This place is dangerous,” she said, grinning right at him. “I could live here. Like, live. We could just bring in a mattress, a case of soup, a radio, and call it heaven.” She blinked as the words caught up to her, stealing half of her smile. “Okay, that sounded unhinged. Just delete that from your memory. Erase it. Except don’t. Unless you want to. Do you love it? No? Yes? Maybe?”

She jumped to her feet and spun in a circle, arms stretched out to the ceiling while his tongue filled with fiftyyesesto each question and invitation.

“This is the first place I’ve ever walked into that didn’t make me feel like I had to shrink. Itwantsmess. It wants volume. It wants me to scream and spill things and not

say sorry for it.”

She turned to him, wild and flushed, eyes burning with joy that hadn’t asked for permission.

Lust surged, coiled low and thick, swelling in his blood, pressing down his spine. It wanted her mouth, her breath, and the soft underside of her chaos. It didn’t want to ask. It didn’t want to hesitate, it wanted to mark her, bruise her, bury itself in her until the air reeked of both of them.

Rage rose behind it, slower, heavier. It draped itself over her like smoke. It wrapped around her laugh, her movements, her hunger for life. It didn’t reach to hold her. It settled over her like she already belonged to it. Both parts of him recorded every shift, every footfall, every sound like it was mapping a territory already promised to him. But which him? There was no order in him now. Only response. Only ache. Only fire. She wasn’t the assignment. She wasn’t a moment. She was an altar. And his entire being was on its knees.

It was Kohl that broke the spell. “What is your plan?”

The studio suddenly breathed again as Jaxi blinked once, then looked down as if remembering her own feet. Her voice came out quiet. “To let my hands figure out what my mouth couldn’t explain to him.”

Fuck. He couldn’t love an answer more.

Whatever she was about to create—it wouldn’t just be art, it would be revelation. Confession. Worship. And he would be watching. Not to guard her or guide her. But to know her. Down to the place where her soul bled color and dreams and hope that confounded.

She was moving through the studio like a priestess searching for a prophecy. One by one, she tested mediums—touched, weighed, smelled—holding each in her hands like a relic that might speak if she stayed still long enough. But nothing answered.

Kaos watched from the wall, arms folded, eyes devouring every gesture. The space had gone quiet, reverent again. Except this time, she didn't look sure. She looked...lost.

Then she stopped.

Turned.

Looked straight at him.

Kaos watched her stillness break with a breath.

“I need to prepare,” she declared as if just remembering. Not to him, but to the air, to the gods. She spun on her heel with purpose, like the next twenty-four hours had just been dictated by divine order and she was its executioner.

Chapter Nine

Hour One: Cookie Chaos

The kitchen lit with war.

Flour detonated, a cloud of white rising as she launched into motion without an apron, without measuring cups—just chaos and intent. She slapped a record on a nearby turntable—real vinyl—and let it scream something jazz-heavy and barely sane into the space.

She cracked two eggs. One splattered. She cursed it like it had insulted her ancestors, muttering with flour in her hair, smudges on her cheek, and one sock higher than the other. She cared less than nothing while Kaos remained in the doorway, motionless and aroused out of his wicked mind.

“Are you going to stand there like an emotional vampire,” she accused, “or are you going to smell vanilla with me?”

She marched over with two bottles, popped their lids, and shoved one beneath his nose. “Too soft, right? That’s not what the Muse wants. We need the bolder one.”

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He took a slow breath. The scent was subtle, faint—forgettable.

She thrust the second bottle toward him. Definitely darker, richer.

“This,” she declared, nodding with zero of his input, “is ambition. And ambition needs cinnamon.”

She turned back to the counter, grabbed the mixing bowl and shoving it at him like a challenge. “Here. Stir this like you mean it. Like it insulted your mother.”

He took the bowl with a glance and one raised brow. “Is it supposed to look like wet sand after a thunderstorm?”

She gasped, happy with his description. “Exactly,” she said, already flinging more flour into a second bowl. “We’re building edible passion andrage.”

He stirred—slowly at first, then faster as the mixture thickened beneath his hand like it recognized authority.

“You’re a little scary,” she muttered, eyes focused on the counter. “Even your stirring is aggressive.”

“This mix is defiant.” Like her. Thoughts of passion and aggression turned his cock into steel as she gave a delighted snort.

“No. It’s judgmental. The batter’s terrified, I can feel it.”

She flung more ingredients into the bowl like she was throwing paint at a canvas then rolled dough with the concentration of someone sculpting clay. Her laughter erupted when a glob stuck to the wall. “Oops. That wall had it coming.”

She dipped her finger into the batter, tasted it with a soft hum of pleasure, then scooped another dollop and held it out to him.

He paused the man handling of his own bowl, frozen in a moment that hovered between caution and capture.

She stepped closer, smile softening. “Come on. One taste won’t kill you.”

His hand shot out and wrapped her wrist—firm, absolute. He locked his eyes on hers, scanning for trickery or intent.

Her smile turned radiant, brows lifted and daring him to do worse.

He brought her finger to his mouth and a second before he took it in, Kaos realized. It was Kohl’s first taste.

The second her finger landed on his tongue, Kaos threw open the power portals and gave both of them something neither of them possessed. The ability to experience the best of both worlds. The human and the spirit.

The sugar was obliterated by the fire of her. Her skin, her energy, the wildness barely contained beneath her flesh flooded both sides of him. The heat in her gaze flared, burning hotter than anything he’d ever felt.

His tongue grazed the tip of her finger and she stared at him—stunned, fearless, and unsmiling. Just fully present. Like she’d suddenly remembered she had a body, and it wasn’t just being noticed, it was being coveted.

Kaos stepped back when Lust and Rage prepared to break through and give her what she begged for, take what she hid in plain sight, and light their worlds on fire.

She spun toward the oven then, slammed a tray inside, then shut the door and twisted the timer. She turned to him, both hands on her hips, breath still elevated.

“You never smiled, not once. Tyrant.”

He had no words. But deep inside, everything had cracked. And bled fire.

Hour Two: Playlist Confessions

With the cookies cooling on the counter, she dropped to the studio floor with a marker in one hand and a mission in her bones. She crawled to the far wall and began writing directly on it without hesitation, her back to him, her humming soft but erratic—like a record skipping across thoughts.

“This,” she declared mid-doodle, “is the playlist zone. Every project needs a soundtrack, and the spirits of the songs need a place to live.”

Kaos tilted his head. The wall already belonged to her, wearing her scrawl like war paint.

She wrote names in uneven rows. Ella. Etta. Billie. Nina. Her voice warmed at each one. Then she paused. “Don’t judge me,” she muttered with mock solemnity, and added one modern name. She circled it with a heart.

Kaos approached, silent.

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“You know what?” she said, glancing back at him. “Never mind. Judge me. It was a breakup year, and she got me through it.”

He looked at the name, and a thought snapped into place with merciless clarity—someone had broken her. Not just disappointed or walked away, but carved a silence into her loudness. His rage reacted first, dark and brutal, already building the bones of revenge with nothing but a name. His lust followed, sharper and more primal, whispering how best to reclaim her joy—through pleasure, through possession, through the kind of relentless devotion that leaves no room for ghosts. Even though he didn’t speak, she clearly heard something in the quiet.

“Music sees what we can’t say,” she said, her voice soft, almost quiet. “And I need it loud, or I forget how to move.”

She stood and turned the volume knob on the player. The record hissed for a second before resuming, louder now—like it was reclaiming the room. She turned in a slow circle with her arms raised to the ceiling, moving her fingers through the notes as though they were tangible threads.

Kaos watched. Her joy wasn’t performative, it wasn’t aimed at him, it just existed whether he was there or not. And that made it sharper somehow.

She began dancing—nothing graceful—her movements raw instinct. A battle between rhythm and memory. She laughed. She twirled. She bumped into a chair and apologized to it. Then she grabbed his hand. “Your turn.”

She grinned and backed up a few steps, narrowing her eyes at him with challenge

glittering in every line of her body. She pulled him in and spun herself around him like she was orbiting gravity. Her grip was firm, her breath fast. She tried to step on his foot, missed, and cursed.

“I was going to win that.”

“You were not,” he replied, his pulse raging.

She laughed again and released him, spinning away with her hands flung out, then suddenly pivoted. “Let’s see how good your instincts are,” she challenged. Without giving him time to respond, she sprinted straight at him like a missile of chaos and trust. Five feet out, she jumped in a reckless, swan-dive arc.

Kaos moved fast, catching her by the waist midair and lifting her above his head. She squealed with delight, limbs flailing as he spun her once, then again.

“I’m flying!” she screamed.

He lowered her slowly, setting her feet back on the floor, but she stumbled as the room tilted beneath her. He caught her again—this time gently, steadying her with hands that never wanted to let go. She laughed breathlessly and threw her arms around him in a hug that was fierce and full of sunshine. Then she darted off toward the next thing, already chasing a new thread of chaos like the day hadn’t even peaked yet.

She made him part of her rhythm and his pulse hadn’t stopped dancing from it. His Lust collected every act and gesture and his Rage created a shrine out of it. And Kohl and Kaos knelt before it like slave children waiting for food to fall from their master’s table.

Hour Three: Bubble Rituals

She skidded to a halt near the hallway, eyes lighting up with sudden urgency. “Do you think they stocked it with bubbles?” she asked like it was the most important question in the world. “Real ones. Not the boring clean kind—something that smells like sin and sparkles when it hits the light.”

She vanished into the bathroom before he could respond. Cabinet doors thudded open. A faucet screeched. Then the unmistakable sound of water rushing into porcelain.

Kaos stood rooted near the hallway, jaw tight. The sound of the tub filling was nothing short of torture—liquid temptation echoing through the walls. His Lust surged, fully alert, imagining her skin slicked and steaming, her curves framed in bubbles and candlelight. His Rage snarled at the thought of anyone who had touched her before he could. She was bathing—in the next room. Naked. Vulnerable. Glorious. And not his. Not in this body. Not yet.

“Hey,” her voice rang out, casual and sweet, just muffled enough to make his pulse jump. “Come sit by the door. I want to talk to you while I soak. No peeking,” she added, sing-song and shameless.

Kaos’s jaw flexed as he approached the bathroom. He sat with his back to it, every muscle drawn tight, every instinct clawing inside him. Steam soon curled from beneath the door, and with it came scent—lavender, citrus, something vanilla-laced and sinful.

He closed his eyes. Her sigh floated through the wood like temptation made audible.

“This might be the happiest I’ve ever been,” she said, voice slow and lazy. “And I’m not even doing anything important. Isn’t that weird?”

He didn’t answer. He couldn’t.

“I used to think happiness came after everything got fixed,” she continued. “Like... after the storm passed. But maybe it just sneaks in during the storm if you let it.”

Kaos let his head rest back against the wall. He didn't trust his voice, so he gave her silence and just listened.

“You're a really good wall,” she added after a while. “Solid. Quiet. Kind of warm. And terrifying. Just my type. Oh!” she chirped, water sloshing. “You wanna play Ten Questions?”

Kaos tilted his head toward the door. “What is that?”

“I ask you a question, then you ask me one. No thinking. Just first thing that comes to mind. Stop at ten. Deal?”

Questions and answers? “Begin.”

“Okay,” she said brightly. “Question one. What do you want that you think you don't deserve?”

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Kaos didn't hesitate. "Redemption."

That earned a breath from her, soft and full of weight. "Your turn," she prompted.

"Question two," he said, numbering the way she had. "What do you fear more—being seen or being ignored?"

"Seen," she answered, then laughed like she hated how true it was. "Damn. That came out fast. Number three," she said, regaining control. "If you could destroy one memory, would you?"

"No. Pain is proof."

A pause. Then a splash. "God, that's hot."

"Question four," he said. "Why do you touch everything like you're trying to save it?"

"Because I learned very young that my touch has power, so I touch everything. Question five," she hurried. "Why is your destiny pain and destruction?"

Kaos's jaw tightened. He stared straight ahead. "Because it's why I was born. Question six. Tell me of a time when you used this touching power."

She paused, just long enough to make him wonder if she'd answer. "There was a boy in the orphanage—George. He fought a lot. Was angry all the time. Everyone avoided him like he was contagious." Her tone softened, shaded in memory. "One night, he

got punished for fighting again. They locked him in the furnace room—no blankets, no light. Poor thing was crying like he was next door to purgatory. So... I sat with him. And hummed to him until he stopped crying and felt better.”

Kaos angled his head toward the door, his Rage uncoiling, his Lust quiet. “That's not touching.”

Water splashed softly behind the door. “It most certainly was,” she countered. “My hands have power. But my power doesn't need hands.” She wrapped the words in happy wonder. “Question seven. Wait... is it seven?”

He smiled. “Yes.”

“Tell me then...whydo you keep pain for proof? Who are you proving it to?”

Her delicate, demanding voice slipped right past the prison doors inside him. “I keep it for me. To remind myself of my destiny.”

He pushed his power closer to her, pausing right before the tub.

“That's... kind of beautiful. And sad,” she added in a small voice that floated out with the steam. The water splashed around. “Okay, number eight. Who would you kill slowly, if there were no rules?”

Kaos chuckled lightly at how she'd stolen his turn without blinking. “Whoever made you think you had to shrink,” he said, voice low, final.

That silenced her. Utterly.

Water dripped. Breathing slowed.

“Nine,” he said. “What would break you completely, right now?” Kaos again glanced at the door when she didn't answer.

“If... you didn't see me.”

Kaos closed his eyes, feeling his pulse answer in ways language couldn't.

“Ten,” she whispered. “What are you ashamed of?”

“That I would forsake divine purpose just to be hers.”

Her gasp was sharp.

“Eleven,” he growled. “What are you doing to me?”

The silence burned through his every breath as he waited. “I'm... waking you up.”

They both breathed through the stormy confessions.

“Twelve,” she dared softly. “Would you come in here if I asked?”

“Yes,” he said. Instantly.

He sat there, his heart thundering. Moments passed. Water stilled. Then the soft shuffle of a towel against skin reached him. A few seconds later, the door opened just wide enough for steam to curl into the hall. She stepped out barefoot, fully wrapped in a thick burgundy robe that clung to the steam.

Kaos rose to his feet, pulse thrumming beneath the surface. She didn’t look at him right away. “That,” she said softly, tying the robe at her waist, “was the most sacred bath of my life. I will never be the same.”

Kaos remained still. She brushed past him gently, the edge of her sleeve catching his hand for half a second. His fingers twitched, tempted to hold on. She didn’t stop, but she glanced back with a knowing smile, like maybe she’d felt it too.

He followed her into the main room, watching her cross to the counter where the cookies still waited on parchment. She picked out several and set them on a small plate. Then she pulled a clean glass from the drying rack, poured milk, and carried everything carefully back across the room to the studio couch.

She set the plate and glass down on the coffee table before sinking into the cushions with a sigh of contentment. Then she pointed at the far end. “You. Sit,” she ordered, mouth full of cookie.

Kaos didn’t move at first. He realized she enjoyed bossing him around as much as he liked being pushed around by her chaos. There was something pure and less cursed about it.

He settled on the opposite end as instructed. The couch was barely long enough for her to stretch her legs, which she did—long and warm, her toes coming to rest lightly against his thigh.

She chewed in silence for a few seconds, then leaned back. “It’s secret-sharing time,” she announced, licking a crumb from her lip. “We tell each other one thing about ourselves no one else knows. I’ll go first.”

He waited while his mind focused on the feel of her toes—pressing against his thigh with an eager, unconscious rhythm.

“Sooo,” she began, dragging the word with juicy warning. “I have really crazy dreams. Not like nightmares. But real and vivid. Like I’m actually living two different lives in two different places at the same time.” She paused and laughed softly. “Only... not at the same time. Because I’m not really living this one while I’m asleep!” She grinned, amused by her own contradiction.

“Sometimes I dream things that come true,” she went on. “I dreamed about you and Kildare coming to my house—and you did.”

Her voice softened now, just slightly. Still casual. Still her.

“Sometimes I wake up and forget which version is the dream and which is my life.”

She looked at him then. “Okay. Your turn. One real secret.”

Kaos didn’t move or blink. “I was a god in another life... then I craved to kneel before another.”

Two seconds, then a snort. “Please don’t bring your queen into this and ruin my night.”

He turned and locked gazes with her till the air sizzled between them. "I didn't," he said, low and final.

She didn't flinch as she stared back, toes curling slightly against his leg.

"Tell me," he said, the connection between them tighter. "Which of your dreams was the most vivid? Which did you wish was your real life?"

She swallowed after a second, her eyes fluttering downward the moment shame and guilt arrived. "You'll laugh maybe," she barely tested, toes digging.

"I won't," he assured, anticipation stirring his cock.

She took a deep breath, angling her gaze to the coffee table. "There was one," she began. "A... man... came to me. Not someone I know, but... I seemed to remember him the second I saw him."

Kaos tilted his head slightly, his pulse thundering. She remembered him.

"So... this is the part that's kind of crazy," she warned, her smile hinting at the edge of her perfect little mouth. "I'm just going to say it quick, and you can't laugh."

"Say it," he urged as her toes pressed nervously.

A big breath and she set her plate on the table then plopped her hands in her lap. "I can't look," she said, raising them over her face. "So, first," she said behind her tight fingers. "He had big black wings, black as night. And he had black horns too, and his eyes were nightmares with fire, and yet they were kind and... beautiful," she finished softly. "Uuugh, I told you it was crazy," she said, dropping both hands into her lap, toes drilling.

He could hardly focus while wanting to capture her foot and put it on his cock. “Sounds like you encountered a demon,” he said, feeling his two selves clashing now.

She considered that with a grimace. “No,” she said quietly, head barely shaking at the air between them. “He was definitely an angel.” She added the barest smile. “And he was mine.”

A single sharp breath escaped him as something hot surged in his chest. Possessive, raw, dangerous. His rage didn’t know whether to growl or kneel. His lust... it wanted to mark her deeper. Bind her harder. Ask her what it would take to be that again—hers. And Kohl was ready to rip his own head off for having her before he did.

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But Kaos wasn't the least phased by his rage. "Tell me," he said, voice quieter. "What did this demon-angel do?"

Her entire face flushed and she lowered her head. "I definitely cannot say."

"I thought you were telling me your secret?"

"I did!" she shot back, flustered. "You're just digging for more."

He angled a look at her. "Your toes are what's digging for more." He lifted her foot and pulled it in his lap. "Tell me without telling me." He slid his thumb firmly over the arch of her foot, memorizing every single detail he felt. "Use your colors and special paint brushes."

She gave a moan that electrified his cock. "Wow, that feels amazing." She scooted lower onto the couch with a sigh, adding her other foot to his lap. "My colors and brushes," she mumbled, oblivious to what her little gift did to him.

He captured it in his other hand, giving it the same finger worship.

"Fine," she said with a soft sigh. "But you still can't laugh. It's probably just some dumb wish-fulfillment thing." She exhaled slowly, eyes fluttering half-closed. "Okay," she prepared. "If I'm painting..." Her toes flexed in his hand, like the memory lived in her body more than her mind. "It started with red. Not soft red—the deep kind. The kind that stains your mouth after biting into something forbidden." She swallowed. "Then gold... like I was glowing from the inside out. Like his hands lit candles under my skin."

She drew a slow breath then let it go.

“Then it all turned dark. But not an empty dark.” Her brows pulled together a little. “Like rich, dark-chocolate-dark.”

Her voice dipped lower. “He touched me like I was sacred. Like his fingers were reading scripture.” She paused with flushed cheeks, gaze down. “I couldn’t see the edges of myself anymore. I just... dissolved. Like he’d painted me with fire until all that was left was light.”

Her soft words stilled everything in him.

“And then...” she whispered, her breaths thinning. “He remade me into something that doesn’t quite fit inside my skin anymore.”

Kaos’s hands were locked in the fire with the rest of him. His Lust and Rage merged into a power that had his blood quaking. Shoving and demanding at the door of every cell. He held himself very still.

“But... it was just a dream,” she muttered. “And yes, it’s the one I’d trade my real life to have.”

Kaos’s voice was low, almost reverent. “And why do you think he did this?”

Her gaze dropped to his hands on her feet, to the memory seared behind her eyes. She swallowed, her face becoming a sculpture of pain. “I... wish I knew.” Her toes curled in his hands, and he pressed every finger into her tiny feet, the fragile crack in her voice piercing his chest. “Before the dream faded... he said I’d forget. But he wouldn’t.”

She captured her lower lip with her upper one then slowly released it. “I didn’t

forget,” she swore softly, head shaking barely. “I will never forget.”

Kaos sat motionless as his true form clawed against his human skin, demanding freedom, threatening to take it. He inhaled through his nose, slow and sharp. Kohl wasn't her salvation, Kaos was.

Kaos's jaw flexed. Kohl's voice came out. “So you just... gave yourself to him?”

Her head snapped up, eyes wide. “What?”

He felt the shift. Her shock, her pulse. But it didn't stop the human venom.

“You let some devil-angel claim you like it was fate,” he said, quieter now. Sharper. His voice wasn't his own anymore. “He touched you like you were his. And you let him.”

“It was a dream, Kohl,” she said gently, like that explained the fire still on her skin.

He looked up and locked her in his stare. Kaos moved behind his eyes now. The man and the god staring at her. “Was it?” Kohl accused.

Her breath hitched and they both caught the flutter at her throat, the way her body didn't know whether to run or reach.

“You're jealous of a dream?” she whispered, barely incredulous.

He exhaled as ice filled his human veins. “Not jealous of a dream,” Kohl said. “Pissed you gave yourself to one.”

The hurt in her eyes kicked up the fire in Kaos's spiritual bones. His Rage shoved through Kohl's grip and leaned toward her. “And now I get to live knowing the shape

of your breath when you break for a god that isn't allowed to be.”

Chapter Ten

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She stared at him, blinking slowly. “I didn’t surrender. I recognized.”

Kaos’s breath stilled.

“That’s what it felt like,” she continued. “Like... something inside me had been waiting. And when he touched me, it stopped waiting.” She reached for her cookie again but didn’t take a bite. She stared at the air between them with small nods. “No,” she confirmed lightly, locking her eyes on him. “Not surrendered. Remembered.”

Kaos leaned back slightly, jaw clenched. He needed to anchor himself in something neutral before he unraveled entirely.

“Maybe you can go to sleep now,” he said, quieter. “Go meet your devil-angel again while I go touch base with Kildare. Let him know your inspiration is still inspiring.” He stood, adjusting his coat. “And I’ll grab dinner. Maybe celery. Something bland after listening to your angel-demon bedtime erotica.”

She burst out laughing, her body folding sideways across the cushions. “Elegant,” she wheezed after a moment. “Bitter and nutritious.”

Her laugh bubbled in his blood and cock as he headed for the door.

“You know,” she called after him, voice still colored with amusement. “You could just say it.”

He turned at the door, powers sucking up everything she dangled between them. “Say what?”

Her one drawn up leg slowly wagged as she held him captive with her small smile. “That you wish I was dreaming of you.”

Another chunk of power bowed at her little feet. “Remember when I said I’d shove my fingers past your lips and drag them along your tongue like a promise?” He opened the door before he did something she’d never recover from. “You think I said that because I wanted to be in your dreams?”

His powers felt her breath hitch and it created a loop straight to his chest and cock. He hurried out the door and shut it, the quiet click resonating louder than a slam. He moved quickly when his Lust banged at the door of his control with hungry, cruel fists. He sharpened his thoughts into a blade, forcing clarity on the unexpected storm brewing inside him. Inside her. It was no longer a simple game of temptation and control. It had become something deeper, darker, and infinitely more dangerous. His appetite was now a vicious craving, daring anything or anyone to stand in its way. He didn’t need permission to sate it, nor did he intend to seek it from anyone. What he needed was more intuition than his pathetic human vessel was equipped with. Because he didn’t just want her at night. He wanted her in the day. And he didn’t just want her with his true form, he wanted her with his human one too. The two of them were snarling rivals that initially wanted to kill the other, but now a truce had been struck.

They would both have her.

Jaxi pressed her hands to her cheeks, warmth flooding through her face, down her neck, and straight into her heart. Shesank onto the couch, staring blankly at the spot where he’d stood moments before, her heart pounding fiercely in her chest.

“He likes me,” she whispered softly, barely daring to believe the words as they

slipped past her lips. A smile bloomed, bright and ecstatic, before uncertainty flickered at the edges of her joy.

But did he really?

She replayed his words over and over. “Remember when I said I’d shove my fingers past your lips and drag them along your tongue like a promise?” Jaxi whispered, savoring each word as if they were precious, dangerous secrets. “Do you think I said that because I wanted to live in your dreams?”

His eyes. His voice. The careful intensity—every memory sent a delightful shiver down her spine. Yet doubt crept in, taunting her with ambiguity. Had he just confessed desire, or was he simply challenging her again?

She thought back to everything they’d shared that night.

The cookies, the chaos, the way he stirred the batter like it had personally offended him. She remembered the way he tasted it off her finger—slow, deliberate—and how her breath hitched like he’d just rewritten her pulse. He surely had. And he hadn’t smiled. Not once. But something in his eyes had burned, and it left a mark. That moment felt like a dare—and maybe an invitation. Or a silent pleading.

Then the playlist wall. Her scribbled names. The way she danced like no one was watching—even though she knew he was. He hadn’t joined in, but he hadn’t looked away. When he caught her mid-air and spun her like she weighed nothing, she’d felt it. The tension in his hands. The way he lingered just a second too long. And when she’d dared to hug him, it was like hugging a tree of life. Joy and elation surged through her, filling her blood and bones with secret colors and sounds and feels.

Oh my.

And the bath. She flushed just thinking about it. He'd sat outside the door like a guardian—and a storm. She'd told him too much. Or maybe just enough. His voice had reached through everything, and his answers... still haunted her. Redemption. Proof. Pain. And that one line... 'Whoever made you think you had to shrink'...that had gutted her.

And then the couch and the milk and cookies. Her smile began to bloom again. Toes against his leg. Hard, muscular leg. And the dream she'd just told him. Why would she tell him that dream? She chewed on her lower lip, opening herself to the real answer. Oh yes, she wanted him to know. She wanted to force him to react. Even if it meant a bad reaction. But it hadn't been bad. Not really. He hadn't mocked her, he hadn't flinched. But his jealousy had bled into the air, sharp and claiming. She had never felt anything more powerful and dangerous and... glorious. But he hadn't taken. Not physically. He'd only watched her. And asked and listened. Like she was something rare. And maybe beautiful.

Jaxi pulled a pillow onto her lap, hugging it close as she stared thoughtfully at the closed door, anticipation battling with confusion. Either way, Kohl had just made their game infinitely more thrilling, and she couldn't wait to see what happened next.

Kaos crossed into his apartment and shut the door behind him with a low thud. The silence hit differently here—quieter, darker. He exhaled and dragged a hand through his hair, pulling his phone from his pocket and dialing Kildare.

He answered on the second ring. "There he is. How's the upgrade?"

Kaos didn't answer at first. He stared at the wall like a blockade. "It's not an upgrade, it's a handicap with sharp teeth."

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Kildare laughed low. “You sound like it’s chewing on you.”

“Every time I use these human...tools, they root deeper. Like a bad line of code. Not just in the flesh, in the wiring, in the pulse. They weren’t made for me—but they’re starting to grow. And I can’t tell if I’m feeding them or they’re feeding on me.”

“Sounds perfectly normal.”

Normal. Kaos’s jaw flexed. “She doesn’t flinch or obey or yield. She dances with fire and doesn’t burn, she doesn’t ask to be seen—she just is.” He steadied his breaths, that nagging thought festering in the marrow of his bones. “Why are you letting me touch her? In any form? You made it clear my true body would trigger a bond. Draw attention. So why are you letting me do this? Why not post me at the door like a sentinel?”

“Because you need to,” he said, voice low. “And nobody said you couldn’t. Yet.”

Kaos found himself at the closet in his room. “You downloaded ten years of human tech, behavior, and useless social diseases,” Kaos continued. “But nothing about women.”

“That was intentional,” Kildare said smoothly. “Those things have to be learned through experience and exploration.”

“And you know this because you have experience with it?”

A sharp breath escorted out his, “Hell no. But I know enough.”

Kaos turned to the dresser drawers, opening the top one. "Of course you do. Mr. Ancient. I'm short a few millennials."

"You were created for a purpose."

Kaos growled, snatching up clothes. "Which was ripped from my soul," he reminded.

"Well. Not entirely."

Kaos paused at the hint of change. "What does that mean?"

He drew in a deep breath. "I don't know, but I know."

Kaos shook his head. "You are fucking absurd."

"Yes," he said in flippant understanding. "And you can trust the plan. Whatever it is."

Kaos pulled a clothing bag from the closet door. "I can't wait to learn what the dark fuck it is and how it'll get ripped from me again."

"Ahh, come on," Kildare scolded with a chuckle. "No need to be a pussy. It's just pain."

Kaos realized suddenly. He didn't care about his pain. "If something or someone dares hurt her, I would not forgive or forget it."

"Relax, Dark One," Kildare cautioned. "She's in good hands. No matter how fucked up anything might seem. Trust the one behind the plan."

Raviel. "I don't share your faith, Ruby."

A slow breath left him. “Neither does Krave. Who by the way says hello. As does your son, Kross.”

That name moved through him like a slow fire, stirring a demanding curiosity. “What else do you know?”

The silence stretched just long enough to throb. “I know Kross is gathering power. I know Raviel’s silence is intentional. And I know the pattern forming around your girl is older than either of us were allowed to study.”

Kaos stilled, heart thudding once—low and hard. “What pattern?”

“The kind that doesn’t loop,” Kildare said. “The kind that breaks and yet remains unbreakable.”

Kaos gripped the frame of the doorway, rage twisting in his spine. “Then tell me now—am I meant to protect her, or lose her?”

“You’re meant to find out,” Kildare said. “That’s the part you can’t download. That’s the part the fire won’t burn away.”

Kaos’s hand tightened on the clothes in his fist. “Then make peace with what I’ll become.”

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He hung up, barely remembering he couldn't crush the device that served as a human lifeline to her. He shoved clothes into the bag. She whimpered and the sound then headed for the bathroom, pausing halfway. Subtle alarm twisted low in his gut. He'd only been gone fifteen minutes. Maybe less. And somehow, it already felt too long.

Obsession lined his body like gravity, forcing him to recalibrate everything. He turned sharply, rerouting back to the studio. He'd shower there. Inside the same space her breath and pulse lived.

Kaos stepped inside the studio, his eyes landing on Jaxi, standing before the far wall with a paintbrush in her fingers. "I know his name," she whispered.

He shut the door and walked slowly in then froze at seeing the painting. It was him. Not Kohl. Kaos. Wings dripping with pain and shadow, hands blood-bright. Eyes like emerald ruin. And before him—her. Painted not in his arms, but between him and something unseen. Like she had stepped forward, facing a force not yet named. Shielding him.

Her head turned and she locked dazed eyes on him, her chest heaving with shaky breaths. "I know his name," she repeated, the words raw. "It's Kaos."

The second his name left her mouth, a thread pulled straight from the center of her. Light pulsed in his chest—deep red and gold, weaving through cracks in a fragile

shell. He stepped forward and black wings unfurled behind him.

“Oh God,” she whispered, heart hammering.

He stepped again, revealing onyx horns curled up from his head. Dark eyes locked on her.

The brush slipped from her fingers.

He moved closer, the shadows of his wings stretching across the studio walls. Every breath he took pulled the air tighter, binding them in a moment neither could escape or fully grasp. Her heart thundered in her chest, the tremor in her hands matching the storm building between them.

Kaos. The name turned inside her again—full and claimed. “Are you... real.”

His gaze flared with those red embers as he came to her, stopping exactly where he had in the dream. “You called me forth, Fleshling.”

Fleshling. She shivered, breath catching in her throat. She didn’t move, but everything inside her leaned toward him. A walking dream, vivid and impossible. “Where... is Kohl?”

His gaze held hers. “My human vessel remains apart from me,” he said quietly.

Jaxi blinked, trying to process while her eyes continued to devour him. “Are you... real?” She slowly reached out, needing to feel if he was. “Am I dreaming?”

He eyed her outstretched hand and pulled her back into his gaze. “I am no dream. I exist within him. I also exist beyond him.” His eyes narrowed. “But remaining here creates danger.”

His words and the shift of his wings stole her breath. “Why?” she wondered, her stomach twisting. “You can’t... stay?”

Her breath caught at the low growl he gave. Just like in the dream. “Bonding with me here exposes you, Little Human,” he said, the words rough against her skin. “Tell me—how did you summon me?”

She blinked around tears and gasped through the burn in her chest. “I... I don’t know,” she whispered, looking back at the image she’d painted. “I dreamed of you, but you were...blurry.” She looked back at him, stepping closer. “I thought... I was forgetting you, and... I wanted to remember. You said I would forget, but I didn’t, I remembered everything,” she swore, wiping tears. “I’ll never forget.”

“You spoke my name,” he whispered, his wings slowly moving behind her. “Who gave it to you?”

She regarded his wings, desperate to feel them again. “It...just came to me. After I painted you...” She slowly reached out and touched his wing, jerking her hand back when he growled.

She held both hands at her chest in fists. “Does it hurt?” She roamed her gaze over the sharp cut of muscle on his body. “You’re... so beautiful. And real.” She covered her mouth with a hand, looking up at him. “Are you real?”

“I must leave,” he urged. “You’re not safe with me here. I’ll find you in your dreams.”

She latched onto his wings with both hands, a sob choking her. “Please... don’t...” She shook her head, gasping for air, trembling. “Don’t leave me.” Her lungs burned, her chest ached. “You said you were mine.”

Panic hit her and she threw herself into him, wrapping her arms around him as tight as she could. The connection of their bodies brought a surge of joy and hot energy. Oh God, he was real. His muscles burned like hot steel. She pressed her face, then mouth on him, tasting it was true, her dream alive and breathing in her arms, his breaths ragged and hot in her hair.

Chapter Eleven

Kaos closed his eyes at the feel of her mouth on him, body pressed fully against his. The unspeakable sensation lit a fire that consumed reason. He couldn't explain how she'd reached him—drawn him from the divide into her space. Her call bypassed laws, ignored structure. It stirred something buried and unshaped.

He lifted his hands—slow, careful—and traced her spine with his claws, reverent around bone and heat. Her presence wrapped him, steadying every volatile current within. He tilted her head back and met her gaze. Wide. Bright. Trusting. “I cannot bond with you... not here, angel.”

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She reached up and held his face, pulling it to her mouth, her need rendering him powerless.

He growled and pressed his mouth to hers. Her lips parted. The taste of her hit his tongue like prophecy. He deepened the kiss with—a slow worship. Everything about her was real now. Every breath. Every heartbeat. Every fragile inch.

He kissed her again, more thoroughly this time, his body trembling with restraint. He scooped her into his arms and carried her to the nearest patch of floor where moonlight spilled through the high windows. He set her down gently, like a forbidden prayer.

Her body responded before his mind could issue command. She arched into him, her legs parting, her breath coming faster. He settled between her thighs, bracing his weight with cautious reverence. He traced her cheek with a clawed finger, then her jaw, then down her throat. His mouth followed the path a moment later, laying soft, anchoring kisses across her collarbone.

Warnings continued to blare inside him but each time he tried to stop—he went deeper.

He dragged his tongue along her shoulder and then kissed the side of her neck. Her pulse pounded beneath his mouth. A low growl rumbled in his chest as his fangs lengthened. She was human. Fragile. Flesh that tore. Bones that broke. And yet her soul glowed too bright for the thin shell that held it.

His Lust surged, demanding he coat her cells with healing—seal her from the inside

out before claiming what pulsed beneath.

Rage prowled close behind, dark and coiled. You see what resistance does. It fuels.

The thought struck deep.

She has somehow obtained authority over us, Rage continued.

Kaos shuddered. His hands trembled where they touched her. He opened his mouth above the curve of her neck, hesitating.

“I’ll make it safe,” he breathed.

Her body thrust into his, nails digging in his back. “Please,” she whispered, voice trembling against his mouth. “Make me yours.”

Her plea struck deeper than any force he’d known. His fangs ached with the need to obey. His body bowed to it—slow and certain. Then he bit her with a jealous precision.

Healing wrapped her first, coating every cell with protection. His mark followed, sealing into skin and nerve with a controlled burn. The sharp puncture released heat and light, anchoring him inside her with a force both physical and final.

She cried out softly, clinging to him, her legs wrapping tighter around his hips.

His hand slid down to the warmth between her thighs. The first touch unraveled her. Her thighs clenched, a moan catching in her throat. His Lust surged, demanding he taste her—demanding proof of what the dream only hinted at. Her heat. Her flavor. Her need.

He lowered himself, the fire inside him coiling tight. One last chance to resist, and still he descended. He covered her decadent center with his mouth and she cried out—soft, shocked, desperate. Her fingers tangled in his hair as his tongue moved with agonizing devotion, venerating her with slow, deliberate passes. Every flick, every press, pulled more from her. Her moans deepened, surrendering breath by breath. The taste of her soaked his tongue, unmaking him with every shiver she gave. Lust stormed. Rage approved. And he worshiped with mouth and will until her thighs locked around him and her cries broke through the veil. This was no dream—this was her soul, unraveling in his hands.

His wings spread wide above her like a canopy of night, trembling with restraint as they arched protectively around her. One hand gripped her thigh, anchoring her open. The other splayed across her stomach, fingers flexing with each pulse that rolled through her. Every flick of his tongue met with the twitch of his wings. Every cry from her mouth pressed his palm harder to her skin, holding her steady as her pleasure took control.

Her cry turned into a broken wail as her orgasm overtook her, her body tightening and shaking beneath his mouth. Every ripple of her release echoed in his bones. She convulsed with pleasure, clutching him as the waves claimed her, sobbing his real name like a plea and a praise.

Only then did he rise, lips wet with proof. Her eyes opened, locking on his. Kaos froze at the sight—raw shock, drenched in loyal surrender. No fear. Only trust. Mouth parted, pupils wide with longing, as if her soul had surfaced just to see him.

Kaos aligned himself, his body hovering above hers. He dipped down and kissed her once—tender, unhurried. “Do you truly crave me, little one?” he murmured against her lips, his voice a breath.

“So much,” she confessed between breaths.

He brushed his tongue along the seam of her lips, letting her taste what he'd taken from her body before their mouths fully met again. She whimpered and the sound brought a groan that bordered on obsession.

He pushed inside her—slow, deep, real—his breath stalling at the impossible pleasure of her. Her body trembled around him. He stilled, letting her adjust, letting himself feel it.

She opened her thighs more, rocking her hips with a breathless moan. “Kaos,” she pled, buckling his power.

He moved. Each thrust built on the last, sacred and slow, until their rhythms met like music written in ancient tongues. Her name whispered past his lips. Her pulse flared beneath his fangs. He felt the bond rising, wrapping both of them. His body trembled from the effort of holding back, but she kept giving—breaths laced with want, cries woven from something older than memory. Her body drew him deeper, again and again, until the tempo became sacred.

He buried his face against her throat, his fangs scraping lightly along the skin he'd marked. Her moans broke into sobs, and still he held her hips, moved within her, chased the final thread of control he never truly owned.

His wings shuddered, muscles locking.

“My human,” he groaned against her skin.

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The climax crashed through him—violent, holy, complete. He surged into her with a growl torn from marrow, pouring everything into her body.

He held her tight, every muscle rigid as his orgasm stole the breath from his lungs. The bond cinched, anchoring itself in the joining of blood and flesh. And when the tremors slowed and his breath returned, he felt it. She had taken him. All of him.

A knock shook the door, bringing Kaos's shield over every inch of Jaxi. He used his wings to lift her and laid her on the couch as another knock followed—harder. Faster.

“Who is it?” she whispered to him.

He pressed his lips on hers. “Don't move. I have hidden you from human eyes.”

He hurried to the door and placed his hand on the surface, dread eating through his blood. Four beyond the barrier. Bonded to him.

He yanked it open to Kildare, Krave, Kross and Kollaborator, all standing there with alarmed expressions. He stepped out and shut the door.

“Raviel sent us,” Kildare said lowly.

“I bonded with her,” Kaos confessed, his panic surging. “I couldn't stop.”

“What do you mean you couldn't stop?” Kollaborator wondered.

He looked at none of them. “I mean when I tried to stop, I did the opposite.”

“Why did you show her your true form?” Kildare demanded, anger mixed with the gravity in his ruby gaze.

His gaze snapped to his. “She called me forth when she said my name. After you and I spoke, I got back here as Kohl and found her at the wall, paint brush in hand. Staring at what she’d painted.” His breaths quaked at the memory. “She painted me and her. She stood with her back to me, facing someone or something. She said, ‘I know his name.’ And she spoke it. It was as if she unlocked the door between realms and pulled me right in.”

“Who is this woman again?” Kollaborator demanded in strained awe.

“Raviel’s pick,” Kildare said. “He summoned us to get over here immediately. Your bond didn’t just flare, it detonated a bomb that reached Nominous.”

“Nominous,” Kaos said, searching his mind for the meaning.

“His name means ‘the one who unmakes.’” Kross's low words jerked Kaos’s powers.

“That flare you triggered,” Krave said, low and sharp, “wasn’t just a signal—it was a rupture in the Pattern. Nominous is the enforcer of said Pattern, cleaning up anything that doesn’t fit the rules. It doesn’t care about why or who, it just unbinds.”

“Explain that,” Kaos’s Rage demanded.

“Tears apart any bond or creation that breaks the First Design,” Krave said. “Your burst with Jaxi set off a major alarm.”

Kollaborator stepped closer, his breath carrying power that cut through tension. “Listen. Nominous doesn’t play favorites,” he said with quiet urgency. “It’s pure function, enforcing the Pattern without bias. When it detects an anomaly—especially

something born from human creativity mixed with divine power—it moves quickly, decisively.” He glanced toward the studio door. “What you two made didn’t just bend rules, it punched a hole in the laws of existence.”

“Then let him come,” Kaos realized, looking at them. “Let him unbind us.”

“You don’t understand, brother,” Kildare urged quietly, the red in his eyes ominous. “He’s not coming to untie your love knot. He’s coming to untie your existence from your being. Possibly both of you.”

His words drove a stake of terror through his gut. “What do I do?” he demanded.

“Raviel is coming,” Kross informed softly. “We’ll be dealt a hand to play.”

“And we’ll need to play it quickly,” Krave warned.

“Why?” Kaos hurried.

Kollaborator put his hand on Kaos’s shoulder. “We have a narrow window before Nominous arrives.”

The divine dose of peace he forced into him felt like war.

“How narrow?” Kaos breathed.

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“According to my gifts,” Kollaborator said, “three hours and forty-six minutes narrow.”

Laughter and voices drifted through the closed door, bringing a surge of terror. Kaos spun and hurried inside, halting abruptly at finding Raviel sitting calmly on the couch, eyes and smile locked on Jaxi who spoke animatedly about the painting she’d created.

Raviel’s eyes twinkled as he asked, “Do all your paintings tell you things?”

Jaxi nodded a lot with a happy grin. “Always. It starts with these feelings inside—like secret thoughts or ideas trying to push their way out. It makes me need to paint or create. Sometimes those feelings want to live in clay or metal, charcoal or paint. Once I find the right medium, I create until the feeling can speak to me.”

She reached behind her, grabbing a small plate. “Would you like a cookie? I made some earlier.”

Her smile faltered as she noticed Kaos and his brothers standing near the door.

“Oh! There he is. With company.”

Raviel rose smoothly, his dark cloak shifting like liquid shadow. His long hair, streaked with silver, fell loose, framing a face that held calm authority as he moved toward them.

He pulled four cards from the folds of his cloak and handed them to Kross.

Kaos watched them catch the dim light, then shifted his gaze to Raviel, waiting for words, any words, as the weight of what those cards meant pressed down on him.

Raviel's gaze met Kross's momentarily then he turned and gave a smile to Jaxi, then walked to the door, opened it—and left. Not a single. Fucking word.

Kaos hurried to Jaxi and pulled her into a tight embrace, his mind racing for the right questions to ask her. Every heartbeat pounded with a silent terror he couldn't voice while his brothers whispered quietly, reinforcing the threat looming.

Jaxi's fingers traced slow circles along his back, sending a shiver through him—sharp and fierce—only deepening the doom he felt coming.

She whispered, “I'm so happy you're real. And here.”

Kaos wrapped his wings protectively around them both, pulling her closer. His lips met hers in a deep kiss, desperate to tether her tighter to him.

He pulled back slightly, his breaths quaking. “You must know that five mortal minutes with you has given me an eternal heaven.”

Her fear sliced him as she peered into his gaze. “Are you saying... we only get five minutes together?”

He captured her face in his clawed fingers then caught the shift in tone behind him—quiet, sharp whispers threading between Kross and the others.

He took her hand and walked her over to his brothers. “She needs to know,” he said, eyes on the cards.

“Let's sit a moment,” Kade suggested, moving to the couch.

Kaos pulled his wings into his skin and sat with her, holding her close to him.

“So, when you were with Kaos in his true form,” Kade began, “it forged a permanent bond between both of you—human and divine. And that kind of union breaks a law etched into the foundation of existence. It’s forbidden because it overrides the controls built to keep divine power separate from human will. And that bond sent out a signal—loud enough for the ones who enforce those laws to hear it. And once they hear it, they come to correct it.”

Jaxi looked between them, fear and confusion tightening her face. “Who comes?”

“A being called Nominous,” Kollaborator said carefully. “His sole purpose is to undo such unions.”

“Undo?” Her voice dropped, like the word tasted wrong in her mouth. “What does that mean?”

Kaos felt her fearful gaze hit him. He looked at her for many seconds and took her hand in his. “It means we would be removed from existence.”

He felt her heart stall as she swallowed, holding his stare. She then looked at his brothers, searching. “Is there a way for me to fix it?” she asked, voice small. Her eyes drifted to the painting. “I only made it so I wouldn’t forget him. I didn’t know it would show me his name. I-I didn’t know it would... cause this.”

She stared at the painting, like it might answer. “Maybe it was the way I started,” she mumbled. “I didn’t sketch first, I just... let it happen. Maybe that’s not how you’re supposed to paint something sacred.” She looked in her lap. “I used the same brush I had dipped in metallics. I didn’t clean it first,” she whispered, voice thin. “Sometimes that changes things.”

She suddenly looked up at Kade. “Do you think it will help... that I love him?”

The air left his lungs instantly as her words gutted him. They struck deeper than the threat, deeper than law. Now, his every breath would forever hold that confession.

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Kade held up the cards to her, fanning them out. “These will show us how to fix it,” he assured gently.

“When we figure out how to use them,” Krave muttered.

Kaos held his hand out to Kade, and he placed the cards in them. Cold—thin, smooth. Too quiet. He ran a thread of power through them, subtle and sharp, testing for any reaction. Nothing moved. Nothing opened.

He looked at Jaxi and held them to her. “Try touching them.”

She took them carefully, her fingers brushing along the edges.

“The last time these were delivered,” Kollaborator said, “it took a Nephilim-class courier to get them to Josie—and Krave had to drink her blood just to see what they said.”

Kaos remembered it clearly but there was no emotional attachment to the event. There was only Jaxi, studying the blank surfaces, her brows pulling slightly. “They feel... like they’re waiting.”

Kade pitched, “What if it’s not about opening them directly? What if they respond to action, not contact?”

Krave gave a slow nod. “Like a trigger woven into a behavior or trait. Not touch or will.”

“I think Jaxi’s the key,” Kollaborator said. “Like Josie was.”

Kaos reminded, “She touched them. Nothing happened.”

“Wait,” Kross said suddenly. “One of the cards—look.”

Kaos locked his power on the one with a shimmering surface. Subtle. Brief.

Jaxi leaned forward fast and took the card without warning, looking at the painting on the wall. “It’s the same,” she said, standing.

Kaos stood too, following her gaze to a mirrored pattern, down to the flow of color and line.

“Itisher,” Kollaborator said, something ragged threading through his voice. “She’s the key.”

Krave stared hard. “What does it mean?”

Kollaborator stepped closer to the table, eyes fixed on the card that had reacted. “It means the trigger’s been met. Whatever Raviel encoded into these—the lock required a specific impulse. She gave it. Her action initiated the sequence.”

A faint shimmer crawled across the edge of the second card. Light stitched into its surface, thin and sharp. Kross leaned in. “Another one’s reacting.” The glow built slowly, outlining a shape too complex to name.

Kaos spotted movement in the lower corner. Numbers, descending. “There’s a timer,” he said sharply. “Fifty-nine minutes and dropping.”

Kross leaned in. “All of them have it—except hers.”

Kollaborator released a sharp breath, eyes scanning all the surfaces. “There’s no countdown on my end, I just see visual structure—symbols, embedded overlays. Nothing counting down.”

Kaos’s jaw flexed. “Why are we seeing a clock run out?”

Kollaborator’s head shook as he looked up. “I don’t know.” He moved to the third card, scanning faster now. “Flame signatures—tight spines, branching out from a central origin. This card is Kade’s.” His fingers slid to the fourth. “Fractured geometry... mirrored edges... heat bands. Rage and Lust. That’s Kaos.”

Kaos eyed the timer: 00:58:41.

“Glyph rings,” Kollaborator continued. “Legal recursion. That’s mine.” He regarded the last card. “Deep anchor points... all lines drawn inward. Stabilizer pattern.” He glanced at Kross. “The son of Kaos. The King’s King.”

Kaos felt the race of data while dread thickened in his chest. What exactly happened when the countdown ended?

Krave stepped back from the table with a labored breath. “How exactly do you know what they mean?”

Kollaborator kept his eyes on the surface of the cards. “I don’t know how I know—I just do. It’s like the meaning’s embedded with the structure. I see it, and it clicks.”

Kross gestured toward the first card. “Any idea why hers doesn’t have a countdown?”

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Kollaborator reached and picked it up. His eyes tracked the depth of the layers, slower now. “This one’s different. No role, no mirrored pairing. Everything here points somewhere.” He turned it toward Kaos suddenly. “It’s a map.”

Kaos stepped in closer but didn’t get a fucking thing but chaotic lines.

Kollaborator wagged her card between all of them. “Wherever this leads... that’s where we’ll find out what the hell this timer’s counting down to.”

“Is this a dream?” Jaxi barely asked, her gaze sweeping across all of them like the possibility kept returning.

Kaos moved to her and placed his hand on her back, grounding her. “You’re here,” he said. “And it’s real.”

She leaned slightly into his touch, voice barely there. “Am I in trouble?”

Her words hit, like she thought she’d broken something sacred by simply being herself.

“Did I get you in trouble?” she worried even more.

He shook his head once. “No. And we’re going to find out exactly what’s going on. And fix it.”

“Maybe The Queen would have some insight,” Kollaborator thought.

Kaos felt Jaxi still even through the distance. “The Queen?”

He watched her gaze move from him to his brothers, then locking back on him. “The Queen?”

Her jealousy boldly filled the air like a tempest and Kaos was sure it was smile worthy.

“Kaos told you about her?” Krave asked, his own obsession entering the fray.

Her gaze snapped to the Kissing King. “Oh yes,” she fired out, arms folding tightly. “She’s all he talks about.”

“She’s possessive,” Kaos murmured, unable to keep his smile from growing.

Kross chuckled low. “She might be more dangerous than the Queen.”

Jaxi’s head snapped toward him now. “Excuse you—I am a deeply nurturing presence.”

A snort threatened his throat.

“I bake. I rescue stray cats. I cry during commercials. I am not dangerous—I am a gentle threat at most.”

Krave smiled wryly. “Gentle’s not what reached Nominous.”

Jaxi blinked.

Kade leaned forward, voice softer now. “That flare didn’t just come from him. You carry something strong—something that answered his chaos with your own.”

Kollaborator nodded, gaze steady. “That wasn’t just danger—it was magnitude.”

Something shifted in her beside him—sharp and rising, like color hitting oil. Kaos didn’t move. He felt the weight coil through the air as her silence stretched thin. She stared at Kade, but her focus had pulled inward, fracturing and reassembling too fast for her to speak.

“You said it was Kohl,” she realized, facing him. “That night at dinner. The Queen. The bond. You made it sound like it belonged to him.” Her voice hit clean, hard, gaze slicing. “But it was you. It was always you.”

The room bent with her revelation.

“You sat across from me, moaning and groaning about this sacred bond—this spiritual orgasm you two shared through holy intimacy and celestial therapy or whatever the hell you called it.”

Her voice cracked against the air like a whip.

“I thought I was jealous of Kohl. Thought he had some tragic love story tucked into his past like a broken heirloom.” She pointed now—fingers trembling from the storm she called up. “But it wasn’t in his past, it was in yours. And it wasn’t some heirloom, it was your whole damn identity.”

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Kaos didn't blink as he sucked her in.

"You paraded it around like it defined you," she cried, her fury growing like a third heaven. "Like it made you noble. Sacrificial. Holy." Her voice pitched. "And all that time, you let me think ~~he~~ was the one who lost her, who ~~suffered~~ for her. Who got all spiritually naked with her."

The words slammed down like a challenge.

"You let me carry that image, let me see ~~the~~ while you sat ~~there~~ soaking it in."

Kaos felt his Rage stir. Not at her. At the truth she just cracked wide open. At how deeply he'd wanted her to ~~burn~~ for him. More so now.

Her mouth opened once more, lips parting with a gasp of disbelief. "And now I'm in love with the bastard who used it like foreplay."

Her passion moved through Kaos like sanctified power. He went to her, blocking the room with his body, forcing her to look up. He took her face in his hands and leaned his mouth to her ear. "Say it again," he whispered.

She took hold of his hands and lowered them. "Say what?"

"That you ~~love~~ me."

She stared at him, jaw setting harder, anger flaring brighter. It tasted like spiritual cool-whip, and Kaos waited, his body alive with the pulse of possession.

She shoved him away and declared war with a jab of her little possessive finger. “Do you know how much worse this is? Now that I know it was you all along? You—the smug divine lunatic who sat there acting like her memory was some tragic poem?”

Her hands flew, wild and dramatic as she paced out his judgment.

“Maybe I should march back to that wall and paint you as a weeping black demon in a diaper, wailing over your celestial soulmate.” She nodded, liking the idea a lot. “Or maybe I’ll just whip out a fresh canvas and capture your sacred grief in interpretive glitter.” She stormed bravely up to him, eyes blazing. “Or maybe I’ll save Mr. Ominous the trip and unmake you myself.”

His brothers all erupted in stifled snickers while every inch of her jealousy sang to him like sacred flame. He inhaled it deeply, her fury the air he was built to breathe.

Kollaborator checked the nearest card. “Well. That leaves us exactly fifty-three minutes to throw him a going-away-forever party.”

Jaxi jolted. Her eyes locked on the card, then on Kaos—fear swallowing her whole. “Fifty-three?” Her voice caught. “That’s all that’s left?” She whirled back to Kaos. “Why are you standing there, we need to hurry!” She turned on the others, hands flailing at them like blades. “Why are you all just standing here? He’s going to be erased! You said that!”

Kaos watched as she shoved the stupid divine beings toward the door with her tiny human hands, crying “Move, move, move!”

She suddenly spun and faced him, eyes huge with disbelief. “You’re not moving?” she shrieked, storming over and yanking him toward the door. “My God, am I going to have to rescue you by myself? I’m just a girl, a human girl!”

Kaos couldn't speak as she pulled him. He glanced once more at the painting on the wall, gaze locking on her face. Fearless, fierce protection. She was standing between him and his eternal death, he realized. Determined to save him. With no thought of herself.

And it unmade him more than Nominous ever could.

Chapter Twelve

The trees blurred past the window like smudges on a canvas. Jaxi sat in the back of the vehicle, flanked by Kaos on her right and Kross on her left, but the only thing anchoring her to the moment was the weight of Kaos's presence beside her. But the timer in her chest never stopped ticking. Fifty-three minutes. Clawing at her ribs.

She stared ahead, then sideways. Kaos hadn't spoken in a while, hadn't so much as looked at her, but she could feel it—how tightly he was holding himself back. Every inch of him was drawn taut, like his skin could barely contain what boiled under it.

She reached for his hand, threading her fingers between his. He didn't look down, didn't move, just curled his grip tighter around hers.

"I keep thinking," she said quietly, her pulse in her throat. "If something happens... I don't want to leave this world without proving to you that I meant it."

His eyes flicked toward her, sharp and searching.

"That I love you," she added. "I didn't just say it because I was scared. I said it because everything in me knows it."

His jaw shifted slightly. "I know."

She turned in her seat to face him more fully, a knee drawing up between them. “I don’t want to disappear having only said it once.”

His grip on her hand tightened slightly. “You won’t.”

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“Kaos,” she said, voice smaller. “Please look at me.”

He did.

She studied his face—so calm, but full of fire. Her heart pulsed harder. “I keep wondering,” she whispered, “if it’s really going to happen. If I’m really going to be erased.”

His eyes locked on hers. “Not while I breathe.”

“But if it does—”

“It won’t.” His voice was solid, final. Not hope. Intention.

Her breath hitched, eyes flicking to his mouth, then down to the space between them. The words she’d meant to say vanished.

“I want to touch you,” she whispered. “Like you’re mine.”

Kaos moved before she could finish, his wings unfurling and closing around them in a single, silent command. Light vanished, sound dimmed. Only heat and breath remained. His arms followed, pulling her into his lap, holding her. “I am yours,” he said, the words low and shaped from something primal cracking inside him. “Nobody can see us now.”

Her breath stuttered. She moved, straddling his lap, hands shaking as she pushed her fingers into his hair. “I want to show you what it means to be mine,” she breathed.

Her body was fire in his lap, fueled by panic and worship. His hands locked around her waist, then her hips, pulling her tighter against him. His mind screamed warnings, ticking clocks, consequences—but her need drowned them all.

She dragged her lips across his jaw as if tasting the seconds left between them. Kaos growled deep in his throat. “Show me,” he said, voice rough with restraint.

His hands moved under her shirt, palms skating across her back. Her touch was hot, trembling, but steady in the way she kissed him—like she was carving her name into the inside of his chest.

His restraint shattered. He kissed her with the weight of every second left, every thread of fury and devotion wrapped into one impossible storm. Her mouth opened under his, and he devoured her, a god trying to burn the clock alive.

The gleaming black mantle that flowed from his waist to his feet parted at her touch—Lust and Rage yielding to her hands. Her breath struck his cock like a summons. “Jaxi,” he said, low—part warning, part surrender.

“I want this,” she said, her voice thick, trembling. Her fingers brushed along his shaft—possessive. Heat hit him like a war drum. “I want to taste every part of you.” Her mouth closed over him, warm and hungry, and time ripped loose from its tether. He throbbed against her tongue, breath punching out through clenched teeth as she dragged him into a rhythm born of urgency and possession. The heat of her lips claimed him, and he felt it—every ounce of his restraint screaming as it burned away in her mouth.

His spine arched with her raw, desperate movements. Inexperience made holy. Made lethal. Kaos reached down, pulling her up hard into his lap, his breath ragged now. He

yanked at the waistband of her jeans, dragging them down her legs and tossing them aside, then stripping away what remained between her and the throb of his cock.

He kissed her, rough and full of heat, his mouth moving to her ear as he pressed her down against him. “I need your body,” he rasped, sucking her into his lungs, “wrapped around my cock.”

He drove into her in one fierce stroke, and her breath shattered against his throat. Her body clung to him—tight, wet, trembling—pulling him deeper with every thrust. The rhythm was primal, their skin crashing in a silent war against time. He gripped her hips, burying himself harder, faster, chasing the edge as her desperate shocked cries filled his ear like salvation.

Every thrust dragged him closer to the edge, breaking his breaths into ragged groans. “I’m going to come inside you,” he growled, voice shredded with heat. “I want you full of me.” He slammed her faster. “So deep the gods fucking choke on it.”

A wave of power slammed into his wings then mind. If you climax again, we’ll have more than Nominous on our backs, Kollaborator warned. Pull out, or kiss existence goodbye.

Kaos’s body locked up.

Jaxi gasped against his mouth. “What’s wrong?”

He exhaled once, hard and rough. “We have to stop.”

She looked stricken, confused, still burning. “Why?”

“Because I plan to keep you.” His voice came jagged, breath steaming against her mouth. “But if I climax inside you, I lose the one thing I’d burn heaven to keep.”

The vehicle swallowed the road like it knew time was waning. Kaos sat motionless, his shoulders coiled, every part of him still raw from what he hadn't finished. Jaxi's breathing was the only thing he could hear and the one thing that didn't make him want to burn the sky.

“Turn there,” Kollaborator said.

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Kaos lifted his gaze, eyeing the coming split in the road. No signs, no markings. Just a jagged path through the trees that looked as wrong as it felt. He glanced at Jaxi, still flush but shaken. Still his angel.

He touched the curve of her jaw with his thumb. Just to remind her of what they shared. What could never be undone.

A static like current brushed across his skin from the front. He watched Kollaborator as the pressure in the cabin shifted and something unseen passed between them like a wave.

Kollaborator flipped Jaxi's card, his jaw ticking.

"What is it?" Kaos asked.

He looked up and around. "We're not heading to a place," he said. "We're heading into one."

Kaos exhaled slowly through his nose as Jaxi's pulse climbed under his own skin. He set his hand on her thigh, grounding his power in her. He stared out the window, watching the trees begin to blur. Lines skewed, colors deepened. The air moved in ways it shouldn't.

"We're not in Kansas anymore," Kollaborator warned quietly.

The meaning of his words registered in his generational lingo and Kaos gripped the hilt of his power. It felt like a trap morphing into a battlefield with every warped

second that passed.

“What are the cards doing now?” Kade asked from the far side, voice tight.

“They’re definitely doing something,” Krave muttered, looking around, both hands gripping the wheel.

Kollaborator flipped through them. “They seem to be syncing, but not to each other, not that I recognize.”

Kaos leaned forward. “Then what are they syncing to?”

“I don't know,” he said. “They’re cycling, shuffling roles, like.... some cosmic slot machine.”

Krave lifted both hands off the steering wheel suddenly. “Okay.” He looked at Kollaborator. “Something else is driving now.”

Outside the window, the world distorted again. A row of trees repeated twice—exactly the same, like copy-pasted brushstrokes.

“Can anybody tell what the hell is happening?” Kollaborator wondered, gaze moving between the cards and the windows.

“The world seems to be repeating itself,” Krave said.

“Yes, I see that much,” Kollaborator murmured.

“That card is glowing,” Kross said, pointing over the seat.

Kollaborator looked. “That's your card,” he said to Krave.

“Mine? What’s it saying?”

Kollaborator stared, brows pulling hard. He shook his head barely. “It says the wind must open what was sealed without force.”

A landscape unfolded outside the vehicle, bleeding across the terrain like a projection forcing itself onto reality.

Krave faced him in the seat. “And what the hell does it mean?”

“It means you’re first.”

“First for what?”

The vehicle vanished.

“Holy shit,” Kollaborator breathed, looking around with the rest of them. They stood in a space of nothing, feet on smooth stone ground with a sky that spun wrong. In the distance, a narrow stone corridor stood, flanked by two towering humanoid statues without faces.

Kaos sealed his wings over Jaxi and strapped his arms over her chest, every layer of his powers loading.

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Kollaborator searched around for clues. “This must be some kind of...”

“Dimension,” Kade muttered, nodding at the corridor.

A sealed gate appeared between the two humanoid figures now. No hinges. No locks. No seams.

“So, I guess I’m supposed to try and open it,” Krave said, head angled at it.

“Is that what you’re getting?” Kollaborator asked.

Krave snapped his red eyes over to him. “No, but you said I’m up.” He gestured with a hand toward the strange vision, keeping his eyes on the Kollaborator. “The wind must open what was sealed without force,” he said, pointedly.

“Does that mean the door was sealed without force or that he must open it without force?” Jaxi’s asked, the question small but relevant.

“Err to the side of caution,” Kaos said.

“Which is?” Krave demanded, whipping his head to him.

“Don’t use force opening it,” Kaos spelled out.

Krave eyed the door before them. “And if I fuck up?” he wondered quietly. “Who’s going to bleed out this time?”

“We shouldn’t expect this to be the same,” Kollaborator said, his usual billowing calm moving in fractured slices. He suddenly glanced down at the cards in his hand. “Uh...” His alarm shot adrenaline through Kaos. “Whatever the facts may be this hand, we’ve got twenty-two minutes left on this countdown.”

“Twenty-two?” Krave balked as Kaos held Jaxi closer.

“Time is misstructured here,” Kross muttered, his tone loaded with warning as he looked all around.

“Fuck me,” Krave muttered, taking two steps toward the gate. “Open what was sealed without force.”

The air changed and Kaos caught his breath when Jaxi's hands latched to his arms, nails digging as the air thinned around them.

Kaos sent his Rage through her, coating her cells with power while trapping every scrap of oxygen between his wings and sealing it around her. He forced her breath into a loop, divine heat recirculating the air between their bodies while tracking the movements of Krave’s lungs.

A micro-flicker of red lit up his nailbeds followed by a slight shimmer rolling across his shoulders, like heat mirage. The Earthly Kissing King brought his body to near combustion, controlled, but just barely.

Kross adjusted his stance as the need for more air thickened around them.

Krave’s shoulders rose slightly, spine tight, control rigid as he harnessed the air.

Kaos’s eyes flicked to the gate. Its surface trembled, then bulged. Like it recognized Krave’s power and answered with a breath of its own. A sharp line etched across its

middle and Krave's body trembled, veins catching fire from the inside, heat pushing outward.

Kaos pushed his powers carefully into the gate, searching for answers to its purpose, watching as shimmer coil at Krave's fingertips.

The gate pulsed again. Then moaned. A segment at its center peeled back

Krave drew in a breath, shallow and scorched, his body glowing like a forge on the edge of detonation. He suddenly dropped to his knees and released the oxygen, refilling every pair of lungs he'd sucked it from.

Jaxi gasped and coughed, sagging into Kaos as Kollaborator whispered, "What the hell was that?"

Krave's lowered head barely shook. "I pulled the air from everything. Held it in my chest until it begged. Then shaped it into a key."

"Maybe there's more than one lock," Kross mused at the shut door.

A flicker pulsed in Kollaborator's hand right on cue. Another card. Another glow.

Reality began to bend again.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 1:04 pm

The world distorted, every surface slick with unreality, colors running like wet paint across stone. They all stood on the fractured ground, shadows stretching long beneath a sky that spun with no axis. Kross stood rigid, head tilted, as if he could feel something crawling toward them out of the fabric of the air.

A flicker ran through the cards—every countdown blurring then turning to zero in the same instant. The air dropped ten degrees, light bending sideways, the world itself seeming to pause between heartbeats. Kaos felt it first, the sucking void of power so old and cold it felt like law, not malice, grinding its way into the open.

A presence bled into the center of their circle, silent and total. The figure was tall, faceless, a silhouette carved from fractal glass—its eyes flickering with alien light, runes spiraling just beneath the surface.

“Nominous,” Kaos whispered.

“Composite entity detected,” the being said with a voice that spoke inside bone. “Origin pathways: unauthorized. Multi-source convergence: unregistered. Nephilim-class structure: extrajudicial. Power strata exceed lawful limits. Existence unsanctioned. Termination ordered.”

Kaos felt the ground shudder beneath his feet, reality fracturing in waves that tunneled straight through him. His senses began to dull—color leached from the world, sound flattening until all that remained was awareness of unraveling. It started at the edges of his body, a pulling apart so absolute, he could feel himself being written right out of The Pattern.

“Kaos!” Jaxi screamed.

Kross suddenly stood between him and the judge, fire exploding from his wings. He unleashed targeted wind, slicing at the seams of Nominous’s form, probing for weak points in his code. He followed with fire, aiming at the forces holding the judge together while lightning danced in calculated patterns, testing for feedback, for a glitch in the law.

Kaos felt the shift—Kross extending his absorption power, reaching deep, mapping the logic of the Pattern, trying to unravel it from the inside out. Every attack he launched adjusted, recalibrated, a seamless fusion of aggression and insight, hunting for the one flaw that would let him break through.

But Nominous absorbed the force, the fire, even the unraveling force of Kross’s will. Kaos felt the recoil hit each time, a growing pressure building in his son’s chest. Frustration bled into desperation, and beneath it, the darkness he’d raped into his being tightened its grip, eager to turn his genius into destruction.

Kaos’s pulse hammered as he watched the change—Kross’s attacks growing sharper, wilder, brilliance slipping toward rage. Like a storm pressing in, it crawled up from the depths, threatening to consume everything that made Kross different. That made him good.

Kaos gathered every bit of his fading power and pulled Krave’s winds into his body—air rushing down his throat, expanding his chest, bracing his core. He drew Kildare’s fire till heavenly heat tightened every muscle. Rage steadied his focus and Lust grounded his will, cold and absolute.

Kaos narrowed his vision, combining his sight with Kollaborator’s precision until every thread of darkness inside Kross lit up in stark detail. He locked on to the thickest root twisting through Kross’s spine. Kaos hooked his power to it, bracing

against the ground. The darkness fought—writhing, burning, snapping under the pressure. Kaos yanked, inch by inch, forcing the darkness out through Kross's back.

It tore free in a rush and the shadow slammed into Kaos's hands, thick and electric, flooding up his arms and spreading through his chest. Muscles seized as the darkness shot through him, heavy and cold, sinking deep into bone.

Kross hit the ground hard, gasping, emptied while the monster settled inside Kaos, every nerve braced for violence, every instinct pressing toward destruction.

Kaos turned toward Nominous, power coiled in every limb, layered and volatile. With every ounce of force he borrowed and owned, he launched himself at the judge—wind lashing, fire roaring, darkness pouring out in a wave meant to obliterate.

The world buckled as power crashed against law in a flood of fury and violence and every forbidden force Kaos could wield.

Kaos hit his knees, winded and trembling, raising his gaze. Nominous stood exactly where he began. The air was still, color faded, as if nothing had touched the judge at all.

Nominous raised his hand, palm opened and leveled at Kaos. The ground shuddered beneath them, air pressed in from every side, crushing, squeezing the breath from his lungs.

The judge's power tore at every cell, every thought, every scrap of will as Jaxi screamed, fighting to hold him.

Blinding light flashed before him followed by a figure with a drawn sword. "Atzor. Dai."

The words were foreign but sharp as a blade, burning clear in Kaos's mind. "Stop. Enough."

Nominous unleashed his power at Kaos—the wave of force hurtling from his outstretched hand. It met the figure's sword and vanished on impact. For a breath, nothing moved. Kaos stared at the back of the figure standing between him and the judge. Light bled off the sword in slow waves. Kaos took in his white cloak and the raven hair spilling down his back. The sword remained outstretched, held like a barrier between Kaos and the judge. The voice, now quieter but iron-edged, echoed in the space between them. "Lo tiga b'vni ha-bekhor."

Kaos blinked through the haze, breath ragged, focus sharpening on the man who had just commanded Nominous, 'Do not touch my first born son.'

A breath of recognition punched the air from Kaos's lungs. Raviel.

The fierce ownership fell like a gavel and anchored Kaos to the ground. The archangel's presence filled the air with a pressure equal and yet opposite to Nominous—a power forged to stand against law itself.

The world held its breath as Raviel stood unmoving, sword leveled at the judge. Nominous regarded him with that impossible, empty gaze—no emotion, only the quiet, crushing weight of law. Power lingered in the air, raw and unsettled. Kaos stayed perfectly still, heart pounding, caught between the two authorities in a silent face-off.

A ripple passed through the light of the angel's sword and a figure that resembled a skeleton of radiating bones walked toward Nominous. He stopped before him and raised one finger then pressed the center of the judge's blank face.

Kaos watched, pulse stuttering as the surface split—seams of light spiderwebbing out

into the air. The bone-figure lifted the judge's face off and pressed it to his own. Light and shadow twisted, patterns shuffling behind mirrored eyes. Nominous staggered and collapsed as if emptied of meaning. The skeleton of light turned, knelt before Raviel, and bowed his head.

“The Refractor serves thee,” he said, voice like glass over water.

Raviel nodded once and vanished.

The bone being angled his head, presenting only his glowing profile. “Judgment has been suspended.” The smooth words fell like silk as the edge of his bone mouth tugged upward. “For now.”

Chapter Thirteen

The water hit his shoulders like judgment. Too warm. Too soft. Nothing about it could burn away what was gnawing through his chest. He leaned forward, braced his hands on the tile, and let the stream run down his back. It wasn’t enough. Nothing was. Not the soap, not the silence. Not the time he thought would give him distance from what Kaos had done. From what he had done.

They told him it had to be done in human form. To protect the truth. To seal the deception in layers they couldn’t trace. But nobody told him how to walk into her arms like a man who hadn’t watched her fall for something more than human. Something perfect. Kaos had taken her first. Claimed her with wings and fire, fangs and prophecy. The divine standard had already been set—stamped in her moans, her cries, the trembling way she whispered his name like a goddamn vow. And now... she had to have him. Kohl.

His hands fisted against the tile. What did she see when looking at him? A placeholder? A body with the right shape? She said she loved Kaos. He was Kaos. And yet not. She saw them differently. And they were. Kaos wasn’t just in his blood—he was the blood. The pulse. The lust he couldn’t always leash. And yet here he stood, forbidden to borrow a single note of divine knowing, ordered to fumble his

way forward like a mortal lover with no knowledge of how to please.

His heart thundered as he lowered his head, letting the shame run down his spine with the water. She would be waiting. She'd bathed. Prepared. Maybe even hoped.

He exhaled roughly and opened his eyes as the stream numbed his skin. He whispered the truth aloud for the first time. "I'm not enough." The words echoed without rebuttal. Not from the water, not from the walls and not from the god inside him.

Kohl stepped back, water dripping from his body, breath ragged. He would go to her anyway. Not as Kaos. Not as a shadow of something holy. But as a man. And if he failed—if he shattered under the weight of not being divine—then at least he'd do it with her name on his lips.

He dressed in only black lounge pants and stepped into the hallway, heart braced for impact. Jaxi was there, damp hair clinging to her neck, cheeks still pink from her own shower. She looked at him for a long second, something quiet and steady in her eyes.

"I have an idea," she said simply. "Come with me to the studio."

He stilled, watching her walk to the door wearing only a thick white bathrobe. "Why?"

She looked over her shoulder, the corner of her mouth lifting just enough to challenge his breath. "Because I want you to explore." She tossed her head at the door. "Follow me," she urged. "Bring your curiosity. And maybe a little courage."

He fell in step behind her, gaze fixed on the back of her neck, where damp strands clung like brushstrokes still drying—rough, imperfect, alive. Each step pulled him deeper into something he hadn't named yet, but already obeyed. And prayed he'd

survive.

Jaxi crossed to the center of the room, keeping her back to him—not because she was afraid, but because she knew what he’d been ordered to do. Knew the man behind her had no inherited knowledge, no divine muscle memory to pull from. They’d told him he had to come to her in human skin with no skill, no instinct, no edge. A god hollowed out and forced to be tender. He’d have to learn everything from scratch and there wasn’t time. But maybe—if she held her nerve—she could give him a chance to be curious. To explore. To fail without shame. To be a man without needing to be a myth. And to see that she was just a girl. A girl that had fantasies about him, the man, before the god.

He needed to know that he was his own god. In human form. And it fell to her to teach him that. Which required lots and lots of nerve. And she had just enough to do it without crying, screaming, or exploding into glitter.

She stopped near the spot where she’d painted him before. The mural still whispered to her as her heart did its best hummingbird impression. Kohl stood somewhere behind her—silent and carved from tension. But she felt him. All that sexy gravity with angry opinions.

“No need to talk,” she said lightly, plucking a brush from the mason jar on the table. “You already look like you’re solving quantum physics with your shoulder blades.”

She turned to face him, brush in hand. Her smile came crooked, a little sideways, but it was real. “I thought this might help,” she said gently. “To start with something that asks for presence. And attention.”

The mural was behind him, all shadow and lust and memory. Her stomach tightened

at realizing. His first time with her under the stare of a god who'd already taken her. Already known her. Already conquered her with power Kohl wasn't even allowed to reach for.

She walked in a wide circle till the mural was behind him. "I don't want you standing in his shadow," she said softly. "I didn't bring you here to compare."

He shifted slightly, jaw flexing. "But now you're the one looking at him."

Her pulse skipped a beat at hearing his jealousy. She hesitated, then crossed to the supply shelf and grabbed a gallon of dark slate paint. She opened it and poured it in a shallow tray then walked straight to the mural and launched the entire gallon at it. The splash cracked the silence, thick and final. Paint ran down Kaos's face, over his chest, his eyes, his mouth.

She turned back to Kohl, breath catching. "Not tonight," she said, tossing the empty tray behind her with a clatter and smile. She remembered her original plan and hurried to the paint supplies, selecting a soft gold body paint and emptying it into a fresh tray.

"So tonight, you get to learn me. One stroke at a time." She stepped back, untied her robe and took a quick breath before letting it fall to the floor.

Oh God, I'm naked and he's looking.

Breathe. You still have panties.

She spun around, arms forming an X over her breasts. She took in every ounce of him—the storm behind his eyes, the barely bridled need in his clenched hands, the way his breath caught like he didn't know where to look. Vulnerability suited him. It made him more real, more touchable. She saw the man who never asked to be

worshipped, who didn't expect reverence. Just a chance. And she loved that.

Her right hand cupped her opposite shoulder as she turned and selected a brush from the jar and held it out to him. "Start anywhere besides the obvious," she said, voice thin. "Elbow. Knee. Collarbone. Somewhere that lets you breathe." Her voice trembled, but she didn't drop her eyes. "I trust you," she said. And she waited—for him to take the brush, or catch his breath, or her heart to remember how to beat.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 1:04 pm

He came to her and took the brush from her hand, fingers brushing against hers. It felt like the first step in a dance both of them hadn't learned yet. He slowly looked around the room before his eyes returned to hers. "Where's the canvas?"

She held his gaze, lips parting with a smile just crooked enough to soften the weight between them. "My body is the canvas," she said, swallowing her fears as he stared at her, brush motionless in his hand.

The room seemed to shrink around her words. His throat worked around a sound he didn't make. He moved toward her then paused beside the shallow dish. He eyed it and dipped the brush into the gold, soaking the bristles. Then he stepped close, standing just inside her breath, where the air between them quaked.

Her breath caught as his eyes drifted downward—lingering at her chest still covered by her arms.

Don't hide from him.

She forced her arms to lower and his breath rushed out as he stared at her breasts, heavy with anticipation, flush with shame. A sharp flutter lit in her belly at the idea of him starting his painting spree there. She suddenly lifted her elbow between them like a shield. "Elbow," she whispered again, softer this time. "That's still on the list."

He studied the angle of her arm, the tension hiding in its curve, the way she offered it like a tether to steady them both. All while the sight of her breasts burned holes in his

fears. The brush hovered, gold dripping.

Elbow.

He forced his gaze on the sharp bone and let the bristles kiss it just barely. It felt like one wrong stroke might splinter the moment. Surely reverence had rules.

Color spread slow across her skin. The gold shimmered as it moved beneath his brush, catching light in delicate ripples. She stood steady under his gaze, breath held, letting him explore her. She bravely breathed through it, like she wanted him to believe he could do this. Like she believed it.

He moved the brush again—up, then down, across the gentle slope of her forearm—dragging light, deliberate lines he didn't know he'd memorized until now. Each stroke slowed his thoughts. Softened the roar in his chest.

This was her idea of him learning her. How did she know he needed to? For the first time since the shower, he didn't search his humanity for control.

“What are you feeling right now?”

He felt the subtle tremor riding her words. Was it nerves? The same kind twisting through him, making his breath drag and burn beneath the surface? Or was it the way her bare skin demanded more than reverence? His chest ached with it—want, full and sharp, climbing past control. Did she feel that too?

His eyes didn't leave her skin, jaw shifting once. He remembered the honesty clause he'd first set up with her. “I'm overwhelmed. By how much I want you. By how much I don't want to fuck this up.”

He moved the brush higher, but his fingers brushed the inside of her wrist—an

accident that pulled his breath tight. He stilled, brush suspended midair.

Her breath had hitched and he'd felt it down to his spine.

He let the brush linger above her skin, hovering as if waiting for her to vanish. But she didn't. She stayed open—bare and trembling and real. He shifted, brought the brush to her shoulder. Gold followed, sliding over bone. A line. A pause. A breath. Then another.

His hand slowed. The brush skimmed her shoulder, each pass gentle, deliberate, asking more than taking. She was being a canvas that pulled the man to the surface, one stroke at a time.

He dipped the brush again, slower. Dragged it across her collarbone—center to shoulder—then let his eyes settle on her breasts—soft curves that tightened his grip on the brush, demanded his focus, and stoked something hot behind his ribs. Her breath snagged under his gaze, caught in the silence thick between them.

She held still. Fierce surrender, chest rising as if her body had chosen him before her mind could catch up. He tracked the flicker in her throat, the shift in her fingers next to her thighs. Every twitch pulled his focus. Every stillness asked him to stay present. He moved lower, brush sweeping along the arc of her bicep. His hand steadied, but the hunger behind it didn't. He moved down her arm, but his focus had already shifted back to her breasts. Pink peaks tipped tight from cold or anticipation—he didn't care which. His gaze only cared about studying them, drawn like a tide. The ache that had gripped him in the shower flared sharp behind his ribs. Not just need. Hunger.

His grip shifted. The brush slowed.

“You’re beautiful,” he murmured, voice caught between wonder and ache.

She gasped. “Okay—stop.”

He froze.

She stepped back, breath stuttering in her chest. “New game,” she hurried, voice lit with something wild. Her fingers brushed hair from her eyes. She turned toward the shelves and grabbed something—whatever it was, it wasn’t paint. She didn’t meet his eyes when she faced him. “Your turn to follow.”

Jaxi moved quietly, one arm across her chest, and reached for the paint. She didn’t speak. She dipped two fingers into the gold and dragged a smooth arc across her forehead, curving it up over her temples like a coronet. For a princess. Not a queen. She didn’t need to be a queen, a princess was enough.

She knelt on the floor, gaze locked on him. Before she could stop herself, she blurted, “I realize I’m not her.”

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 1:04 pm

He stared at her, brows drawn until he was devastatingly handsome. “Who’s her?” he asked, voice low.

Jaxi swallowed but didn’t look away. “The one you were made for,” she reminded, forcing her tone light. “The one the universe built just for you. The one you lost—and never stopped hearing.” Or talking about.

Kohl held her eyes while she kicked herself. “I’m not thinking about her when I hesitate.” His voice stayed steady, but tight. “I’m thinking about what happens if I give you everything I’ve got—and it’s not enough.”

His words stole her breath and she lowered slowly to her calves. “You’re not the only one risking something.” She forced her voice to remain even.

He came before her and dropped to one knee, eyes level with hers. “I’ve never done anything without power.” His voice rumbled low, eyes hot and digging. “And I don’t know if that’s enough to hold someone like you.”

She stared at him, his words making her dizzy with want. “You don’t need power to hold me,” she said quietly. “You just... need to want me.”

Kohl tracked the tension in her shoulders as he raised his hand. Her breath stayed even, but her eyes followed every inch. He touched her jaw with the back of his fingers, then brought his thumb to the gold near her temple.

“I want you,” he vowed softly, gaze dragging slowly over her breasts. “That’s the only thing I’m sure of.”

She swallowed and raised her hand, taking hold of his. She brought it to her mouth, sliding his fingers over her lips. He flexed them, feeling the softness and heat of her breaths. “I’ve... never done this part either,” she confessed quietly. “With a man.” She brought her other hand up, holding his, pressing small kisses on his fingers. “But... I think it starts with kisses.”

The realization crashed into him. She was scared.

She slowly lowered to her knees. He followed, searching her eyes and body for direction, his human body suddenly filling with new urges. Ones focused on her fears, not his.

She suddenly let go of his hand as she sat. He knelt before her, still watching. The need to assist her somehow grew as he recognized what he was seeing. She wasn’t building anticipation, she was walking a tightrope, trying not to fall. And his gaze seemed to be her choice of tether as she placed her palms behind her on the floor and drew up her closed knees.

Several breaths passed as she sat still, watching him. His pulse jumped at realizing she was waiting for something. Fuck, she was calling him onto that rope. Waiting for him.

He needed to go carefully too. His every move had the power to throw her off balance. They both had no idea what to do and yet she was the only thing he had to guide him.

He searched his mind for anything to help him. Any tool that might be useful. He had a body with needs, she had a body with needs. He knew what his were, but what were

hers, exactly? What order did he fill them in? How quickly did he fill them?

“Touch me,” she whispered, her voice fragile and shaking.

The green light unleashed his adrenalin then tangled his breath in his lungs. He lowered his eyes to her locked knees, knowing it was the door leading in. He needed to open it.

He moved carefully, eyes on his target. Her breaths turned shallow when his hands touched down. He eyed her face, searching for fear.

The look in her soft gaze slammed into his gut. Approval. Silent and scared. But also hot. So fucking hot. She wanted it as much as she feared it. Or maybe she feared how much she wanted it. Something in his head said they were the same thing or close enough.

He kept his pace slow, gliding his fingers along the silky skin just past her knees. He focused his attention on her breaths and eyes as he explored. The lower his fingers got, the higher the heat built. The molten look in her gaze turned his cock into steel. His fingers slid along the seam of her legs, searching for give.

Her lips parted with shaky breaths, her eyes lowering to his hands. “Yes,” she said, the word all breath.

All the cues hit his stupid brain, and his own breath rushed out at what they said. She was waiting for him to open that door. Not just hungry for it, desperate.

A memory hit him. Dying for it. unlock that door. It hit his stupid brain what she was saying to him. A memory hit him, adding fuel to his ability to think. So maybe I’ll shove my fingers past your lips... drag them along your tongue... like a promise. His words had wrecked her little artistic tirade and set her on fire. She’d liked what that

man had said. More than liked. And she'd wanted it.

To ask her to open the door was wrong. He didn't need to ask. He just needed to do it. "I'm going to open you," he said, his voice low and sure.

The lock on her body suddenly broke, her breaths flying out as she closed her eyes.

Heat surged through his cock and blood at the victory. He slid his fingers along the seam of her legs, up and down, eyeing her pretty face as he coaxed.

He began to open her, inch by reverent inch.

Her breaths staggered and his own froze as the sight of her—bare and waiting—seared into him. His throat tightened. Heat pulsed low in his body. She was giving this to him. Letting him see her. Open and vulnerable and beautiful.

He didn't stop till every inch was bared to him. He swallowed once, voice nearly caught. "You're breathtaking."

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She looked down at herself, face and body flush and trembling.

Kohl slowly lowered himself between her open thighs, his gaze holding hers as he went. He was no longer searching for cues, he was devouring the answers screaming at him.

Between her legs, he stroked his fingers along her outer thighs, lips gliding along the inner. Her scent throbbed in his cock, pressed against the floor, turning his breaths thick and hot.

He opened his mouth more on her. The warmth of her skin put a steady fire in his stomach. His heart thudded as he kissed, letting his tongue taste now.

Her breath hitched with a sharp gasp when his fingers moved to her inner thighs and pressed them to the floor, feeling the muscles.

His mouth hovered right at her glistening pussy, breaths ragged and ready. He stroked his thumbs along the bottom of her folds, her frantic breaths punching against his cock.

“Kohl.”

His name flew out between her hot breaths, the aching need driving him. But he was no longer in a hurry to meet them. He wanted to explore them. He was quickly becoming obsessed with her reactions. Needing to explore them. Measure and define exactly what they meant. He weighed his options. He could ask for what he wanted. He could say what he wanted. He could take what he wanted. Or he could ask

whatshewanted.

He needed all of those answers. Wanted them even more.

Which one did he want first?

A last lingering doubt pointed the way.

“Do you want me to kiss your pussy?” he asked, massaging her soft petals.

She answered yes with sharp gasps. No words.

“I want to kiss your pussy,” he whispered, breathing it in. He moved his gaze up the line of her body, meeting the pure fire in hers. His cock answered it with a vicious throb. The idea of asking for her permission fell right off the option list. She needed him to claim what she’d already given him.

He lowered his head and dipped the tip of his tongue in her opening.

“Kohl! Oh God,” she panted, thighs trembling.

It was a new language that meant Yes, exactly that. And the second he tasted, felt her on his tongue, lust splintered his thoughts, sending them into a million burning directions, his body loaded and ready for all its filthy directives. He dipped his tongue deeper, moaning as he twirled the tip slowly, tracing the inner edge.

Her desperate moans confirmed everything. She wanted him to take her apart. Slowly. With meticulous devotion. With absolution.

“You’re like silk,” he whispered, pushing his tongue inside her again, using a fucking motion. He paused and turned to her inner thigh, filling his mouth with soft flesh and

sucking. He wasn't gentle. But her hot, shocked gasps said she loved it.

He released the skin, dragging his tongue along the flesh, moving back to her intoxicating pussy.

"Kohl," she whispered, voice breaking.

He kissed slowly along her open folds, rocking his hips against the floor. "How does it feel?" he whispered, ready to hear it wrapped in her voice and words.

"It aches," she gasped.

Holy fuck.

Every emotion he heard in her voice rewired him. The squirm of her hips, fighting to get what she wanted and needed filled him with peculiar powers that were part mercy, part ruthless. He liked making her need it. He liked driving it. He loved controlling it.

Each realization cut a tether to some urgency. Doors and windows would shut if he didn't hurry and find them, hurry and open them, hurry and enter them. There were no doors, no windows. Only layers of pleasure. And him taking his time peeling each one back.

"K-kiss it."

The beg wrenched from her chest followed by wrecked breaths that jerked in his cock. The ruthless side of this power snaked through him. "You want my mouth on you?" he asked, pressing delicate, teasing kisses on her open cunt.

"Yes!"

He pressed her thighs tighter to the floor then watched her hips flick for it. He leaned in and kissed the button of flesh, getting a full body jolt and broken cry with his name.

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Fuck. He stared at the spot, using his tongue this time, circling the new target.

“Oh God,” she gasped.

His cock pounded as his breaths shuddered. “Yeah? You like it there?”

“So much,” she breathed.

He circled it again, slower, firmer, his groan hot.

This cry came with her fingers fisting in his hair, trying to force him.

He didn’t think he could get any hotter or harder. But that did it.

Now he needed more of that. He pressed his mouth right on that sweet button of flesh and gently sucked.

Both her hands fisted in his hair, her moans spiking as she jerked him against her. Her hips writhed and he moved his hands beneath her ass, setting her free. She lifted her hips, shoving from both directions, her cries coming faster as he gently milked over that spot, his cock grinding into the floor.

“I’m going to come,” she panted, forcing his mouth higher. “Oh, right there!” She flicked her hips against his mouth. “Oh my God, right there.”

Her announcement hit his hunger more like a threat, triggering the ruthless side of it. He lifted his mouth off of her, gasping for air, sliding his thumbs along her slick

folds. He wasn't sure what he wanted at that point, he only knew she wasn't coming.
“Not yet.”

“Please,” she begged, still fighting for it. “Suck me till I come.”

It felt like heaven was clashing with hell, and hell triumphed with a fuck no.

He stood and her eyes lowered to his cock straining beneath thin black material. Before he could decide what he wanted, she was on her knees before him, hands at the waistband, pushing them down.

Hell was suddenly on his side, declaring fuck yes.

He clasped his hands behind his head, giving her full control, ready to learn what she would do with it. She exposed him slowly, gaze locking on his cock that throbbed before her breathless face.

He kicked free of his clothes and braced his legs apart, watching her hands now rising to touch. She carefully wrapped him in both of her hands, sending heat ripping up his spine.

Her eyes shot up when he gripped her hands with his, seething through the burn.

She watched him as she squeezed him harder then moved her tight grip along his shaft.

“Fuck,” he breathed, mouth open with ragged breaths as he watched.

She leaned and covered the head of his cock with a greedy suck, sending his hands to her head, breath punching through his lungs. “Jaxi,” he gushed, a beg and warning as she moaned lustily, moving her hands to his hips.

He gripped her tight, at first holding on, then moving that wet fire further down his cock, aiming for her moaning throat.

She suddenly popped off of him and lay back on the floor, opening her legs. “Fuck me,” she breathed, chest heaving.

He dropped to his knees, taking hold of her leg and opening her wide, lifting her.

She guided his cock to her slit and their breaths collided at the first contact. “Slow,” she panted, working the head in her tight heat. “I want to feel you.” Her eyes latched on to his. “Every beautiful inch.”

Fuck, he was going to explode.

He pushed into her slowly. She braced her other foot on the floor, lifting her ass higher, watching him enter her tight body with rapturous cries. “Yes,” she panted, her head dropping back. “So perfect.”

He sank deeper, trembling.

Her hand latched on to his shoulder, nails digging, moans riding every breath now. “Deeper,” she gasped. “So deep.”

He locked his hand on her hip and held it tight, pushing all the way in.

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He choked on fire as her head fell back with a shocked gasp. She brought her gaze back when he began to thrust, slow and careful.

She rose to meet him, her breaths hot, hungry, eyes locked on the wet shine of his cock. “Oh yes...” Their gazes locked, burning up. “Fuck me so good,” she barely whispered, brows drawn as she flicked into his thrusts.

He groaned, his strokes following her moans, faster, louder. He placed a foot on the floor, getting a direct angle while opening her wider. He groaned as he fucked her with precise, thorough strokes.

“Harder,” she pled. “Please.”

He took hold of her hips and lined her body up, his hunger back to no mercy and ruthless. He pulled her onto his cock with a hard jerk, her tits jolting with her broken cry.

Her arms braced on the floor as he began fucking her again. His human lust built a filthy rhythm and momentum, watching her body take every blow.

She moved a hand to her pussy and rubbed her favorite spot, unleashing another layer of lust—thick and lethal. His eyes locked on her fingers, the sight bringing harsh groans. “Fuck yes,” he rasped, hips moving faster.

Her fingers raced as her cries peaked and body trembled. She arched her back and released a cry that set fire to the room. “Fucking break for me,” he swore, hips now a war hammer on her pussy as she shook and bowed.

The tightness, the sound of her, the sight of her coming apart brought him crashing down on her. She wrapped his body with her legs and kissed him. His rhythm faltered and his body seized as he poured into her, her name the only thing he remembered. It fell right into her mouth without stop—a vow, a curse, a prayer, a seal.

He finally collapsed next to her, pulling her into his arms, into his body. They held on to each other, breath mingling, skin slick.

He was wrecked. And yet, his bones felt like magical dust, his muscles rivers of pure energy, blood flowing with a strange light.

He kissed along the side of her face. His beautiful color-storm had done it. She created a man out of a god.

Chapter Fourteen

Kohl woke to the hush of brush strokes tapping against the wall—measured, steady, like her breath was guiding every stroke. He stayed still at first, adjusting to the silence her absence left behind.

He started to rise.

Let her be, Kaos said.

Kohl froze then settled back on his elbow.

She's not just painting, Kaos said.

Kohl stayed still, gaze fixed on the wall where her brush moved. She faced the mural of Kaos—the one she threw paint over to make room for her choice. She painted with long, deliberate strokes, blackening the edges of the god's face.

Kohl's mouth twitched. She's covering you.

No, Kaos snarled. She's sealing me in.

Kohl narrowed his eyes on her work. Her lines formed a border with mathematical precision and reverence. You sure about that?

I am.

Kohl reached for Kaos's sight, and his field of vision flickered. A glow filled Jaxi's arm, pulsating where her hand met the brush.

She's channeling us, Kaos said. And she's not just creating. She's summoning.

Kohl's fist clenched. And you're aroused.

Kaos marked the edge of their mouth with a smirk then jerked lust through their cock. We are aroused, Kaos clarified.

Jaxi shifted her weight, reaching high. Her back arched, her legs parted slightly for balance. Kohl's breath hitched with the sudden burn in his stomach at her ass. There was something rebellious about it.

You've learned new things, Kaos mused, sounding curious.

Kohl considered what his tone implied and realized. He had learned things. Things the god in him didn't know. Things only a human would know. I have learned many new...human things, Kohl admitted.

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Kaos gave a dark hum. Would you like to share, or do you prefer I violently rape it out of you?

Kohl's grin bloomed at the unexpected leverage. No need for violence. Maybe next time I fuck her, you can ride along.

Black rage rolled through his muscles. Then you must witness when she's with me, mortal, and learn what pure undiluted rapture is.

Kohl's lip quirked at his other half's arrogance right as Jaxi stepped back from the wall.

His cock stirred when she bent over and placed the brush in a pan.

Is there a greater perfection? Kaos murmured, his undiluted Lust burning him hotter.

She's trembling, Kohl noticed.

I need to touch her, Kaos whispered, the words evoking a dense ache in his cock.

His phone buzzed on the coffee table near the couch, drawing Jaxi's eyes. She found him watching her and Kohl angled his head at her while Kaos read the look in her eyes.

She's hungry, Kaos determined. Let me have her.

Kohl climbed to his feet and made his way to the couch and sat, reaching for his

phone now vibrating on the table. He checked the screen. "Kollaborator."

He pressed the answer button. "Yes?"

"What happened with Jaxi?" Kollaborator's voice came low and clipped.

Kohl glanced at her, standing naked and unashamed, eyes locked on him. "What do you mean?"

"I woke up burning," Kollaborator said. "My seal flared like another divine entity had just come into being."

Kaos gave a dark hum. Possibly, he offered.

Kohl echoed it aloud. "Maybe."

"I think we're supposed to meet," Kollaborator said. A hiss, low and sharp, pierced through the phone. "Yes," Kollaborator confirmed. "We're supposed to meet. I'm gathering the kings. Expect us in thirty minutes."

Kohl hung up and lowered the phone, eyes back on Jaxi, hunger stirring.

I'll take her before they arrive, Kaos said.

You'll do nothing, Kohl assured.

Kaos seethed. She's ours. But we're not the same. You claim her with breath. I claim her with fire.

We let her choose, Kaos said. Right now.

Kohl didn't flinch. You sure you want that answer?

I want the truth, Kaos said. Even if it kills me.

"I will not choose," she said, her voice stilling both of them. "I can hear you both. I don't know how. But I can."

They watched as she slowly made her way to them, eyes moving over his body as she came. She stopped in front of him, then climbed into his lap, straddling him with quiet certainty. One knee at a time, one breath at a time.

Her body settled into his, soft and hot. Kohl's heart punched once against his ribs, hands gripping her thighs without thinking.

Kaos stirred deep in their center, his hunger spreading like heat across their spine. Kohl pressed his hand against her lower back, grounding them both.

She cupped his jaw in both hands, staring directly into his eyes. "I can't choose between breath and fire," she said. "When both live in me."

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Kohl's breath stayed locked as Kaos's fire crawled through his veins.

Her fingers trailed down his throat, resting against his chest. "One holds me steady. The other sets me burning. But neither carries me without the other."

Kaos's need curled low in Kohl's mind. She wants us both.

She leaned in, her breath against his mouth. "You both claimed me."

They pulled her closer.

"Now I claim both of you.

Kohl adjusted beneath her, sliding his hips lower on the couch until her weight settled fully into his lap. His cock pressed hard against wet heat. He slid his hands up her thighs, gripping her ass, pressing her forward.

She moved with him, hips shifting, rubbing against him. The pressure drew a breath from his throat. She leaned and kissed him—open, slow, demanding. Tongue wet with intention.

He gripped her waist and rocked upward. Her breath hitched. She pressed harder.

Kohl groaned and leaned his head back against the couch. Her mouth moved to his throat, her hips circling.

Kaos surged, heat crackling through their spine. Let me.

Kohl gritted his teeth. Not yet.

She pulled back and looked at him, eyes flushed sharp. She reached down and moved his cock to her slit.

Kohl growled, hands tightening on her hips.

She sank onto him, slow and sure, making every inch burn.

Kohl's hands rose to her back. Kaos arched with him when her walls clutched tight.

She began to ride him. Claim him with rhythmic strokes.

The room suddenly pulsed with breath and fire, thighs tight around him, breasts before him, hypnotic, soft, full.

Her rhythm built with purpose, her breath hot over his jaw, tight ass flexing in his hands. Lifting and pressing, milking his cock with each glide.

Kaos growled in his head. Give her more.

Kohl began meeting her thrusts. He leaned and claimed her breast with his mouth, tongue dragging across her nipple, then sucking it deep.

She gasped, nails raking over his shoulders.

He pulled harder with each stroke, his cock throbbing inside her.

Her body shuddered. She rode harder.

Kohl groaned into her chest, then dragged his mouth to the other breast, punishing it

the same.

Now, Kaos thundered through them.

Their bodies locked.

Her cry hit his mouth as she came and he followed—deep, hard, endless.

She collapsed against him, breath stuttering while Kohl held her and Kaos breathed with them.

My turn Kaos whispered, hands gliding down her back and gripping the thick flesh of her ass. Watch. Feel.

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Kohl gave him the reins.

He moved her forward, easing her to hands and knees on the couch.

He knelt behind her, eyes moving over the curve of her back, the slope of her ass.

The breaths catching in her throat pulled at his cock. She was still soft from climax, still open. And yet, her body waited for him.

That did something to him.

He moved his fingers over her sides, touching each rib with slow reverence. His fingers claimed every vertebra, starting from the top. Inviting, enticing, requesting permission. His other hand found her slick heat. He stroked along her folds, then up—spreading it over the last guarded place.

Her breath hitched.

She didn't pull away.

He lowered his mouth, pressing a kiss to the cleft of her ass.

As her body opened for him, she reshaped him.

He circled the star-shaped muscle with slick fingers, each swirl patient. Waiting for her answer.

She moaned, trembling. Her thighs parted more.

He pressed one finger in—slow, shallow, steady. Her body accepted him, inch by inch. Her surrender brought his Lust and Rage to a seething boil.

“You trust me here.”

She answered with a sharp gasp and another rock. He kissed her spine, her shoulder. Then added a second finger, slow and deep.

Her body moved into it.

Kaos exhaled, chest tight.

“You’ll give me everything,” he murmured, voice rough with need. “Every dark shadow. Every silence.” His cock jerked when her next moan cracked open with pleasure. He fucked her ass slowly, his grip biting her hip. “Every hope and dream is mine.”

Her hips shifted with need, and he withdrew his fingers, taking hold of her in both hands. He placed his cock on her ass, watching it slide along the valley, thick and aching.

He waited one more breath then pressed the head at her primed entrance.

Her breaths quickened, sharp and hot.

“Slow,” he promised, stretching her carefully.

She gasped, arms bracing.

He held her hips when the head passed the threshold, holding still. “Feel it,” he whispered, fingers moving over her vertebra. “Feel me.”

Her ass flexed with a rush of her breaths. He pushed. Slow. Deeper.

“Kaos.”

His name burst forth on a cry, calling his Lust. He latched a hand to her neck, stilling the hunger tearing through him.

“You feel it,” he whispered hotly, milking the muscles at her neck with his fingers. He pushed his cock deeper, not stopping till he touched bottom. Till her breaths became cries, her moans tight and sharp. “You feel when your god has you.”

He fucked her slowly.

Each stroke matched the depth of her moans. Denied need bleeding through her breaths and cries.

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He pressed his palm over her belly, feeling the echo of each thrust inside her.

“You take me like you were born knowing how,” he whispered, voice breaking on the fire. “Like you’ve carried me longer than I’ve existed.”

She cried out, her voice ragged, desperate.

Kaos felt the snap before she did. The quake in her thighs, the tremble in her hands. He anchored her with one arm and drove deeper as she shattered again—hot, tight, clenching around him in waves.

Her release pulled him under.

He pressed his forehead to her shoulder and gave her everything he’d held back. And she took every drop, her cries reaching triumphant when he collapsed and dragged her into his embrace.

Tangled. Shaking. Breath clashing over skin. Kaos drew her against his chest, still buried inside her. Kohl surfaced and the shift between them didn’t jolt—it merged like layers of warmth. They both held her. She had become the peace within the chaos inside them.

He pulled out of her slowly and curled his limbs over her, lips claiming the nearest silky skin it could find. Sucking, kissing. Tasting, savoring.

The phone eventually buzzed, announcing the Kings’ arrival.

Jaxi's fingers gripped his arms. "He's here."

Her voice cracked like a wire under strain, her fear drawing up Rage.

Kaos kissed her temple. "You're safe."

How does she know he's here?Kohl asked.

Because she knows what we know. Kaos answered the phone. "Give us a minute."

He ended the call and wrapped his arms around her, kissing her cheek then neck. "Ready for this?"

She held his face, turning in his arms and kissing him. "There's no need to fear," she whispered, calling forth her own courage.

Kohl smiled on her mouth. "Not when you're owned by the god of Rage and Lust."

She gasped on his mouth, small smile flickering before she pressed herself tightly into his body, arms clinging. "And by his human shadow. Who is too jealous to let another ruin me."

Kohl's chest burned with those words. He snatched her face and kissed her deeply, a groan of pleasure unleashing. "We will always protect you. Every atom of both of us."

They felt her tears before they fell. "I can help by getting dressed." Her tiny words tangled inside their heart as they wiped the tears from her face.

"It would stop a war before it started," Kohl murmured, tenderly kissing her lips as he sat up, pulling her with him.

They searched around for clothes, then stole glances at each other while dressing. A small smile adorned her perfect little mouth and they both knew it belonged solely to them. A gift they'd destroy worlds to protect.

We should be in our true form for this, Kohl thought.

Jaxi turned to the wall when she was done, eyes fixed on the black square she'd painted.

Kaos flooded their shared vessel with divinity and opened it to receive their true form. He stopped behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist, kissing her neck. "What bothers you, my colorful storm?"

She sucked in a breath and turned, staring up at him. Before Kaos could worry about the strength of his bond with her, she lunged into him, clinging tight. "Kaos," she whispered.

He held her head in his clawed fingers, watching her cover him with hot little kisses. He growled low as her lips turned his Rage and Lust into weapons, ready to kill.

"You missed me?"

She pulled back and he took her mouth with his, snatching her gasp and breath in hunger. Not even Kohl's possessiveness could be bothered with jealousy while tasting her in their divine form.

The knock on the door happened right as their hand touched between her shoulder blades.

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What is that?Kohl demanded, as Kaos traced the raised lines on her skin with his fingers.

A seal.

What kind of seal?

Kaos kissed her once more, his human counterparts racing. That's what we're about to find out.

He moved to the door, barefoot and bare-chested in divine form, power still thrumming beneath his skin. Jaxi flitted to his side and crammed her tiny hand in his, her panic instantly commanding his shielding power to cover her in symbiotic black goo.

The sight of her in it ignited his Lust and put his Rage on a warpath. He was ready to execute the intrusive beings beyond the door that prevented him from fucking her that second.

Jaxi held his gaze, her ability to know his thoughts filling her eyes with heat and awe. "Really?" she accused him quietly. "You like methatmuch?"

Another knock. Faster, louder.

Kaos growled and Jaxi giggled. "Be nice, my beautiful beast," she whispered.

Kaos opened the door.

The cold met him first. Then power. Ancient and stirring.

Kollaborator hurried in, boots sharp on the floor. He caught Jaxi's eyes first and offered a soft, hurried smile—still tethered to something personal, even in the rush.

“Hello again,” he said, voice low. He turned to the others entering, gesturing at the Heavenly King. “Kildare you’ve met,” he said, turning sharply. “And Kross—our King’s King.”

Kaos held the gaze of his son as he entered, his powers stirring at the last memory they shared.

“Father,” he greeted quietly, coming to stand before him as Kollaborator continued introductions. He covered Kaos's shoulder with a hand, sending a golden ripple of power through him.

“And this is Larena,” Kollaborator said, her presence drawing Kaos's curiosity. “Known as the Angel of Mothers. And you’ve met Krave. This is his wife, Josie. Also known as our Lost Saint.”

Kaos froze as his gaze landed on her. His severed Queen.

Jaxi's hand tightened in his and he realized she knew the second he did.

“Hello,” Josie called with a small wave at him, her eyes landing on Jaxi next. “You must be Jaxi. It's a pleasure to meet you. Very excited to have you on the... team.”

Kaos felt the pull of the Earthly King's stare but couldn't take his focus off of Jaxi's jealousy now clobbering his powers. A mix of shock, pain, and helpless rage pressed outward like a shield while the severed, phantom bond slipped between his ribs like a blade.

Jaxi's hand tightened in his till their connection heated up. It soon burned like fire and coated him from head to foot.

She's protecting us, Kohl marveled the second Kaos realized it too.

She feels what was and what no longer is, Kaos said, needing to bury himself in this fire she wrapped them in.

Kollaborator came before them. "And this is Jaxi," he announced, glancing up at Kaos. "She bears the seal of the Artifex."

Kaos and Kohl felt her pulse quicken.

"She is no longer just an artist," Kollaborator said, turning to the others. "She is the new Pontis—the bearer of cards. Directions are encoded in her creations and every step in this hidden war will now be delivered through her."

Jaxi didn't move, but they felt her soul brace as Kollaborator's gaze shifted to the black square on the wall. He walked toward it like it might speak.

"This is not paint," he said, pointing at it, glancing toward them. "It's a veil." He took several steps back and nodded at it. "It hides five keys," he murmured, scanning the paint. "And only the fire of your son, Kross, can burn away the cloak that conceals them."

Kaos lowered his wings around Jaxi, shielding her from all eyes like a jealous lover. She leaned into his body and clung to his arms covering her.

Kross stepped toward the wall and stood next to Kollaborator, staring at the veiled square. His hand ignited with a mix of red, gold and green fire. He stepped closer and waved his arm, sending flames racing over the surface.

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He moved back as the fire quietly hissed in pulsing waves over the paint, revealing an image beneath. Not five keys. Five women. Each one bearing unique symbols on their foreheads. Each one different. Each one special. Each one powerful.

Kross slowly returned to the wall, studying them. One hand lifted, then pointed. “This one is calling me.”

It was the one bearing the broken crown symbol on her forehead and fear in her gaze.

“And the others?” the angel of mothers asked.

“The others...” Kross murmured, voice echoing with finality as he peered at each one. “...are daring me to come.” He moved from one to the next, reading, weighing, judging. He paused, looking halfway over his shoulder. “They want to kill me,” he marveled quietly. “Before I can kill them.”

The angel of mothers stepped forward, sliding her fingers over the woman holding fear like a shield. “This one... I know where she is.”

Kaos tightened his hold on Jaxi as Kross stood before the woman on the wall, gaze locked with hers as if he was seeing her. “She’s not just calling...” he said in quiet realization, “...she’s collapsing.”

He faced Larena suddenly. “You must take me to her,” he said, flames rising over every inch of his skin. “Now.”