



Red Obsession

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Category: Erotic, Romance, Adult, Dark

Description: Izel I learned what they were going to do to us. I saw what they planned on doing to my brother. So, we ran. Until someone called Devil was hired to get rid of us. Only he practiced torture techniques on me. He needed to make sure they hurt. It did. Now he's dead and I'm trapped inside a cage in the basement, trying to figure a way out. Until some masked man showed up, and I was not prepared for him. Or what I was going to have to do.

Zion I'm a monster. I'm what they call The Butcher. A hired hitman. No remorse, no feelings, I don't care. Until I find her in a cage with a collar wrapped around her neck. She's feisty and doesn't listen when I tell her no. More importantly, she's not scared of me. She looks me in the eye, she laughs at me, and she says whatever is on her mind. She enrages me—someone I shouldn't want, but someone I need. She sees me for who I am; she sees me as more than a monster in a mask.

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Prologue

Izel

“I don’t want to leave you,” Gabriel begs me, tears streaming down his face. His hands grip onto my wrist, pleading with me. “Please don’t.” His eyes close causing another round of tears to fall. His blue eyes vibrate from crying, trying to shake his shaggy dark blond hair from his face, but nothing works.

“I’ll be okay,” I whisper. Did I want to leave? No. But it was the only way to save him, and I swore on everything I would protect him. I will protect him. “I’ll be okay,” I tell him again, trying my best to sound convincing. But I’m a shit liar and we both know it.

“We can run together; I can be fast.”

“Gabby, we both know you’re faster than me. You’ve always been fast, but I need to get them away from you.” The last thing we needed was for Dan’s men to find us. It wouldn’t end well for either of us. Especially Gabby. I wouldn’t let them touch him, so if I had to sacrifice myself, I would.

I would do anything for him.

“I don’t like this,” he mumbles, finally releasing my wrist. Trying to hide the wince, I give him a smile.

“Trust me?” I ask.

“Always.”

“Good, now hide. Don’t come out until I come back for you, and if it’s not me, hit them.” Looking down at my feet, I snatch up the bat. “With this.”

Grabbing the backpack, I sling it over my shoulders, giving Gabriel a glance over. Hoping this isn’t the last time I see him. This couldn’t be the last time.

I smile once more, squeezing his arm.

“Love you,” I whisper.

“I love you,” he murmurs back.

I wait while he hides in a small hole in the wall before turning around and running into the forest, running for my life.

Because I might as well be.

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Zion

Zander's dead body was fresh from the smell of it. His blood and brain matter were splattered across the tile flooring and cabinets and shit, even the ceiling. Glancing down over his body, I smirk at my dead friend. What a shame. I haven’t seen him in ten years, two years before I even left that god awful town.

Nudging his body with my foot, I question what’s wrong with me. To think that an old friend being dead is funny. But you don’t torture and kill people with a heart; you learn to turn it off. To turn off the emot—

A faint rattle breaks me from my thoughts.

“I need to give you an address and have you check it out. Aziza said there was a girl there in the basement, someone who helped her escape. I need you to take care of her.”

Right, there was a girl here who I needed to take care of. But not kill, even though that's what I did. Instead of being the monster I am, I was supposed to save some girl that was trapped here. Somewhere.

Turning on my heel, I search around the living room. Only finding a couch that clearly has seen better days. Besides dust, there is nothing, just a musty smell and Zander's rotting body.

Just as I pass another door, the faint rattle happens again, only this time it's a bit louder. Opening the door, I peek inside finding a set of stairs leading down. I may be a hitman, someone who can kill anyone almost a hundred different ways. But basements, they give me the creeps.

Shaking my head, I head down the stairs. Just as I reach the cement floor, the rattle is much louder, and that female voice is cursing up a storm. My eyes drag to a set of two tables with chains, blood covering both. Filth everywhere, empty liquor bottles, trash. And that godawful fucking stench. If my nose wasn't so used to the foul smell of bodily functions, I'd probably be in tears and trying to shove tissues into my nose.

“Come on, you little balls.” That woman's voices strains, more clicking sounds coming from further in the room.

Following the sounds of metal, I stop mid-step. My stomach turns at the sight of her, kneeling, a long chain attached to the collar around her neck. I can't tell anything about her from the amount of dirt, blood, and absolute filth that covers her bare skin,

scraps of clothing barely covering her.

“Wow, you’re big,” she mutters, yanking on the collar again. “Don’t imagine you got a key on ya?” she asks, staring at me, only her eyes aren’t looking around like most do. Instead, she looks directly into my eye.

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My skin begins to crawl with her intense gaze. I can't even remember the last person to ever dare to look me in the eye. Everyone's always so quick to stare anywhere else but my face. Sure, they glance, but all they see is the black mask I wear. My dead eyes, my coldness. I am a monster, and that's all they see. Except her.

No, the way she's looking at me right now, it's different. It's unsettling, downright fucking weird.

"Alright, big guy, I know it might be your first time seeing a woman. We got tits, a butt, and, well, a vagina. And though I don't have much tits, I do have a butt. But I imagine it's not that, so it must be the dirt and the blood caked to my skin."

"What?" My voice comes out rough, a little husky, and what the fuck was she talking about?

"A key? You know those small little things that are made special to unlock something?" She yanks on the collar once more, obviously annoyed with me. And for some reason all I can think to do is stare at her and continue to stare like she hasn't been talking.

"Okay, well, this has been an... interesting conversation, not that you've even conversed at all, but that's okay," she huffs, rolling her shoulders while grabbing ahold of the chain again. Giving it her all, she yanks, pulling and grunting.

"You're going to hurt yourself," I say finally finding my voice. Stepping closer, I find the chain connected to a large anchor in the wall. Completely rusted over, I have no idea how I'm supposed to get this thing off her. I don't have a key or bolt cutters.

“Well, you got any ideas?” She sits back on her knees, once again looking me directly in the eye. Kneeling, I take in her dainty, yet thick, and extremely dirty form. I can’t see the color of her eyes or hair from the darkness down here. Her round face with high cheekbones, only filth litters her face and neck.

Standing back up, I turn, needing to find something that will cut through these chains. I have no idea if Zander even has anything that will work.

“You’re just going to leave, are you?” she asks. Ignoring her, I wander over to a cabinet. Pulling the doors open, I scan over the weapons. Knives, guns, some nails, and a hacksaw.

It’ll do.

Grabbing the saw, I make my way back to the girl. Her eyes slightly widen, glancing down at my hands before my face.

“So, like, I’m all for foreplay. I love it, in fact, but this might be a little too far.” She tries to laugh but falls flat when I reach between the bars of the cage and grab ahold of the chain. “Hey buddy!” she yells, her own hands grabbing hold of the chain and pulling it.

Glaring, I jerk the chain, trying to get her to drop it. Only she doesn’t, and now it’s as though we’re playing tug-of-war. Damnit, why haven’t I just walked away from her yet? She’s infuriating, annoying, and already talked too damn much in the five minutes since I’ve been down here.

She once again tugs on the stupid chain. Even in her small frame she’s strong. But thankfully I’m stronger, and before I can think about it, I drop the chain and grab hold of her wrist.

She gasps but doesn't let go, narrowing her eyes at me.

"You want to get out?" I growl. Irritation rising, moments from losing my temper.

Slowly, nodding her head, something passes over her face as we stare at each other. My skin feels clammy, my heart beats a little faster, and for some reason when she drops the chain, we're both unable to look away. I just can't look away.

"Can you let go?" she asks, twisting her hand. Suddenly I'm dropping her arm like it's on fire. "Thanks."

Nodding my head, I grab hold of the saw and chain. Once more I begin cutting into the chain. Between the bars, and barely having space, along with her attention on me. What should have taken maybe thirty minutes ends up taking much longer and sweat beads down my forehead.

Finally, the chain drops, and she yanks it from her collar. Though she still has the thing around her neck, I can tell she feels lighter, not having the weight of it around her neck.

"Move to the furthest corner." I tell her. Stepping in front of the door, I sit on my ass, waiting.

She doesn't answer. Nonetheless she listens to me, moving away and sits in the corner. Bringing her knees to her chest, she inclines her head. I lift my legs to my chest, using all my strength, and try to kick the door open. It budes but doesn't break. Taking a deep breath, I do it once more.

She lets out a little whimper as the door finally gives, and slams against the side.

"Come on." I hold out a hand. Feeling odd that I'm even doing it, I wait as she begins

to crawl out, ignoring my hand completely. Biting my cheek, I ignore the hurt. I shouldn't feel that she would rather crawl on the floor than let me help her off the floor. Can she stand?

“Yes, I can. I have two feet,” she hisses, making me realize I asked it out loud. Stepping back, I wait for her to indeed get to her feet. Only she sits back on her knees again, looking out into the basement. I don't know what she's staring at, but after a solid minute, I can't take it anymore. Reaching down, I grab hold of her arms, pulling her to her feet. She wobbles at first, but doesn't protest when I wrap my arms around her waist and legs. Lifting, I ignore her gaze on me, this was a new for me, and I was even questioning my actions myself. Biting my inner cheek I head for the stairs.

Once we reach the landing, she finally huffs and pokes me in the cheek. Startled, I come to a halt, frowning down at her.

“What are you doing?” she asks. And I'm wondering that myself. What am I doing? Carrying this girl, being this close. Touching a female and letting her touch me back. It's doing things to my body that I'd rather not do.

The weird feeling of wanting to keep her alive and safe hits me out of nowhere.

“What's it look like?” I mutter back.

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“Well, I don’t know, you ogre, that’s why I’m asking. Obviously.” She huffs out an annoyed sigh.

Ogre.

Did she really just call me a fucking ogre?

That’s new.

“Cat got your tongue?” She smiles, and fuck me, she’s beautiful. Her face lights up, and even though it’s still dark outside, I can see it. Even with the dried blood on her teeth.

“Okay, since you apparently don’t talk, much at least, can you at least nod and shake your head?”

Rolling my eyes, I start walking again. Through the hallway into the kitchen. One glance into the kitchen, I give Zander's dead body one more look. Not bothering to stop, I walk outside into the cool air. Immediately she breaks into a shiver, shaking as I make the way down the stairs to my bike.

Realizing now, I should’ve thought about the fact I came here to save someone. Taking my bike was not the smartest decision, and when she laughs the moment I get near it, I debate on dropping her onto the gravel driveway, yet my arms tighten around her body at the thought.

“I might have called you an ogre, but that doesn’t mean I want you to squeeze me to

death. Be more like Shrek and say, ‘Get out of my swamp.’” Her voice drops at the words, laughing to herself.

Loosening my grip on her, I mutter, “Sorry.”

“It’s alright, big guy. So how are we gonna ride out of here on this thing? I imagine that’s why you’re here.” Unable to look at her, I eyeball my bike and finally get the nerve to peer at her. Of course, she’s still watching me. Not that she’s stopped since the moment she noticed me in the basement.

“I think I have another jacket in my saddle bag,” I mutter, setting her down on the seat. I peek inside the bag, only I don’t have anything in there. Remembering I took everything out at the hotel, I cringe when I realize she’s going to freeze.

But why do I care?

Tugging my coat off, I hand it over, waiting for her to take it.

“I don’t want to get it dirty. I’m pretty gross.”

“It’s already touched you.” I toss the coat to her.

Rolling her eyes, she doesn’t need to be told twice to put it on. Only seeing her pull my coat on gives me ideas. It engulfs her body; the sleeves hang over her hands. I can only imagine if she were to stand up, it’d go to her knees, maybe even past them.

“Sit back,” I order.

She doesn’t move for a moment before slowly scooting back. Swinging my leg over, I climb in front of her. Turning the bike on, the motor roars to life, and I place my hands on the handlebars.

Looking over my shoulder, the girl looks nervous, her legs dangling off the side. Without thinking, I grab her calves and yank her up against my back, her arms grabbing my shoulders. A yelp falls from her lips.

“Wrap your legs and arms around my waist,” I yell over the bike. She doesn’t need her legs around me, but my inner thoughts are telling me to. When she doesn’t move, I try not to let my anger win as I hold her gaze. “I won’t let anything happen to you.”

That seems to be the right thing to say because seconds later, her chest is completely flush against my back. My cock takes notice of her tits pressed against my back. The last thing I need is her foot or ankle pressing against my groin, but I don’t want her burning her leg.

Once she’s settled, I take the handlebars again, and we leave. The wind wraps around us. I can feel her body shake as I pick up speed. Her face presses against the middle of my back, tightening her body against my own.

I just pray this ride back to the hotel is over quickly. And as I realize I’m taking her back to my hotel, I shake my head as to why I don’t just drop her off anywhere else.

Why have I taken her with me?

I stare at the hotel as I shut my bike off. Her arms stay wrapped around my waist, her head laying against my back. I try not to read too much into it, but I can’t ignore the warmth it brings me to have her touching me. I can’t even remember the last person who touched me and lived.

Yet here she is, touching me, hugging me. My body shivers at her touch.

Tapping her hand, I clear my throat. “We’re here.”

She jumps, releasing her body from me before scrambling down. I wish I could say I didn't miss her being against me. Dismounting the bike myself, I all of a sudden have no idea what I'm supposed to do.

Kill the person, check.

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Leave their body, check.

Send proof, check.

Take care of a person? I have absolutely no idea what I'm doing. I can barely take care of myself.

"Are we going to stand here all night?" she asks, her eyes bouncing between me and the hotel.

"Uh, yeah. Right." Shifting on my feet, I climb the stairs off to the side of the building, scanning the keycard and unlocking the door.

It wasn't much—a large plain room with a bathroom off to the side. My duffle bag is placed on the table, while the bag of weapons sits under the bed.

"Soooo." Once again breaking into my thoughts, I turn to find her already watching me again. "You mind if I shower, or is that against the rules?"

"Rules?" I furrow my brows, though she can't see them. I've gotten so used to wearing a mask, I barely even notice anymore.

"Yeah, you're my new kidnapper. Not that I'm complaining; you're a lot nicer than Devil ever was. So, I'm asking, can I shower, or do you prefer the grime and filth?" Motioning down towards herself.

It makes logical sense; kidnappers don't care if you're filthy. They don't care if you

shower, they only care about whatever they plan on doing to you. Devil aka Zander, was known to torture and play games and it is not all that surprising, knowing him from before. He was never right in the head, even as a teenager. None of us were.

But if she thought I was kidnapping her, why does she talk so fucking much?

“Do you always stare at people like they're dumb?”

Cocking my head to the side, I blurt out, “Do you always talk so much?”

Of course, she rewards me with a smile, and of course I can't help myself but continue to stare at her. Only I try to fix my face and not look at her like she's dumb. Though, on the contrary, because who lets a stranger get them out of a cage in a psycho's house, to leaving with that stranger, without at least asking questions.

“Are you going to let me shower or not?” she asks, rolling her eyes.

Without saying anything, I turn and head further into the room. I don't bother making sure she's following me; I can feel her behind me. Leading her into the bathroom, I flick the light on.

“Uh, there's soap and shit in the shower, towels are over here.” Motioning around the room, I don't bother looking at her. “Let me grab you some clothes.”

“Can we get this collar off me?” She asks, lifting her chin up as if I can't see the chunk of metal around her neck.

Not saying anything, I all but run to my duffle bag, grabbing some sweatpants, a t-shirt and one of the paperclips from the folder of contracts. Turning on my heel, I stop in front of her thrusting the clothes into her arms. She rolls her head to the side giving me access to the lock. Thankfully picking this lock takes less than a minute

before it's dropping to the ground. Bending down, I snatch it up before I'm grabbing the door handle and slamming it shut. I faintly hear the water start up before I'm turning on the spot, my eyes dancing around the room.

What the actual fuck am I supposed to do?

Saving the girl did not entail bringing her back to my hotel room. And I'm at a complete loss about what to do. I mean, I could have taken her to the hospital, dropped her off at the police station—fuck, even taken her to Killian. It's his problem, not mine. But the moment she wrapped herself around me, my heart sped up, my skin was crawling, and I never wanted her to let go.

There's something seriously wrong with me.

She talks too much, and I've only known her for a few hours. And the things that come out of her mouth, I don't understand half of it.

Do I actually look like an ogre?

I've been called all the normal things in life, a giant, big guy. Which she's called me multiple times. I've been asked how the weather is up here, every joke you can think about. But a damn ogre, and her mimicking Shrek, "Get out of my swamp."

She's crazy.

That's it. She has to be crazy, or something is obviously wrong with her. Something has to be clearly wrong. But it still begs the question, what did Zander want with her? And what the hell did I want with her?

"Thanks for the shower." Her voice sounds too close, and when I look up, she's standing next to me. Either she's too soft on her feet, or I was too distracted in my

head that I hadn't realized.

And now I'm back to staring at her. Only this time, my lungs fail me. My eyes nearly bug out of my head. I can't believe what I'm seeing. I feel like a damn teenager seeing a female for the first time. My cock immediately aches as I take in her round face that's covered in freckles. I couldn't see them before, but now they're on clear display. Pale, milky skin, covered in so many freckles it'd be impossible to count. Her eyes are a shade of forest green, with flecks of brown. They're a little cloudy, but it's probably because she's tired. Her lips are full and round, her bottom lip slightly bigger than the top. Her hair is naturally red, and long. I can't tell if it is straight or wavy since it's wet. But either way, she is beautiful.

My clothes drown her. I don't know how I didn't notice how much smaller she is than me. But it isn't hard with me being six foot seven. I am over a foot taller than her. And outweigh her by more than a hundred pounds.

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She's so tiny.

"You alright over there?" Cocking her head to the side, I am unable to form words. "What's your name?" she asks, stepping closer to my side. Why is she stepping closer to me?

She is making me uncomfortable, and it isn't something I am used to. Especially from someone half the size of myself.

Oh god why is she so close to me?

"Zion," I find myself answering her.

What the fuck?

Now I register my mistake. Not only did I tell her my actual name, but I'm still wearing the mask that hides my identity from everyone. I am The Butcher with this mask on, the hired hitman, the killer, the monster. Yet not even twenty-four hours of knowing her and I am ready to rip this thing off my face. It is unsettling. It is weird. Awkward. Uncomfortable.

Something is seriously wrong with me.

"Well, Zion, since so far, you've been the nicest kidnapper I've met, I'm going to push my luck and ask for food. I'm starving." Backing away, she jumps onto the bed, settling her back against the headboard, tucking her legs underneath her ass.

Glancing around, I'm so stupid. Of course, she's hungry. She's been locked in a basement for God knows how long. Looking at my duffle bag once more, I take out the small jar of peanut butter I carry and sandwich bread.

"I don't have much," I mumble. Obviously, we're in a damn hotel room.

"That's fine, I'm not picky." Tucking her hair behind her ear, a strange feeling washes over me. I want to tuck her hair behind her ear. Shaking my head, I grab the jar, holding it up.

"Peanut butter sandwich alright?" Like she has no idea what peanut butter is.

"That's fine with me."

Getting busy, I make two sandwiches and grab a water bottle from my bag. Handing them over, she wastes no time shoveling food into her mouth. At a loss for what to do, I watch. My eyes never leave her mouth as she chews and swallows before taking another bite.

"So why did you kidnap me?" she asks around a mouthful of food.

"I didn't kidnap you."

She lets out a small laugh, swallows, and finally looks up at me. "You took me from a cage, carried me to your bike, which you also set me on, and ordered me to sit back." Another bite. "And then you drove me to a hotel that's... well, Zion, it's weird." Swallow and another bite. "But thanks for letting me shower and eat before you get all murderous and torture me."

I step back, frowning at the words she just said. Thanks for letting me shower and eat before you get all murder...

Of course, she thinks I'm going to kill her. I've barely spoken a few words to her, and I'm wearing a creepy mask.

"I'm not going to torture you." I growl. Fuck could I sound even more like an asshole.

"Okay, well, thanks for that. But before you kill me, you think since you're being so accommodating—could it be possible to get some coffee? It's been a long time. And man, have I been craving some." Another bite, another drink of water, all while making eye contact. Why won't she look away?

Stop fucking staring at me!

"I'm not going to kill you either," I finally say once she finishes her food.

"Well, I ain't letting you rape me," she rushes out, narrowing her beautiful eyes at me.

Fuck she's so beautiful.

"Jesus fuck." My head hurts. How can she go from thanking me, to torturing and murdering her, to rape? Something is seriously wrong with her. "I'm not going to hurt you or do anything to you." Taking the empty water bottle from her, I toss it into the trash.

"Okay," she mutters. "Then, uh, why am I here?" Finally, she glances around, unsure of herself. She looks nervous, and I find myself not liking it. I don't want her to feel nervous around me. Everyone always does. If not for my size, then for the mask I wear or from not talking. Plus, she hadn't been nervous before now, so there shouldn't be a reason.

"I'm not sure," I tell her the truth. Looking over at the clock, it reads one in the

morning. I don't feel tired, but I imagine she must be. "Come on, get under the covers."

"I am NOT sleeping with you." She glares. "I need to leave anyway. Since you know, you aren't going to hurt me as you said."

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“You’re not going anywhere.” Why did I say that? Now I sound crazy. She needs to go, go very far away from me. I’m the one who’s acting irrational.

“Here’s the thing, buddy.” I don’t like the way she said that. “If you aren’t going to torture me, kill me, or rape me. And that doesn’t mean I’m going to let you do any of that. Anyways, if that’s not happening, then I’m walking out that door.” Crossing her arms over her chest as though she’s trying to cement her point. She looks so cute.

“No, you’re not.” I have no clue why I’m being so stubborn. She should go. I don’t want her here. But even thinking of her leaving makes me cringe because I’m a big liar.

“Zion, whatever your last name, yo—”

“Rain.” What. The. Actual. Fuck.

Something is wrong with me. Two seconds with her and I’m spilling secrets. I’ve never told anyone who I am. My personal life doesn’t interfere with my secret identity; they don’t cross paths. I keep everything separate. And now suddenly I’m spilling everything, not giving a single care.

“Well, Zion Rain, I’m walking out tha—”

“No,” I snap. “You’re tired and you don’t even know where you’re at.” Crossing my arms. Both of us stare at each other, refusing to back down.

Why was I trying to keep her here?

I was ready to pull my hair out, to shove my head through a wall, anything to get away from this infuriating woman who talks way too much. She called me a damn ogre, for fucks sake.

So why am I trying so damn hard to keep her here?

“I don’t trust you.”

“Good.” She shouldn’t trust me; I am a damn killer.

“You’re not helping your case, mammoth.”

Mammoth?

My eyes widen at her words, my arm drop, making fist at my side. Ready to shove her out the door. She needs to be gone. I never should have brought her here. Saving her was a mistake. This was a huge mistake, everything, letting her touch me, letting her shower an—

“You’re bleeding,” I mumble. My eyes take notice of her split eyebrow that’s currently trickling blood on the side of her face. How did I not notice? How did I not noticed the dark bruising on the side of her face?

“You’re not getting out of this conversation that easily,” she huffs, rolling her eyes, suddenly refusing to look at me.

Without giving her a chance, I step forward, hoisting her into my arms. Marching to the bathroom, she begins to protest, moving her body up against mine. I try not to notice her wiggling, and her leg somehow brushing up against my dick. But he sure takes notice, and now I’m sporting a chub.

“Stop moving.” My voice holds no conviction. Planting her down on the counter, I grab the first aid kit from behind the door ripping it open.

“I don’t understand you,” she mumbles. “I don’t do well with growling men; I don’t do well with orders and I need—”

“What’s your name?” I finally ask. I begin to realize she knows more about me than I know about her. In fact, I don’t know anything about her. I don’t like that feeling.

“If I tell you, will you let me leave?”

“Why do you want to leave so badly?” I ask, pulling out the gauze and medical glue.

“I have something I need to do,” she whispers, unable to meet my eyes.

“This might sting some.”

Giving a small nod, I press the gauze to her eyebrow. I make quick work of cleaning up her face, before applying the glue to her brow. “It’s going to take a few minutes to dry.”

Peering down, I find myself getting lost in her eyes. The green yet cloudy warmth she gives me is exhilarating and the tightness in my chest comes. But along with that I’m reminded of the fact I’m just supposed to save her—that doesn’t mean I need to keep her here with me.

“Just rest for the night and then tomorrow you can leave. I’ll drop you off at the bus station, or wherever you need to go.” I find myself saying.

She waits a minute, her head tilting to the side as she studies me.

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“Okay,” she finally whispers.

“Okay,” I say, stepping back. “You can take the bed; I’ll sleep in the chair.”

Once she smiles and jumps down from the counter, I watch as she climbs into the bed, lying in the middle. Her eyes track me the entire time I move around the room, flicking the lights off, before settling in the chair. Even in the dark I can feel her eyes on me.

“I’ll see you in the morning,” I tell her, closing my eyes.

I still need to let Killian know she’s out and alive, but the idea of leaving her is unsettling. I don’t like the feeling or the idea. What is so fucking special about this girl? Why is she calming the raging monster inside? Why hasn’t she tried to escape yet? Besides the little fight about leaving she hasn’t tried anything else.

I can feel myself faintly drifting off when she says, “My name, it’s Izel.”

Izel

I want to test her name on my lips. But I don’t want to look like a fool, so I don’t say anything. I’m afraid what would come out. Because somehow within a short amount of time, this girl, Izel, has burrowed herself under my skin.

2

Izel

I can't hold the yawn that escapes. My eyes begin to fall closed for a moment. Considering I haven't slept well in the past month and if I happened to have fallen asleep, it was on the cold ground. Devil also always had plans to either beat me, cut me, or just talk until I finally shouted at him to shut up. Then I'd be beaten because I wasn't supposed to talk.

Typical.

So when I saved the blonde girl, I expected to die, to be tortured to death, so imagine my surprise when all I got was a push down the stairs and then locked in a cage. I thought for sure he was going to take his time beating and torturing me. It wasn't until the following day that all I could hear was commotion upstairs, then four rounds going off. Then it was a long day and a half of me yelling, screaming, and trying everything I could to get that stupid collar off my neck. Even the damn chain that it was attached to, but no matter what I did, no matter the amount of pulling, no matter whatever, it didn't budge.

But Zion.

That masked stranger.

I don't know if I trust him. I shouldn't, I really shouldn't. Granted he got me out of that awful house, but I still don't understand what his intentions are. He grunts at me when I speak and never says much. He acts like I'm an inconvenience, though when I tell him I want to leave, he says no.

He's irritating.

In a hot kind of way.

Don't even get me started on how hot he looks. I mean talk about muscles. Even if he

wore a black long sleeve and a coat until he gave it to me. That man packs some serious heat, and I'm not talking about the gun I felt on his side. Damn, even his thighs are huge, tree trunks I'm telling you. And the mask he wears? I don't know what is wrong with me, but lord have some mercy. Because there has to be some type of kink for that. He has yet to take it off, even though he's sitting down on the chair. And I'm some creep unable to look away from him. I'm getting lost in the sight of him. I never liked those who were taller than me, though it isn't hard with me being five foot three. I love that he towers over me, instead of fearing what might happen. I love it. It makes me feel safe and strong. It doesn't make sense, and I truly don't understand it. I could get lost in him.

Letting out another yawn, I try to keep my eyes open. I want to keep staring at him, hiding the fact I need to watch him. I need to come up with a plan for tomorrow. I need to leave before he wakes up. It is going to be highly difficult. Good thing I am quick on my feet and used to tiptoeing around. I need to get out before he changes his mind about letting me go. But the smell of pine and honey wood clings to my nose and exhaustion takes me over.

My eyes flutter open, my face buried in the most comfortable pillow I've ever laid my head on. The bed is huge, almost like sleeping on a cloud, and I would like to keep lying here. To continue sleeping in this bed and not be on the run. I had expected to have trouble falling asleep, yet I passed out with no trouble. And waking up, I sure thought I was going to feel anxious or scared. But this feeling is different and feels warm.

Nope. I can't get too comfortable.

Sitting up, I tug the blanket to my chest. I don't need to get comfortable or feel like this is home. I have a problem, and I need to get away from Zion to fix it. The startling realization that I've been just lying here, sleeping, getting oddly comfortable while he is right there doesn't sit well.

Throwing the covers off, I make my way into the bathroom. Flicking the light on, I lock the door before turning the shower on. Even though I showered last night, I have no idea the next time I'll be able to shower. So might as well take another one.

Shredding Zion's clothes off, I step into the stall, making quick work to clean myself again. Once I finish, I put my borrowed clothes on again. Searching in the small bag that is setting on the counter, I find his toothbrush. I bite my inner cheek, my eyes trained down on his toothbrush in my hand.

I couldn't.

But a clean mouth is a happy mouth.

What he doesn't know won't hurt him.

Shrugging my shoulders, I brush my teeth quickly.

I need a plan and I need one quickly. Hoping Zion is still asleep, I can possibly grab a few water bottles and that jar of peanut butter. That will hold me off until I find Gabriel.

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Not a great plan, but it will do.

As quietly as I can I flick the bathroom light off once more. Easing the door open, I peek my head out.

“Coffee?”

I scream at the top of my lungs, my hands flying to my face as I jump. I jerk my body back, my body slamming against the bathroom door. Naturally being myself, and a clumsy mess, I fall back onto the tiled bathroom floor.

“Shit, shit, shit.” The thud of his boots comes closer. “Fuck, shhh you’re safe.” His voice above me causes me to flinch. “Shit, it’s just me, Zion.”

“Why are you awake?” I ask, narrowing my eyes at him, deflecting that he just scared me, and I didn’t just flinch because he is standing above me. Jumping to my feet, I grip my hips, trying to calm my rapid beating heart down. “You’re lucky I didn’t bring out my Kung-Fu moves on you.” Not that I know any, but he doesn’t need to know that.

Zion tilts his head, and though I can’t see his face, I imagine he’s frowning at me. Especially since I just jumped like a little girl and fell into the bathroom, all because he asked if I wanted coffee.

“What?”

Why does he always look at me like I’m speaking another language? I’ve always

wanted to learn but never got the chance or had the tools to learn.

“Are you always awake this early?” I ask again, sidestepping him and heading to the table that held his bag and a few water bottles. I probably shouldn’t make myself at home, but I feel the need to keep my distance from him. “You think I could take a few waters for my trip?” I ask.

“Your trip?”

What is with him always repeating my words?

“Yes, my trip. You know, you said you’d take me to the bus station. You’re still uh taking me to the bus station, right? You’re not like taking that back, are you?” I spare a glance over at him.

“No.”

“No, like no you’re not taking it back? Or no you’re not taking me to the bus station?” My voice shakes slightly as I try to calm myself down, because there is no way I could take him. Zion is huge, well over a foot taller than me. I feel like a damn cat next to a lion. But I could possibly outrun him. There’s no way he could run faster.

“I’ll take you,” he mutters.

“Awesome.” I sigh in relief. “So, water? Can I take a few water bottles with me?”

“Yeah.”

“Thanks. Well, on that note, let’s go.” I smile. “Oh, wait, do you have like socks, something I could wear since I don’t have any? Oh and the coffee?” My eyes drop to

the cup of coffee. Realizing he must have left to get this. Grinding my molars, I'm irritated with myself, knowing that he snuck out while I was asleep and I could have easily made a run for it.

I could feel Zion staring at me like I'm crazy. He doesn't say anything as he turns and digs into his duffle bag once more.

Extending his hand, I take the slippers from him. Slipping them on, I laugh out loud.

"Few things, what are you doing just carrying around a pair of slippers?" I laugh because seriously what kind of dude just has a pair of slippers? "And dude, what is your shoe size?" I continue laughing. I can't help it; I mean my feet are engulfed by his slippers. "Oh, you know what they say about big feet," I try joking.

Zion doesn't say anything, not that he ever does. Instead, he hands me the coffee, being careful to not touch my hand. Snatching his bag up and he opens the hotel room door leaving me behind. Taking a sip of the coffee, I nearly choke at the bitter taste.

"Gross." I mutter under my breath, snatching up the jar of peanut butter he left on the table, I rush to follow him. Don't need to be left behind.

3

Zion

Iamfucked.

Completely and totally fucked. Once she fell asleep, I was able to rush to Killian's, an hour away to tell him that she was safe. The whole time my eyes laid on the camera I placed in the room. Willing her not to wake up while I drove there and back. While the whole time thinking I could get over whatever the fuck I was feeling. But

apparently not. I didn't sleep my eyes drawn to the camera, watching her toss and turn. But I had to make sure she was still in bed, still here.

But it will be fine. I am taking her to the bus station, and she will go on with her life while I go on with mine. I had Alex, someone I worked with countless times before, pick my bike up and drop off my F-150. That way when I drop her off she won't have to touch me.

Because that's what I am doing, dropping her off and walking away. I can't have her touching me.

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Throwing the door open, I move across the parking lot my F-150. Unlocking it, I throw my bag into the back seat, before moving to the front door and climbing inside.

I watch as Izel...fuck, even her name fits her. Different, outspoken... annoying, and talkative.

The passenger door opens, and Izel looks up at me, her eyes frowning at the ground.

“Hey, you giraffe, you got a stepstool over there?” she asks, finally glancing back up at me.

Rolling my eyes, I shake my head. I’m afraid if I speak more than two words to her, I’ll spill secrets and end up wanting her to stay. When I desperately need her to be gone and out of my space.

From the corner of my eye, I catch her backing up. I don’t have time to ask her what she’s doing. I don’t have time to go chasing her around.

You fucking liar.

Izel starts to sprint towards the truck. I have no idea what she plans to do, not until she’s moments from hitting the side of my truck.

“Stop!” I bark. My voice is coming out rough, but she stops. “What the fuck are you doing?”

“What does it look like?” She furrows her brows as if I asked such an off-ball

question. I didn't, I just can't fathom what she's doing. "Stop looking at me like that," she hisses at me. "I asked if you had a stepstool, and you ignored me. So, it was either try to run and jump or ask you to come help me into your giant butt of a truck. And since you look moments away from either hitting me upside the head or leaving me in this parking lot."

There is so much to unwrap in what she is saying.

"So, either I run and jump into your too big of a truck, and I mean come on. Why do you need such a big vehicle that I can't even hike my leg up to get inside?" She huffs, shoving her red hair behind her ear. I wonder what it feels like. Her hair looks smooth. It's probably soft and silky.

Izel rolls her eyes, once again backing away.

This time I don't let her get far enough, and I'm out of my truck. My feet move on their own accord. Walking around the truck I stand by the passenger side.

"Come here," I order.

Much to my surprise she does what I tell her, only stopping directly in front of me. Bending I grab the back of her thigh, lifting her into the truck. Now I should have backed away and shut the door, but my brain apparently doesn't work around her because I'm reaching across her lap with the seatbelt, clicking it into place.

"Thank you," she whispers.

Nodding my head in acknowledgement, I shut her door before getting into the driver's side. Taking a deep breath, I start my truck, pulling out of the parking lot. Heading to the bus station, I fight with myself. I have no reason for wanting to be close to her or wanting to go with her wherever she's going. She's just a random girl who doesn't

mean anything to me.

Or so I keep telling myself.

Thankfully, she doesn't talk once while I drive forty minutes to the station. Parking my truck near the entrance, neither of us speak as we both watch the building. With it not being busy this morning she'll have no problem buying a ticket.

Suddenly it dawns on me, she's been trapped inside a cage for God knows how long. She doesn't have anything on her. She's literally wearing my clothes, my damn slippers.

Pulling out my wallet from the side door, I hand her all the cash I have in there. I can always get more.

"Here," I tell her, holding out the money.

Izel turns towards me, but she doesn't look at my hand or say anything. Unsure what to do, I decide to grab her hand and shove the money into it.

She tries to hide her flinch by crouching "What's this?" she asks, finally looking down.

"To get a bus ticket, and whatever else you need. It's about a grand, it'll help get you where you're going," I mumble, unsure about my actions now. I should have asked, or at least said something. "I can get you more if you think you need it, I'm not su—"

"Thank you," Izel interrupts me. Tucking the money into her pocket, her eyes swing back towards the bus station. "I never thanked you for getting me out of the cage. So, well, thank you. I'd probably end up rotting there if it weren't for you." Leaning across the middle console, she kisses my masked cheek. My throat closes, choking on

emotions that have no place being there. “Goodbye, Zion Rain.”

I’m so surprised by her actions that I don’t speak, at a loss of what I’m feeling. I watch her climb out of my truck and run into the bus station.

What is it about this girl that makes me feel so... comfortable? Yet uncomfortable.

Not once did she look at me like I was insane, like most people do. They take one glance at me and either run or piss themselves. Don’t get me wrong, I enjoy them being terrified. I live for it. It’s part of my job to scare people and to kill them.

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Yet Izel, my redhead.

My?

Where the fuck did that thought come from.

She can't be mine. I've known her less than twenty-four fucking hours. Sure, she touched me, and sure she interrupted me, and I didn't end up choking the life from her. But that doesn't mean she's mine. She was just locked inside a fucking cage for heaven's sake.

And yet she hadn't been freaking out. Why?

I was a stranger, a large mammoth, or ogre as she called me. One who wears tactical gear and a mask that covers my entire face but my eyes. Yet she wasn't afraid of me. She actually appeared to be quite comfortable.

I shouldn't have touched her. I'm craving her, I'm craving the feeling of her skin against mine.

Glancing down, I realize I've been sitting here for twenty minutes. I should leave, drive home. I've been on the road for a few weeks now. I should go home. I need to. I really do.

Fuck it.

Yanking my door open, my legs eat up the distance to the station before I even have a

plan on what I'm going to say to her. "I can't stay away from you." Because I see that going over well, especially since I've been nothing but quiet and like a damn statue towards her.

Only I don't see Izel standing near the attendant post or sitting down in any of the open seating areas. My body nearly catches on fire, as if I'm not trained to figure out where people disappear to.

Taking a deep breath, I close my eyes. She couldn't have gotten far.

Bathroom.

The only logical place she would be is the bathroom. I would have seen her come out. Or I would have seen if someone was trying to kidnap her. It would be her luck.

Spotting the women's bathroom, I don't care if anyone sees me enter. Only the moment I near the door, I hear her voice.

"Let me go." She yells.

Ripping the door open, I don't think as I grab the man who's grabbing at her shirt. Yanking the back of his hair, I smash his head into the wall. His body goes limp, yet I knock his head into the wall once more with such force you can hear his skull break.

Dropping his body, I stand over whoever he is. My breathing comes in ragged, my eyes burning with rage. Something's clearly wrong with me.

"Well, that was eventful," Izel mutters behind me.

Shit.

How did I not think about the fact she was standing there when I decided to just smash this poor fucker's skull into the wall at the bus station? I was too blinded by the fact he was grabbing at her to even think about my actions. Which is another first, because I'm always clear headed.

"Where are you going?" I ask, my eyes moving from the lifeless guy to her.

"What?"

"Where did you buy a ticket to?" I step towards her. She's like a magnet, and I have no control over myself.

"Oh, uh, well. Why?" Cocking her head to the side, she tries to act as if she doesn't want to tell me. But I can see the relief she feels knowing that I'm here, and I'm not sure what to do with that.

"Let's go," I tell her, holding the women's bathroom door open.

"What about..." Her head spins to look back at the dead guy.

"Should probably get out of here before people ask questions." I don't tell her that even if they did, I wouldn't be arrested. Neither would she, but she doesn't need to know that.

Marching back to the truck, I open the passenger door for her. Only Izel stands a few feet away from me, arms crossed.

"What are you doing?"

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“Trying to get you into the truck?” I have no idea why it comes out sounding like a question. All hopes that she won’t pick up on it go out the window when she narrows those beautiful green eyes at me.

Beautiful?

I’m so fucked.

“And I beg the question, why?”

“Honestly, I have no idea. I just—” I stop myself. I just what? How can I explain to her that I don’t have a reason behind my actions, that she’s just different?

“Just what?”

When I fail to answer her, she lets out a long sigh, dropping her hands at her side.

“How can I trust you?”

“You can.”

“You just killed a man,” she states. Which in fact, I did. She just doesn’t need to know this wasn’t the first time. Nor will it be the last.

“I did.”

“How do I know you won’t kill me? I mean, I’m annoying. And I know I am, so before you try and argue you th—”

“You are. You talk a lot, and you call me names.” And yet none of it bothers me coming from her.

“I called you names before you told me your name. I had to call you something. I mean, I’m sorry. I really am, it was rude of me.”

Grunting, I roll my eyes. She called me a giraffe after the fact, and yet I don’t correct her.

“You’re not going to hurt me?”

Shaking my head, I wait for her to make up her mind. Though it’s not beyond me to just kidnap her.

Finally, she steps closer and stands directly in front of me. “Alright, big guy, don’t make me regret this. So, come on up we go.” Waving her hands at me.

Trying to hide my smile, I grab the back of her thighs again. Lifting her onto the seat, I grab the seat belt pulling it across her.

“I can do that myself, you know, the whole seatbelt thing.”

“I know, Red,” I murmur, ignoring her and clicking the seatbelt in.

Getting into the driver’s side, I pull my phone out, bringing the GPS up. Holding it out to her, I wait for her to take it. When Izel doesn’t glance over, I watch as she folds her legs underneath her. I smirk, knowing she’s getting comfortable, it does something to my heart.

“Where are we going?” I ask, placing the phone into her hand.

“Denver.” She smiles. I watch as she inputs the address, switching to my music app. “I call dibs on music. I don’t imagine you listen to, well, anything good. Also, here.” She takes the money I gave her from her pocket.

“Keep it.” I have my card and can always pull more out.

“Nope. That doesn’t sit well with me, I don’t want it.” Again, shoving the money in my direction. Taking it from her, I toss it into the middle console. “Alright, now that that’s done. Let’s go, times a wastin’.” She chuckles, clapping her hands together.

Only twenty-six hours locked inside a car with her was bound to test my patience and my restraint with being so close to her.

4

Zion

Twohoursintothetrip and I am damn near the point of ripping my hair out of my head—moments from driving this truck off the damn road, to crash into any object just to put me out of this misery.

Izel insists on playing every Hannah Montana song, on fucking repeat. My head is moments from exploding. I don’t think I can listen to another pre-teen pop song. But when I think things can’t get worse, she begins to sing at the top of her lungs as though she is in a mini concert.

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I am losing it.

But fuck, watching her sing on the top of her lungs does something to my insides.

And I'm not sure how to feel it.

By the fourth hour, I have listened to every damn album. I am going so crazy, that I even find myself humming along to the songs.

Finally, Izel turns it down, but only to turn and face me. "I'm starving," she damn near yells. Of course, I am close enough to being deaf from that racket.

"You think we could possibly stop and get something to eat?" she asks. "I mean, you're a big guy, I can't imagine you not wanting to eat."

Come to think of it, I should probably eat. As if on cue, my stomach starts to growl.

"What do you want?" I ask, switching lanes.

"I'm not sure."

That's helpful.

Coming up on a sign, I take notice of a small diner along with some fast-food places. Choosing the diner, she'll at least have a few more picks there. Pulling into the parking lot, I turn my truck off, and climb out. Going around to help Izel down, I growl the moment she jumps down. I wanted to help her down.

“You really need to get a smaller vehicle,” she scoffs.

“Why?” I ask, walking past her towards the entrance.

“In case you haven’t noticed, I’m short. Been short most my life, so whe—” Izel stops mid-sentence the moment we step through the door. Almost every pair of eyes turn towards us. Izel immediately shrinks away, pushing her body up against my side. I don’t know why, but it feels nice knowing she is comfortable with me.

“Just sit anywhere!” a waitress yells from somewhere.

Without hesitating, I grab Izel’s hand. Tugging her forward, I don’t stop moving until I find an empty booth in the back. It’s important I’m able to see the exit from the kitchen and the entrance.

Izel scoots in the booth, and I know I should sit across from her. I know this, and it is going to mess with my head. None the less, I slide in beside her, reaching across to grab the menus. Handing her one, a waitress comes up.

“Hi, I’m Hannah. I’ll be your waitress. What can I get you two to drink?”

Glancing over at Izel, she continues looking over the menu as if it’s a test she’s studying for.

“What do you want to drink?” I ask Izel. Wondering why she’s suddenly shy, it’s not like her. Even if I did just meet her, she’s been loud since the minute I walked into that basement.

“Coffee,” she mumbles.

I barely hear her, so I turn towards the waitress. “Coffee and water.”

Once she's gone, we both go back to looking over the menus, and something about her being so quiet begins to bother me. I'm used to the silence, thrive in it even. But now with Izel sitting beside me, not speaking. It's odd and unlike her.

The other thing, she's acting perfectly fine with the fact I killed a man in front of her. She didn't run for the hills. Instead, she sang Hannah Montana for five hours.

Finally, I can't take it anymore. "You didn't scream," I mutter.

"What?" She looks over and up at me, confusion written all over her face.

"When I killed that man, you didn't scream?"

I don't know why I'm bringing this up inside the diner, where people can easily eavesdrop. But I must know. I need to know why she's not freaking out, calling the cops, trying to get away from me.

"I'm not entirely sure." She shrugs. Though I can feel her lying, I don't say anything. The waitress takes that moment to walk back with our drinks.

"I'll take the burger with no mustard and a side of fries," I tell her.

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“Okay, honey, and for you, miss?”

Izel looks up at me and then back at the menu then back at me. I don’t know what her problem is, but I’m close to losing my patience with her.

“Uh, just a side salad. No meat,” she whispers.

“I’m sorry, what?” the waitress snarks back.

I don’t know what comes over me, but I focus my gaze on the waitress. I’m not going to just let her talk or give Izel looks.

“Give us a minute,” I tell her. She huffs, walking away, swinging her hips a little too aggressively.

“Alright, Red, let it out.”

“What do you mean?”

“Since the moment I stepped foot in that basement, you’ve talked nonstop and called me names. But the second we got here? You’ve shut down, stopped talking and I want to know why.”

“I just don’t do well in public places or with a lot of people,” she mutters, going back to staring at the menu.

“Okay. Well, you need to eat, so let’s order. We can eat quickly and then be on our

way.”

Izel waits a moment before nodding her head. “Can you just order for me?” she asks shyly.

“Sure, what do you want?”

“I’m not picky, I just don’t eat meat.”

I’m dumbfounded, but quickly recover. Plucking the menu from her hand, I skim over it before the waitress returns.

“Are you two ready?”

“Burger, no mustard, fries on the side. Veggie burger and a side salad.”

Once she writes everything down and leaves, Izel is pouring cream into her coffee. One after another, she pours her seventh before grabbing sugar packets. And I watch as she pours seven packets into her coffee. Stirring and taking a drink, swallowing she groans. My cock takes notice, and I shuffle forward so she can’t see my half-hard cock. It’s been too long since I’ve been with a woman, and apparently a little sound from Izel will do it.

Down boy.

It’s not long before our food is set down and Izel wastes no time digging in. She lets out small moans as she chews her veggie burger. I should have known she was hungry. She most likely didn’t eat when she was locked up, and all I fed her was a peanut butter sandwich. I lift the mask to uncover my mouth, barely getting two bites in before she moves on to her salad, shoveling food into her mouth.

Smiling between my own bites, I nearly finish when she reaches across my plate and grabs my water. Chugging half of it, I open my mouth to tell her something, I don't know what, when she grabs two fries from my plate. Shoving them in her mouth, I sit back and blink over at her.

Dumbfounded.

The name calling, the talking too much, not being scared of me. And now taking food off my plate. She really must have a death wish.

Izel's eyes flicker up to mine, already seeing that I'm looking at her.

"Do I have something on my face?" she asks, reaching for a napkin.

I grin.

"I'm sorry." She drops her head back at her plate. Which is a complete and total mess. But it brings me joy knowing she's comfortable enough to eat however she wants. Even if it is a mess. She still has ketchup on her chin.

Using my thumb, I wipe it off, sucking my thumb into my mouth. Izel's eyes widen, and I realize what I just did. What is wrong with me?

"You want my fries?" I ask, pushing my plate over.

"Did you know potatoes were found like eight thousand years ago?" she questions, plucking a few fries from my plate.

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Shaking my head, I drink most of my water, leaving a few sips for her, if she wants it.

"Anyway, ketchup is from Southeast China."

Oh lord, she's a fact nerd too.

The urge to bash my head into the table wrecks my brain. I don't think I can listen to her tell me facts for the next twenty or so hours. Not with how much she talks.

"Are you all set?" the waitress asks stepping up. Pulling my mask back down, I nod.

She places the check on the table. "You done?" I ask Izel.

"Yeah," she mumbles, shoving in another bite of veggie burger and then draining the rest of my water.

Standing up, I drop a fifty-dollar bill. Izel steps out, heading towards the door. But the strong need to touch her comes in full swing and I can't ignore it. Grabbing her hand once more, I ignore her gaze that drops to our hands back to my face. Even if I can't feel her skin since I wear gloves, it still feels nice.

When we step up to my truck, I help her up, seatbelt on, and get myself into the driver side. Once we're on the road again, I hand Izel my phone knowing she wants to play music.

"You asked me why I didn't scream when you killed that man. I lied when I said I didn't know why."

I don't get a chance to be confused before she faces me, her full attention.

"You're not the worst monster I've been around." Is the last thing she says before turning the music back up.

A few hours later, my eyes begin to grow heavy from the lack of sleep. And though Izel hasn't said anything, I know she has to be tired as well. We just arrived in Tennessee, and even though I want to drive further, we need to get some sleep.

Pulling into a motel, I park the truck, muttering for her to stay put and that I'll be back. Only after wanting to punch the motel clerk in the face a few times, telling me they only had one bed, I snatch the keycard from the counter and make my way back outside.

Izel, mostly listens to me about staying put. The door is wide open, and her legs hang outside. I don't know why she's smiling, but something about it is off.

"Can I ask you a question?" Holding my hand out, I help her down, leading her towards our room. I wait for her to ask, and when she doesn't, I turn my head, looking down at her.

"If I tell you no, I'm sure you're going to ask me anyway." Keying us inside, I do my normal look around, bathroom, under the bed, and in the small coat closet.

"Well, now I have two," she huffs, sitting on the bed. "Actually, make that three."

Leaning against the wall, I cross my arms, giving her the floor to ask whatever questions she must be dying to. She hasn't talked much in the two hours since we left the diner, so I imagine she's dying right about now from the lack of silence.

"First one and I have to ask these in order since that's the way they entered my brain.

So, feel free to answer them in order as well.” She smiles sweetly at me.

Sweetly?

I am so fucked.

“First one now, why the mask? I mean don’t get me wrong, it’s cute.” Cute? She thinks it’s cute? It’s not meant to be cute. It should terrify her, why the hell doesn’t it? “But I don’t understand, and I guess there are more than three questions, but the next few goes with the mask. Why the gloves, and all the tactical gear?” she says waving a hand at me.

Cocking my head to the side, I study Izel. When I first rescued her, her hair was matted, eyes cloudy, and she wore scraps of clothing. Now she’s wearing my clothes, which I should probably get her some of her own so she’s not dragging around baggy clothes. Her hair is a wavy mess that she keeps tucked behind her ears, and her eyes are still cloudy. I thought at first it had something to do with the fact she was overly tired, but now I’m not so sure.

“Mask and gloves because it hides my identity. Tactical gear because it’s part of my profession.” It’s the truth. She just also doesn’t need to see my face, it’s hideous. Once I take her to where she needs to go, it’s over. I can finally go back to what I need to do, and she can go on with her life.

“Hmmm, okay. I guess that’s technically an answer, though I would prefer some detail, but that’s fine. I’ve learned you’re not a talker. Second question, why did you just check the motel room?”

“Let’s say it’s part of my profession as well.”

“What’s your profession?” she finally asks.

I don't want to lie to her, but I can't tell her. She'll freak out because I doubt she knows who I am.

"I hunt certain people." That sounded way better in my head, and I hold my breath waiting for her to realize what I said.

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“Were you hunting me?” For the first time she sounds angry, and I have no idea what I said. I’m only answering her questions. But I want to know why.

“No, why?” I narrow my eyes, even if she can barely see them.

“Nothing.”

“I don’t do well when people don’t answer my questions,” I say stepping towards her.

“And I don’t do well when people threaten me.” Her eyes are full of rage, and I watch as she fists her hands, refusing to budge.

“Do I look like a man you should argue with?”

Izel laughs, full on belly laughs. Bending at the waist, she holds her stomach as she laughs at me. Why the fuck is she laughing at me? I don’t understand. Most people fear me. They take one look at my masked face and run for the fucking hills.

She just fucking laughs and laughs at me.

“Sorry, I shouldn’t laugh. I really shouldn’t. I mean, I have this habit of laughing in the most inappropriate times. This seems to be one of those times...” she says trailing off as she takes in that I’m serious. But I know deep down, I wouldn’t hurt her. I couldn’t.

“No, I wasn’t hunting you. An old friend of mine asked me to get you out...” I take a deep breath, debating on telling her. Opening my mouth to say anything else, but

what comes out instead is, “You saved another old friend. The girl you, I guess, let out.”

“The blonde?” Her body deflates as she sinks back onto the mattress.

“Yeah, her name is Aziza. I’ve known her since she was six.”

Izel seemed conflicted, her fingers tangled with one another, eyes unfocused. Her breathing comes out uneven.

“Red, a—”

“I’m going to shower,” she mumbles, rushing into the bathroom. Slamming the door closed, the last thing I hear is her locking the door.

My stomach cramps as my brain tries to understand what I said that freaked her out.

5

Zion

The first ten minutes I pace around the small room trying to wrap my head around what I had said that made her run. All I tried to do was tell her that Aziza made it. Thinking it would bring her some sort of peace, knowing that girl she let out, had made it. But apparently it did something else, something I don’t know because she ran off and locked herself in the bathroom.

Around half an hour later, I finally order pizza, thinking she will want to eat since I’m sure Zander starved her from the way she devoured lunch. Only when she comes out, wearing the same clothes that I gave her, she says she is tired and just wants to sleep.

I want to argue with her, to make her eat. But she isn't mine to demand she eats. She isn't mine at all. I am just helping Killian out. Sure, I should have left her at the bus station, but I am just making sure she gets where she truly wants to go.

It is just to help Killian and Aziza out.

Liar.

So instead of sleeping, like my body needs, I watch her sleep for countless hours. I doze off for maybe a few hours before I'm back awake and watching her. My body feels as though I can't rest because I need to protect her.

To make sure she's okay.

To fix whatever I did that made her get so upset.

"Izel," I whisper. As much as I want to continue being a creep and watching her sleep, we need to get back on the road.

"Izel," I say a little louder when she doesn't even stir. "Come on, Red. Wake up." I reach over, my gloved hand pushing her red hair away from her forehead.

Izel's eyes peel open before she stiffens, and nothing prepares me for when she screams at the top of her lungs. Her eyes slam shut as she throws herself away from me. She falls off the bed to the floor with a yelp.

"Izel?"

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Like a switch, she stops screaming. Her head pops up from the side of the bed, and her eyes focus back on me, only they're cloudier than before. It's something I should ask her, but remembering the way she freaked out last night and now here, I don't.

"Zion?" she rasps, her throat scratchy from screaming. "Shoot, sorry. I di- I didn't know it was you. Sorry for screaming." She tries laughing it off, pushing off the bed to stand.

Standing to my full height, I step back. Afraid that if I look at her any longer, I'll regret whatever comes out of my mouth. I hate the cloudiness in her eyes, the bags under them. I hated her screaming. And I'm not ready to admit she is doing something to me.

"We need to leave," I grunt out.

"Yeah, you're right. Let me just freshen up, and then we can head out." Izel climbs over the bed, rushing into the bathroom. I shouldn't be surprised when I hear the door lock, but it still does.

Closing my eyes, I hang my head feeling like a complete jackass. I don't know what it is about this girl, but she awoke something in me. The need to protect her, the overwhelming urge to keep her latched to my side. The need to touch her all the time.

"You good over there?" Izel asks from behind me. Grunting, I swing my bag over my shoulder, not ready to sit in my truck with her for the next several hours. But the quicker we get to Denver, the better off she is away from me.

Yanking the door open, Izel follows me to the passenger side. Helping her in, I climb in myself.

“Do you think we could stop at the store?” she asks when I start the truck.

Refusing to look at her, I start the GPS once more. Eighteen hours left; I can drive through the night. Once she’s dropped off, I’ll just get a motel and sleep for a few hours before I head back.

Pulling out of the parking lot, I head into town, knowing there must be some type of store.

“Alright Zion.” Izel reaches over, turning the music down. We’ve been on the road for a few hours now after the store, where she reminded me of the fact she couldn’t live in my clothes. Much to my dislike, I loved seeing her in them. I also couldn’t hide the fact that seeing her wear leggings that hugged her thick thighs and round ass were doing things to me. I still convinced her somehow to wear my shirt. But that didn’t stop my mind from wandering, imagining what she felt like, wanting her handcuffed to my bed, while I took her from behind. To feel her warm cunt around me. To see her ass jiggle every time I slammed into her. Fuck, my cock w—

“Zion!” she yells.

Titling my head towards her, I see Izel’s face red with anger, her arms crossed over her chest.

“Are you even listening to me?”

No, I was just imagining what you’ll look like when I fuck you.

Shaking my head, I focus back on the road. No need to scare her any more than I

already have been. Or imagine what she looks like while I'm buried deep inside her.

"Of course not, men never listen," she scoffs, sulking back into her seat. "Whatever, we need to stop. I have to pee, and I'm thirsty."

Glancing down, I notice we only have a fourth of a tank left, so might as well stop for gas anyway. Switching lanes, I take the next exit and pull into the gas station. Turning the truck off, I get out and begin pumping gas.

Once that's done, I'm at the passenger door, opening it to help Izel down, only to find her spot empty. The rational part of my brain knows that she's most likely inside. But I've never been very rational about anything in life.

Slamming the door closed, I make my way inside. The clerk's eyes snap up at me, widening at the sight of me. I always get the same stares. I'm a pretty big guy, who wears all black, tactical gear, gloves, and a mask. The only "skin" you can possibly see is my eyes.

Thankfully for my height, I can see over most anything in here. Which is how I find Izel, hands on hips at the coolers. Taking a deep breath, it does nothing to calm me down, not even when I'm standing next to her. It's not rational. But I don't seem to care.

"Smart or Voss?" she asks, pointing between the two.

While she's deciding which water to get, I'm near seething, foaming at the mouth. I didn't hear her get out of the truck, nor did she wait for me. She walked in here, without regard to her safety. She grinds my gears and most of all somewhere deep down, deep, deep down, I like it. It's new, and I like that she pushes me. Even if I want to bash my head into the nearest wall.

“Z?” She finally looks up at me. Only I’m struggling with wanting to yell at her for not waiting for me. Not wanting her to call me Z because that's what everyone calls me. I like her calling me Zion. It feels almost special.

Reaching inside, I grab two Smart waters.

“Snacks?” I ask, leading her towards the aisle.

“I get snacks?” she gasps, twisting her fingers together.

“Yes,” I grunt, confused on why she’s so excited about snacks.

I watch as Izel grabs different types of candy, a few bags of chips, and then a random apple from the basket before we get to the clerk.

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“Did you find everything okay?” he asks, eyeing me.

“We did, thanks,” she answers him, stepping closer to me. I’m unsure if she’s doing it because she’s uncomfortable around him or for some unknown reason. But I might as well take it and run. Slipping a hand around her waist, I narrow my eyes at him. Why does this feel as if I’m marking my territory.

“Uh, your total is forty-three even.”

Handing him a fifty, I don’t bother with the change. I grab the bag and Izel’s hand and drag her out. The logical part of my brain must be shut off because I have no reason for the way I’m acting. But I’m becoming obsessed with her.

“Z, you gotta stop.” Except I don’t. I walk faster, and not until we’re at my truck do I finally look down at her. “Alright, we need to talk,” she huffs.

Raising a brow, I wait for her to continue.

“Well, not out here in the open,” she says throwing her hands in the air.

Only once I’ve helped her up, and gotten myself situated, does Izel turn her body towards me and say, “I need you to help me out here.”

“What?”

“One minute you’re acting as though you can’t get rid of me fast enough. You ignore me most of the time. I mean, we’ve established I talk a lot. And I’ve tried to keep that

to a minimum because of the fact you apparently can't stand me. But you also can't be holding my hand and dragging me. I mean, come on, you're a big dude. Twice the size of me, literally. I have short little legs, and I had to run just to keep up with you. And you didn't even realize I was close to falling with you dragging me!" I'm sure she just stopped talking because she ran out of air.

Letting out a breath, I open my mouth to tell her I don't ignore her, when I realize that's exactly what I do. Since the beginning, I've been ignoring her. I've been trying my damndest to ignore her presence, give her the bare minimum, because of this growing obsession inside me. It's slowly becoming unbearable. The idea of someone hurting her ignites something inside me. I want to ask what Zander did to her just so I can figure a way to bring him back and kill him again.

"We've got about twelve hours left before you get rid of me. Then you can go back to your life, Z, so can we just, I don't know, talk? Get along? Can you please just stop ignoring me?" Rolling her eyes, she swings her legs over to the door, turning her body away from me. I swear if she starts crying that'll be the end of me. I can't handle women crying. Call it a weakness of mine, I don't care. But if she starts crying? I'm done for, I'll lose my mind.

"Don't call me that."

"What?"

Grinding my molars, I debate on ignoring her and just driving away. Or telling her that I hate her calling me Z. It's what everyone calls me but coming out of her mouth, it's foul, it's... wrong coming from her.

But she needs me to stop ignoring her, and I'm barely holding on myself.

"I... like when you call me Zion."

Confusion crosses her face and for a minute she stares at me. I'm not one that gets uncomfortable by anything, yet her eyes unsettle me. It's maddening, odd, and warms my heart.

"Okay, Zion. Let's make a deal. For the next twelve hours, we talk. Which includes you, not just me speaking. I want to hear that voice of yours. And then we can go our separate ways."

I don't want to make that deal with her, because I know I won't be able to leave once I get her to where she needs to go. I won't be able to stand not being near her. I found her three days ago, and now she's buried her way into my chest, burrowed her way into my skin. She's a damn drug, a talkative one, nonetheless.

But she's mine.

The odd thought dawns on me that this girl could be mine. No, not could be, she is mine.

Mine.

So, as I stare at her, and she smiles, I don't stop myself from saying, "Deal."

Because I know once we get there, I'm not leaving. She won't escape me.

6

Izel

"I'll be fine," I tell Zion for the millionth time. And for the millionth time Zion says nothing. But I can hear his fingers tightening on the steering wheel, and I can practically hear him growling. I mean I doubt he's growling, he's not an animal. But

he might as well be a giraffe, or maybe bigfoot.

“Are you going to say anything?” I squint my eyes. And though he can’t see them because he’s focusing on the road. I feel much better, even when I’m imagining smacking him in his gigantic head.

I don’t even know why I keep telling him I’ll be fine. He hasn’t even asked what I’ll be fine from. And though I’m upset about him not asking, I’m not sure if I can tell him the truth. Not that he even cares to ask.

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“My mouth hurts,” he mutters. He has been talking a lot more than I’m sure he’s done in the past. After we made that “deal,” I fired questions at him. Granted they were good questions; they weren’t the ones I really want to ask. Like why he always wears a mask. Sure, he wants to hide his identity, but I don’t really care who he is. Why had he saved me from the Devil’s cage? It couldn’t have just been because the girl I let out was a friend of his. Friends don’t just do that out of the goodness of their heart. And more importantly, why is he willing to take me across the country?

I’m a stranger to him. I’m no one and I’m nothing. So why is he suddenly okay with driving from North Carolina all the way to Colorado?

I did learn he hates TV shows and movies. He’s never eaten a vegetable he likes, and he also hates anything sweet. Which is horrendous sounding to me, someone who literally needs sweets to survive. I mean, at least a cup of sugar in my coffee and most likely half the container of cream. I have a terrible sweet tooth as Gabriel likes to say.

Like now, a bag of Skittles sits in my lap as I munch down on them. It calms my nerves.

But, even thinking of Gabriel causes my heart to beat in an ungodly fast way. I’m worried it might be too late. But I also feel like I would know if it was. Gabriel is smart. Even if he can’t be where we agreed to meet up if we ever got lost, I’ll find him.

I have to.

“Of course.” I sighed under my breath, bringing myself back to our conversation that

is dying out.

“What was that?” I could hear the hint of laughter in his voice, which is the only indication that he isn’t serious. Something I’ve learned about Zion in the short few days—he’s too serious. I don’t know what the deal with the mask is, but when I told him his vibe was good, I wasn’t lying.

I get good vibes from him. Even when I was locked away with a collar around my neck, I knew somehow deep down he wasn’t there to hurt me.

Not like when the Devil grabbed me.

Then I knew something was wrong, besides the fact I knew why he was coming after me. The Devil was a vile man, and someone who was your prime definition of scum.

Zion is not that.

Zion is... caring.

He saved me from that basement for one, and then the bus station, even if some drunk guy had followed me. Zion had shown up like some prince charming, except he isn’t exactly a prince. He is more of the villain. But a good villain.

I hadn’t lied to him when I said he wasn’t the worst monster I’ve been around.

I am a product of a monster. I was raised by monsters, and Zion is very far from one.

He is my angel. Because even Lucifer was an angel once.

“You vile bitch!” I can hear something crash and glass shatters in the next room. I can hear his stomps, and something else breaks. “Where is she?” he screams. My

body shakes as I creep against the wall. I already know what's to come. This wall won't protect me, but I can act as though it does. The little hope that I'll stay hidden.

The door slams open to Devil, the monster who likes to take pleasure in beating me. Dark spots cover his clothing. They're always covering his clothes.

"Get over here," he growls, his voice hardening as he sees my small frame crouched down. I don't want to go near him, but I have no choice. He's already mad and I know he won't take it easy on me.

I knew this was going to happen, but that didn't stop me.

I let her out.

She could barely walk, but I couldn't stand by as he carved into her. I couldn't watch as he screamed at her, cut her. I couldn't not do anything.

So even though I don't want to move, I do.

"Where is she?" Devil screams the moment I'm in front of him, his face inches from my own. I can smell the whiskey on his breath, the cigarettes lingering on his skin and clothes.

"I'm not telling you," I grit back. I want to spit at his face, but from the lack of water or food for that matter, I barely have saliva left.

Pain radiates through my body causing me to shake, not from the fear he is trying to insert. I wouldn't be scared of him. Even if I was facing death, at least Gabby would survive.

"I can do this all night," he slurs. "I'm in the giving mood tonight, so I'll ask once

mor—”

“I’m not telling you!” I growl. His fist was unforgiving that night. My body was black and blue, but at least she was safe.

She would be okay.

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He would be okay.

They both would be okay, even if I wasn't.

"Izel!"

An ear-piercing scream fills the air. I open my mouth to ask who's screaming when I realize it's me.

I'm the one who is screaming bloody murder. Of course, I am. The nightmares are nothing new, only now instead of Dan and his men, it's someone they call Devil. Even if I know he's dead and gone, that he can no longer hurt me, no one will be able to stop the memories from invading my memory. Especially when I'm asleep.

"Izel, I need you to stop screaming," a deep voice calls from beside me.

I slap whoever it is, I don't care who they are. I claw, hoping whoever it is will bleed and they'll leave me alone. But all I get is fabric. I scream again. Maybe if I can scream loud enough help will come this time.

"Red, please stop." My actions falter as I hear that name. Only one person has ever called me Red. And he's safe. "Come on, baby."

Zion.

My eyes strain open, darkness filling them. "Don't touch me." I grit my teeth, ready to fight with everything in me again. I know deep down it's Zion, and that he hasn't

hurt me. But the thought that he can still do anything he wants crawls at my skin, threatening to take me under again.

"Red, calm down. Breathe in, please."

"I know how to breathe," I snap, my hands pressing against my rapidly beating heart. I know I'm panicking. I know all of this, and as much as I don't want to admit it, Zion being here is helping me. Even if it might not seem that way.

"Well, then, fucking breathe," he snaps right back, with no heat. Rolling my eyes, I close my eyes, focusing on the things that always work to stop my panic attacks.

Gabriel.

Singing and dancing.

Sucking in a deep breath, I slowly let it out before I open my eyes once more. It's still dark.

It's a bad day

"Do you want to talk about it?" Zion asks, his body shifting further away from me.

"I don't remember," I lie.

Of course, I'm a terrible liar and I'm sure he knows this but thankfully doesn't comment on it.

"What time is it?" I ask, wringing my hands together. I need to get busy, or the memories are bound to take me under again.

“Uh... twenty-three hundred.”

Rolling my eyes, I say, “I don’t know what that is.”

“Eleven.”

“Thank you,” I mumble, swinging my legs over the side of the bed. “Let me shower and then we’ll head out?” Already heading towards the bathroom, I barely hear him mutter some type of agreement or I’m assuming he is.

Locking the door, I take a few good deep breaths. I need to calm down and relax. I don’t need Zion asking a million questions or Gabriel when we finally get to him.

I’m fine.

I’m totally fine.

I have to be.

Zion

Six hours later Izel scans the wooded area, searching for something. I wish she would just tell me what or who she is looking for. But I don't bring it up, not wanting Izel to shrink back into herself. She's more delicate than she lets on. Just something about her makes me want to protect her, to keep her safe.

I keep close to her, opening my mouth to tell her we can come back in the morning, when there's more sunlight. But I stop when my eye catches movement off to the side. Like second nature my hand grabs my gun from my leg holster while my other hand reaches for Izel.

It doesn't take long for Izel to see where I'm pointing my gun, my breathing evening out as I take proper aim. Ready to pull the trigger. Only I'm stopped when whoever it is cries out, "Izel."

"Gabriel?" I can hear the tears in her voice as she whispers. Pushing my arm away from her, she moves to stand in front of me.

"Izel, stop!" I hiss, pointing my gun above her head. Which, truth be told, it's not exactly that hard to do since she's so much shorter than me.

She doesn't answer me. Instead, she lets out a sob as she and this Gabriel person run towards each other. The moment they reach each other, Gabriel pulls her into a hug, both falling to the ground.

My chest tightens as I have no idea who this is. The raw thought that this could be a

boyfriend, a lover, someone she has an emotional connection to dawns on me. Here I've been obsessing, wanting Izel, almost lusting after her. And she's been unavailable the whole time.

Not that she even gave me any indication that she was looking or even available. I mean for fucks sake she was locked in Zander's basement like some dog.

I can hear both of them crying, and Gabriel's arms are wrapped around Izel as her face is pressed against his neck.

Leave. She found what she needed. Now just go.

Except for some reason I once again am unable to walk away from her. I can't even turn my back to give them a private moment. I need my eyes on Izel. I'm unable to look away.

"Are you okay?" she asks, finally peeling herself away from him. Gabriel releases his arms but doesn't stop touching her arm. Izel grabs his cheeks, brushing her thumb over his jaw. My vision almost blurs from pure rage coursing through my body.

"I'm fine, I'm okay." Fuck. He even smiles at her.

"Don't lie to me, I've been worried about you. Are you sure you're okay? You're hungry, aren't you?" she asks, turning towards where I'm still standing, gun in hand ready to take him out.

Gabriel hasn't noticed my presence until then. He jumps up, standing in front of Izel protecting her. But that's my job, and I won't have him protecting her from me.

Raising the gun once more, I hate the idea of hurting her if I miss. But I need to eliminate him. He's the threat.

“Who are you?” Gabriel growls, voice full of venom. I don’t say anything, I never do. My finger moves towards the trigger.

Izel shuffles to her feet, ignoring Gabriel’s poor attempts to stop her from moving around him. Her eyes narrow in my direction, but they don’t quite meet mine.

“Izel, get behind me. He has a gun,” he hisses, grabbing at her arm.

“A gun?” She turns her head towards him before returning to me. How can she not see the gun in my hand? I’m basically waving it in their faces. “Oh, have mercy,” she mutters, throwing her hands in the air. Marching towards me, she stops all but two inches from me, before waving her hand in the general direction of my gun.

“Put that thing away,” she grunts. Turning towards Gabriel, she holds her hand out for him. “Come on.”

“I’m not going anywhere with this psycho,” he says, waving a hand at me.

Well, I don’t want to take him anywhere, anyways.

“Don’t be silly, Gabriel. Let’s go, he’s not going to hurt you.” She once again holds her hand out to him.

“Izel!” he hisses. “He’s crazy. He’s wearing a fucking mask for fucks sake, and that gun is still in his fucking hand!”

“Language! I didn’t raise you in a barn!” Izel growls, stomping her foot. “And you,” she says pointing her finger in my direction. “I said put that dang thing away, now please.” I tell myself I switch the safety on and put my gun back in the holster because she says please. But I’m a fucking liar, because just her simply asking me is the reason. My eyes shoot to Gabriel, eyeing him. There’s no way, there can’t be a

way she has a child. Because he is grown. I mean, he's taller than her only by a few inches. I can't see much in the dark, but if I have to guess a shade darker blond.

"You have a kid?" I ask before I know better.

Both Izel and Gabriel's eyes swing towards me, Izel finally looking me in the eye. Only both of them are disgusted by my question.

"Her?" He points.

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“What’s that supposed to mean, her?” she scoffs. “But to answer your question, no. He is most definitely not my kid.”

“Dude, how old do you think she is?” Gabriel laughs, nonetheless, throwing an arm around her shoulders before tossing her hair.

“I don’t know,” I mutter, suddenly feeling uneasy. I probably should know how old the girl is that I’m awkwardly obsessing over.

Izel shoves Gabriel away, pushing hair out of her face. Which only makes him laugh harder.

“Alright, well where are we going now?” he asks as we start walking back to my truck.

I walk behind Izel with the urge to touch her. I want to grab her hand and walk beside her, but I don’t want Gabriel saying something. I know there’s always a chance for her to and Gabriel seems just as talkative as she is.

“We’ll figure it out,” she mumbles as if she doesn’t want me to hear what she’s saying. “It’ll be okay.”

Neither of them speak as we approach the truck. Unlocking it, Gabriel climbs into the back and before I can open the passenger side, she taps my arm and nods her head towards the back. I fight the urge to roll my eyes, but still help her into the back. Rounding the truck, I wait for them to buckle up before pulling out of the woods.

Just as I go to hand Izel my phone for music or whatever she wants to do with it, someone's stomach growls in the back. My eyes shift to the mirror, looking back at Gabriel who shyly tries to sink back into the leather seats.

"When was the last time you ate?" Izel asks.

"I'm fine," he mutters.

"Gabriel, when was the last time you ate? And you know I won't stop asking, so just tell me. When was the last time?"

Gabriel's eyes flick up meeting mine in the mirror before he scowls. "Two days." He lowers his voice but fails at not letting me hear it.

I might be a bastard but I'm not going to let the boy starve. Even if I want him to stop touching her.

"Uh..." Her eyes travel to the front. I already know what she's going to ask before she has to.

"I'm fine," Gabriel once again says.

I'm getting real sick of this fucking word, fine.

"The only place probably open is McDonalds," I finally say, taking a left where the fast food would be.

"I told you I'm fi—"

"Gabriel Hollow!" Izel hisses, rage filling her eyes as she glares at him. "Just say thank you."

“Err, thank you.” He grunts, meeting my stare in the mirror.

Nodding my head, I tighten my grip on the wheel when Izel grabs his hand, holding it. I have no right to feel this way. I shouldn’t be upset that she’s touching another man. Fuck this sickening feeling.

She’s not mine.

She’s not.

She can’t be.

“That’s a lot of food,” Gabriel’s says to Izel as she steals another fry from me. She tries to be sneaky, yet she almost misses the container every time. I swear she’s blind half the time.

“Just say thank you, Gabriel,” she reminds him.

“Thanks.” Since saying thank you, he has refused to make any more eye contact, or even glance in my general direction.

Waving it off, I swirl the cup in my hands, needing them to do something. I want to reach over and run my hands across Izel’s skin. But that would be weird especially with Gabriel. Just the small amount of time with him, he’ll noticed and surely ask questions.

No one talks after that. Izel just smiles at him while he shoves his face full of nuggets and fries. Having ordered two twenty pieces, two large fries, and three burgers, Gabriel finishes most of it but the fries. It’s not until I glance over at Izel that I find she’s already watching me, it shouldn’t surprise me. But it does.

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“I’m going to use the restroom,” Gabriel announces before shuffling out of the booth and running off.

“Thank you.” Izel brings my attention back to her. I don’t know what she’s thanking me for, but I wave her off as well. I don’t even know what I would be doing right now if it weren’t for her. Probably getting into another contract, maybe in the middle of killing someone. Who knows?

“You’re not just going to wave me off like you did with him.” She smiles, eyes darting to the bathroom doors.

Grunting, I pull my mask up some before draining the water in my hand.

“Zion,” she whispers.

That stops me. My eyes snap down to hers and I’m lost.

“Will you ever show me your face?”

Shaking my head, I don’t need her to see the scars. I don’t need her being scared of me.

Izel gives me a sad smile, “I wish you would, but I get it. Anyway, I mean it, thank you. You’ve done so much and for a stranger. I can’t imagine what better things you could be doing. So, thank you.”

“You don’t need to thank me,” I finally speak.

“You saved me and just saved my brother.”

That stops me.

Brother?

“He’s your brother?” I blurt out.

Izel laughs, her hand grabbing mine. I almost sigh in relief. Thank the fucking heavens above.

“Well technically, he’s kind of my cousin, but brother.”

“What?”

“Long story short, we have the same mother and our fathers, well they’re brothers. It’s kind of confusing and a little complicated. But we just say we’re siblings. I mean we fight like cats and dogs, but I’d do anything for that little nugget,” she says, watching the bathroom once again.

“How old are you?” I find myself asking.

“Twenty-one, you?” She sighs, her thumb rubbing against my hand.

“Thirty-three.”

Izel opens her mouth to say something when Gabriel comes back, sliding back into the booth. Izel drops my hand and I try not to be hurt.

“We going to the bus station now?” Gabriel asks before either of us can say anything.

Izel glances over at me before nodding her head. I don't like the idea of them heading off to the bus station. But I have no control over them, nor do I need the trouble Izel is bound to bring into my life.

"Yeah, let's go," Izel mumbles, shoving Gabriel out of the booth.

Izel

"Izel...." Gabriel leans his head against my shoulder. "We'll be okay right?"

Opening my eyes, I look around at the near empty bus. I know we'll be okay for now, but I still have that feeling in the back of my heart that something is going to happen. But I don't want to worry Gabriel.

"Yeah, we're okay." I sigh, leaning my head against the window once more.

"Are we going to talk about him?" he interrupts me trying to get some sleep.

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“No.” I don’t know what I am feeling towards Zion. I can’t have actual feelings for him, that would be crazy. Plus, it should be the last thing on my mind, but from the moment he pulled me out of that cage, he’s burrowed his way inside and hasn’t left. He’s wild, and a murderer. Also, he wears a creepy mask, and I have no idea who he even is. Or why he came down to that basement. Not that I’m not thankful, because I am. I don’t think I could have gotten out of that cage myself, and that collar was a pain and a half to get off. So, I’m highly thankful that he was able to get me out.

I should have been scared when he killed that guy in the bus station. But I couldn’t find myself to care. Zion killing had no effect on me. It’s not the worst I’ve seen, or that I’ve done. Which is the sad reality of living with a motorcycle gang. They murder people for a living.

“Are we going to talk about you being locked in that psycho’s basement?” Gabriel breaks the silence once more.

“Gabby, there's nothing to talk about. I got out, and now we’re going to find a new place to start our new lives. We should come up with new names.” I lean into him, trying my best to change the subject. I need to get my mind off Zion. He is gone, and I am never going to see him again.

“Yeah? Hmmm, what will my name be? Tyler? Sam?” Gabriel chuckles as he thinks of names. “Oh lord, could you imagine if your new name was Sally? Oh, yes, you’re Sally and I’ll be Jack.”

“You do realize Sally marries Jack right, that would be so...”

“Totally gross, you’re my sister for fucks sake.” Gabriel fake gags. “Plus you don’t have the right equipment.”

When Gabriel was ten I found him crying in his closet covered in all his stuffed animals. When I tried asking him what was wrong, he refused for two hours until I made some joke that we should get out of the closet because it was becoming stuffy. Only Gabriel didn’t laugh and told me he was scared that if he came out of the closet Dan, my father, his uncle, would kill him.

I hate to admit it took me longer to understand what he was trying to tell me without using so many words.

Gabriel is gay.

Then we cried for another hour while I reassured him I didn’t think of him differently and he was still my brother/cousin and him being gay didn’t change that. I wouldn’t tell Dan because I knew my father would do something to Gabriel. Maybe not kill him, but he would set Gabriel out to be an example.

“We’ll think of names, okay? We don’t need to stress about it. Right now, that is,” I mutter.

“I still think your name should be Sally.” Gabriel smiles at me before resting his head against my shoulder once more. It isn’t long before he drifts off into sleep.

I, on the other hand, can’t sleep. My mind keeps drifting off to Zion, and as much as I don’t want to think of that hunk of a man, I can’t stop. For someone his size, I should be scared, but I’m not. He made me feel safe and protected, even in the short amount of time. It probably isn’t normal that I just let the man carry me out and the fact I went home with him.

Just something about him speaks to me. Like I know deep down he won't hurt me. He is shy, awkward at times, and it doesn't hurt that his arms are the size of my damn thighs. And something about that mask makes me want to burn my clothes off and throw my naked body on top of his. Preferably on top of his face.

It doesn't take long to finally fall asleep dreaming of Zion holding me.

8

Zion

I shouldn't be doing this, but I can't help myself.

I was doomed from the moment I laid my eyes on her; she might have been released by one monster. But she was caught by another, me. I'm powerless to her; anything she wants I'll give it to her. The addiction she gives me, the obsession. I want her to be consumed by me, not able to breathe without me. I want her thoughts to be filled of me, no one else.

I don't know why I thought I could just walk away from her. It was a silly thought, so fucking stupid.

I need her.

I crave her.

So as much as I tell myself I'm following the bus just to make sure she's safe, It's the sick obsession of mine.

My truck sits behind one of the buses. Izel and Gabriel are the last to get on. Her eyes scan the area, pushing Gabriel to walk ahead of her, and she skims over my truck. I

hold my breath, waiting to see if she notices me. When she finally steps onto the bus, I let go, unsure of how to feel that she hasn't noticed me.

It's not long before the bus pulls away and I'm a few cars behind them. I tell myself I'm just following her to see where their destination is. It's the least I can do.

But when two motorcycles zoom past me, raising their guns at the bus, my gut tightens. My foot presses the gas pedals, gaining on the bus and motorcycle. The murderous rage comes out at the thought of them there for Izel.

The fear that they're there to hurt her.

Izel

When Gabriel shakes me awake, my brain is foggy, but I don't have time to get my bearings before the sound of gunshots ring out. I probably would've screamed if I wasn't so used to the sound. Gabriel's hands tighten around mine, his body shaking.

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It's not until the fifth one rings out that my body finally moves. They've found us. Shoving Gabriel out of the seat, death grip on his hand, I drag him to the back of the bus.

Shadows erupt everywhere as I blink rapidly trying my best to clear my vision. My knee connects with something, causing me to trip and nearly fall into the aisle.

"Oh, Izelllllll."

Oh no. No no no. This cannot be happening. He can't be here. I can feel every part of my body being paralyzed. I can barely even breathe. This isn't how I imagined I would react if he came around again. Ragged breaths slip through my lips, my heart beating against my rib cage. Everything is too loud, too damn loud.

"Come out, pretty lady," his voice rings in my ears. Panic wraps around my throat making everything blur and time slows down.

"We can get out from the back," Gabriel whispers into my ear. I can't believe I nearly forgot Gabriel is here with me. Of course, he is. This is why we are on the run.

Blindly nodding my head, I regrip his hand before nearly dragging him towards the back of the bus. A few people stare at us wide eyed as we pass, keeping low so they can't see us from the window. Once we reach the back, I ease the door open, my eyes peeled for any mov—

"Gotcha." His hot, whiskey-filled voice hit my neck as his arms wrap around my waist lifting me off the ground.

“Get off her!” Gabriel yells from somewhere behind me.

I claw, my nails digging into his skin, scratching and lashing out the best way I can. The only way I can think of, yet I’m no match for him. Tiger has half a foot on me, and a lot more muscle. I might be a bigger girl, a little thick around some areas, but I’m as weak as a mouse.

"Leave her alone!" Gabriel yells once more before the sound of him falling with a grunt echoes around the abandoned street.

“Gabriel!” I scream, trying to throw myself down from Tiger’s grip. His hand presses against my breast, squeezing so hard I scream at the top of my lungs.

“You always liked that, didn’t you, baby.” I gag, his tongue running from my neck to my cheek. “Hmm, you taste just as I remember.”

Jerking my head back, I finally connect with his nose, and his hold on me loosens, allowing me to throw my bodyweight down and Tiger drops me. I could cry with hope, but I only lose when the tight grip of my hair is pulled back. He swings my body around so I’m now facing Gabriel. I cry out as my eyes zero in on the gun pointed at his head from some prospect I’ve never met before.

I’m forced to my knees as Gabriel and I face each other, him crying while I try and hold on to whatever strength I can muster because I’d rather die than be returned to Dan.

“Daddy says he misses you.” Tiger’s breath washes over my neck, his voice low in my ear. “He says to return the boy alive, but he doesn’t care what I do to you. Kill you or take you for myself. I’m thinking I want to keep you.” He pulls my hair tighter causing me to cry out. “I’ll make you a fucking bloody mess, have my men take their turns on you again.” I hold in my whimper, not wanting him to know how much he

can and has affected me. He took my childhood away from me. I won't let him take my barely started adulthood.

"Izel." Gabriel's voice drags me out of the dark corner of my head. I can hear the sadness in his voice; he is giving up. He knows what this means for us.

We're going to die.

"It's okay," I manage to whisper before the barrel of Tiger's gun presses against my forehead.

I accept I am going to die early before I truly even got to live.

My heart practically skips a beat as I meet his ice-cold expression. He's a monster and always has been a monster. Our eyes lock, and I refuse to break for him. I won't look away just because this man tore me apart, just because I know I'm moments from being shot in the head. I barely suck in a breath when time stops. Tiger screams, the gun dropping to the ground as he falls to his knees too close for comfort for me. He cradles his hands, and it takes me a moment to realize he has a knife sticking out of his right hand.

The hand that he was holding the gun with.

"You fucking bitch!" Tiger screams, spit flying from his mouth. I fall back onto my butt, scooting back. He angrily reaches for my leg before another knife comes flying, impaling him in the other hand, nearly missing my leg entirely. I have no idea where they're coming from, and I don't have time to think about it.

Tripping over my own legs, I stumble to my feet, barely standing before I'm swinging around towards Gabriel.

“Let him go,” I hiss at the prospect. My trembling legs barely carry me towards them.

“Fuck no.” He laughs, tapping Gabriel’s head with the gun. Gabriel whimpers, and my blood runs hot. It’s only moments before I feel someone grabbing the back of my hair, yanking with their might. I fall onto my back, black spots invading my vision. But I don’t have time to think before they’re ripped away from me.

“Don’t. Fucking. Touch. Her.” I know that voice. I miss that voice.

Zion.

I sigh in relief.

"Who the hell are you?" Tiger gasps out.

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“Your worst fucking nightmare,” Zion grunts out, and how cliché. I roll my eyes, watching in awe as he grabs the knife that’s still sticking out from one of Tiger’s hands, dragging it up into his arm.

I cringe as Tiger screams bloody murder, falling to his back, he thrashes around. Zion stomps on his hand, the sound of his bones breaking.

“Oh, fuck,” the prospect says somewhere beside me. Gabriel is suddenly at my side, as the prospect turns and runs away. He doesn’t get far when Zion pulls a gun out of his vest shooting the prospect in the back.

“I-Izel,” Tiger’s voice brings me back to where Zion is now standing over his face. “H-help me.”

I laugh, air filling my lungs, and for the first time since Zion dropped us off, I feel safe again. I can finally breathe. I open my mouth unsure of what I’m going to say when Zion brings his foot up and stomps on Tiger’s face. Over and over again.

Bones break, blood pours everywhere. Before I can process much more, Gabriel is pulling me up to stand. My legs struggle to hold myself up. Gabriel thankfully takes most of my weight.

Zion finally stops stomping on his face. I’m sure he’s dead. “Who was he?” he asks, not looking up from the dead body.

While I don’t say anything, Gabriel has no problem. “Someone who took advantage of her.”

Zion snaps his head towards me, his mask only giving his eyes away. It takes all my strength not to fall at his feet and beg him not to leave us again. But that's not who I am. I'm the strong sibling.

I have to be strong. I need to be.

"Took advantage of her." Zion mimics back, looking unsure. Then in a blink of an eye he takes that gun once more and is shooting Tigers...dick. "Let's go," he says, leading us towards his truck.

Gabriel has no problem climbing into the backseat. I don't know what I'm doing but I slam the door closed turning towards Zion.

"You followed us." It wasn't a question. I knew someone was following us. It just turns out there were two different people following. Him and Tiger. Though I'm fully grateful that Zion was and that he saved us again. I can't help but wonder why.

Zion doesn't say anything, his eyes never looking at me but instead above my head. I hate that. I don't know why. But I hate it.

"Where do you plan on taking us?" I ask, crossing my arms over my chest to stop myself from reaching for him. I must be strong. I don't know why I expect him to say anything; he never does. "If you can't answer me, Zion, then we're going. I can't drag Gabby around God knows where with people after us." I slam my mouth shut, realizing I'm actually admitting someone is after us. I don't like this. And I surely don't like the look he's currently giving me. I may not be able to see his face, but his eyes give everything away. I won't be surprised if he's not foaming at the mouth.

"Who's after you?" he asks.

Shaking my head, I refuse. "If you can't answer a few questions, easy questions from

me, then what makes you think I'm just going to answer yours, Zion? Because I won't. Men have walked all over me my whole life. I'm not about to let another one. Even if it's you." Shoot, why do I keep saying more than I really need to? I need to just shut my mouth.

"Why do you always argue with me? I'm not a man that takes arguing well."

"You won't hurt me," I mutter. I wasn't sure if I truly believed it or not until now. Zion has done nothing but be kind and caring towards us. He might be a monster to others, but he isn't one to me.

"You don't know that."

"You don't scare me."

"I should."

"You don't, Zion." Reaching up, I cup his masked cheek. Wishing I could feel his bare skin, dying to tug that stupid mask off.

"You would if you knew the things I want to do to you..." he whispers.

"I trust you."

"That might be your biggest mistake, Red."

Sighing I drop my hand. I don't know why Zion makes himself out to be the bad guy, but I'm stubborn and bound to figure out why. "Some people aren't born a monster; some are made. And they're only made because they were forced. I see you, Zion. I see the real you, and one day you're going to let him out. And I'll be waiting." With that, I open the back seat and climb inside without his help.

Zion might think he's a monster, and he might be. He murders people and hunts them for a living. But that doesn't mean he's not still human somewhere in there. I'll just have to figure a way to bring him out.

9

Zion

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Pulling into a busy gas station, I turn the truck off glancing into the back seat to find Gabriel and Izel asleep. His head lays in her lap as he snores, while she rests her head against the window. She looks highly uncomfortable, yet her hand clutches his dirty shirt as if he is going to disappear.

The pure rage I felt when I saw the fucker grab her. I hate that he even got close enough to her. I could feel the terror she felt around him, and I hated that it took me so long to kill him. I wanted to take my time to kill him. But I couldn't, not with her and Gabriel there, and not with a bus of people watching what I was doing.

I hate that I like when she argues with me. It's refreshing in an annoying kind of way, but it's nice. It's odd she's not scared of me and challenges me. But I want to know more about this dead fucker and the people she's running from. I want to know why they're running. I hate the idea of going behind her back and doing intel about her. I need to know who I'm going up against. I need to know how to protect her and Gabriel. And I can't do that if she's hiding shit from me.

The overwhelming need to protect her from everything is deafening. The need to touch her and have her within eyesight is nearly drowning. She burrowed too far into my skin.

Shaking my head, I carefully remove myself from the truck and begin pumping gas. I need to relieve myself and probably need to get some type of caffeine. My plan is to just drive straight through until we reach my house, and with very little sleep in the past few days, I am going to need something.

"I need to pee."

How the fuck does she keep sneaking up on me?

Turning around, Izel stands there watching me, her curly hair a mess, a fine line across her cheek from being pressed against the side door.

She is beautiful.

“Can I go?”

Nodding my head, Izel swings around heading towards the gas station.

“Wait.” I nearly trip over the gas pump. “Fuck,” I mutter under my breath.

Why the fuck am I so God damn nervous?

“Yes?” Izel motions with her hand to continue speaking. I don’t have words; I just don’t like the thought of her going in there by herself. But I don’t tell her that. I’ll never tell her that. I already fucked up by telling her there were things I wanted to do to her. She’s bound to run from me if she knows the dirty things I want to do to her body.

“Me too,” is what I tell her instead and like I’m the biggest idiot out there, Izel squints her eyes and cocks her head to the side. “I have to pee too,” I tell her. Which I do, but it’s not the reason I want her to wait.

“Ooooookay,” she draws out, walking back towards me.

Hurrying up, I finish with pumping gas and close the cap. Locking the doors, I grab her hand without thinking, carrying us across the gas station.

Neither of us speak before she’s slipping inside the women restroom. I rush into the

men's since I don't want her to come out and decide to look for snacks without me, again.

Standing by the ladies' restroom, Izel comes out and grabs my hand without a word. I smile behind my mask, loving that she's comfortable to touch me. Even if my hands are still gloved.

"Dill pickle?" I ask as we stop by the chips.

Izel's head snaps up to mine, as though she's confused on how I know that's her favorite chip. She's only eaten about five bags in the past two days before we got to Gabriel.

"No, I don't want to wake Gabriel up." She gives me a sad smile, trying to tug me further down the aisle. Snatching up a large bag, I follow behind. We grab a few water bottles, some caffeine for me, and my arms are nearly full of chips, candy bars, donuts, and an apple for Izel. Nearing the counter, Izel stands close to me when all of a sudden, she squeals and runs off.

"Izel," I growl. Irritation spiking that she would just run off.

"Look, oh my god, they're so cute!" I don't get a chance to see what she's looking at before I'm next in line. Keeping my eyes on her, I rush to pay for the snacks.

Once I reach her, she's twirling a turtle keychain around, eyes glued to the thing.

"Isn't it so cute?" Izel shoves the turtle up into my face, I nearly smack her hand away. But the smile on her face makes everything disappear. I love that smile on her face.

On the other hand, when I finally get a look at that turtle she's shoving in my face, I

will never complain about my mask again because of the disgusted look on my face. That has got to be the ugliest fucking turtle I've seen. The keychain is an off silver, the eyes are way too close together, and one of the legs is much smaller than the others. And there's a long crack along the shell.

It's so fucking ugly.

"It's different," I find myself saying instead.

"It's cute Z—" She stops herself from saying my name. I almost beg her to just say my name. I love hearing it from her lips but instead she smiles and mumbles, "You know we need to come up with a nickname for you."

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“Why’s that?” I ask, peering down at her.

“What do your friends call you?” she asks, hanging the turtle keychain back up.

“I don’t have friends,” I tell her, picking the stupid chain back up and heading back to the counter. Why am I even buying this?

“Is this it?” the clerk asks.

“Yes,” I tell him at the same time Izel says, “No.” She reaches down and grabs two packs of bubblegum.

The clerk glances between us, as if he doesn’t know if he should ring it up. Izel shifts her hand reaching forward to take the gum back.

“And the gum.” I glare at the clerk for making her uncomfortable.

“Uh, yeah alright. Your total is... twenty-six even.”

Swiping my card, I hand the turtle over to Izel as we exit the gas station.

“Thanks, but you know you didn’t need to get this for me.” She sighs, holding the ugly thing up. “Anyway, uh, here let me see your keys.”

Without notice she reaches inside my tactical gear pants pocket, nearly missing the keys entirely when she grazes my cock. Both of us still. My breath hitches as I try not to hiss out loud and I’m sure I fail. Izel’s eyes snap up to meet mine, and they widen

before she snatches the key fob out, nearly dropping them to the ground.

“Sorry about that,” she mumbles as she moves the keys around until the turtle is placed on the ring.

“It’s fine,” I mutter, willing my cock to settle the fuck down. It’s not like he hasn’t been grazed before, but the way he perked up it might as well be.

“Here,” she says handing my keys over. “Now every time you see it, you’ll think of me.” She bounces on her toes, and turning around she jumps into the truck. I stand there for a moment, wondering what the fuck is happening to me.

Five and a half hours later we finally arrive at my property. Most of my land is woods, and a creek running along the back property. But once you go just about to the middle holds my log cabin.

Gabriel hums in the backseat as he stares out the window. Izel sits in the front seat, bouncing around like a kid in the fucking candy store. I’m slowly realizing neither of them have seen much of the world. And as that thought comes, I want to know why and where they’ve been their whole lives. Who are they running from? Why won’t see tell me? All these questions I want to ask, yet knowing Izel, she won’t tell me anything. She’ll run and I have a feeling it’d be difficult to ever find her again.

“Holy shoot, I’ve never seen so much green in my life!” She laughs, her face practically glued to the window.

“How much land is this?” Gabriel asks from the back, his head popping out in the middle.

“Uh, sixty-one acres,” I mutter.

“Holy shit.” Gabriel laughs.

“Language.” Izel scowls, unclicking her seatbelt before rolling the window down. She all but lays out the window, and my hand automatically reaches for the back of her shirt.

“Red, be careful,” I snap.

Izel sits back, smiling over at me. “This is so beautiful. I can’t believe you own all this, I mean this is so pretty Z—” She stopped herself. Once again I hate that she won’t say my name.

No one speaks as we round the dirt road, and the trees start to fade. It’s not long before the house comes into view. I hear Izel gasp while Gabriel bursts out laughing.

“Holy fuck.” Gabriel continues laughing.

“Gabriel Hollow!” Izel screeches.

“Izel, come on! Do you see this shit?” he says, pointing in front of us.

I don’t see what the big deal is. Sure, it’s bigger than the three-bedroom house Ma and I had in New York when I was younger. But after I left and was able to get Ma into a home that she loved, I had nowhere else to go and to just be myself, so I bought the land and built the house myself. It was hard and took a few years. But I was able to do most of it by myself.

Three stories, massive windows that went from the floor to ceiling, allowing sunlight in. The porch on the front and the back were my favorite. The dark wooden logs matched the black trim.

Pushing the button on top of my visor, the garage door opens allowing me to pull inside. Turning the truck off, I shut the garage door before I even spare a glance at Izel and Gabriel. Only I find them already staring at me with wide eyes.

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“What do you even do?” Gabriel asks, his eyes narrowing at me.

My eyes flicker towards Izel, wondering if I should tell him the same thing I already told her.

When it appears that I have no idea what to say or do, Izel smiles back at her brother.

“He’s a hunter.”

Gabriel doesn’t look like he believes her but doesn’t comment before he pushes the door open and slams it shut behind him.

“I really need to come up with a nickname for you.”

“You’ve called me plenty of names.”

“Sure, but I don’t think I should call you ogre or mammoth out in public. I mean, unless you’re fine with that. Then I don’t mind.” Laughing, she shrugs her shoulders.

Frowning over at her, Izel just gives me the biggest smile.

“Or I could call you giant, because no one would even think the name was odd because you’re so big.”

“Yeah, and you’re fucking tiny,” I blurt out.

“It’s genetics,” she hisses. “Alright come on, show me this big house...Pup.” Izel

giggles, swinging the door open.

Pup?

What is it with these fucking nicknames she insists on giving me?

I'm known for only one thing: The Butcher, the hitman who murders those without a care. And yet I let this five-foot three, redhead, who has more sass than anyone I've ever met call me ogre, giraffe, and more. And now pup.

She has me by my fucking balls.

Shaking my head, I peer out the windshield finding Gabriel and Izel standing next to each other looking at me. Gabriel is frowning at me, his arms crossed over his chest, while Izel smiles big at me, her eyes softening as our eyes meet. And that does something to my chest.

I want her eyes on me all the time. I like them. And for the millionth time, I'm seconds away from ripping my mask off and never wanting to wear it again. But would she like me, just old regular me?

Izel begins to frown, her shoulders falling as we stare at each other. Pushing out of the truck, I grab her hand and unlock the garage door to the house.

Leading them from the mudroom into the kitchen, I can hear both gasp as they take in the kitchen. Besides my bedroom and workroom, the kitchen is the only other place I was very specific on what I wanted. High ceilings, with dark wood cabinets, marble countertops. A large island in the middle that holds six barstools. Not that I ever needed that much space. I just love the idea of an open kitchen where I can cook and enjoy being myself.

You can cook for Izel.

The idea pops into my head. I almost drop to my knees in the quick realization that I want that. I may not know Izel, or anything much about her. But I want to keep her close and to always be around her.

“So, yeah, this is the kitchen.” I motion around, trying my best to get the image of Izel and I out of my head. Who knew if she even wanted that?

“You going to cook for us?” Izel asks, her eyes swinging to me.

“Of course,” I find myself saying. Not that it’s hard, I find myself itching to cook for her now.

“Great, because I don’t know how.” She laughs walking past me towards the living room.

Following Gabriel and Izel throughout the house, I show them the living room and the library which Izel fell in love with. Upstairs, I show them both of their rooms they can stay in, thankfully on the opposite side of where my room is. I don’t need the temptation of knowing Izel is right there.

“You’re really letting us stay here?” Gabriel asks, unsure of himself. He glances around the room, taking it in. It’s nothing much, a queen bed, a dresser with a TV on top, and a small walk-in closet with a decent-sized bathroom connected. It’s all cool tones of blue and gray. But the way Gabriel is staring at the room, it’s like Christmas morning.

“Yes, you both can stay as long as you need.” I make sure to look over at Izel, so she knows I meant it. They can stay as long as they needed, preferably forever. I want them here and safe.

“Thank you,” Izel mumbles as she walks over to Gabriel.

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“Don’t mention it. I’ll, uh, just let you guys get comfortable. If you need anything, let me know.”

Backing out of the room, I close the bedroom door behind me. Making my way downstairs, I glance at the clock realizing it’s near dinner time. I could make them dinner, but I have no idea what either of them like. And Izel is a vegetarian, so I have no idea what I could even make her.

I could always ask her.

Turning back towards the stairs, I make my way back to Gabriel’s room.

Just ask. I bring my hand up to knock, and that’s when I hear him.

“How are your eyes?”

Her eyes? What’s wrong with them?

Dropping my hand, I know I should just walk away and leave them to have their private conversation. Obviously, they don’t want me to be a part of it since he didn’t ask during our ten-hour drive here.

“The same,” Izel mumbles. I could barely hear her.

“Don’t lie to me,” Gabriel snaps.

I ready myself to barge in there, to yell at him not to get snippy with her, when I hear

Izel shush him.

“Don’t yell, I don’t want him hearing you.”

“Sure, of course.” I can hear the sarcasm in his voice. “And who even is he, Izel?”

“He already told you who he is; he got me out of that guy’s cage.”

She wasn’t wrong, but why does the way she say it not sit well with me. I want to be more than just some random guy who saved her. I want to be her man. I want more.

The realization hits me like a fucking freight train. The idea of Izel and me being more, of being hers and doing all the sappy couple shit. While I never wanted anything but a quick fuck to anyone else, I want more with her. I want everything.

“He seems to think you’re more than that.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Izel, the man can’t take his eyes off you. He also held your hand, and I saw when you guys were walking back from the gas station. Even if I can’t see his face because of that stupid mask he wears, I could see that he had that stupid smile on his face. Also, no guy just randomly drives across the country to save a girl’s brother just for the fun of it—”

“Gabriel he’s not like that.” Izel tries to defend me. But I am, I am just like that. Here I am lusting after her while I’m probably the last thing on her mind.

“Do you even know anything about him? Like his name, or what he does for a living? Because I don’t believe he’s just a hunter. Who is this guy, Izel? He could be the one we’re running from, have you ever thought about that?”

Izel says nothing. And my heart stops.

Of course, I knew someone was after them. Izel let it be known. But besides a few comments here and there she hadn't said anything else. It doesn't sit well with me, but I also know better than to push her. I don't need her running off thinking I am the one hired to go after them like Zander was.

I also know I need to tell her I know Zander, that I grew up with him. But I couldn't find the right time, not that there was much before we arrived. But I know I need to tell her at some point.

"I know all those things."

"What's his last name?" Gabriel asks.

"Rain."

"Rain?"

"Yes, it's Rain."

"Well, that's a real stupid name and doesn't even sound real."

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“Gabriel Hollow!” Izel yells. I’m sure if I was downstairs, I’d hear it. “Listen, we don’t need to stay here long okay. Just... let’s rest, and in a week’s time we’ll leave, okay?”

I don’t wait until Gabriel answers her. Turning on my heel I head back downstairs. They’re not leaving, especially Izel. My need for her is growing uncontrollably and if that means locking them both in this house I will. She won’t be able to breathe without me, I’ll make sure of it.

But first I need to cook them food and then Izel is going to tell me about this little eye problem she apparently has.

An hour later I’m pulling out the vegetable lasagna from the oven when Izel walks into the kitchen.

“Gabriel went to sleep,” she says. Making herself at home, she sets up on the barstool. “What’s that?” she asks, pointing to what I took out.

“Uh, lasagna,” I choke out.

Fuck, I need to get my shit together.

“Oh, well, that’s good,” she mumbles, her eyes dropping before she looks everywhere else but at me.

“There’s no meat in it. It’s all vegetables. I figured you both would be hungry...” I trail off, feeling hesitant on if I should have even cooked for them. I don’t do this, I

don't make those around me comfortable.

"Really?" Izel picks up, finally looking up at me, her unclear eyes zeroed in on me.

"Your eyes," I blurt out.

Izel cocks her head to the side, studying me.

"Are you blind?" I ask, cutting a piece of lasagna for her. Plating it, I scoot the food over until it's right in front of her.

"No. I'm not blind." Izel's voice hardens, shoving a forkful of food into her mouth.

"What's wrong with them?"

I don't know why I have to be such an ass. There are a million other ways I could ask her about what is wrong with them.

"Wow, Zion, and to think we could have been friends." Sarcasm drips out like venom. "For your information nothing is wrong with my eyes. They are perfect just the way they are." Her voice wobbles, trying her best to act as if me asking hasn't affected her the way it has.

I don't know what to say. Everything she's saying is true. We're not friends. I don't want to just be friends with her. I don't even know anything about her, besides her weird obsession with green apples, dill pickle chips, sugar addictions, even her Hannah Montana obsession, and her knowing all the songs. There's also nothing wrong with her eyes; they are perfect just the way they are. She's beautiful and I'm not just saying that because I want to stick my cock in her.

Izel is drop dead gorgeous, and she does something to my heart. She makes me feel

things that I didn't know were possible for myself to feel.

“Well, this was great, but I'm going to go to my room.” She breaks me from my thoughts. I hadn't realized I'm staring at her, frowning until I furrow my brows to find they already were.

“Izel, I did—”

“No, it's fine. I've always been the weird one with messed up eyes, everyone sees it that way. What makes you different? So, it's fine, yup totally and completely fine. So, yeah, I'm going to go and head to bed. Thanks for dinner.” Izel shuffles before turning on her heel and running off.

Double fuck.

10

Zion

Myfeethitthetop of the stairs, debating on if I should turn left and just go to my room. I could shower and take this fucking mask off without the fear of her seeing me without it. Or I could go check on Izel and explain to her that I'm a major fuck up. That the words from my mouth didn't reflect on what was going on inside my head.

There is absolutely nothingwrong with her eyes. I love them. They are that perfect forest green. Sure they are cloudy, but I can get lost in them. I can lose myself in them. I already find myself lost.

Fuck I turned into a goddamn pussy.

Fuck it.

Marching towards her door, I knock but hear nothing. Twisting the door handle, I push it open slowly, the sound of the water running hits my ears. I could just wait for her on the bed, but when I hear the soft whimper coming from the bathroom, I'm moving. The bathroom isn't locked, thankfully. Steam fills the room, the mirror completely fogged over. My eyes immediately lock onto Izel, who sits in the middle of the shower stall.

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Opening the shower door, I step inside, the hot water hits me soaking through my clothing, burning me.

“Oh, Red.” My voice cracks. Reaching over I turn the temperature down. There is no way it isn’t burning her. “Come on, let’s get you out.”

“There’s nothing wrong with my eyes. There’s nothing wrong, nothing wrong.” Izel sobs, her breathing coming in ragged. “Zion, there’s nothing wrong with my eyes. There’s nothing wrong with them.”

“Red, there is nothing wrong with your eyes. I promise you there’s nothing wrong with them.”

I was never good at comforting others. Ma tried teaching me; I just wasn’t wired that way. But for Izel, I can try and comfort her. I’m just not sure what she needs.

“It wasn’t my fault,” she flatly says. Finally looking up at me, her once green eyes are now red, and more tears stream down her face. “None of it is my fault. I was a child.”

My body stiffens as her words, sitting down, I fight with wanting to pull her into my lap. She tugs her legs closer to her chest, hiding herself from me. I force myself to close my eyes, not allowing myself to look at her naked body. She doesn’t need that from me, not when she’s crying because she thinks there’s something wrong with her eyes.

“What happened, Red?” I ask, opening my eyes again, only to stare at the shower wall.

Izel doesn't say anything for a long time. I thought she might have fallen asleep, or she is just ignoring me. I deserve it since I was a complete asshole to her downstairs.

"Monochromacy," she mumbles. "I'm color blind."

"That's oka—"

"All I see is black and white, that's what it means. And, well, sometimes, I don't see..."

"What do you mean sometimes?" I ask, furrowing my brows.

"Sometimes I don't see at all, or sometimes I see very little. Just depends." She shrugs, sighing, finally glancing in my direction. "When I was a child, I was sort of forced out a window."

"Who?" I ask, feeling powerless. Something I'm not used to feeling. I have to have control, in every way possible. "I want a list of everyone that hurt you," I tell her.

That earns a chuckle from her. "That's a long list."

"I want it," I tell her again. I don't care how long it is, I want the fucking list.

"Like a list of everyone, everyone?" Izel shifts, and my eyes drop down catching sight of scars covering her legs. Redness fills my vision, and my knuckles crack from the force of my fist. "There was a boy who pushed me off a slide when I was in first grade." She looks over at me, her chin resting on her knees.

"Yes, what's his name?"

"You're crazy." Izel smiles.

“But you already knew that, Red.”

“I did. Are you ever going to take your mask off?”

I think about it. I probably should take my mask off now, but I'm afraid that she won't like what I look like. Which is outrageous because I shouldn't be. I have no reason to be.

“I will, eventually,” I finally mumble. “But first I think you should get out of this shower and get some rest.”

“You’re right.” Izel sighs. Her eyes drop down before flying back to me. “I’m naked.” As if she just realizes where we are. Her eyes gaze down at her body again just to look at me shyly. “Wow, I’m really out here in all my glory.”

“I don’t mind.”

What the actual fuck.

I don’t even know why I decided it would be a good idea to say that out loud. But it seems like nothing is off limits with this girl.

“Well, this was nice, but I think I’m going to finish showering so I can go to bed.” Izel moves her arm waving at me to move. The top of her breast peeks out, and my eyes are glued. I always claim I am an ass man. Sure, tits are nice. Love them, but there is something about a good round ass. But Izel’s tits, I want to suck her nipples into my mouth.

Literally.

Fuck. Me. Sideways.

“What’s your middle name?”

Snapping my head up, she narrows her eyes at me.

“What?”

“Middle name, Zion.” She orders me. And for some reason, I like that. I like her being sassy and bossy.

“Wyatt.”

“Well, Zion Wyatt Rain, would you be so kind, and get out!” Izel cocks her brow at me. I know I shouldn’t look; I know my eyes need to stay above chest level. But that doesn’t stop me from dropping my eyes down to her tits again. I’m truly going to hell. Not for murdering countless people. But because the idea of fucking her tits makes me groan, and I’m moments from losing myself before Izel snaps her fingers in front of my face.

“Zion!” she hisses.

“Fuck,” I mumble, standing up. I need to get out of this shower. I’m here to comfort her, not think about fucking her tits before I take her ass. God, I want to fuck her ass with my tongue. I want to taste her as she withers beneath me. I would tie her hands to my bed post, while I fucked her with my mouth—

“Zion Wyatt Rain!”

I’m staring at her tits again. “Sorry,” I mutter, backing out of the shower. I don’t say anything, shutting the shower door and the bathroom door. I’m now the one running from her bedroom to my own, needing to hide from staring so fucking hard at her.

I’m acting as though I’ve never seen a naked woman before. I’ve seen plenty and done plenty.

But fuck, the idea of Izel spread wide open for me, taking her ass, her tits jiggling—I’m near cumming in my pants from the idea. Her thick thighs wrap around my neck as I devour her cunt.

Shaking my head, I storm into my room, slamming the door before tugging my clothes off heading to the bathroom. I don’t stop until I’m in the shower and running the cold water. It does nothing to help my raging hard on. Somehow it makes it worse. My hand wraps around the base, giving a slow tug, precum beading at the tip.

“Ah, fuck,” I groan, my hand tightening around myself.

I’d wrap my hand around her hair as I dive into her, pounding into her warm wet cunt. I’d tie her hands behind her back, shoving my fingers down her throat. My cock deep in her pussy, whil—

“Ah, fuckkkk,” I grunt, cum shooting from my dick spraying the shower wall. “Fuck.”

My head hangs low, my breathing finally evens out as I realize I’m not any better than that man I killed. Here I am jacking off to the thought of her, sexualizing her.

Washing off the wall, I hurry through my shower before drying off and getting into

bed. At the last second, I tug my mask and some clothes back on. I never sleep with them on, but the fear that Izel walking in here to find me not only naked but unmasked. I can't risk it.

I'm just nearly asleep when a quiet knock on the door startles me awake. It takes all of two seconds before Izel opens the door, peeking her head inside.

"Are you awake?" she whispers.

Sitting up on my elbows, I mumble out, "Yeah."

Closing the door, she leans against it waiting for something I'm not sure. After a few seconds, the need again for her to be close becomes overwhelming and I sit up fully.

"Are you okay?"

Izel nods, before she steps over to my bed. I open my mouth to ask again before she jumps into my bed, almost landing on me, dragging the covers up to her chin.

Turning onto her side, she asks, "How do you feel about cuddling?"

"Can't say I've ever done it." I try to think back to my childhood. Ma was always working. I don't blame her, it was hard being a single parent. Let alone she raised me and my old best friend Killian. His father was a piece of shit who beat on him every day. Knowing this, Ma took him in, and he never left, had his own room even.

But I was never cuddled or much less talked about my feelings.

"Hmmm," Izel hums. Her eyes rake down my arms before she moves to her back and stares up at the ceiling. Lying back, her hand immediately grabs mine, interlocking our fingers together. "I like holding your hand."

"I like it too," I blurt out.

“Yeah?”

“Yes, Red,” I mumble into the air.

After a few minutes of silence I think she’s fallen asleep, until she begins rubbing her thumb against my knuckles.

“I have optic nerve damage,” she whispers. I don’t say anything, wanting her to continue talking. “I was around nine, when someone close to my father was chasing me around. At first, I thought it was a game, but when he started saying curse words, I knew he had plans, plans I didn’t know what for. But yeah, I ran into my father’s office. Thinking he would help me, but he just laughed, and the only escape was to jump out the window.”

My hand tightens around hers, thinking back to little thirteen-year-old Izel, running for her life and having to jump out the window. Rage fills my veins.

“So... I did, I jumped and fell on my back. I don’t remember much after that. It knocked me out, and, well, I didn’t wake up. Not for three weeks, and they said it was all in my head, the chasing, the reason for me jumping out the window. When I woke up, I knew right away something was wrong.” Izel shoves her feet on top of my leg “I was born with monochromacy, only seeing black and white if you don—”

“I remember.”

“Yeah.” The moonlight shines on her face, allowing me to see a hint of a smile. “So I was used to being different. I was used to having issues with my eyesight beforehand.

But with the damage, it was a whole new learning curve. Some days, I can see perfectly fine. Others, I can barely see and usually need help. It can be cloudy, like I'm seeing through fog, or the image that my eyes are seeing have a dark figure blocking some of it."

I rack my brain, trying to think if I did anything that could have made her struggle during our travels. She couldn't see the gun when we first found Gabriel. I thought it was because it was getting dark. I chalked it up to her being excited to see her brother. But the truth is, she can't see. She's struggling with her eyesight and that's why.

"Gabriel was there when it happened, but he was only four. So, he basically grew up helping me."

"I'm so sorry, Izel."

"I'm okay, Zion, I—"

"Don't tell me it's okay." Because nothing that she's been through is okay, and I don't even know half of it.

"But it is, Zion. We got out, we're okay. For now, at least, we're okay." She drags our hands up, pressing her lips against my thumb. "We're okay, Zion."

I don't know how this went from me wanting and needing to comfort her, to her comforting me. Because I need her to be okay. I need her to be more than I need air.

"Anyway, I'm going to go to bed. I'm sure Gabriel will freak if I'm not there when he wakes up," Izel mutters, letting go of my hand all too soon. I watch her walk to the door, easing it open. "Goodnight, Zion."

“Goodnight, Red,” I mumble. The moment she closes the door behind her, I slam my eyes closed.

I know I shouldn’t let myself get attached so quickly, but she feels like home. She is mine, even if she doesn’t know it yet. I will protect her from any harm, even her brother. I will do anything for her.

I am going to kill everyone that laid a hand on her beautiful body. Those scars proved to me that something happened. And though she isn’t ready to tell me, that she doesn’t trust me yet, I am going to show her that even monsters can be good.

11

Zion

Something is burning.

My eyes snap open, blinking several times trying to get my bearing’s, I barely even remember passing out last night when Izel left...

Shit, something is burning. Throwing the covers off I jump to my feet, rushing to the bedroom door when Izel casually walks ahead of me.

“Red,” I grunt, my voice rough from sleep.

Turning around she smiles. “Oh, you’re awake.”

“Yeah, something is burning.”

How the fuck can’t she smell that? Can she not smell? I want to ask, but the memory of her getting offended when I said something about her eyesight, stops me.

Only her laughing brings me back to the present. “Why are you laughing at me?” I growl, which only makes her laugh more. Izel throws her head back, laughing as if I haven’t even asked anything. It’s irritating.

“Red,” I once again growl trying to get her attention.

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“Oh, man, you are hilarious. I mean I might not be able to see your face, that I would be able to even see it well enough. Buuuuuut, yeah, you’re right, something is burning. But don’t worry.” Sobering up, she walks over to me. “It’s Gabriel, he doesn’t cook very well,” she says, shrugging her shoulders as if it’s no big deal.

“Red, I don’t think whatever I’m smelling is even edible.”

“I’m sure it’ll be okay.”

“It doesn’t smell like cooking. It smells like my house is being burnt down to the ground as we speak.”

My house could literally be burning down, and I couldn’t care less while she stands here in front of me.

She’s so fucking pretty.

“Your house isn’t burning... I don’t think so anyway.” Izel shrugs her shoulders once again. Turning on her heel, she walks away from me. “It’s only happened twice. I’m sure he learned his lesson.... Maybe.”

Maybe?

Izel is already walking down the stairs before it registers that she said maybe. That my house might be burning down right now.

I nearly trip over myself, running down the stairs into the kitchen. The smell of

something foul fills the air. Izel stands off to the side watching Gabriel as he throws my now burnt pan into the sink before turning the faucet on.

“Ah, fucking hell,” Gabriel mutters under his breath. “Piece of shit, a goddamn piece of sh—”

“Gabriel, I know you’re not swearing,” Izel says hands on hips.

He swings around, glaring at her, then glaring even harder at the burnt food.

“I made you breakfast.”

“You made me breakfast?” she asks, a little surprised as if no one had ever made her food before.

“Yes, and I expect both of you,” he says making a point to look directly at me, “to eat all of it.” He narrows his eyes at each of us.

Izel doesn’t say anything about the rubbery eggs, blackened toast, or burnt to a crisp bacon. Instead, she pulls out a barstool, pulls a plate to her, and takes a large bite of eggs.

I can’t help but admire that she doesn’t think twice about pulling out a chair and eating whatever food he made. Even though there is no way any of that can be good for her, she continues eating it because her brother made it for her.

Pulling out the stool next to her, I grab the second plate, pull my mask up over my mouth and take a large bite of the toast. Thankfully, the mask covers my face but my eyes and mouth because this has got to be the worst piece of toast I’ve ever had.

“Thanks, Gabriel,” Izel says, shoveling more food into her mouth.

“Is it good?” he asks shyly.

Shoving the rest of the toast into my mouth, I don't say anything. I'm afraid if he looks too hard at me, he'll know this is disgusting. And if I make Gabriel sad, Izel is sure enough going to remove my balls. Izel nods her head before shoveling the rest of her eggs into her mouth.

“I don't think he likes them.” He points at me.

Izel snaps her head in my direction, glaring at me. Telling me I better not say anything negative about his cooking or else. But I am also a shit liar when it comes to her, and I'm not sure I can lie about this disgusting breakfast.

Izel elbows me, making me realize I haven't said anything. Swallowing the very dry and disgusting toast.

“It's good,” I mumble.

“Well, you're very welcome, mask boy.”

Izel giggles at what I'm assuming is the nickname he decided to give me. Which honestly is much better than whatever she's been coming up with.

“It's Zion,” I tell him.

If they are going to be living here, I need to put some type of trust. So, telling him my name is the first step. Plus, he is like the male version of Izel and talks too fucking much.

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“Zion,” Gabriel repeated, his eyes flickering to Izel before coming back to me. “You’re a shit liar.”

“Gabriel!” Izel chokes on her food. “Language, and he’s not lying!”

“Izel, sister-cousin of mine, you are both terrible liars. Him more so. I mean, come on, man. Even with that creepy mask you’ve got on, I can tell you’re struggling to eat.” Crossing his arms over his chest, he says, “Also, I know I’m a terrible cook. I mean, those eggs do not look edible. I’m pretty sure the bacon is close enough to coal, and that toast looks more like a hockey puck, my dude.”

Glancing down, I chuckle, because it does indeed look like a hockey puck. I don’t understand how someone can burn toast. There’s a timer for fucks sake.

“I can’t believe you both are even trying to eat that.” Gabriel shakes his head, and turning towards the dirty dishes in the sink he begins cleaning up.

“Gabby, I got this, go relax.” Jumping off her seat, she pushes Gabriel out of her way. “Seriously, go, I got this.”

He nervously glances over at me before muttering to Izel, “We need to get some clothes. I need to change my boxers.”

Izel didn’t spare me a look when she nods. “Go take a nap and then we’ll go.”

Nodding his head, he rushes off.

I feel so dumb for not realizing. Of course, they don't have anything. Izel has been wearing the same pair of pants and shirt for the past few days. I don't know how long Gabriel was out there, so I'm sure his clothes are disgusting.

Grabbing my plate, I dump the rest of my ruined breakfast into the trash before taking it to the sink.

"We can go get you both clothes and then go grocery shopping," I tell her.

"You don't need to do that; we probably should leave today."

Furrowing my brows, I'm confused for a moment until it hits me that she plans on leaving. Not to just go shopping for what they need, no. She doesn't plan on coming back.

"You're not leaving," I blurt out.

"Excuse me?" Izel swings around, her eyes enraged with what I said.

"I told you, you both can stay here as long as needed." I try to redeem myself only I know I'm sounding more and more like a controlling asshole.

"Yeah, and what's your point?"

"You're not going anywhere."

Oh, for fucks sake.

I want to smack myself. I clearly have no idea how to speak to women, evidenced by the fact I'm speaking without thinking. Izel also looks moments away from removing my balls from my body and shoving them in a place I don't want to even think about.

“Zion Wyatt Rain, I know you are not telling me what to do,” she hisses through clenched teeth. “Because if you ar—”

Something in me snaps, and my hands reach out. Grabbing her waist I yank her towards me.

“Oof,” Izel huffs, her chest against mine. Her eyes widen, as if she can't believe what I just did. I can't even believe what I'm doing, but something about her just pushes me. I want her. I want to taste her mouth; I want to feel her skin against my bare hand. I want those beautiful thick thighs around my neck like a fucking necklace. To taste her cunt and drown in her cum.

“Zion,” Izel mumbles, breaking me from my thoughts. Grabbing her chin with my other hand, Izel places her hands against my stomach, balancing on her tippy toes.

“I'm not a man that takes lightly to arguing. It's annoying and useless. You're staying, he's staying. I don't know who's after you, but if it's like those men I already killed outside the bus, then I'm the only thing standing between whatever or more like whoever you're running from.”

“How do you know we're running from something?” she softly asks.

“The moment we got you out of that basement, you've been worried about getting to Gabriel. There's no reason why a twenty-one-year-old should be running and taking care of a what, fourteen-year-old?”

“Twelve.” she whispers.

“Who are you running from, Red?” I ask. Because whoever it is, I'll bury them. They will cease to exist on Earth.

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“It doesn’t matter.”

“It does.”

“I can’t let you get caught up in my mess, Zion.” Izel begins to relax into me, her body no longer tensing as my hand rests against her waist.

“You’re not a mess, Red. Whatever is going on I want to help. I don’t care who is after you, I will protect you.” Gripping her chin, my thumb nears her mouth where I desperately want to shove my thumb and make her suck.

Izel looks between my eyes, as though she’s trying to find a lie that I’m not telling. My obsession, my need for her is growing uncontrollably.

“Don’t make promises you can’t keep.” Izel whispers, licking her lips, causing herself to touch my thumb with her tongue. I don’t know how I didn’t realize my thumb is now tracing the outline of her mouth. But fuck, I want her mouth on mine. I want to taste her mouth, to have her tongue shoved down my throat.

“I always keep my promises, Red.”

“Why do you call me that?” she asks, not bothering to remove my thumb from her mouth.

“Do you know what the first thing you said to me was?”

Izel shakes her head.

“Fuck, you’re big.” I smile. “Then you asked about the key to get you out. Most people get nervous, get scared of my size. Especially when they’re so much shorter than me—”

“I’m not that short, I’m five three.” She mock glares.

“Love, I’m six-seven. You’re short to me, but that’s okay. I call you Red because it fits you. You can be a soft red or a dark red, you make your own rules.”

“You’ve only known me for a week.” She tries to defend the fact I don’t know her. But that doesn’t work for me.

“I know more than you might think. You love dill pickle chips. You only like the red and green Skittles, and you hate chocolate. You love coffee, it doesn't matter if it's iced or hot, you have to have at least a cup a day. You have a serious sugar addiction. You love green apples, though you only eat half of it. You sleep with your mouth open, and your hand cupping your cheek. You take showers like you’re burning in Hell, and you will do anything for Gabriel.”

Izel opens her mouth then closes it like a fish out of water. For the first time I think I finally found a way to shut her up without shoving something in her mouth.

“I call you Red because you stopped me in my tracks, and though I shouldn’t feel the thing I’m feeling I can’t stop myself.”

“What are you feeling?”

“Like you’r—”

Heavy footsteps sound on the stairs before Gabriel yells, “Let’s go! I need to get some donuts!”

Izel sighs, rolling her eyes. While I'm moments from shoving Gabriel in the basement so I can take her upstairs and violate her. But as much as I'm irritated with Gabriel interrupting us, I'm thankful because I wasn't thinking. Getting involved with her can't happen.

I'm a hitman. I live in a dangerous world and having someone you care about will only bring harm and death.

I can't lose her.

I won't.

So, stepping away, I drop my hands from her body. Izel's face drops and I hate that I'm the cause of her hurting. But it's for the best, it has to be.

"What's the deal with the mask?" Gabriel asks Izel. They're both walking ahead of the cart, and the one thing I learned very quickly is that they're children. Sure, when Izel and I went into Walmart to get her some clothes, we were in and out. But now I'm realizing it's because I dragged her to the aisle, she picked her size out really quick, and we left.

I figured they wanted to get clothing and some personal things. But I never imagined, two boxes of donuts and another two bags of dill pickle chips. Gabriel grabbed a blanket that he felt while we passed and screamed it was the softest blanket he had ever felt in his life. Izel shook her head but did it with a smile on her face. And I would do anything to keep that smile on her face. I don't care what it takes. She is going to smile for the rest of her life.

"I don't know, why don't you ask him?" Izel lies, smiling back at me. Gabriel huffs but doesn't ask, instead turning down an aisle of books and begins browsing around.

Izel stays back, though her eyes never leave his sight.

“Is he scared of me?” I ask.

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She peeks up at me for a moment, before shaking her head. “No, I think he’s just nervous. If he was scared, he wouldn’t be filling the cart with random things.”

I nod my head. I don’t know why it gives me relief that he’s not scared of me, but it does. If he can trust me then she can, and then she won’t leave.

“Thank you for this by the way,” she mumbles, shifting on her feet.

“You don’t need to thank me.”

“I do. And before you say something, don’t. I don’t know why you came to that house. Maybe you were working with him, but you helped me and have been helping. I can’t tell you how much that means to me, but it’s the world. You not only saved me, but you also saved him,” she says, nodding her head towards Gabriel, who currently has his arms full of books.

“The blonde, her name is Aziza.” It should feel weird telling her something personal to me, but it feels nice. Like I can be Zion instead of The Butcher or Z. “She was, uh, one of my childhood friends, and her boyfriend, probably husband by now, knowing Killian. I grew up with them.”

“She seems young though.”

“Not that much younger. Killian, the other, saw her getting bullied when she was around six years old, and we became friends.”

“You became friends with a six-year-old when you were uh, uh. I’m not good at

math.” She raised an eyebrow at me. Thinking about it now does sound weird, but then it didn’t.

“I was ten, Killian was nine. But yeah, I know how it sounds. She was more like a sister honestly, annoying, but funny. Killian was the grumpy one—”

“Grumpier than you?” That seems unlikely.” She laughs, and I find myself getting lost in her eyes. The brightness shines through, the way she’s slowly finding herself again.

“Even more than me. She nicknamed him popsicle, which is another long story. But she’s the only one who’s been able to save him from himself. Which that’s—”

“Another long story, I get it. I’m glad she made it, Zion.” There’s something bothering her, and before I can ask what’s troubling her Gabriel appears next to us.

“Okay, I need help.”

“What do you need help with, kiddo.” Izel laughs ruffling his hair.

“First off, I’m not a kid. Second, you’re messing the hair up.” Rolling his eyes, he places the books down on the shelves next to us. “What books am I getting?”

Izel peers over, looking over the books he has placed down. “Gabriel Hollow! Are these sexual books?” she hisses, her voice dropping so low I can barely hear her.

“It’s not like you don’t know what sex is.” Gabriel rolls his eyes once more. “Come on help me, I can’t pick just one.”

“How about none, you don’t need to be reading about this.” Waving her hand towards the books, her face turns red as she is unable to look at me. Hmm interesting.

“Are we really going to talk about this in the middle of the store and in front of him?”
He frowns, and for the first time he looks unsure.

“Get them all.”

Both Izel and Gabriel's heads whip towards me, while he looks surprised but gleeful. Izel does not, looking like she is moments away from removing certain body parts. Again.

“Really?” Gabriel jumps on his toes, trying his best to hold on to his excitement and that means more to me than anyone could know. I’ll buy the man a library if he wants.

“Of course, as long as it’s fine with your sister.” Because I do not need her removing parts of my body or trying to strangle me in my sleep.

“Little, big sister...” Gabriel smiles sweetly at her, and I can’t help the chuckle. Which only earns me a glare from Izel, and her arms crossed over her chest.

“As long as Zion doesn’t care, since he’s the one paying and it's his house,” she mutters, waving a hand towards us and walking away.

“Where are you going?” Gabriel calls out.

“I need razors!” she yells back, marching away from us.

Gabriel laughs, placing the last of the books into the cart. “Come on, knowing my sister she’s probably worried about me.”

Not giving me a chance to say anything, Gabriel walks off. I follow behind with a cart that’s filled to near the top of random shit. Sure enough, I find Izel looking over

different types of razors.

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“Why do you need razors?” I ask nearing her.

“I look like Chewbacca, and it’s not very ladylike.”

I was dumb, of course. Girls shaved their legs and shit; how could I forget?

“You don’t need to shave; I don’t mind hair.”

What the fuck was I even saying?

“Zion...” Izel tries to hold her smile, which is the only reason I continue.

“Chewbacca could be cute.”

“You did not just say that.” Izel’s mouth hangs open as if she can’t believe I just said that. And honestly, neither can I. But it wouldn’t bother me if she has hair all over her body. She’d still be beautiful.

“Izel, come help me!” Gabriel yells further down the aisle, just as my phone starts to go off.

Izel grabs a pack of razors, tossing them into the cart before trotting off to help her brother.

Grunting, I pull it out not bothering to look at it before answering.

“Yeah?”

“I need a favor,” Alex’s familiar voice speaks into the phone. “And it’s going to be a little late notice.”

“Of course,” I growl.

“Hey, come on now. That’s no way to speak to someone who’s going to pay you half a million for it. Andddd, helped you with your little bike problem.”

I don’t need the money. I have more than I will ever know what to do with. But this might be what I need. A job, some distraction to get my mind off Izel.

“Tell me what it is before I give you an answer.”

“A client needs someone taken care of tomorrow night.”

Irritation spikes, my blood pressure increasing. “Tomorrow night,” I mimic back.

“I mean if you’re not up for the chall—”

“I never fucking said that. Just send me the details. I have to go,” I mumble, hanging up.

Pocketing my phone, Izel and Gabriel walk up.

“Who was that?” she asks. I should keep my mouth shut; I’m irritated for no reason. And I know if I say something it’s going to upset her. But that doesn’t seem to stop me.

“None of your business,” I growl. Izel flinches, shocked at my words. But since I’m already here, I might as well dig my own fucking grave.

I don't want to see her hurt expression. I turn the cart around and head to the checkout. I don't need to feel bad about hurting her feelings, I need them gone, out of my life. She's tormenting me by just being close. I can't be the guy she needs. I can't.

"God damn it, Izel," Gabriel hisses from the hallway, moments before I hear a knock.

After the store, Izel doesn't say a word to me. Not that I had expected her to. I was a complete and total dick to her. Gabriel had tried asking what was wrong, but she refused eyeing me from the back. When I would catch her staring, she'd quickly look away. Which only fueled my anger even more.

Not that I don't deserve it. I'm conflicted. I want her but shouldn't. I want to push her to answer me about who the fuck she is. But I'm a scared little bitch that she'll take off. It's unlike me, and I hate this feeling. I'm not in control. She is, and I hate it.

So, I take Alex's contract, and am making the means to murder some guy that I don't know in some club because it gives me the hope that if I kill someone she'll get out of my head.

I need to get her out of my fucking head.

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“Yeah,” I finally answer. Shutting down my computer I stand from my chair. Gabriel slowly opens the door, peeking his head inside.

“Oh, darn, I see you’re busy. That’s okay, can you um... where’s your first aid kit? You have one of those, don’t you?”

“Why do you need a first aid kit?” I ask, rounding the desk.

“Hey, mister, no need to get all grrr.” He chuckles, sobering as he notices I’m not smiling. “There was, well, you see, there might have been a small accident.” Gabriel twirls his fingers together the same way Izel does when she’s nervous... Izel.

“What happened?” I growl.

“It’s not, it’s truly not a big deal,” Gabriel rushes out, his voice ten octaves higher, unable to look directly at me.

“Gabriel,” I grunt, losing that patience I barely hold on to.

“Fine, okay, okay,” he says, throwing his hands up in surrender. “Izel hurt her—”

I’m moving, not letting him finish his sentence. I’m in the kitchen in no time, stopping in my tracks. Blood trails down Izel’s bare leg onto the hardwood floor.

“Did you know rocks are slippery when they’re wet?” Izel chuckles, her hand pressed against her shin. “Also, did you know if you step on them when wet you could very easily fall and well...” She shrugs her shoulders trying to hide the pain in her eyes

along with the slight hiss she lets out.

Reaching the sink, I bend down and grab the medical kit. Placing it on the island, I turn and lift Izel up.

“Whoa there, buddy.”

Setting her on the island, I make quick work of washing my hands before pulling out gauze.

“Move your hand,” I order, pulling on a pair of gloves. Izel slowly moves, blood pouring from her shin. Pressing down with the gauze, I carefully use my other hand to start cleaning up the blood trailing down her leg with a wipe.

“Gabriel, grab some Tylenol from the bathroom cabinet and a glass of water,” I tell him.

“I don’t need that, I’m okay,” Izel whispers.

I don’t say anything, as I continue pressing the gauze against her leg, trying to stop it from bleeding. Handing her a wipe, she cleans her hands off. Switching the gauze out, it finally slows down enough. Grabbing a syringe, I flush it out before iodine, antibiotic, and then butterfly stitch.

Gabriel finally arrives back carrying the Tylenol. Taking two pills out, he hands them over to Izel, who glares at him and then at me. Throwing the gloves away, I clean up the blood before grabbing a glass of water for her.

“I told you I’m not taking these.” Setting them down on the counter, she scoots under her legs dangling off.

“Take the Tylenol, Izel.”

“No.”

“Take the fucking Tylenol before I—”

“Before you what? Shove it down my throat?” She laughs, raising her brow. Little does she know that’s exactly what I’ll do. And she seems to catch onto that. “You wouldn’t.”

“Don’t test me, Izel. Take the Tylenol, it’ll help with the pain.”

“I said, I don’t want it. What is so hard to understand?” she hisses, her hand tightening around her knee. This stubborn fucking woman, she’s irritating and so fucking annoying.

Placing my hands on either side of her thighs, I bend so my face is inches from hers. Our eyes lock as I make sure I have her full attention.

“You are going to take these two Tylenol and you’re going to lay upstairs in your bed and take a nap.”

Raising a brow, she smirks as if there's something I don't know. “Or what?”

Grinding my teeth, I am moments from shoving them down her throat when Gabriel coughs causing me to drop my head and back away from his sister.

“It’s Tylenol, Izel, just take them and let’s go take a nap. I’m getting tired myself and then we can leave, okay?”

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Leave? Why do they keep trying to fucking leave!

Izel hops down, gritting her teeth. I move forward to help her when she smacks my hand away. “Don’t.”

“Izel...”

“No, I’m not any of your business,” she spits, limping around me. I’m motionless as I hear Gabriel helping her upstairs.

One step forward, two steps back.

12

Zion

I stand against the dresser, watching Izel as she sleeps. Her mouth hangs open as she scrunches her nose. Her hands fist the blanket for dear life as if she’s having some sort of nightmare. Her brows furrow moments before she lets out a gasp and sits up straight in bed. Izel’s hand grips the shirt against her chest, her eyes squeezed shut as she tries to slow her breathing down.

“Izel,” I say as softly as I can. Only she squeezes her eyes even tighter as if she’s still stuck inside her nightmare.

She doesn’t say anything, shaking her head slightly. “He was hurting Gabriel,” she whispers. “They both were hurting him, and I couldn’t let them. I couldn’t let them

do what they were going to do.” Her eyes finally open and look up at me. “They were going to sell him; he doesn’t know that. But they were going to sell him.”

That’s why they were running. Why she was protecting him, it all made sense. “You’re not leaving,” I blurt out.

“We shouldn’t stay in one place for too long,” she mutters, clutching the blanket against her chest.

“No one will find you here, Izel.”

“Why don’t you ever take your mask off?” she asks, changing the subject.

“I told you,” I mutter, my hands gripping the side of the dresser for dear life. Stopping myself from reaching her.

“Yeah, hide yourself from others, you’ve told me. But why can’t you take it off around us?”

I didn’t have an answer for her.

“Great, alright. So, we’re supposed to just stay here with some masked man who we know nothing about? How is that fair?” Izel questions, throwing the blanket off her before standing up. “Take the mask off.”

“No.”

I really sound like an asshole; I know I do. I have no excuse for not taking my mask off. The fear she might not like what she sees. Not only is my body covered in scars, but so is my face. My face is probably the worst of all.

“Zion...” she whispers, stepping towards me.

“No,” I growl. Having enough, I throw the door open and leave. I don’t need her asking why I won’t show my face. I don’t need her questioning me. I especially don’t need her trying to be sweet when I need to let them leave. They both just need to go, that way I can get back to my life.

I just reach my bedroom when Izel grabs my arm stopping me.

“You don’t get to just run off when I’m speaking to you,” Izel hisses.

I sigh, hanging my head. Ma ought to beat my ass from the way I’m treating her. There's no explanation for my actions, I’m well aware. But being around her makes my brain just shut off and nothing but her exists in it.

“Zion, you will listen to me!” she growls, yanking on my arm.

“I don’t want to listen to you.” I swing around stepping forward. Izel stops in her tracks, eyes blown wide and taking a large step back.

“Fine, then we’re leaving!”

“No.” Why can’t I just let her go? I want to rip my hair out. I can’t even explain to her what I want. I want her to go but I can’t let her. I need her to be near me to breathe. I want to make it impossible to breathe without me, but it appears I’m the one who can’t breathe. I need her.

“Oh my god, you’re so, so, so infuriating,” Izel screams, fisting her hands. Her face flushes red as her eyes turn to slits.

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Rolling my eyes, I cross my arms over my chest, not daring to say another word. It worked when I first grabbed her from Zander's house. So, it should work now, or so I mostly hoped.

“Oh, so we’re just going to go back to you giving me the silent treatment, acting as though I’m a stupid thorn in your side.”

I don’t speak. It’s easier if I just keep my mouth shut. That way, I don’t say something that I’ll regret. Like asking her to stay. Begging her to not leave me. It’d be foolish, and dangerous.

“You’re such an infuriating giant, giant, prick!” she screams, throwing her hands in the air. Swinging around she begins to walk away but trips over her own foot. Unfortunately, between the momentum and her legs catching around each other, Izel reaches out blindly. She knocks into the wall, causing the lamp by the bedroom door to fall to the ground, glass shattering everywhere as she falls to the ground.

“Oh, fuck,” I hear someone say. Before I can say anything, Gabriel is at her side glaring up at me. And it’s not until now that I realize what this probably looks like. “What the hell did you do!” Gabriel growls getting to his feet. His hands fist at his side, and his stance widens. I have to give him props, even a head shorter and a hundred pounds less he’s ready to fight me. That he’s defending his sister.

I open my mouth to say something, tell him I didn’t do anything. Yet my mouth doesn’t work, and my eyes glance down to Izel who seems just as shellshocked as I am.

Gabriel advances toward me, anger seeping through his body. “I’m going to kill you,” he yells, moments before he takes a swing. Dodging his fist, I smack his second attempt. If he were anyone else, I’d lay him out, put a bullet in his skull. But oddly watching Gabriel, the only thing I want to do now is train him how to properly throw a punch.

“You’re going to break your fist if you keep tucking your thumb in your hand,” I warn, dodging another failed attempt.

Gabriel glances down, barely fixing his thumb before throwing another punch. Only this time I grab his fist, twisting it and shoving him away.

“If you’re going to throw your weight around and try to fight someone twice your size, you’re going to need to learn how to punch or you’re going to end up hurt.”

Something small but hard knocks into my cheek. My head flies to the side, before I snap it back to who hit me. Expecting it to be Gabriel, maybe even someone else. But there stands Izel, fuming as she rolls her shoulder, scowling at me.

“Gabriel, he didn’t do anything. Go upstairs and pack our things.” Izel doesn’t bother looking at Gabriel as she tells him this. Our eyes lock together, neither of us backing down.

“I’m not leaving you alone with him.”

Izel sighs, turning her attention towards her brother. “Gabby, I’ll be okay. I tripped, I’m serious.” She smiles as he raises a brow at her. “Go pack and we’ll leave in a few minutes.”

That isn’t happening. Not if I have anything to do with it.

Gabriel seems to debate for a moment before pointing a finger at me. “I’ll kill you if you do anything to her.”

I nod my head, agreeing with him. I’d let him kill me if I did anything. Fuck, I’d lay down and let him beat me to death. I wouldn’t hurt her.

You’re hurting her by not taking your mask off.

My body freezes as I realize that’s exactly what I’m doing. Sure, I haven’t known Izel or Gabriel for long. Izel a little longer, but that doesn’t mean I can’t trust them. They’re running from someone, and though I don’t know the details, I want to gain her full trust and I have to give her something if I want the same from her.

“One day you’re going to run into someone, someone pretty great. And when that day comes, I hope you realize it’s okay to trust them and that you take your stupid mask off,” Izel calmly says before she gives me her signature smile.

I, on the other hand, stand there unable to say anything, but unable to let her walk away. Reaching forward, I hook my arms around her waist, dragging her body to mine. I don’t give her a choice as I sidestep the glass and walk down the stairs to the living room. She gasps, her arms wrapping around my neck and her legs around my waist.

“Wh-what are you doing?”

Settling down onto the armchair, I keep Izel pressed against me. The need to touch her overpowering any clear thoughts I might have, willing my cock to stay down.

“Zion, what are you doing?” Izel asks again.

Taking a deep breath, I keep one hand against her back while I rip my mask off,

showing her my face for the first time.

I keep my eyes down, unsure of what or how she is going to react. I hate that I feel this way. But I desperately need her to like me.

Izel hesitantly reaches towards me, her eyes uncertain of my reaction. My heart thumps against my ribcage as I wait for her reaction. It's not often others see my face. If they are afraid of me in a mask it only gets worse without.

I just hope she sees me through the scars.

Izel sits on my lap, her eyes laser focused, but flickering between my eyes. Giving her the slightest nod, she suddenly becomes unafraid.

I'm overcome with the want for her touch, for her to finally see who I am. Not The Butcher, not the one who tracks and kills people for hire. I want her to know who Zion is. The guy who loves her weird dance moves, who loves her singing, and who loves that she never stops talking.

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Love.

I love Izel. I am falling in love with her.

“Are you sure?” she whispers, her hand hovering over my cheek. Nodding again, she finally places her hand on my skin, and I ignite. Everything inside me lights on fire, and I swear my heart stops beating before it explodes. Her hand is soft and cold.

“What color hair do you have?” she whispers.

“Blond.”

“I have no idea what that looks like.” She chuckles, her hand running up my cheek to the side of my face until she’s running her fingers through my hair.

I try my best to hold my moan in, but the way her fingers work into my scalp, I can’t help it.

Her eyes widen but continue to work into my hair.

“It’s light, like the sun, warming and light.” I feel stupid trying to explain this to her, but the smile she rewards me with, it’s everything.

“I thought it would have been longer.” She laughs.

Her words are making sense, but all I can focus on is her hands moving from my hair back down my face. Placing my hands on her hips, the strong urge to have her closer

and to feel her skin with my bare hands for the first time nearly sends me spiraling.

“Why are you showing me your face now?”

Without answering her, I pull her further into me. Izel lets out a small gasp, and my cock twitches. I know she can feel how hard I am. It doesn't seem to matter what she does, I stay hard around Izel. My hands trace along her back, finally feeling her softness. Fuck how did I go so long not touching her? I never want to stop.

“Don't go back to not talking, I finally got you to speak more than two words to me.” Except I can't speak. All I can do is feel her skin against mine. Her hands run down my face, and I know she feels the worst scars of them all. The gash travels from my eyebrow down my cheek, over my lips to my chin. I flinch as she gently presses her thumb over my lips.

“What happened?” she whispers, her hands slowly traveling down my neck. Her eyes, glancing down to where I knew my tattoo was poking out.

“When I first became a hitman, I ran into some trouble. I didn't do the proper research into a client and walked into a trap. I also didn't make it out.” I sigh, remembering that night as though it was yesterday and not nearly ten years ago.

“Tell me about it another time?” She smiles, bending to press her lips against my cheek. “How many tattoos do you have?”

“Only these three.” My left arm is filled from my shoulder down my wrist, while a snake lays on my left pect and a butterfly in the middle of my chest.

“Are you going to go back to wearing your mask now?” Dropping her hand, Izel sits back. Gripping her back, I refuse to let her move off me just yet. I haven't had my fill of her yet, and I don't think I honestly ever will.

“Does it bother you that much?”

Izel tilts her head, studying me.

“No,” she says, finally answering me, “but do you think you could maybe keep it off when it’s just us?” One thing about Izel, she’s never shy when she asks for things. I’m not sure why she’s becoming shy all of a sudden.

“Don’t be nervous now, Red, you’ve never been before,” I smirk, only now she can finally see it.

“I’m not nervous per se, I just, sometimes I’m unsure on how you’re going to react. I could say the wrong thing. I do that often. I’m sure you’re well aware of this by now.” She lets out a nervous laugh. Setting her hands on my chest, she watches once again for me to react. Only I love her touching me. I have since day one.

“Ask me again.”

“I’ve asked a lot of questions, Zion.”

“Fuck, say it again.”

“Zion.”

I groan, not giving myself another chance to talk myself out of it. I grab her face with both hands and drag her lips down to mine. Her lips are soft and wet. I just can’t get enough of her. My tongue teases the seam of her lips, wanting entry. Izel opens her mouth, her body trembling against me. My cock hardens to the point of pain when she rocks her hips against me. Izel’s mouth opens as she moans, causing me to hiss. My calloused hand lifts her shirt, wanting to touch her. The moment my hands touch her soft stomach, Izel stiffens. Grabbing my wrist, she tries pulling my hands away

from touching her. But I can't have that, I need to feel her.

“Red,” I mumble against her mouth.

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“I don’t like my stomach being touched.” Pulling back, her eyes well with tears. Dropping my hand, I cup her cheek, wanting to understand what’s causing her pain.

“I don’t understand.”

“I’m not like those girls you’ve been with before.”

“I didn’t ask you to be,” I said defensively. I don’t want her to change.

“I have scars.”

“I have scars too.”

Izel huffs, but I see the corner of her mouth twitch. Reaching up, I cup the back of her neck. Squeezing, her eyes flare, arousal flashing in those beautiful green eyes.

“I like those scars—”

“You’ve never seen them.”

“Red, you’re going to learn very quickly, I tolerate very little. One of those things—”

Izel tries shifting back, but the grip I have on her neck stops her. “Zion, you don’t know everything,” she whispers, interrupting me, again.

“Interrupt me again, I’m going to shove your panties down your throat.” Raising a brow, I wait for her to say something. Only her eyes narrow, but there’s something

else there. She's aroused by the idea. That'll come in handy for later.

"Now that we understand each other, let me explain something else to you. I don't care about your scars," I mumble, dragging my hand across her stomach. Dragging her face closer to mine, my lips brush against hers. "I'll kiss every single one of them, no matter where they are." Trailing my hand up higher, I groan at the fact she's not wearing a bra. I waste no time cupping her bare breast. I don't know how my cock becomes even harder in my pants, but he does. Squeezing her breast, my thumb brushes over her nipple.

Izel moans, her eyes dropping closed. But I can't have that, I want her eyes on me. I need them on me all the time now.

"Nuh uh," I tsk. "Eyes on me, Red."

Her eyes flash open, her hips bucking against my groin. I can't take this anymore. I know I should wait. Lay her down in bed, but I need her now. I need to feel her warmth around me, and I need it now.

Letting go of her breast, I un-flick my button, ready to pull my zipper down when my phone begins to ring.

"Fuck," I mutter. This can't be happening. I know the only reason someone would be calling me is if it's important.

One hand on her neck, I dig into my back pocket pulling my phone out. Alex.

FUCK.

I never forget. I have a job, and I let myself get distracted.

I don't bother answering it. Tucking it back into my pocket, I turn my focus back on Izel. There's no way what I say is going to sound good, it's all going to sound like an excuse.

"I have to go," I mumble, hating her hurt expression. Hating that she jerks herself away from me. But that doesn't stop me from bending down and kissing her forehead.

I hate leaving her, knowing she's thinking of all the reasons I could be leaving. There's no good excuse for it. So, before I second guess my decision to leave, I grab my mask from the table, pulling it on. Grabbing my Glock from my office, I rush to the garage, before climbing into my truck and speeding off.

13

Zion

Bloodsplatters over the bathroom stall. Snapping a picture, I send it off to Alex, already knowing he's going to give me shit for being late. I don't care about the cut difference, the only thing I want right now is Izel and I know she's likely to ignore me or curse me out without using any colorful language.

"This is why you left?"

I swing around, not believing my ears. Yet, sure enough, Izel stands against the door, arms crossed over her chest. I thought I had locked the door; I swore I had.

This also begs the question, how the fuck did she get here?

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“I can explain,” I start, only stopping when she holds her hand up. Shutting my mouth, I step forward. The pull to be near her is near drowning me.

“Don’t bother,” she hisses, yanking the door open.

“Fuck,” I swear under my breath as I race after her. For someone who has short legs, she’s fast as shit. She races through the half-naked girls throwing themselves at men, half of them already on their knees. A few of them block the main entrance, watching her glance back at me before rushing towards the hallway.

I’m almost to her when a hand grabs my forearm, stopping me.

“Hi, baby,” I hear a female slur. Glancing down, I notice it’s Rachel. Not sure if that’s her real name, but she’s my last hook up. I should have known she was going to notice me here. “Want to come back to our room?”

I almost gag as she says our. There’s nothing in this world that is “ours.” She was just a decent fuck that understood not to touch me, that I only wanted to fuck girls from behind. I don’t do skin to skin. Now she’s the fuckhead that’s stopping me from reaching Izel.

“No,” I grunt. Looking around, I try searching for Izel. Which I don’t have to look very hard, because there she is by the door, her eyes focusing on my arm.

Looking down, I hadn’t even realized Rachel is still gripping me.

Shit.

But it's too late, Izel sees it. In a rush she turns, running smack dab into a fight that starts to break out. Suddenly she's shoved down to the ground, and her screams break out. Fists are thrown, more people are shoved, and Izel only nearly misses being stomped on.

Ripping my body away from Rachel, I grip her neck. "Don't ever fucking touch me again," I growl, dragging her face closer to mine, her toes barely touching the ground. "Do it again and I'll kill you."

Shoving her off, I race through the crowd trying to get to her before she runs off again. Izel drags herself to her feet and glances behind her once before taking off, slipping through the crowd.

Scanning the fight, I look for the dead man that shoved her. It takes two seconds, and I'm marching towards him. Gripping his shoulder, I swung him around, and my fist connects with his nose. Bone crunches, blood pours down his face, and I don't stop.

He hurt her, and that's all I can think about. He hurt my girl.

Pulling my knife out from my pocket, I ram it into his neck. Screams erupt, and the crowd falls apart from us. I don't give a shit. Dropping him, I'm seething. Shoving everyone out of my way, I reach the entrance, searching the street.

She can't leave me.

I won't let her. Even if I have to tie her to my fucking bed.

Climbing into my truck, I don't waste time breaking every law so I can get home before Izel does something stupid.

Thankfully, I don't have to look for long. The moment I turn the corner, I find Izel

limping on the side of the road. Picking up speed, I pull off in front of her. I don't think as I shove the door open.

"Where are you going?" I yell marching towards her.

Izel ignores me as she continues storming off, where to, I don't know. But with the way her hands are fisted at her side, and the clear stomp of her feet, it doesn't take a genius to know she's pissed off.

"Stop ignoring me, Red!" I say a little louder. I'm inches behind her when I grip her bicep. Swinging her around, she pushes against my chest before backing away from me.

"I can explain," I start. Unsure how I'm really going to explain that I just killed two men in a sex club. I mean, I've shown her who I am, who I really am. "That guy, he—"

"She touched you," she hisses, anger radiating off her body.

That stops me in my tracks, confusing me for a moment. Ready to ask what she means until she cuts me off. "You kissed me, then left me and let some bitch touch you!"

"Izel, I didn't let her touch me. I was trying to run after you."

"You don't let anyone touch you," she argues.

"Izel—"

"So, it's Izel then, no more Red?" She throws her hands in the air. "Well, fine then, Z."

Narrowing my eyes, I bend in front of her, making it so we're at eye level. I know it bothers her when we argue and she's not eye level with me. It makes her feel less, and I won't have that.

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“Call me Z one more time, Red. Some random girl touching me isn’t going to come close to how angry you get,” I threaten.

“Oh, yeah, well news for you, I have a whole twenty-one years of anger built up.”

Grabbing her chin with my fingers, I force her to look directly at me.

“Tell me,” I demand. I want to know why she doesn’t like Rachel touching me.

But my stubborn woman keeps her mouth closed, trying to smirk as though she won something. Little does she know I’ll win at this game every single time.

Gripping her face harder, she winces, narrowing her eyes at me.

“Tell me,” I growl.

Shoving me hard against the chest, I drop my hand, waiting for her to smack me, knee me in the junk. Do almost anything, but what comes out of her mouth surprises me.

“You’re not hers.”

“I’m not,” I agree. I’ve never been Rachels, nor did I ever want to be hers.

“You’re not hers, Zion. She doesn’t get to touch you like that,” she grits out, jealousy filling the air. It all starts to make sense; she is jealous of some random girl. Little does she know, she’s all I see.

“She doesn’t.” Once again, I agree, crossing my arms over my chest. I wait for her to continue whatever path she is taking this conversation.

“You’re mine, you’re not hers. You don’t get to kiss me, tell me sweet things. Then just leave and let another girl touch you!” she growls, sounding more like a hurt kitten than anything else.

“I am?” I ask, not budging. I am hers. We never talked about it, but as far as I’m concerned, she is mine and I’m hers.

“Yes.” Gripping my shoulder, she pushes down. Easily I get down on my knees for her. Always. “Mine, and I didn’t like her touching you.”

Wrapping my arms around her waist, I smile. “I didn’t like her touching me either.” Dragging her closer to me, I need her touch now. “I didn’t realize someone grabbed me. I was too focused on trying to get to you. It wasn’t until I saw that look on your face,” I mutter.

“I want to see you,” she mumbles, her hands gripping the bottom of my mask.

My eyes glance around, and seeing no cars and no one, I nod. It’s a risk I never would have taken before, but if she wants to see my face, I’ll give it to her.

The moment my face is clear, Izel crushes her mouth to mine. Nothing sweet about the way she attacks my mouth, and I instantly open for her. Sucking onto her tongue, my arms tighten their grip around her waist. Izel gives no complaints as I take over, shoving my tongue into her mouth.

This kiss is much different from earlier. This is everything. This is a new beginning. A beginning for us, and I need her to know that. There is no one else; she’s it for me. Even if I don’t believe in the happily-ever-after fairy tale. She is my home. She is

what I need. What I crave.

My cock is painfully hard against the zipper of my pants. Precum leaking from the tip, I need to get relief soon. I am sure to have blue balls from earlier when she rubbed herself against me.

“Zion,” she groans against my mouth.

Grabbing the waist of her pants, I rip them down her leg. Izel steps out of them, thankfully never protesting. Gripping her shirt, I go to lift when she stops me. I want to ask questions, but I can’t ruin this for us. Not right now.

My eyes drop down to her bare pussy. Her legs are pale and freckled. Soft red curls lay against her mound. Her thick thighs are asking to be wrapped around my head. My mouth waters just thinking about getting a taste of her.

I don’t give her time before I grab the back of her thighs, lifting her up. Wrapping her legs around my waist, I pull my zipper down, my cock pulsing as I press the tip against her warmth.

Her eyes widen down at me, knowing exactly what I’m about to do. The smallest nod, and I slam into her. Izel screams, throwing her head back, her nails digging into the back of my head. I growl against her throat, sucking on her skin. I barely give her time to get used to me before I’m using my hands against her ass to pull her up before thrusting her back down on my length.

Over and over.

I knew she was going to be tight; she’s much smaller than me. But the way she’s strangling me is causing me to lose the little control I do have.

“Don’t stop,” she begs.

“Never,” I grunt out. I never want to leave her. But I do slow down, turning, and I press her against the side of my truck. “Hold on,” I tell her, the only warning before I’m once again dragging my cock out of her before slamming home.

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“Z-Zion,” she cries out. “Do–don’t stop, don’t stop,” she’s begging over and over again. I can feel her pussy tighten around me. She’s close.

“Not yet,” I growl into her ear, biting her earlobe.

Izel trembles, her fingers yanking my hair, trying to pull me back. I relish in the pain. My truck rocks, but I can’t get enough of her. I slow down, just enough she doesn’t cum without my permission.

“Zion, please.” Her eyes lock onto mine.

And that’s what I need.

“Eyes on me,” I order, and when she moans again without closing her eyes, I tell her. “Cum for me.”

Her body explodes around me, her eyes never leaving mine as we lose ourselves in each other. I cum for longer than I think I ever have. Stars take my vision, as pure bliss takes over Izel. Her lips crash down against mine, and her tongue shoves into my mouth. All I taste is her.

Once I’m sure I’ve emptied myself in her do I ease out of her. Not missing the wince. Carrying her to the bed of the truck, I set her down. Tucking myself into my pants, I grab her pants, and my mask.

Placing my mask beside her, I push her legs open.

“Lean back, Red,” I order.

Doing as I ask, she props herself on her forearms, watching me. My eyes track my cum that slowly drips out of her cunt. Loving the sight, I trace my thumb rubbing our mixed release against her clit.

“Zion...” she whines.

“Yes Red?” I ask, my eyes flicking up to hers.

“I—I’m sensitive.”

“Hmmm...” Pulling away from her, I hold my thumb to her mouth. “Suck.”

Opening her mouth, she sucks my thumb into her mouth. “Good girl,” I praise.

Her eyes flare, heat rising in them. Smirking, I pull my thumb from her mouth.

“You like that?” I ask, as I grab her pants, beginning to pull them up her leg.

Izel nods, lifting her ass from the tailgate. Helping her into her pants I grab her chin dragging her face to mine.

“You’re mine too, Red,” I try to warn, and I’m rewarded with a wide grin.

She’s mine.

The moment we step inside my bedroom Izel leans against the door before her voice breaks through. “Does this change things between us?” Izel asks, twirling the end of her shirt in her hand. Turning around, I drag the mask over my head and carefully place it in the top drawer of the side table. No longer needing to hide my face from her. It’s an odd feeling, but for Izel I can change.

“What do you mean?” I question, slowly turning towards her. Izel wrings her hands together, something I notice she does when she’s nervous.

Izel narrows her eyes at me. “What does this mean for us?” Walking further into the room.

Cocking my head to the side, I decide to play dumb. The moment I decide this, I realize it probably is not the best choice because Izel picks up the remote from the dresser and chucks it at my head. I barely dodge it before she’s marching towards me. Shoving hard against my chest, I let her move me until I’m sitting on the bed.

“You’re not stupid, Zion,” she hisses. “You know what I’m talking about. I know I’m a lot to deal with. We’ve gone over this, many times. But I’m a very jealous person. I don’t get along with other girls. I like you, which means I hate knowing other girls are looking at you. I hate knowing they’re better than me. I get attached quickly, and I’m over sensitive. I might not show it. But you found me crying in the shower. I’m irrational, and I make stories up in my head. I need to know everything, I have to. So, tell me, tell me what’s going on between us.” Izel huffs, her shoulders falling as though she’s unsure of what she just said.

And being the asshole that I am, I don’t say anything. I keep my hands at my sides on the bed, emotionless as I watch almost every type of emotion cross over her face.

Yet neither of us move, both at a standstill to see who will move first. And knowing how stubborn Izel is, she won’t back down.

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“Tell me something, Red.” Leaning my elbows against my knees, I glance down at her body. Groaning from the sight of her legs, knowing my face was inches from her pussy just an hour ago.

“What?” she growls, crossing her pale arms over her chest.

“What did you feel when you saw Rachel touch my arm?”

God, she is so fucking beautiful when she gets mad. I can see the light blue vein in her forehead when she furrows her brows at me. The way she digs her nails into her skin. Wishing she was digging them into my back.

“Of course, you know her name,” she mutters. Grinding her teeth, she closes her eyes before shaking her head. “Forget this, we’re leaving.”

I don’t let her take a step away, moving faster than I think I probably ever have. My hand grabs the top of her flannel yanking it forwards, and the button fly, hitting the ground. Following her body, Izel drops to the floor. “Answer the question, I don’t like repeating myself.”

Her breath hitches as she drags her legs in front of her chest, trying her best to cover her body with her ruined flannel.

“I need a-a shirt... please.” She lets out a stuttering breath.

“No.” I step closer, moments from ripping her arms away.

“Zion, please. I n—need a new shirt. We can talk when I’m covered okay?”

“I’ve seen you naked before.”

She shakes her head, choking on a sob. I have no idea what just happened. One minute she’s shoving me, throwing a fucking remote and now she’s sobbing because she’s naked. I’ve seen her naked before. Sure, she’s in the same position she was in before, but I don’t understand.

“Red...”

“Zion, you can’t see it. You can’t see them.”

Our chest is less than an inch apart and I bend down so we’re at eye level. Gentle sobs leave her, and her body trembles as she rests her forehead against her knees.

“Will you look at me?”

Shaking her head, I try to calm myself. I shouldn’t force her. But I can’t protect her if I don’t know everything, whatever she’s hiding from me.

“Tell me your safe word,” I demand.

“Safe word?” she parrots back.

“Yes, Red, tell me your safe word.”

Her blurry eyes glance between my own, searching for something I’m not sure. But I’m about to show her exactly what it means when I say she’s mine. That I don’t give a fuck about Rachel or any other girl I fucked in the past. I don’t care about scars. That Izel is all I see, all that I’ve thought about since she opened her damn mouth in

that basement.

“I-why-why do I need a safe word?” she asks, too confused to stop me as I grab her arms and force her onto her back.

“No!” she cries out, hands above her head. My eyes trail down her naked body finally. Her tits are large and full, dusty pink nipples, begging for my mouth. But as much as I would love to shove my face into her breasts, that’s not what my eyes are glued to.

“SLUT”

“WHORE”

And the worst of them all: “DEVIL”

All I see is red, the blood in my veins boils. I’ve been angry before. I’ve been in a murderous rage. But nothing compares to this. No one can describe the amount of rage coursing through my body, the pure thought of someone scarring her perfect skin. My fingers inch for a gun, to kill every single person who has hurt her. I need to tell her about Zander, who he truly is. I know I need to tell her. But the words don’t come.

“I’m ugly,” she chokes, tears streaming down her face.

“Who said you are ugly?” I growl, dragging my body on top of hers.

She opens her mouth, and nothing comes out. Her eyes plead with me. “I want those names. You might not tell me today, or even tomorrow. But I want those names.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Kill them. They’ve touched something that’s mine, and I don’t play well with others.” Dragging my eyes down her body, taking in every curve, the white and pink stretch marks covering her hips and thighs. The carvings along her lower stomach, on top of each other. Soon my name will cover them. She’s not going to escape me.

Dropping down her body, I grab her thighs and push them to her chest.

“Zi—” Her words die as I swipe my tongue through her folds. I don’t give her time to try and stop me. I lap her clit, sucking her into my mouth. Her hands grip the strands of my hair, pulling me into her. Lifting her hips she thrusts against my mouth, my tongue working her hole. I’m addicted to her taste, to the smell of her cunt.

“Your taste, god damn your fucking taste.” I groan into her, my tongue flattening, licking her from ass to pussy. Biting her clit, Izel hisses but doesn’t say anything, and that’s a green light for me. Shoving two fingers into her pussy, I curl them and press.

“ZION!” Izel screams, her hands gripping my shoulders.

“Fuck, I love you screaming my name,” I mutter. Kissing her sex once more, I trail my lips along her stomach, licking her nipple before I’m moving onto her neck. Izel moans trying to press her body against me. Switching between kissing and sucking on her neck, I pull her hair a little tighter before sinking my teeth into the part where her shoulder and neck meet. Izel screams as she cums, her juices soaking my hand.

“Safe word, Izel,” I growl, not letting up on her.

“I don’t need one,” she pants.

I ease back, looking into her eyes, curious if she is lying or truly believes she doesn’t need a safe word. And from the pure desire in her eyes, she’s telling the truth, and that is dangerous.

“I’m going to ruin you,” I mumble before slamming my lips over hers. My finger works her over, and Izel moans into my mouth. Shoving my tongue into her mouth, we’re a mess and everything feels like my body ignites.

“Please,” she begs.

“Please what, Red?” I taunt, pulling my fingers from her body. I ease back letting go of her hair. Izel looks like a mess sprawled out on the floor, but I want to make her dirtier, to completely ruin her.

“Don’t stop touching me.” Grabbing the back of my neck, she drags me down. “Please, touch me. Mark me, do anything, just don’t stop.”

Who the fuck is this girl?

I groan, unable to stop myself. I grab the back of her thighs, lifting us up, and I turn, tossing her onto the bed. Izel gasps, pushing up onto her elbows watching me. Grabbing the end of my shirt, I toss it off to the side and unzip my pants. I can feel her eyes on me the entire time. And for the first time I don’t mind. I actually like it. I want her eyes on me, to never look away.

“Spread your legs,” I order. She doesn’t disappoint either. Doing as I tell her, she spreads her legs far apart so I get the perfect view of what’s mine. “Good girl.”

Izel smiles and moans.

“Hmm,” I hum slowly, bending down. “So, my girl likes to be praised.” I blow on her pussy, and her breath hitches. I smack her hands away as she tries to grab for my head. “I don’t think so.”

My mouth hovers over her clit, watering at wanting another taste. I could get drunk from her taste. I want to bathe in her juices.

Done with teasing her, I latch my mouth around her clit and nearly cum on the spot when she wraps her legs around my head. Her heels dig into my shoulders. I can’t help myself gripping her thighs. Instead of pulling her thighs away from my head, I press them harder. Wanting her to drown me.

“Ho-holy... Zion,” she stutters out.

Plunging my tongue into her hole, I make a mess. Her juices flood my mouth, her hands gripping my hair, yanking with her strength.

“Does this change things between us?” I ask her the same question she asked me.

“W-what?”

“Tell me something, Izel.” Crawling up her body, I trail kisses along her thick thighs, her soft belly, to her round full breasts. “Do you think I let just anyone see me, touch me?”

“I haven’t touched you,” Izel shoots back.

Without thinking, I flip us around so she’s straddling my hips. I grab her wrist pulling her forward until her hands rest against my chest. “Touch me,” I find myself almost begging.

I don't think I realized how deprived I have been from physical touch, and now that Izel is giving me this small inch, I'm apparently taking a fucking mile.

"I can see your tattoos," Izel murmurs. Dropping her wrist, her fingers spread out through my chest hair. "Oh, you have hair here."

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“I do.” I try to hide my groan. No one’s ever ran their fingers through my chest hair and now I can’t imagine Izel not doing it.

“Do you have color tattoos?” she asks, as she begins tracing along the snake that sets on my left peck, “I think this one.” She thumbs across my left nipple, where the snake crosses my nipple. “Are you going to answer me?” she smirks.

“Only one, but the other two are black and gray,” I finally answer her.

Izel hums as she continues to trace along my chest tattoo leading to my shoulders and up my neck. I get lost in the feeling of her soft, delicate fingers tracing over my skin. Feeling her warmth against me. I never want her to stop, and don’t know how I went so long without her touching me. I’m like a drug addict who needs their next fix, and Izel is the only drug I want or need.

“Did you mean what you said?” she asks, daring to look at me finally.

“I said a lot.” I’m not sure what she’s referring to. The part of me being hers or wanting to kill everyone that’s hurt her.

“Zion,” Izel whines, tilting her head to the side. “You know what I’m talking about.”

Grabbing her hips, I lift her up before slamming her down onto my length. Both of us groan, and Izel’s eyes widen at my actions. Her hips buck on their own accord, and I smile, keeping my hands on her hips, pushing, and pulling her back and forth.

“Zion.” She pouts. Nonetheless, she moves her hips with my hands. “Are you mine?”

she moans.

Ignoring her, I grind my hips harder. “Fuck, you’re so fucking tight.” Reaching up I flick her nipple before twisting. Izel’s eyes fly open, her hand flying to her mouth as she screams.

Ripping her hands from her mouth, I pull her forward until we’re chest to chest. Pulling her arms behind her back, I hold her arms while her face lays into my neck. “You don’t get to muffle your screams for me.” Thrusting up, Izel moans, her breathing ragged. “I want you to scream for me, let everyone know who you belong to. Because make no mistake, Izel, you’re fucking mine.”

And I don’t let up. I pound up into her, feeling her breast pressed against my chest, her ass jiggling uncontrollably as my cock pounds into her wet cunt. And when she cums, I don’t let up. Izel tries to wiggle her arms loose, only I wrap my hand around both her wrists. Using my other hand, I smack her ass hard. Knowing I left a handprint, I do it again and again.

“ZION!” she screams. I smack her ass again, and I can feel the warmth on her skin. “Ow!” she yells, twisting her body trying to get away from me.

“Such a dirty girl,” I murmur, my hips moving on their own accord. I can’t stop thrusting up, my movements doing their own thing.

Rolling our bodies, I grip her hands above her head, while my other hand wraps around her throat. I grind and thrust into her. “Mine,” I growl at her.

“You’re fucking mine, Izel.” Tightening my hand around her throat, her eyes widen, her nails digging into my hand, and I’m sure she’s drawing blood. Only it’s turning me on, along with the sight of her breasts bouncing along with the teeth marks on her skin. I lose control. Reaching my mouth down I latch onto her nipple and bite.

Breaking skin, metallic flavor fills my mouth. Izel cums, her mouth gaping open as she tries to scream.

She shakes, barely breathing as I continue working myself into her. Unable to stop. Pushing her towards her limits, I groan, licking her nipple before letting her throat go.

Izel gasps, trying to suck in much needed oxygen. Letting go of her hands, she immediately reaches for my face. I let her cup my cheek, and she drags my face down slamming our lips together.

“You’re mine,” she tells me before biting down on my bottom lip. I can feel the skin break before she sucks my lip into her mouth. “Mine,” she repeats. Her legs wrap around my waist, locking us together.

“I’m going to cum,” I warn. I expect her to unwrap her legs, shove me away. Only instead she tightens her legs. “Cum for me, Pup.” She bites down on my lip again, and I can’t hold it anymore.

I explode inside her, and she doesn’t let up on biting and sucking my lip. Even when my hips stop moving, and my body gives up. I have half a thought before I roll us, my cock still lodged inside her.

“You’ve came inside me twice,” Izel mumbles into my neck.

Humming my agreement, I realize she’s the only one I’ve fucked without a condom, and I’ll never go back. Izel’s warm pussy against my bare cock is heaven and it will stay that way.

“I’m not on birth control.”

“Okay,” I whisper, closing my eyes. Izel chuckles, pressing herself closer to my

chest. Slowly I can feel her head lift off my head and then a moment later my eyelids are being peeled open. Izel's face is directly in front of mine, her eyes bouncing between mine.

"Okay?" she repeats. "That's all you have to say after I tell you I'm not on birth control and that you've came inside me twice now."

I hear the words she's saying. I know they're important, but I don't seem to care. The idea of her being pregnant with my baby is turning me on, and that's an odd feeling, a very odd feeling. And I feel like I should be freaking out, going to the store, and buying that plan B shit, but instead my arms tighten around her back, my cock twitching inside her.

"We can make it a third time." I smile.

Izel frowns, her hand grabbing my hair and pulling it back. My neck is exposed to her, and she latches onto the side, kissing and sucking. I moan as she grinds her hips, my cock that is still hard inside her, begging her to keep going.

"You're playing a dangerous game, Red," I growl, my hand gripping her hips in a bruising form.

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“I love games,” Izel says a moment before biting down on my neck.

Thrusting up into her, we lose ourselves again. And I can’t think of a single last time I was this obsessed with being inside a girl.

15

Zion

I’m barely awake when I feel Izel jump from the bed as she says, “Oh no,” over and over again. And though I believe she thinks she’s being quiet, she’s not. It’s not until she slams the door that I finally open my eyes. I immediately search for what she would be stomping around about and what has her panties in a bunch. I don’t see anything out of place, so I don’t understand what has her freaking out.

“Oh noooo,” Izel just about yells from the bathroom as the shower begins to run. Rolling my eyes, I finally decide to get up and ask her what the issue is. It’s not until I throw the blanket off that I notice the large blood stain on the gray bed sheets.

Last night after the fourth round, Izel finally shoved me to the side and told me I broke her vagina. She was laughing when she said it, so I didn’t think anything was wrong. But as my eyes take in the large amount of blood seeping into my mattress. I’m freaking out.

My feet smack against the hardwood floor. Slamming the door open my eyes lock on Izel who is standing in the shower looking at me.

“Why are you storming in here like I just kicked your cat?” she asks as she starts washing her body with my loofah.

Shutting the door with my foot, I waste no time closing the distance between us. Stepping into the shower, I hiss the moment the boiling hot water connects with my skin.

“Jesus fuck, woman,” I growl, shoving my body into the corner where the water barely reaches me. “Why the fuck is it so hot?”

Izel laughs but doesn’t bother answering me, just continues to wash her body as though she’s not practicing burning in hell or that she wasn’t bleed—

“You’re hurt,” I blurt out.

“What are you talking about?” she questions, rinsing her body off. Before I can say anything else, her face drops, suddenly realizing what I’m talking about. “I’m sorry about that,” she mutters shyly looking away.

“Are you okay?” I ask, which sounds dumb the moment she laughs and says, “Besides the cramps, my uterus literally attacking itself and the cravings for all bad things, I’m good.”

Of course. She started her period, and now I feel like a child not knowing anything about female anatomy. It seems all logical goes out the window when it comes to Izel.

“Sorry to make you uncomfortable,” she whispers, turning her body away from me. Bracing myself for the devil’s water, I grab her arm and pull her to my chest.

Izel squeals, bracing her hands against my chest.

“You didn’t make me uncomfortable, I just...” I trail off, unsure of what to say. Thought that what? She got hurt while lying in bed next to me? I’m a light sleeper, have to be. So, thinking of it now sounds stupid.

“Thought I got hurt or something?” she asks, wrapping her arms around my waist.

“It sounds dumb now,” I mutter, resting my chin against the top of her head. Even with the height difference I have to lean a little bit.

“I don’t think it’s dumb, it just means you care.”

“I do care.”

“You don’t know me,” she says, trying to step back. “And I don’t mean the things I like, or what I don’t like. I’m talking about the important things.”

“Tell me.” Reaching for her, I can’t stand not touching her.

Izel shakes her head, as if it physically pains her to think about what she wants to say. Giving her a minute, I wait for her to decide what to say and when she doesn’t say anything I finally kneel so we’re at eye level. Tears glisten in her eyes, and her face flushes red. She shakes her head, refusing to look at me.

“I don’t want to force you,” I tell her. Gripping her chin, I make her look directly at me. “I’m here, a man on my knees, asking you to tell me. Tell me what you’re running from, who you’re running from. I can’t help you if you don’t tell me.”

“They’re bad people, Zion,” she whispers.

“Red, in case you haven’t noticed I’m bad too. I’ve killed people. I’m a killer, Izel, and whoever is after you will have to go through me.”

“I don’t want them to hurt you.”

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“No one can hurt me.” Except you. But I don’t tell her that, even though I know it’s too soon to start throwing around that I’m in love with her even if I don’t know her completely.

“They’re not after me,” I barely hear her. “They’re after him, and I won’t let them get to him, I can’t.”

It takes a moment before I realize she’s talking about Gabriel. That whoever these people are, they’re after her brother and she’s trying to protect him.

Taking a deep breath, I know right now I need to tell her who I am, what I do for a living.

“I’m known as The Butcher. A hired hitman that a lot of undercover circuits use. I’ve killed more people than I know,” I say, dragging her hand to my side. I know she can feel the little indents of the scars I mark on my body for the kills I’ve done.

“Bad or good?” she asks, her finger tracing along the scars.

“Not all of them were bad.”

Izel doesn’t say anything, and I honestly don’t know what to think about it. Her hands are still moving against my skin, and I can feel my cock threatening to harden from her touch.

“Have you killed children?” she finally asks me.

“No,” I immediately say. “I, I won’t hurt children, even most of the time women. It’s usually men that I kill, but no, never children.”

Izel lets out a sigh I hadn’t even realized she had been holding. Nodding her head into my chest she stops touching my side and wraps her arms around my waist.

“We all have to do some bad things, but that doesn’t make us bad people,” she whispers.

And if that’s not the truest statement I’ve ever heard. It makes my heart ache and my stomach flutter because I’ve told myself I’m bad. I do horrible things. I murder others and get paid for it. I enjoy it, the rush, the feel. I have a sick mind, but somehow Izel looks at me as if I hang the sun for her.

“You’re not going to hurt me or Gabriel, are you?” She tilts her head back to look at me.

Shaking my head, I refuse to hurt her. Even if they, whoever they are, tried to hire me. I wouldn’t.

“Then you have nothing to worry about. I don’t look at you differently.”

I didn’t realize her saying that, that it was my worst fear. That she would truly think I’m a monster, even when she witnessed me murdering four people.

It’s a long moment before she finally lets go of me. I reach forward not wanting her to let me go just yet. Grabbing her wrist she stops in her tracks, glancing down before meeting my eyes.

I open my mouth, but nothing comes out. How am I going to explain to her that I’m just a needy bitch, and her touch seems to calm me down?

“I need to go lie down. My cramps, my body is starting to hurt.” Smiling at me, she pushes up on her tippy toes. “Come on, I can only reach so far, Pup.”

I smile unable to help myself when it came to her. Bending down, I press our lips together. Groaning, my hands slip around to her ass, pressing her against me.

“Zion...” Izel moans, pushing against my chest. “I wasn’t kidding when I said my cramps are hurting badly. I need to go lie down.”

Nodding my head, I reluctantly let her go, watching as she dries off, throws her hair into a towel, and leaves the bathroom. Hurrying through my own shower, I barely make it out of the bathroom when I hear movement downstairs and find her not lying in my—our bed. Throwing on a pair of jeans and a long-sleeved Henley, I make my way downstairs, only when I reach the end of the stairway I hear Gabriel.

“I take it we’re not leaving?” he asks. I can hear the playful tone, and thank God, because I don’t know what I would have done if he wasn’t being nice towards her.

“We talked some, and I think it’s best if we actually stay.”

“Did it have anything to do with the noises I was hearing last night, well, actually this morning. Because, sis, I gotta tell you there are some things I’d really rather not hear. I mean, fuck, I’m surprised you’re even walking with the painful screaming I heard.”

I don’t know if she’s blushing or not, but when she gasps and whisper-shouts his name, I smile, knowing full well that she was not in pain. Or any pain that she didn’t like.

“Don’t make that face at me, Izel.” He laughs. “Have you at least seen his face? Or do you have some mask kink? I hear that’s a thing.”

I dread hearing what she truly thinks. I know I'm ugly, the scars on my body are hideous and my face goes right along with it.

“He has, and I swear to God, Gabriel, if you make him feel any type of way, if he even shows you... I'll chop your tiny wiener off and shove into a blender. Good luck fucking another man with no cock.”

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Pressing a hand against my mouth, I do my best not to laugh. Izel being protective of me is turning me on and knowing that she'll go against her own family, the only family she seems to have, is hot.

“Oh, baby, you really think I do the fucking?” He laughs and a moment later I hear something being thrown and then they both burst out laughing.

“You remember what you just said about not really wanting to know?” Izel asks, but I can still hear the laughter in her voice. “I did not need to know that you like it up your butt.”

Gabriel bursts out in a hyena laugh and that only causes Izel to as well. And I find myself smiling at her laugh, loving the fact she feels comfortable enough to let loose. And I have a feeling this is the first time in a long time or if ever they've been able to just laugh and be themselves.

After a long moment of me being a creep and them just laughing and them falling silent, Gabriel lets out a long sigh, before asking, “Are we sure we can trust him?”

“I'm sure,” she says immediately. And I find myself very pleased with that answer. Almost too pleased at it.

“How can, you be sure? I mean we—no, I thought we could trust Kiwi and look how that turned out...” I can feel the pain in his voice. And I oddly don't like it, knowing that whoever this Kiwi person was caused pain to Gabriel, and that means that he indirectly caused pain to Izel. And I can't stand for that.

“First off, I don’t ever want to hear that disgusting things name again. I should have told you, and I’m sorry I didn’t. But we all make mistakes, Gabriel, and I trust Zion. I trust him with my life—”

“And you might end up paying for it,” Gabriel mutters under his breath.

“I might, but he’s different.”

“Yeah, his cock apparently.”

“Gabriel Hollow!” Izel whisper-shouts. “Will you listen to me? We can trust Zion. He saved me from that hitman Dan sent after us. He saved me from some guy in the train station, and don’t forget what happened on the bus.”

“He killed them.”

“That poop-head—”

“Izel you just said fuck, I think you can say shit. It’s not going to damn you to hell or anything.”

“You never know, Gabriel, now stop interrupting me.” I can just imagine that red eyebrow raised, scowling at him but trying to hide her smirk. And failing miserably. “He’s killed people, but haven’t we?”

What?

That was news to me. Izel and Gabriel have killed people? I mean it would make sense on why she didn’t even bat an eye. Why neither of them did for that matter, but I can’t imagine tiny little Izel or Gabriel who was even more sassy than his sister murdering someone.

“Yeah...” Gabriel's answer breaks through my thoughts. “I—I’m sorry you h—had to do that I—Izel.” He hiccups. I hear movement until finally someone starts crying.

Peeking around the corner, Gabriel is holding onto Izel for dear life as she rocks them back and forth. She kisses the top of his head, humming low. I want to make myself known, but I feel like they need this, they need to let their emotions out.

Fuck, who am I?

Letting their emotions out. I stand back, unsure on what to do. It’s not until I hear movement and then Izel's quiet voice, “It’ll be okay, Gabby. I promise it’ll be okay. Annnnd if it’s not, I’ll chop his cock off and shove it down his throat.”

My poor manhood.

Cupping my dick, I smile knowing full well she would do exactly that too. And I can’t help but feel a little turned on. Izel threatening me really shouldn’t turn me on, but fuckkkkk.

“Okay, so when Zion gets down here, I’m going to ask him if he can take me to the store,” Izel states, and with that I don’t waste time. I take a few steps back, acting as though I just got downstairs. Super pathetic I know.

Rounding the corner, Gabriel’s head snaps up to mine while Izel lies on the couch with a throw blanket cuddled up to her chin. She smiles at me, while Gabriel looks skeptical, and his eyes widen as he notices I don’t have my usual mask on. And if I’m going to get Izel to trust me fully, then I’m going to need Gabriel to trust me. And with him I know it’s going to take a little more than taking them to the stores, cooking food, and letting them stay here.

“I need to run to the store. Izel you can stay here and relax. Gabriel, uh, would you

like to come with me?”

Gabriel’s eyes snap between us, confused on why I would ask most likely. But I’m determined to make them trust me. So, Gabriel going to the store with me alone hopefully can move us in the right direction.

“I’m not sure.” Gabriel is the first to say something, his eyes refusing to move away from Izel.

“Go on, I’ll be okay.” Izel smiles, curling herself into the couch. She looks moments from falling asleep anyhow. “Seriously go, Gabby, I’ll be okay. Get me some spicy noodles, those sound really good right now.”

“Are you sure?”

“Oh, yes, I’m going to take a hot bath in the twelve-jet tub he’s got. Then take a good nap.” She smiles at both of us. “Oh, and get me some Sour Skittles, those sound sooooo good.”

Gabriel was already shoving his feet into his shoes.

“Oh, how could I forget donuts. Get some donuts, the chocolate filled ones, God those sound so amazing right no—”

“Okay, okay,” Gabriel rushes out, throwing his hands up to stop her from talking. “You’re on your period, got it.” He shakes his head, muttering something under his breath before he leaves out the front door.

“Zion...” Izel calls after me as I reach for the door. Looking at her over my shoulder, I nod my head, already knowing what she wants to tell me.

“With my life, Red,” I promise her. Earning a smile, I close and lock the door behind me, only to find Gabriel frowning at me, and I already know from that look he is about to bombard me with questions.

“Apples or bananas?” Gabriel asks as we stand in the produce. When I prepared myself to answer whatever question he wanted to ask, this is not what I thought it was going to be.

I thought maybe why the mask? How did I find his sister? Who am I? Anything

honestly.

Not this.

“Uh, apples,” I answer awkwardly.

“I love bananas.” Gabriel giggles, grabbing a bunch of them. “You know why I love them?”

Shaking my head, I grab the cart following behind the twelve-year-old like a child following their damn mother. I was a fucking killer for fucks sake, and for some fucking reason I’m being a shy awkward teenager.

“They remind me of dicks.”

I choke on my spit. My eyes widen at his bluntness. I shouldn’t be all that shocked; he is related to Izel. And she has no filter—whatever comes to mind she says.

“They come in all different shapes, and sizes, and man...” He glances back at me, and I swear his eyes drop to my crotch. “They’re delicious.”

“I, uh... I...” What the fuck am I supposed to say to that? And thankfully I don’t have time to think or say anything before Gabriel is moving on to another topic.

“Aren’t you a little young... to... know about, you know...” I trail off, feeling extremely uncomfortable.

“If you grew up with the men we did, you’d be surprised I’m not worse.” He mutters, eyes dropping to the ground. “How did you find my sister?” Gabriel asks before I comment.

“She was locked in a basement that had someone else locked up.”

“That makes no sense.” Grabbing a whole box of spicy ramen noodles, he throws them into the cart.

“A friend of mine was also in that basement, and I was told to go get Izel out.”

“Hmm.”

I didn't like that “hmm,” that way he nods his head but continues on walking down the aisle is different.

“Were you sent to kill her or save her?”

“Neither really,” I mutter. Gabriel stops in his tracks, swinging around at me.

“Excuse me?”

“I mean, I guess I was sent to save her. I'm not really sure—”

“You were going to kil—”

“No,” I growl. “No, and even if I was, I wouldn't have killed her, Gabriel. I was asked to get her out, and the reason I even went was because Izel saved someone very special to me.” I tower over Gabriel. I don't want to frighten him, but I'm going to make him understand that I'm no threat to him or my girl.

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My girl.

I really like the idea of that.

“Why didn’t you just let her go?” He finally asks, moving his feet to walk.

“I’m not sure.”

I can feel the eye roll even if I can’t see his face.

“My intention was to let her leave. I mean I gave her the money, drove her to the bus station. She even got out and bought the damn ticket.”

“What changed?” he asked grabbing a few boxes of donuts.

“She was comfortable around me,” I blurt out. I don’t know if that is the actual reason, I couldn’t let her go. It’s not something I like thinking about because it isn’t me. But what is me? Zion is long gone. He’s someone I don’t recognize. While The Butcher, he is someone I’m comfortable with, the one that kills without remorse. I thrive being the killer that everyone fears.

“The first thing she said when she saw me was, “Wow, you’re big.” I laugh, remembering that little fireball of energy that didn’t take any shit. “Then she asked if I had a key for the cage she was locked in.”

“I can’t believe she was locked in a fucking cage,” Gabriel growls, his eyes narrowing at me.

Rubbing the back of my head, I nod, unsure of what else I should tell him since Izel apparently hasn't told him about her time with Zander.

"She called me an ogre within the first five minutes too."

Gabriel laughs, throwing his head back. He stops in the middle of the aisle and laughs deep in his stomach.

"Holy shit." He wipes a tear away. "That's good, real good."

"Glad I could amuse you," I mutter, rolling my eyes as I walk around him.

"Well, I mean shit, how tall are you again?"

"I'm not telling you."

"Six-four, six-five?" Gabriel follows behind me, still laughing.

"Six-seven." I'm unsure why I even tell him this. I know I'm a fucking giant. Especially compared to Izel's five three frame and from the looks of it, Gabriel's five-five frame.

"Damn, you really are a fucking giant."

Growling, I stomp away. Hating that him making fun of my height bothers me so much. It's not like I can help it exactly. I mean, fuck, I am a god damn giant.

"Hey, wait up!" Gabriel calls from behind me. I barely let up my speed and head for the female hygiene. "Hey!" His arm wraps around my arm, trying to pull me back.

"Don't fucking touch me," I growl, removing his hand from me. Gabriel throws his

hands up.

“Okay, okay. I’m sorry, I didn’t realize you don’t like being touched. I, I don’t either, you know. But anyway, I’m sorry. I just saw Izel touch you before and didn’t know it was a problem.”

“Only her,” I blurt out. Fuck I really need to get my emotions under control.

“Only her, got it. I’m also sorry for making fun of your height. I didn’t mean anything by it, I’ve just never seen someone so tall and okay, I’m just sorry, okay?”

“Okay,” I mumble. Turning toward the pads and tampons, I realize I have no idea what she wants or likes. “Uh, do you?” I point towards the shelf.

“This is going to sound weird, so just don’t ask questions.” He sighs. “Pads, those.” Pointing to a pack, he says, “Tampons hurt, I guess. I don’t know, I don’t do female shit. I like guys. If—if you haven’t noticed.”

“I know,” I say, grabbing two packs of pads and tossing them into the shopping cart, then heading towards the ice cream.

“Really? I mean, like sure I said that comment about bananas, but normally people think I’m just joking and then when they find out I actually like dick they freak out and think I want to sleep with them. Or they comment how I’m so young. Which I get it, I’m twelve, it’s young. I should be worried about I’m not actually. But it was rough growing up. I’m like an old person in a young body.”

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Opening the freezer door, I begin pulling out a bunch of different types of ice cream.

“I get it. I’m not judging you.” I turn facing him. “As for you being gay, you want to fuck my ass?” I ask, raising a brow at him.

“Uh, no. No, I’m a, well, I’m a bottom.” For the first time Gabriel seems shy. Hm.

“Well, I have no intention to fuck your ass, the only ass I love to fuck is your sisters,” I say, walking away. Leaving Gabriel to gasp and then cough before yelling at me that he can’t unhear what I said.

Serves him right.

16

Izel

Thenexttwoweeksthings settle down, the three of us all getting into a routine. Gabriel and I spend a lot of time lying around on the couch watching TV shows we never got the chance to before. Zion most of the time sits with us, and at first it was slightly confusing when Gabriel and him actually start joking around and having fun. But it’s also nice. It’s rewarding to watch Gabriel come out of his shell and be able to be himself. It’s nice being able to relax again, but it doesn’t last long.

I wake up with Zion’s arms wrapped around my waist, and a dull pain in the middle of my stomach near my belly button. Unwrapping myself from his embrace, I hurry to the bathroom. Inching my way to the toilet, I relieve myself thinking it will help.

Standing, I wash my hands, only the pain intensifies so much that my knees nearly give out.

I grip the countertop, and squeezing my eyes closed, I try to calm my breathing down. I don't know what's wrong with me, but with every minute passing the pain becomes unbearable. I reach for the bathroom door. Twisting the knob my body crumbles and I fall to the floor.

I try to hold the scream in, but the moment my body hits the floor it escapes my lips. Zion immediately is at my side, his hands gripping my face to look up at him. Only I can't. My arms wrap around my waist, and tears stream down my face.

"Red, baby, what's wrong?" His voice fills with worry, his thumbs wiping my tears away, only being replaced by more.

"I-I don't know," I force out. Somehow the pain worsens, and I swear I'm going to burst. Something is wrong.

"Where, Red? Where does it hurt?" He tries to pry my hands from my side. Shaking my head, I can't move. This seems to be the only thing that is holding me together right now.

"My stomach. I don't know, my side, everything, Zion," I cry out. I swear I'm going to pass out any minute now.

"Fuck, fuck." He lets go of my face. "Gabriel!" he shouts. I can hear movement, dresser drawers opening and then the bedroom door.

"What the fuck?" Gabriel's sleepy voice calls out.

"Get dressed, she needs to go to the hospital," Zion says, moving around the room.

I don't hear Gabriel say anything, but a faint sound of movement down the hall.

Suddenly Zion's arms wrap around me, and he lifts, carrying me out of the bedroom, Gabriel's footsteps heavy behind us.

"Grab those keys," Zion says before I'm hit with a cold draft. Car doors open and close before I'm set in the back seat, laying my head down on Gabriel's lap. His fingers immediately go to my head, rubbing small circles at the base of my neck, just like he used to do when Dan beat me. I would smile at the tenderness, but another wave of pain comes, causing me to gag.

"Zion, how far are we?" Gabriel asks nervously. The truck roars to life two seconds before Zion is driving crazy. I can feel every bump and movement, my stomach moments from emptying everywhere.

"Twenty minutes," he mutters, and I nearly sob at the thought. Twenty more minutes in pain. Granted it's logically not that long, but I'm not sure I can handle another minute with this pain.

Gabriel starts to hum our favorite song. I know he's trying to get me to sing along with him. It's been our thing; I would get beat for standing up to Dan and Gabriel would tend to my wounds. We would sing together and cry.

"Come on, Izel, hold on..." I'm not sure if it's Zion or Gabriel telling me this. My body starts convulsing I gag once more before my stomach empties itself. I'm aware of the warm mushy throw up seeping through my mouth everywhere. I want to apologize, but I can't.

"Fuck, fuck fuck fuck, no..." I swear it's Zion chanting. The truck comes to a halt, the movement dragging another painful sob from me before I'm throwing up again.

I can feel movement. My eyes try to open but I feel so drained that I can't even move my pinkie toe. Suddenly I'm plunged into darkness.

My eyes shoot open, blinded by a bright light. Squeezing them shut once more, I take a deep breath. My left side aches as I try to shift.

"Don't move," a faint familiar voice says beside me.

I can hear footsteps nearing, the bed slightly dipping before their hand presses against my right hand. "Izel?"

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Opening my eyes once more, I squint into the bright, warm light. It takes a minute for my eyes to adjust to the light before I'm glancing around the room. A blurry version of Gabriel sits beside me, his hand holding mine while Zion is standing at the foot of my bed. His hands are gripping the bar at the end, and even though I can barely see his hands, I can feel the tension in his grip.

"How are you feeling?" Gabriel asks bringing me back.

"Better than those beatings I got," I croak out, only realizing that was probably a mistake when I feel the pressure of Zion's knuckles.

"Well, uh, I'm not sure what to even say to that," Gabriel breaks the silence. "Anyway, guess what?" He squeezes my hand, bringing my attention back to him.

"Hmmm?" I hum, my throat feeling sore.

"They took your appendix out. Honestly, it was pretty gross. There was a lot of nurses and doctors rushing around, and dude you should've seen the amount of throw u—"

"That's enough," Zion growled.

Gabriel's head snaps in his direction, while I for some reason can't bring myself to look at him. I don't know why, but the distant memory of falling in his bathroom, Zion carrying me downstairs, and then, oh god... I was throwing up everywhere. All over the backseat of his truck.

Oh God, his poor truck.

I cringe, really not daring to look at him now.

“How are you feeling?” Gabriel whispers as if he doesn’t want Zion to hear him ask me.

“You just asked me, Gabby,” I remind him.

“I did, and you made a joke. It’s a terrible joke, but you didn’t actually tell me how you feel.”

“I’m okay,” I reassure him. Gabriel is always the one who worries about everything, while I have to remind him that everything works out. “I promise, I’m okay.”

Gabriel only nods his head before a nurse opens the door.

“Oh, look who’s awake!” She smiles, walking over to the other side of my bed. “How are you feeling? How’s the pain level?”

I almost make another joke about being beaten by that psycho in the basement this time, but at the last second clamp my mouth shut.

“Uh, my body aches more than being in pain.” I shrug, which causes my stitches to move. Groaning I try to hide it, but of course Zion notices and narrows his eyes at the nurse. I raise a brow in a way that tells him to be nice, or I hope it translates to that.

“That’s wonderful, no more sharp pains or any of that?” She starts checking on the IV bags hanging above.

“No, just aches,” I mutter around a yawn.

“Alright, we’ll see about giving you some more painkillers so you can rest some more. We’ll have the doctor come in and check on you soon, and then see about getting you home by tomorrow.”

As soon as the nurse leaves, Gabriel follows, needing to find food. Zion on the other hand doesn’t move from his spot, his eyes locked on mine.

“Are you just going to stare at me the entire time?” I ask, fighting myself to not fall asleep.

Zion grunts at me but doesn’t say anything. Of course, he doesn’t. I know he doesn’t really give a shit about me or Gabriel. I’m just a warm body for him to have sex with and cuddle.

“Okay, well can you do it after I fall asleep? I can’t exactly fall asleep with you staring so hard,” I snap, irritated that I’m letting my feelings and emotions get the better of me.

I know I asked if things had changed between us, but that funny, annoying little voice in the back of my head tells me it was a lie. That he doesn’t truly give a shit about me, that he’s just using me. And though I can’t figure out why, he’ll soon get rid of us.

Zion doesn’t speak and just continues to stare at me. My eyes snag on the blurry cup sitting on the table, and my hand reaches for it. And in a split moment I’m throwing it at him. Now I never was good at sports. Honestly, I’m downright awful. I could miss the big circled target even if it’s directly in front of my face. So, it’s not surprising when I miss Zion’s giant form, and hit the stupid wall instead. And I also shouldn’t have thrown anything because now my side is completely aching, and I have to grind my molar not to cry.

“You done?” Zion finally asks.

This time I don’t say anything because what is there to say? I’m overreacting. Zion wouldn’t be here if he didn’t want to be here. I may not have known this man for long, but if there is one thing to know, it’s that he won’t do something if he doesn’t want to.

Zion moves fast until his fingers grip my chin, forcing me to look up at him. Tears gather in my eyes as I’m forced to look at him. Except this time, it’s not his face. The mask is back on and I’m looking into a pair of eyes that I can’t see the color of, and now all I want to do is cry. Not because I’m in pain or because I’m in the stupid hospital. But because I can’t see the color of his damn eyes and he has that god awful mask on again.

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“What is your problem?” he growls, his face inches from mine. I try to shake my head, but he doesn’t let me.

“You’re going to fucking tell me, because if you don’t, I swear, Red, the moment you heal I’m bending you over my lap and smacking that ass until it’s red. Then I’m going to tie you to my bed and edge you on all night until you’re screaming and crying. I will deny you even then, so what the fuck is your problem?”

“It’s stupid,” I whisper.

“Nothing you feel or think is stupid.” His thumb brushes my tears away. “Whatever it is, tell me.”

“What color are your eyes?”

“Blue, they’re bright, almost like the ocean, but deep ocean, the clear deep ocean. They’re light like the sun again.”

I don’t realize I’m smiling until his thumb swipes against my bottom lip. I might not have any clue what blue looks like. But I like the idea of just knowing the color.

“Blond hair, blue eyes. Sounds like an angel,” I whisper.

“I’m no angel, but I will gladly make you see the stars where they live,” he murmurs before pressing his lips against mine. “You don’t get to do that again,” Zion says, backing away slightly.

“What?” I blink my eyes back open, trying to understand what he’s talking about.

"Almost die."

I furrow my brows, confused more than ever at what he’s talking about. Thankfully, I don’t have to ask before he’s telling me.

“I barely made it here in time.”

“You still made it.”

“Barely.”

“You’re always saving me,” I realize. Zion is truly always saving me. First, the basement, the bus, and apparently when my body decides it rejects another part of myself.

“I’ll always save you, Red. Always.”

If only that were true.

17

Zion

The rain against the roof echoes around the kitchen as I start another cup of coffee for Izel. She’s addicted to coffee, and the way she’s addicted is not normal. There’s no way that someone drinks five or more cups a day. I’ve used a coffee pot more times than I thought I would in my life. Even Ma, who worked fourteen hours, sometimes even more as a nurse, never drank that much.

It's not normal.

Izel also is very specific on what kind of coffee she wants. It can't be hazelnut; she absolutely hates it. It has to be either French vanilla or caramel. She also likes it sweeter than fucking pie. Splenda, not sugar, and it has to be an oat creamer, not dairy.

The coffee machine beeps, letting me know it's done. Pulling a cup down from the cupboard, I pour the coffee in, four tablespoons of Splenda, and then six tablespoons of the creamer.

Grabbing the mug, I turn around just as the back door shuts and Gabriel appears around the corner. Water drips onto the tiled floor, causing my eye to twitch.

"That for Izel?" he asks, motioning towards my hand. Nodding my head, I go to sidestep him when he takes the mug from me and takes a large drink. "Thanks." He laughs.

"That was for your sister," I growl, getting irritated that I'm going to have to remake her special fucking coffee all over again.

"Well, my dear sister won't be drinking any coffee any time soon."

Opening the cupboard, I pull another mug down. "Wait, what?" I say, realizing what he just said.

"She's busy, so she won't be drinking coffee anytime soon," Gabriel repeats like I'm the dumbest kid in school. Rolling my eyes, I set the mug back down and turn my entire focus back to him.

“Care to explain?”

Gabriel likes to push my buttons. He thinks it’s hilarious to wind me up. He’s like a little brother I never wanted and dream about punching in the throat. Repeatedly until he can’t get up. Like right now, I can feel my eyes twitching, the struggle to not punch his teenager face and watch him cry.

“You seem to be upset.” Popping a hip, he takes another large drink of the coffee I just made for Izel.

That little shit.

“You’re pushing my buttons,” is all I say, because I don’t trust myself not to say some shit to him. Something that will make him cry and run away.

“You like when I push your buttons.”

Grinding my molars, I take a deep breath while keeping my eyes trained on him. But that little fucker just smirks because he knows exactly what he’s doing. And he knows I won’t really do anything. I won’t risk losing Izel over it, plus the little fucker just does it to annoy the shit out of me.

“Gabriel.”

“Zion.”

That’s it. Fuck the consequences. Surely, Izel will understand.

Taking a step forward, he throws his hands up, almost dropping the coffee I made for Izel, and sobers up.

“Alright, alright. No need to get angry. You kill people when you get angry and listen if Izel finds out you did something to this pretty face, she’d kill you, and then be upset because she killed you,” Gabriel rambles on. Just like fucking Izel, they both talk too damn much. “Stop twitching your eye, it’s weird.”

“Gabriel, if you don’t get to the point anytime soon, your face is going to become good friends with my fist,” I grunt.

“Yeah, Izel won’t like that too much either. But hey, hold your horses!” he hisses as I round the island towards him. “She’s outside,” he finally tells me.

“Okay.” I sigh, feeling relieved. Only for a moment until thunder nearly shakes the house. “Outside! It’s fucking pouring,” I growl, heading towards the back door, nearly missing the puddle of water.

“Yeah, she does that.” He laughs.

“Does what? Does crazy things?”

But of course, she does. That’s Izel. Since the moment I saw her, she’s been nothing but a major thorn in my side, a pain in the ass.

“She likes it when it rains,” he says, shrugging his shoulders, as if it’s not a big deal.

Growling, I open the back door and slam it shut. It’s pitch black out. I can barely see two feet in front of me. Within seconds I’m soaking wet. The things I do for her.

“Izel?” I call out, listening for her answer. Only it never comes. Searching around I

begin to walk around the porch, skipping over the fireplace and sitting area.

“Izel!” I call out once more, walking down a few steps of the porch until I round the house.

“Iz—” Shit. I could barely make out her frame lying on the ground. “Red, what are you doing?” I ask, making my way to her.

“Lying here, what’s it look like?” She laughs, eyes closed.

It takes me about a minute before I say fuck it and lie down next to her. Grabbing her hand I intertwine our fingers. Rain pours on our faces, but I slowly find myself relaxing. I never thought to lay outside when there’s a thunderstorm happening.

“It was raining the day we ran,” Izel says into the air. “It was raining sort of like this, thunder and lightning.”

I don’t say anything, letting her open up in her own time.

“I was so scared they were going to track our footprints; the mud was making everything difficult. We could barely run, and when they let the dogs out, I’ve never been more scared in my life. Even when Dan beat me, I knew it would end. But when we ran, I knew it was going to be worse. When we get caught, it’s going to be hell. I’m not going to make it out alive.”

“They’re not going to catch you, Red,” I declare. Though I have no idea who they are, or anything. I won’t let “them” touch a single hair on her head, or Gabriel’s.

“Dan has people, no matter where we go, Zion. Someone is going to catch up to us, and eventually we’ll be found.” Izel shifts, her eyes opening as she peeks at me through her lashes.

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“Tell me, Red. Tell me who they are,” I beg, the need to protect her from them nearly becoming overwhelming.

“You can’t go after him.”

“I can and I will. I won’t hesitate to end anyone's life that wants to hurt you. I’ll gladly bury them six feet in the ground for just looking at you. So, tell me, tell me who he is, who they are. I’ll end them,” I vow, not daring to look away from her. Izel is going to understand this. She is going to know that nothing is going to stand between us. I’ll bury them. Bathe in their blood and still wipe out the entire population just because they look at her wrong. Burn the fucking world down for her.

“That’s sweet, but truly you can’t.” She sighs, closing her eyes once more and turning her head towards the sky. “They didn’t hurt me as much as his men did Gabriel. That’s how I found him. Gabriel that is.”

Holding my breath, I wait.

“I got home from studying at the library and found two of them beating Gabriel while his pants were around his ankles. Gabriel was begging them to stop, but they laughed and laughed. I was frozen. I was literally stuck in the doorway, and it wasn’t until one of them began unzipping his pants that I finally moved. Zion,” she whispers my name. Turning my head, there is no doubt she’s crying. “I killed them. I murdered Dan’s best friends because they were hurting my brother, because they were about to rape him. I heard them say they were going to rape and then sell him. And I killed them.”

I don't know if she expects me to think of her differently because she had blood on her hands. But I don't. In an odd way it explains a lot between them. The need to protect him from everything, even me. It explains why she was in the basement.

"I love you," I blurt out.

"W-wait, what?" Izel shoots up, eyes wide as she stares down at me.

"I love you." I didn't plan on telling her, not this soon anyway. But now that the words are out, I can't take them back nor do I want to. She needs to know how I feel.

"No, no, you don't love me. No." Getting to her feet in a flash she begins shaking her head. "You don't love me!" she yells before running off.

18

Zion

"You think I don't fucking love you?"

Izel is fuming, but I am right there with her. "You don't!" she screams, sounding like an angry little kitten.

"I let you touch me," I confess.

"What?" I know I'm going to confuse her, but fuck.

"God damn it, Izel," I growl. She's going to make me say it and for the first time I think I might be okay with it. "I let you touch me, my face, I let you fucking see me. I told you my fucking name within an hour of meeting you. I told you who I was when NO ONE knew." I take a deep breath, willing myself to shut up. But I am already

here. “I couldn’t let you go,” I whisper. The confession spills from my mouth. “I couldn’t let you get onto that bus the first fucking time. For fucks sake, I drove across the country for you!”

“Oh, I’m so sorry for being such an inconvenience for you!” she screams, slamming her hand on the kitchen counter.

My last amount of patience snaps, and I grab her waist. Dragging her body against mine, I dig my fingers into her back.

“If you don’t shut your mouth and let me fucking talk for once, I’m going to bend you over this counter and fuck your sweet pussy until you’re screaming and begging to cum.”

“I’m not even tall enough to be bent over the counter.” She smirks as though she won something.

“Oh so help me, Izel.” I grin, grinding my cock against her warmth. “You think I just let anyone speak to me like this?”

“You know, you talk too much.” She laughs, pushing against my chest. “You never spoke before, and now you really won’t shut the fuck up!”

“Watch your mouth there, Red.”

“Or what?” Laughing once again, she shoves at my chest. Backing off, I’m fuming, moments from doing something I know I’ll regret when she charges at me once more, shoving my chest. “You won’t hurt me but that doesn’t mean you love me.”

“Shut up,” I growl. Grabbing her by the throat, I drag Izel up until she balances on her tippy toes. Her breath hitches, her pupils dilate, and I can see the need. I can feel

her need, her legs tightening around my waist.

“I’m a killer, Red. Anyone else speaks to me like that, I’d put them ten feet in the ground, and no one would ever find the body.”

“You wouldn’t hurt me,” she says with conviction because it’s true. I would never hurt her. I’d hurt myself, kill even before I ever laid a hand on her.

“Never,” I whisper. “Never, Red,” I tell her before crushing our lips together. I want to lick her entire body, to taste her skin on my tongue. I want to devour her, to have her cum so much she fully gives herself over to me.

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Holding her ass with one of my hands, I swipe the kitchen island with the other. Papers and cups scatter across the floor. I can hear glass break somewhere.

“Zio—” I cut her off, not giving her a choice as I lay her down on the island. Pulling her soaked sundress off, I drag her panties down her legs and pocket them.

I don’t give her time as I flatten my tongue against her pussy, groaning as I suck her clit into my mouth. Devouring my meal, I suck and lick. My tongue pushes into her opening.

“Oh, Zion,” Izel moans. Her hands grip my hair, slowly bucking her hips up against my mouth.

Gripping her ass, I throw her legs over my shoulders. Pulling back, my eyes land on her other hole. I’ve been a dying man, not wanting to push her but needing to claim that part of her. The only part I know no one has had.

I need to savor this moment. Ever so slowly, I pull her cheek apart. Izel squeals as I blow air on her hole, seeing it pucker before I dive in. Pressing my tongue against her ass, Izel fists my hair. I expect her to yank my head away, but when she tries to drag me closer. I lose it.

“Zion, oh, oh, God.”

“Who’s your God?” I ask, smacking her ass hard.

Izel grunts, losing herself as I give her my all. I can die a happy man now. Tasting

Izel, smelling her wet pussy, dripping onto my nose.

In a moment I pull back. Izel starts to protest before I flip her onto her stomach. Yanking her hips back, I bend once more, with her ass at eye level.

“I asked you a question, Red,” I growl, working my pants and boxer briefs off. “Don’t make me ask twice.”

With her on her hands and knees, I climb up onto the island behind her.

The moment Izel mumbles, “You are,” I slam into her, listening as she screams. Almost losing control, I stop my movement. Her hands grip the side of the island.

“Tell me something, Izel,” I groan, pulling almost all the way out until just the tip is laying in her opening. “You still think I don’t love you?” I ask.

Izel shakes her head, glancing back at me over her shoulder.

Slamming into her heat, Izel screams, throwing her head back. I grip the back of her head, tangling my fingers into her hair. Yanking her head back, our eyes meet, only causing us both to lose ourselves, me thrusting into her, Izel pushing her ass back into me.

God, I love her too fucking much. I don’t know how I’ve gone so long without her in my life. I want to be everything for her, her best friend, her lover, the shoulder she cries on. I want everything with her.

She’s it for me.

One hand on her hip, I remove my other from her head and wrap it around her throat. Dragging her body up, her back flush against my chest, I bite down on her earlobe.

“You’re not answering me again, Red,” I growl.

“I–I, Zion,” she moans out, her hands gripping my arm.

“I want to hear it. I want to hear you scream, beg. I want you to fucking beg me to come, Izel. Beg me.”

I swear her pussy gushes at my words, clutching around me. She’s strangling my cock, making me lose my mind. She’s tight and, fuck, she is everything.

“I love you.” I kiss the side of her neck, my hand gripping her chin before shoving three fingers into her mouth. Izel gags, causing me to groan. “I love you. I love you,” I repeat over and over again.

This might have started with us just fucking, but now this feels closer to making love. My movements slow, not wanting to cum just yet. I want to stay here, in this moment, in her for the rest of my life.

“I love you, Izel.” I smack her tit, before dragging my hand down her stomach searching out her clit. The moment I touch her, Izel cums. Her voice gargles as she tries catching air but is unable to because of my hand.

“I love you,” I repeat. “Now be a good girl for me and cum again.”

Fucking her relentlessly, I don’t let up. I’m more determined to make sure she knows this isn’t just a fling, and that my love for her is truly endless.

“Who owns you?”

“Fu–you... you do, Zion.” She gasps, digging her nails into my arm that’s holding her neck.

“Then cum for me.”

Flicking her clit once more, Izel sets off. Her mouth hangs open, her eyes wide. I don't fight my control anymore. I lose myself in her. Spilling inside her warmth, her name falls from my lips.

My hands fall from her neck, and I turn her around so we're facing each other. Chest to chest. Her eyes meet mine and although they're hooded, a little cloudier than before, I know she sees me. Leaning down I press my lips against hers. This kiss is much softer than we've done in the past. And though I like hard rough sex, no skin touching, having Izel's naked body pressed against my very own, her hands gripping my shoulders and neck, her needing to be closer to me, needing to touch me sends butterflies swarming around.

Pulling back slightly, Izel sighs, her fingers tracing the tattoos along my arms. Only she won't look at me.

“Why do you feel like I don't love you?” I ask, having the need for her to recognize she's the only woman I see. There was never anyone else, only her.

“I don't know,” she whispers, still not looking at me.

“Izel,” I say, tipping her head up so she'll look at me. “Don't lie to me. I want to hear what you have to say. You've never once shied away from telling me what you think or how you feel. Please don't start now. I'd rather you scream at me, throw a tantrum. I want you to do anything but shut me out. I can't handle you shutting me out. I won't. So, you're going to tell me right here while we're both naked on our kitchen

island. Tell me, why do you think I don't love you, Red?"

Izel's eyes never leave mine. Neither of us blinks. Taking a deep breath, she gives me a small smile.

"I'm a lot. I'm too much. I grew up with a shit parent, and Mom died when I was young. My father, he was abusive, he said things. He said no one would want me and well after a while I believed him. I couldn't help it, you know, the things he would say. I was so young and well, as you know, I'm a loudmouth." Smirking up at me, I can't help but smile back. Because it's true, she is a loudmouth and I love her for it.

"It's hard to believe anyone could love me, even Gabriel. I mean he's my brother for heaven's sake. But I'm a lot to deal with. I hate the taste of meat, but I love all sweets. I love my coffee, I have a big mouth, and never know when I need to shut up."

Izel's breath comes in ragged moments from having a full-on panic attack. I know Izel suffers from them silently, never wanting others to know what she's actually feeling inside.

"Izel, you are a lot. You talk too much, the caffeine addiction, the sugar addiction you have is out of this world. Don't even get me started on the fact you never pick up your dirty clothes. You always miss the hamper, which makes no sense to me. The toothpaste cap is always screwed on wrong, the amount of hair you leave on the shower wall, along with the fucking drain..."

"I'm sorry I'm such a problem," Izel snaps, trying to wiggle her way off my lap. Only I'm not having it. I won't let her go.

"Stop fucking moving," I growl, tightening my arms around her waist. "I never once said it was a problem. I don't know if you notice but I tolerate very little, especially from those who I don't give a shit about. So, tell me, Izel, if I didn't love you would I

let you do any of that? The answer is no, I wouldn't. I love you. I love everything about you." Tipping her chin up once more, I lay it all out for her.

"I bought a coffee machine for you, and I will gladly pick up all your dirty clothes because I love you being naked. I love you naked in our bed. I don't care that your hair is everywhere because that means you're here. I've picked up so much of your hair that is wrapped around my balls and ass. But I wouldn't change it."

Izel chuckles, her eyes softening at my words. I never want her to second guess what I want. Because she's all I want, every day, all day. She's the one I think about when I wake up and when I fall asleep. As cliché as that sounds, she is. She's my whole world.

"Just be patient with me?"

"I'll remind you every day, Red."

"Every day, huh?" She laughs, just as the back door opens. Both of us stiffen, realizing we are naked in the middle of the kitchen, and Gabriel is about to walk in on us.

Unfortunately, neither of us move fast enough because when Gabriel rounds the corner, he stops in his tracks, eyes wide. And right behind him is my mother.

"Oh for fucks sake." Gabriel slams his eyes shut, while my mother cocks her head to the side, frowning at me.

"Zion Wyatt Rain, didn't I teach you better? If you're going to have sex with a girl, you can't do it in the middle of the kitchen!" she hisses, letting out a laugh, her head falling back.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” I mutter.

19

Izel

“So, Izel, Gabriel, how did you meet my son?” Zion's mother asked.

I almost laugh at her question, because not even fifteen minutes ago not only did she walk in on us, but so did my brother. I expected her to yell at us and be completely disgusted by our actions. Yet, they both turned their backs so we could run upstairs and clean ourselves up. When we finally come downstairs, we find Gabriel laughing while his mother bleached the countertop talking about how she didn't raise him in a barn.

It's odd seeing a caring parent.

"Well I met him out in the woods while he had a gun aimed at me," Gabriel finally answers, shoving a banana into his mouth.

Ms. Rain gasps before shooting daggers at her son. I can't help myself but laugh ready to tell her all about how I met him.

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"And I met him while he was standing over a cage, I was in."

Now what I don't expect is for her to march her little five-foot five self over to Zion's giant form and grab his ear until he's bending down to her height.

"OW, Ma!" Zion squeals. Neither Gabriel nor I can hold ourselves together, watching his mother handle Zion. It's refreshing.

"Zion Wyatt Rain, I thought I taught you better than this!" she yells. I can practically see the steam coming from her ears. "Boy, I'm going to put you six f—"

"Ms. Rain, he sav—"

She barely glances my way as she says, "Oh, darling, it's Ma or Louise. I'd prefer Ma, but it's totally up to you." Turning her attention back to her son, she says, "Back to you. Six feet into the ground is going to be your new home. I'm going to sell all your belongings. Adopt these two beautiful children and then I'm going to pi—"

"Okay, okay, okay. Louise." Stepping forward I decide to put him out of his misery. Zion's wide eyes soften as I make it over to them. "Your son has been nothing but accommodating to both me and my brother."

"Wait, what?"

Letting out a chuckle, I shrug. "Zion has been nothing but nice and sweet towards us. He saved not only my life but drove across the country to save my brother. He's opened his home to us and is allowing us to stay in his house."

“Our,” he mutters, his gaze focused on me.

Rolling my eyes, I turn back towards Louise and smile brightly. Getting a closer look at her, they both have the same eye shape, though I don’t know what color they are. I only know Zion’s because he told me, blue. While I can slightly see the shade of light-colored hair, it could be blonde like Zion or a light brown.

“They’re blue like mine, a little darker than mine. And her hair is light brown, not as dark as the night, but not as light as my hair. She’s got some gray though.” Zion chuckles. Turning my head up, I hadn’t even realized he’s now standing next to me in front of Louise.

“Oh, dear, are you blind?” she asks, her hands cupping her cheeks. I try not to flinch at her question, yet I do. No matter how much time has passed, I will never get used to others asking me. I hate feeling like my color blindness is a problem, or the fact my eyes struggle some days. It’s a nuisance.

“Ma!” Zion growls, his arm yanking me against him. “You can’t just ask someone that.”

“I didn’t mean anything by it, I’m sorry.” She frowns at both of us.

Taking a deep breath, I shake my head. “No, no I’m not blind. Not completely. I’m color blind. And, well, I do have some blindness sometimes. Like blurry vision, so if you see me squinting my eyes or staring really hard at you...” With a nervous laugh, I shrug my shoulders. “Don’t mind me.”

My feet dare me to run away. I can feel my skin itch and burn with the uncomfortable silence.

She nods her head as though she understands. Zion’s arm tightens around my waist,

his thumb rubbing circles into my side. The only thing that's calming me down.

"Well, while this has been wonderful to watch, I'm getting real hungry. So, unless you, Zion, or you Ma... Is it cool if I call you that too? I imagine I can do that because that's my sister over here. But, yeah, annnnnyway, can we order a pizza or something?" Gabriel breaks the heavy conversation, sending, thanks to him, through nothing but the air between us.

Louise lets out a laugh. "Come on." She waves her hand towards Gabriel. "What are you thinking, do you guys like pasta and lettuce? Chicken?"

"She's a vegetarian, Ma."

"That's wonderful, dear. Alright, come help me, Gabriel. Let those two go cuddle or whatever they like to do." Sending a wink towards us, my face flushes beet red. This is so embarrassing.

"Those two sure love to cuddle, I can hear them all night," Gabriel mutters under his breath.

While I'm sure I look like a tomato, Louise and Zion laugh so loud my ears ring. Elbowing Zion in the side, I glare up at him. Blaming him for letting my little brother hear whatever we do.

"Come on, Red, let's go cuddle." Zion walks away laughing, leaving me behind as I glare at the back of his big head.

"Wow, Louise," I moan around the fork of noodles and mushrooms. "You'll have to give Zion the recipe for it so he can make it for me some time," I say, shoveling another forkful of food into my mouth.

"Zion, have you not been feeding this poor girl?" Ma asks, turning all serious.

Zion who sits next to me, hand on my thigh, stops midchew and glances over at me. Swallowing his barely chewed food, he looks uncertain as if I haven't been eating enough. Surely, he knows I eat all the time. I've gained the weight I lost from being locked away and a few extra pounds.

I smile.

"He cooks for me all the time."

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“He better.” She searches my face, waiting for me to lie. When she seems satisfied that I’m telling the truth, she continues eating. Zion rubs my thigh before he carries on eating.

We all eat while Gabriel and Louise talk the majority of the time. I keep waiting for her to ask why we’re two young kids on the run, or why he was in the woods while I was locked in a cage. I don’t know what I would tell her because I haven’t even told Zion the whole truth. He knows some of our past. But there’s so much to unpack, I can’t even find the words or strength to tell him.

“So are you two coming over for Christmas?” Louise asks later that evening while she and I clean the kitchen up. Gabriel and Zion both sit in the living room playing some sort of video game.

“Oh, I’m not sure. I mean, I don’t know if...”

“Dear, don’t be so nervous. It’s usually just Zion and I, so I would love it if you both come with him. Plus, I’m sure he’ll either drag you with him or stay back with you.” She chuckles, rinsing off the dish before carefully handing it to me.

“I’m not sure what you mean.” Wiping off the plate, I place it off to the side.

“Zion.” Louise says his name like it answers everything. It doesn’t though, it just raises more questions.

“I’m sorry, I’m not following along,” I mutter. I wait for her to call me stupid or anything negative for that matter. I almost flinch when Louise brushes against my

arm.

“Izel,” she softly says. Lifting my head to hers, I’m shocked to see tears forming in her eyes as she cups her hands against her chest. “Someone hurt you, didn’t they?”

I don’t know if this is a rhetorical question or what, but it causes my eyes to water. I don’t have to answer her question either because she’s nodding her head, brushing her tears away.

“Zion cares for you deeply. No, don’t you dare protest. I’ve never seen him with another woman, even when he was a kid. There was one girl. Aziza, I’m not sure if he ever brought her up, but they were best friends, and she was completely in love with his best friend Killian. I’m not entirely sure what happened to them. Zion, love my son, but he doesn’t handle his feelings very well sometimes. So, you, my dear, are the first girl I’ve ever seen him with. And don’t think I don’t know what you two were doing before I showed up.”

Light my face on fire. Because that's what it feels like. I’m embarrassed that she’s bringing that up. And even more embarrassed that I’m once again doubting Zion’s feelings for me. What am I supposed to do, tell him to get my name tattooed on his body?

“And from the way he’s looking at you right now, I’d say he wants a repeat of the kitchen island.” Louise laughs.

I spin around, and sure enough Zion is staring at me. I clench my thighs together, nearly counting down the minutes until I can have a repeat of that kitchen island too.

Zion

Later that evening after convincing Ma to finally leave, Izel stands in front of me as I

work the shampoo into her red hair. “What did Ma say to you?” I ask, massaging the base of her neck.

“She invited us to Christmas.” Izel hums.

“Here, rinse,” I tell her, helping her get rid of the soap suds. Moving her back, I grab the conditioner bottle. “You looked worried.”

It didn’t take a genius to figure out what feelings Izel has at a certain time. She’s easy to read.

“There was more discussion than her just asking you to Christmas dinner, Red,” I murmur against her shoulder, pressing a kiss before slightly sucking on her skin.

Izel moans, trying to turn her body towards me.

“Rinse,” I order. Doing as she’s told, her hair is rinsed clean before I grab the body wash.

“Why are you washing me?” Izel glances at me over her shoulder.

Shrugging my shoulders, I continue working the cloth over her skin, making sure to wash every single part of her. My eyes snag on the scars across her stomach. Kneeling down, I press my lips against them. My tongue darts out, I lick the words that shouldn’t be carved into her skin.

“Zion...” Izel moans, her hands grip my hair.

“What did Ma talk to you about?” Gripping her hips, I hold her still.

“It doesn’t matter.” Izel tries to drag my head back to her stomach. One thing I know

about this girl is physical touch is her love language. And the one thing that I love doing is touching her.

“It matters.” I tighten my grip on her hips. I know I’m leaving bruises.

“She said you love me.”

“I do.” I make sure my eyes latch onto hers. I know she doubts my feelings, but I won’t have it.

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Realizing she hasn't said anything, I stand up so I'm towering over her. My hand latches around her neck. "You're doubting me." It's a statement. Because that's what Izel does, she makes things up in her head until she believes them.

"Hm, I don't know," she says, dragging her hands to my biceps. "I just, I'm sorry. I don't know why, why I make things up. I don't. I don't even know what I'm saying." She lets out a heavy sigh, her hands dropping from my arms, and I see the defect. My girl went so long without affection, without someone besides her brother telling her that they love her.

"Tell me what you need, pretty girl." Cupping her cheek, I wait patiently for Izel to tell me what she needs from me. I'll give her anything, I don't care what it is.

"Just love me," she finally whispers.

"I already do, Red." I smile.

"No," she says, shaking her head. I open my mouth to protest when she stops me. "No, make love to me, show me you love me," she begs and I'm at her mercy. "Love me rough, just..." Tears gather in her eyes. I don't like the sight of her crying.

"On your knees." Fisting the back of her head, she falls to her knees immediately. My cock lengthens in pure sight of her on her knees for me. Her hands grab my thighs, and I don't even have to tell her to open her mouth.

"Hands behind your back," I grunt. My hand wraps around the base of my cock, precum dripping from my tip. The moment her hands are around her back, I'm

tugging her awaiting mouth on my cock. I groan as I hit the back of her throat, and she gags. Tears fall from her eyes, yet I don't let up.

This is what she wants. She wants me to be rough, to fuck the love into her. So that's what I plan to do.

I thrust into her mouth. "Fucking choke," I demand, and on queue she does. Her throat contracts around my length and I nearly cum on the spot.

"I own you, Izel, you hear me. I fucking own you." My voice is rough. I barely recognize myself. "You're my good girl, aren't you?"

Keeping up a slow pace, Izel nods around me, spit spilling down on her chin. It's a glorious sight. Izel's perfect mouth wraps around my cock. Gripping her hair tighter she hisses, trying to wiggle herself back.

"Where do you think you're going?" I growl. Shoving my cock back into her mouth, Izel releases her hands from behind her back. Gripping my thighs, she drags her nails down them, drawing blood. The sight sends me into a frenzy and my thrusting becomes sloppy.

"Such a good little whore," I murmur. Dragging my hand from the back of her head, I place my finger into her mouth beside my cock pulling her lip back. "Whose whore, are you?"

Izel mumbles around me, pulling back as she gasps for air. "I'm yours," she wheezes, her eyes locked onto mine. "I'm your whore."

"Yes, you are," I coo.

Izel's tongue peaks out, running it against her bottom lip before she drags it between

her teeth. The way her doe eyes are pinning me with that seductive look, I'm losing my mind. Reaching down, I hike her body up against mine, her legs wrapping around my waist.

Popping one of her pink pebbled nipples into my mouth, I suck. Izel throws her head back moaning as she wraps her hands around the back of my head.

"I love you," I exclaim. "I love you." Popping off her tits, my hands squeeze her glorious ass, spreading my fingers. I inch them forward until her warm wet pussy swallows one of my fingers.

"Zion," she begs. Moving my finger in and out of her pussy, I walk us to the bedroom.

Lying down, Izel straddles my thighs, her eyes darting down to my hard and painful cock. Grabbing her throat, her eyes widen yet the need is there.

"Lean up," I order. Grabbing the base of my cock I tilt it towards the opening of her cunt. "Lean down."

Ever so slowly, her cunt engulfs me, letting out a low growl. Holy fucking fuckkkkkkk. She's so tight, so warm, and so fucking mine. Her hands brace against my chest as she slowly lifts up and then lowers herself again.

"Suck," I tell her, holding one of my fingers to her mouth. She does as I tell her, making my finger a nice dripping mess. Pulling my hand back, I keep the other wrapped around her neck as I reach around until my finger presses against her asshole.

"Zion," Izel gasps. Circling my finger against her hole, I wait to see if she's going to protest. Only when she gives me a small smile and her eyes start rolling back do I

press my finger a little harder until it slips past that overly tight ring of muscle. Izel's pussy strangles my cock as my finger presses inside before she clamps her hands onto my chest, and she cums.

"Does my girl like my fingers up her ass?"

"Yes," she breathes out.

"Yes, you do. But only my fingers, right? Right, because you're fucking mine. Mine, Izel. This is my ass; this is my cunt I'm fucking. All fucking mine." I plunge two fingers into her ass, thrusting my hips up.

"Yes, yes yours," she yells.

"That's right, all fucking mine. Soon my cock is going to be in this ass."

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Izel's ass clenches. Letting go of her throat, I drag her face down to mine. Our foreheads mash together, her arms circling around my head.

“My girl likes that idea. You like the idea of my cock being shoved deep in your ass, my fingers in your pussy. I could shove my fist in your cunt, and you'd love it.” Latching onto her neck, I alternate between sucking and licking her neck as she fucks herself on my cock and my fingers move inside her ass.

“Zion,” she moans out. “Fuck, fuck my ass.”

Pulling back, I search her face for any hesitant feelings. If she truly wants my fat cock in her ass. Removing my fingers, I smack her ass.

“Sh-sh,” Izel hisses.

“On your back,” I order.

Izel sits back, slowly moving off me. “Shouldn't I, I don't know, be on my hands and knees? I mean, wouldn't it be easier?” she asks, sitting back on her knees.

Sitting up, I reach for her. “Is that how you want me to fuck your ass for the first time?” I ask crawling my way up her body until she is forced to lie on her back. Grabbing her foot I press my lips against her heel, kissing up her foot, leg, I ignore her pussy. Kissing up her stomach, licking her nipple. It's not until I reach her mouth does she attack.

Thrusting her tongue into my mouth she whimpers. Blinding reaching into the

bedside table I grab the bottle of lube. Hiking her legs up, squirt lube along my cock, before drizzling some on her hole. Leading my cock to her ass, I press against that ring of muscle she tenses, gripping my shoulders.

“Relax,” I murmur against her lips. “This is the worst of it, I’ll make it all better.” I pepper her with kisses along her jaw, as she slowly relaxes, allowing me to ease my way into her ass.

“You’re doing so well,” I praise.

“Love me like you do,” she whines, trying to move her hips.

Picking up my pace, I sit back watching as my cock moves in and out of her ass. Shoving two fingers into her cunt, I slam into her over and over again.

“I fucking own you, Izel,” I growl, not giving a damn that the bed is moments from breaking. It slams against the wall, repeatedly. I feel like a man possessed. “You’re mine and you’re not getting rid of me.”

I’ll follow her to the grave, I don’t fucking care. She’s mine, I don’t care about anything else.

“Z–Zion. I’m going to cum, fu-fu.” Izel’s ass clenches my cock, my fingers press against her clit, and she explodes. Pressing my lips against hers I swallow her screams, as I pump myself once, twice, and then I erupt, grunting into her mouth as I release into her.

“I love you, Izel,” I say kissing her nose. “Don’t doubt my love for you again.”

“I won’t.” She yawns, rubbing her dainty fingers along my side.

Gripping her chin, I turn us so she's lying on me, my cock slipping from her warmth. "Don't ever doubt my feelings for you again. I'll tie you to my bed, pound that sweet pussy and ass all day until you're begging me to stop. Only I won't stop. I don't care who sees. I'll claim you in front of everyone. You're mine, Izel."

"You're mine, Zion," she declares, her smile widening.

"Damn straight, Red," I growl before I'm claiming her mouth one more time.

I try to take a deep breath, only to have something block my nose. Opening my mouth, I get a little air into my lungs before I'm opening my eyes and pushing whatever is covering my face. It takes a minute for my eyes to adjust when I notice Izel sitting on my stomach, a pillow in her hand.

"Were you just trying to suffocate me?" I ask, confused on what her intentions were. If she was trying to kill me, suffocating me wouldn't be the best option. I can easily overpower her.

"Yes."

"Why?" I ask, folding my hands behind my head.

"You were snoring, and it was annoying me," she grunts, shoving the pillow back over my face. "I flicked you in the forehead and even smacked your arm, but you didn't move or shut up. Actually, your snoring got worse."

"I don't snore." Or I don't think I do. How was I supposed to know? I was asleep.

Pulling the pillow back she glares at me, and I smile.

"You do, and you twitch in your sleep. You also mumble, and it's annoying. If I don't

fall asleep before you, you annoy me, and I cannot fall sleep. I don't like it!" she growls, pushing my chest into the mattress.

"I wasn't aware I snored, sorry." Smirking, I grab the back of her neck moments from kissing her when she opens her mouth shocking me with her words.

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“All forgiven.” She smiles again on my mouth.

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Izel

“It’s someone’s birthday...”

I keep my eyes closed, hoping they’ll think I’m asleep and not bother with their plan. It’s a weekend thing, and as much as I begged and cried neither of them cared. They liked when I cried my heart out. They liked when I begged them to stop hurting me. They even liked when everyone was drunk enough that the screams were drowned out.

I hate them both. I want them to die, painfully and slowly.

“We know you’re awake.” Of course, they do, that’s the problem. Even if I want to sleep, I can’t because every little sound wakes me up. The fear of them entering my room, the one place I’m supposed to be safe and protected. But I’m not. I never am.

I can hear the club sluts screaming and moaning in the hallway. Men laughing, beer bottles crashing to the ground.

“Harder, Daddy.”

“Fuck me.”

I want to gag, but I don't want them to know I'm awake. Even if they know. If I play dead maybe, maybe they'll take the hint.

Don't be so stupid, Izel.

Suddenly one of them grabs my ankle, yanking me down the bed. I try to scream, to keep them off me, but Tiger's hand clamps around my mouth. I can smell the whiskey. He's always the drunk one, while Reaper is always sober. He knows what he is doing.

"Please," I beg, my voice muffled around his hand. My eyes finally open. Everything is blurry, only a tiny light from under the door lightening the room.

"Aw, she's begging us. Are you begging for our touch?" Reaper mocks, his hand dragging up my inner calf towards my thigh.

Shaking my head, I try backing away. But twelve-year-old me has no power over men three times my age. "Please stop, don't," I hiss, tears forming in my eyes.

"You love it." Tiger laughs, gripping my chin before he rips my nightshirt down, exposing my small boobs.

Screaming, I thrash around. Reaper holds my legs apart, his hands reaching for the waist of my pants while Tiger grabs my nipple yanking hard.

I can't move, I'm paralyzed, held down by grown men who take from me. Take something that doesn't belong to them. My eyes slam shut, wishing for someone to walk in and stop them. For Dan to give a shit about me and make them stop. For Gabriel to be passed out so he won't witness this in the next room over.

"Ah, is my girl going to get wet for me?" Reaper asks, his hands dragging my pants

down to my ankle. My nipples hurt from Tiger pulling on them and my screams are muffled. Both of them laugh moments before Reaper's finger enters me.

I jerk awake, pressing my hand to my chest trying to calm my heavy beating heart. Sweat drips down my face, tears forming in my eyes. I can't catch my breath; a strangled gasp leaves me. Opening my eyes, I can't see anything.

No, no, no.

I cry harder, sobbing into the blanket. I can't see, my vision is gone. I try to listen for where I could be, but the only sound is the pressure in my ears. I can't do this. My vision is gone. They're going to come back, and I can't do it anymore. I can't.

"Izel?" My name being called is a beacon. Something is going to happen. Something bad.

I squeeze my eyes shut harder, willing my vision to come back. Opening them again, all I see is total blindness. I'm never going to see again. I'll never see my brother's pale freckled face, his goofy smile. I'll never see Zion... Zion.

I only cry harder.

"Izel...." That voice again is closer, I can feel the dip in the mattress.

"No, no, no. Don't touch me!" I yell, scooting back against the headboard, fumbling with the covers, trying to get my eyesight back. Just to get me away from them.

"Red." Zion.

I turn my head towards the sound, eyes open. "Z-Zion?" I stutter, willing my hiccups to calm down.

“It’s me, Red.”

I feel movement slowed, and his hand suddenly grips my knee. I jerk back unused to not seeing again.

“Fuck,” Zion mutters ripping his hand from me.

“No, please don’t,” I beg, realizing it probably looks and sounds like I don’t want him to touch me. “Grab my hand, please.” I shakily hold my hand out, waiting until he places his overly large hand in mine. I nearly sob when his familiar, callused hand grips mine.

“What’s wrong?” he asks, pulling my body to his.

“N-nightmare.” Fumbling to wrap my arms around his neck, I breathe into his neck. Pine and honey wood. The same smell he had when he grabbed me from that basement. It was him; it was truly him. Sobbing into his neck, I know I’m hurting his neck from the force I’m embedding my nails.

Zion hisses but doesn't stop me.

“Come on, Red.” Suddenly I’m being lifted, slowly. I can feel him moving around the bed before his back settles against something. “Shh, it’s okay. I’m here. I’m right here, I’m not going anywhere,” he repeats over and over again. Reminding me that this stranger, who is no longer truly a stranger, has shown me more compassion than my own blood has.

“There were two of them that raped me from the time I was eleven until fifteen. It didn’t stop because they wanted to, or someone found out. They had to stop because Dan sent them to a different club. On the bus, that, uh, that was the first time I’ve seen one of them since.” I don’t know why I’m suddenly rambling on about what Tiger and Reaper have done to me. I’ve accepted it. I do my best to not let them affect me anymore. But it’s always around this time of year that I get nightmares.

“And you still don’t want me to go after them?” Zion’s voice is rough with anger, and I can tell he barely holds on to what little control he has.

“There’s a lot of them, Zion, a lot.”

“I can get help if you’re that worried.” He grabs my neck forcing my face back. I refuse to open my eyes and that only seems to make him more upset. “Open them!” he growls.

I’m weak because I can’t deny him.

Nothing.

And I refuse to cry over not seeing, especially in front of Zion. I don’t want him to think of me as weak.

“They’re blurrier,” he murmurs, pressing his lips against my nose, and I lose it. Tears stream down my face.

“It’s a bad day,” I mumble. Hoping he understands what I’m saying without having to actually say the words.

“Then let me be your eyes, Red. Let me show you that you don’t need your eyes to see,” he whispers against my lips, licking along the seam of my mouth.

Opening my mouth, he controls our kiss, and that's fine with me. I surrender myself to him. Zion might have found me by accident, but my feelings for him aren't. My hands reach for his face, loving that he drags me closer to him before he lifts and lays us down. I'm straddling his stomach, his hands holding my sides for dear life.

I can feel his hardness. And I love it. That kissing me can cause this reaction from him.

"Sit on my face." Zion pulls away, his hands grabbing my waist.

"Uh, what?"

"I said, sit on my face," he growls, pulling on my sleep shorts. And for some reason he doesn't have to tell me twice. Though he did, I don't need him to tell me again. Helping to shimmy out of my shorts, I climb up his body, realizing he has taken his shirt off. I fumble with trying to sit myself on his face. Thankfully Zion grabs my ass and lifts me up until I'm set down directly on his awaiting mouth.

"Oh, lord." I moan, his mouth latching onto my clit and sucking hard.

My full weight is sitting on this man's face. I'm smothering him, I have to be. I shouldn't be this turned on from suffocating him, but holy moly. I'm more turned on then I've ever been, and Zion seems to be enjoying it as well.

It's faint but I hear his zipper before the movement of the bed shaking from jacking off. He's turned on and jacking off just from eating my pussy.

"Oh, god," I moan. Cupping my tits, I squeeze and before I know it, I begin rocking my hips. Needing his tongue deeper and harder. But also needing his mouth to latch back on my clit.

Suddenly Zion bites my clit before his tongue plunges into my hole and I cum. Zion grunts underneath me. Taking it as my cue to move, I attempt to lift. My legs are weak from my orgasm, yet Zion grips my thigh with one hand, stopping. I'm unsure what he wants, until he groans into my pussy, his tongue going lax.

Finally, he lets me scoot back so I'm once again sitting on his chest. His arms wrap around my thighs, and his breathing slowly calms.

"I don't think I've ever cum so hard." He laughs into the room. "Holy shit."

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“Same.” I laugh, feeling like the weight of my nightmare is wearing off.

“Come on, let’s shower.” Zion’s hands grab me under my armpits, lifting me as a child. Clinging to him, since I can’t see, he walks us towards the bathroom.

“Wait, what time is it?” I ask.

“Nine,” he answers, the sound of the door clicking shut and the lock. “Here, I’m going to set you down on the counter so I can get the shower started.”

Nodding my head, he carefully places me down. Pulling my knees to my chest, I hear him move around, the steam filling the air.

“Arms up,” he says from in front of me. Awkwardly putting my arms up, Zion peels the shirt off me. I almost expect his hands to linger to touch me, but he doesn’t. Instead, he once again lifts me off the counter, placing me on my feet. Taking my hand, he walks me to the shower, and I try my best not to trip over my own feet.

“Feel the water and tell me if it’s too hot or cold.” Lifting my hand in his, we touch the water.

“It’s perfect.” I smile at where I think his face would be, but honestly can’t be too sure.

Pulling me into the shower, I trip over the step nearly falling until Zion pulls me up. “I got you.”

Setting me off to the side, the water hits my side. I try not to flinch when he begins washing and rinsing my hair. Moving to my body, he slowly washes every area, never lingering.

For the first time, I'm cared for, and I sigh in relief. The feeling of someone not taking advantage of me. His calloused hands glide over my bare skin, and I find myself smiling into the shower.

"What's got you smiling over there, Red?" Zion asks me, his hand rubbing my shoulders.

"This is the first time someone has shown me kindness." I almost hate admitting it, but it feels good.

"That makes me angry."

"Why?" I ask, turning my head.

"I'm a killer, Izel. I'm not a kind person."

"Are you mad because you're being kind to me, or something else?" I'm confused about what's making him angry.

"It's easy to be kind to you, you make me want to do better. You've been hurt your entire life and yet you show the world your heart and you're kind. It's hard to understand those who would want to hurt you," he explains, his lips pressing against my shoulder blade.

"Would you ever stop killing?" I finally ask. I don't know what causes me to ask, but the question seems important.

“I’m not sure,” he finally answers, his hands disappearing from me. I try not to panic. Not being able to see causes my other senses to heighten. I can feel him behind me, but I want his touch. I need his touch.

“Hmmm, how did you know that, uh, something was wrong?” I ask, holding my arms over my chest, feeling self-conscious.

“You were moving around a lot,” he mumbles. His hand reappears on my shoulder as he drags me into him.

“Does that mean you were watching me?” I ask, smiling into his hard warm chest.

“When you say it like that it makes me sound like a creep,” he grunts, “but, yes. I was watching you sleep.”

I should think it’s weird, that he’s a creep. But it oddly makes me feel safe and warm. I like that he watches over me even when I’m at my most vulnerable.

He is always saving me.

21

Zion

Idon’tknowwhois more nervous, Izel or me?

Gabriel is perfectly fine, hands pressed against the window watching the snowfall.

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While Izel and I hold onto each other's hand, her leg bouncing against the passenger door as she hums to the Christmas music, per Gabriel's request. I want to bash my head into the steering to stop the nerves wrecking my body that I'm finally bringing a girl home to meet Ma.

Sure a few weeks ago they met after the kitchen island incident, but this was the first time I'm bringing a girl home. It's serious, and, fuck, are my hands sweating? Or is it her hands? I purposely take the long way to Ma's house, trying to come up with any reason why we can't just go back home. Maybe we could get stuck in a snowstorm, but so far, no such luck. I really need to stop murdering people and get my luck back up.

"Are we lost?" Gabriel asks from the back seat. "I think we passed that tree a few times already."

And a few more times won't hurt anyone. The snow is coming down a little harder now and if I just keep getting "lost," then we can just go back home.

Home.

"Zion." Izel squeezes my hand. "Are we lost?" She smiles, peeking over at me. She knows I'm not lost. I should know where my mother lives. I've only gone there a million times.

Shaking my head, I turn my blinker on and finally head down Ma's private road. While the road used to feel like it took forever until her house came into view, it only lasts two seconds before I'm pulling up next to her sedan.

“Wow.” Izel drops my hand, shoving the door open. Gabriel is right behind her, both of them staring at Ma’s house.

Turning the truck off, I make my way around the hood, stopping next to Izel. “Stop helping yourself down. Wait for me.” I growl.

“What color is it?” she asks. Ignoring me she reaches for my hand.

“Baby blue, white windowsills,” Gabriel answers, just as Ma swings the door open.

“What are you crazy kids doing out there? Get inside!” Ma waves us in. Gabriel takes off running up the stairs barely pausing to hug her. Ma laughs, waiting for us.

Izel tries to drop my hand as she takes off. Refusing, she yanks my hand, dragging me up the stairs. Izel wraps one arm around Ma due to the fact I’m still holding onto her hand. I know I should let go; my mother is bound to say something about me being possessive.

Which comes true when Izel backs away and I one arm hug Ma. “Can’t let her go, huh?” She attempts to whisper but fails because Izel giggles behind me.

“Never.” I smile over at Izel, who blushes and once again tries to drop my hand.

“Alright, come on, children. Hams in the oven. Zion I need you to get started on those mashed potatoes. Do you or Gabriel cook?” Ma asks, rushing into the kitchen. “Izel, are you allergic to anything?”

“No, ma’am.”

“What have I told you about this ma’am? It’s either Ma or Louise, please. Gabriel, are you allergic to anything?”

“Uh, well... just strawberries,” he mutters, shoving another cookie into his mouth.

“Well, then, I guess I won’t be making my famous strawberry pie.” Ma shrugs. I have no idea what this strawberry pie is and that she even made it. So, when Izel glances up at me, I shrug and walk over to the kitchen table, pulling her down onto my lap.

“These cookies are delicious; you must show me how they’re made.” Gabriel shoves another cookie into his mouth, walking over to the fridge and grabbing a beer.

“Gabriel Hollow!” Izel stands from my lap, dropping my hand. “First off, no beer for fucks sake, you’re only twelve! Second, did you even ask if you could have something to drink, or heck, to eat before you just come in here like you own the house!”

“Honey, you both don’t need to ask to drink something here! My home is your home.” Ma smiles brightly at Izel. “We have tons of juice, soda somewhere in there, oh, and Zion’s favorite!”

“His favorite?” Izel gives me a puzzled look.

“Chocolate milk, of course! I’m surprised you haven’t seen the gallons he keeps inside his fridge.” Ma laughs, getting busy making the gravy. “Mashed potatoes, my boy.”

Oh, right. I’m supposed to make mashed potatoes. How can I forget while my mother’s revealing I have a slight obsession with chocolate milk? Ignore the fact I’m a thirty-three-year-old man, who kills people for a living, who enjoys chocolate milk more than a three-year-old toddler.

“Zion...” Gabriel tries to hide his laugh. While Izel on the other hand doesn’t. She burst out laughing, hands on her knees as she attempts to control herself.

“How did we not know this?” Izel wheezes out.

Probably because the fridge in the garage holds a dozen gallons.

I don't say anything as I wash, peel, and cut potatoes, ignoring the three hooligans laughing at me.

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“You sure he’ll be safe?” Izel asks, glancing back at the house.

“He’ll be fine. Ma won’t let anything happen to him.” My mother might look innocent, short and like she wouldn’t hurt a fly. But she knows how to get shit done if the time comes, especially if it comes to children.

“We won’t be gone for long, right?”

“Izel, will you just trust me?” I sigh, knowing if she really doesn’t want to leave, I’ll turn around and take her back to the house.

She looks up at me, and for a moment I’m taken back to when I found her. She had to be scared down there alone, yet she trusted me enough to get her out.

“I do trust you,” Izel whispers, wrapping her arms around my waist. “It’s just, we trusted someone before, and they ended up delivering us back to Dan. After that we only trusted each other and it’s hard to know who’s helping us and who’s in their back pocket.”

“Just say the word and I’ll bury them,” I declare. I don’t care who it is, they don’t call me The Butcher for nothing.

“They’re bad people, Zion, and I don’t want you getting hurt because of us.”

“You can’t live your life on the run, Red.”

“I know, he deserves better. He’s twelve he should be going to school, hanging out

with his friends. Not worried that a gang of men are going to come to rape and murder—” Izel stops talking mid-sentence, and slowly she looks up at me.

I already know what I look like, my eyes narrowing at her words, and my hands fisted at my sides. I’m moments away from contacting Aziza and Killian to find where this “gang” is and put an end to their lives.

“I shouldn’t have said that,” she mumbles.

“They’re going to die either way, Red. Either when they come looking for you or I go looking for them. So, like I said, either way, Izel, they’re going to die. It just depends on where and how.” Sidestepping her I throw the shed door open.

Killian can figure out who Izel is and track down the fuckers that are intent on hurting Gabriel and her. I’ll kill every single one of them, bathe in their blood, create a fucking warpath just for the ones who bullied Izel in school. I don’t fucking care. I’ll tear them apart, make them regret ever laying their eyes on her. Gouge their fucking eyes out and shove a barbe—

Izel’s arms wrap around my waist, her chest against my back. Pressing her lips against the middle of my back, I’m instantly calm.

“You can’t take them all by yourself, I can’t lose you too,” she whispers.

“You’re not going to lose me, Red.”

I might not have cared much about dying before. I walked into a building not fearing I wouldn’t walk out. I knew I was better than those others. I still know I’m better, but now I have a reason to live.

Izel.

“Come on, let’s go for a ride.” Opening the cabinet, I take out Ma’s snow pants, helping Izel into them. Grabbing gloves for both of us, we slip them on before I’m pushing the snowmobile out the door and into the snow.

“You know how to drive this thing, right?”

Grabbing the helmets, I pull it on top of her beanie-covered head. Clasp ing it around her chin, I can’t resist kissing her button nose.

“I do. If you can trust me with a motorcycle, then you can trust me on this.” Swinging my leg over, Izel follows, settling in behind me. Wrapping her arms around my waist, she leaves some room between our bodies.

“Scoot closer, don’t need you flying off into the snow,” I joke.

“Wow, is this Zion, the cranky man joking around?” Izel scoots until there’s no separation between us.

“I can joke sometimes,” I mutter, cranking the throttle. Izel lets out a squeal as I take off, the snow and trees blurring.

We ride over the hills; Izel giggles every time we hit a dip making our stomachs drop. Once we reach the clearing, I pull off to the side shutting the snowmobile off.

“That was the most fun I think I ever had.” Izel laughs. “Man, that was so fun.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed it, Red.” Removing my helmet, I help Izel out of hers before pulling her into my lap.

“I have a question,” she finally says.

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“When don’t you?”

“You’re on a roll with these jokes, Zion.” Rolling her eyes at me, she says, “It’s a question, but also a request. I want to go with you on a hunt.”

Snapping my head back, I furrow my brows, confused. “A hunt?”

“Yes, you haven’t done any contracts since we’ve been here. Well, that one. But I know you haven’t because we’re here, and well I want to go with you on one.”

“Why?”

She’s right. I haven’t taken a job because they’ve been here. For a few different reasons though. I can’t fathom leaving them alone, and without knowing who is after her and Gabriel, I don’t want to leave the chance of them being found. Sure, my house is secluded, but weirder shit has happened. I have no idea who I’m up against, and before I figure it out, I’m not going to leave them alone. Especially not her.

“I don’t have an answer. I just, I have this feeling inside me. I need to see you, the real you. Not this picture you’ve painted. I want to see The Butcher.”

“You have seen me.”

“No, I’ve seen you kill when someone was coming after me. But I haven’t seen you, you. Sure, you killed one guy in that club, but it was quick.”

“Does my girl have a thirst for blood?” I mumble, dragging her mouth down to mine.

I shouldn't even be toying with the idea of bringing her. I shouldn't, but the thrill. The idea that she wants to see all of me. Zion, the guy who has feelings, the guy who wants to do better. And then The Butcher, the one who has no remorse, who doesn't give a shit about anyone.

"You'd be playing a dangerous game, Red."

"I don't beg for much, but I'm begging you, Zion. Take me, let me see him."

I shouldn't, I know I'll regret it deep down. But I'm nodding my head before I know better. "I'll look and find one that's not too dangerous."

"Really, dang I thought I was going to have to convince you or something. That was a lot easier than I thought."

"I'll do anything you ask; all you have to do is tell me." Gripping her chin, I tilt her face up and claim her lips. Her mouth instantly opens, allowing me to move my tongue along the inside of her mouth.

My cock twitches, my body straining for the need to rip her pants down and fuck her in the snow. Though that won't feel good for either of us.

"Zion," Izel moans against my lips. Her hands drop to my zipper, unbuttoning my pants. Pulling her hand away, she licks her palm before shoving it down my pants and wrapping those delicate fingers around my cock.

"Fuck." I hiss, biting down on her lip. Izel works my cock over, our mouths clashing together, devouring each other. "If you don't stop, I'm going to cum all over your hand," I warn, silently begging her to keep going. My dirty girl smiles against my lips and moves her hand faster.

“Shhhhitrrrr.” I groan, spilling my cum into her hand. Pulling her hand from my pants, I watch in awe as she licks my cum from her palm. When her mouth goes to wrap around a cum-soaked finger I stop her.

“Wha—” I cut her off when I suck all four fingers into my mouth, tasting myself. “Mmmm, tastes much better on your skin,” I murmur around her fingers. “Knees,” I order.

Izel listens. Pleased to see her on her knees, I hold my cock to her lips. Still hard and wanting her mouth wrapped around me, she sucks the sensitive tip into her mouth. Her sleek fingers cup my balls, pulling them almost to the point of pain that I thrust into her mouth. Izel gags, causing me to rear back before thrusting to the back of her throat again.

“Take this cock like a good slut.” Sliding my cock through her lips, my hands grab her head. “You’re going to let me fuck your face, aren’t you?”

Izel mumbles around me.

“Relax your throat,” I order. The moment she does I thrust harder and harder.

She’s addicting, my obsession that I can’t shake. I want to fill her with my cum. I want her full of me, so full she begs me to stop. I want her to struggle.

“Does it turn you on knowing they can see us...” I smile when her eyes widen, her head trying to pull back. Gripping the back of her head, I continue my punishment to her mouth. “I bet you’re wet and needy.” My body ignites and I’m moments from spilling into her mouth. “I’m going to cum, and you’re going to swallow every. Last. Drop. Be a good girl for me,” I encourage her. Thrusting my hips once more, I hit the back of her throat just as jets of cum shoot down, pouring down her throat. Even if she doesn’t want to swallow, I give her no choice with my cock being shoved so far

down.

“Hmmm.” Pulling from her mouth, Izel gasps for air. Hands grip my thighs, calming her breathing down. Tucking myself away, I wait for her to finally look up.

Bending down, I lift while her legs wrap awkwardly around my waist. Staring at her with complete awe, I can't stop myself, smashing our lips together once more. I devour her mouth, pouring my love and hoping she understands.

22

Izel

Source Creation Date: May 23, 2025, 3:16 am

It takes Zion two days to find a contract he feels I can handle and that isn't as dangerous as the ones he normally goes on. I don't know why I asked him to take me on one. I think I have something to prove not only to him but to myself.

I know Zion is a killer. I've seen it firsthand. But three of them were because they were after me, while the last one was because a "friend" of his had asked. I hate that because we're around, he can't be himself. He can't go on his missions because he feels the need to protect us. And as much as I love that, I love him for it, I can't let him feel obligated to change his whole life around for a girl he's only known for a few months.

My problems shouldn't be his.

"You're going to be safe, right?" Gabriel asks me.

On Christmas when Zion and I got back from our little ride along in the snow, he pulled his mom off to the side to ask her to watch Gabriel while we're gone. She was more than thrilled and promised up and down that no one was going to hurt him. She apparently has a whole room of weapons, much to her dislike, but Zion's orders. Even if Louise doesn't like guns, Zion makes sure she knows how to use them.

"I'll be okay."

Gabriel is the one we had a hard time convincing. Even now he still isn't convinced. He knows Zion "hunts" others. But he doesn't know he is a hitman, or that he's killed thousands of people. I'm not sure how Gabriel would feel if he knew we were living with a murderer that didn't just kill out of self-defense. We've lived with psychopaths

before. And it hasn't ended well.

Zion might be crazy, but I love his crazy.

"What if you get hurt?" Gabriel nervously folds and refolds my shirt.

"Zion won't let anything happen to me, Gabby." Snatching the shirt from his hand, I toss it into the suitcase Zion gave me. I only packed a week's worth of clothes, hoping we won't be gone longer than that. But he says anything can happen. We could be gone only a few days, or a few weeks. He promised that if it went on longer than two weeks, we'd come back.

"I'm starting to trust him," he whispers, as if it's a secret. I smile because finally Gabriel is learning Zion isn't all bad.

I know we had made the mistake of trusting someone, but they sold us out. Zion isn't him. Zion has no idea who we are. And it's nice. It's great that we can be ourselves for once, and not the scared little children who hide away in Dan's clubhouse.

"Do you love him?"

That's the funny thing about love. I never believed I would find it. Besides Gabriel, I've never muttered the words. The word made me uncomfortable, and weird. I hate that four-letter word more than I hate plain coffee. And I hate plain coffee. So, when Zion told me in the middle of a damn storm that he loved me, I freaked out and ended up being fucked on top of the kitchen island.

I still don't believe he loves me. I can't believe anyone would.

I'm scared, damaged, and have a whole load of problems that would be a shrink's wet dream.

“Okay, okay. No need to answer me.” Gabriel laughs.

“I’m... I’m not sure how I feel. I mean, I think of him all the time, even when he’s next to me. He’s always on my mind, I want to know everything about him, I... I’m not sure, Gabriel.” I fumble over my words, finding myself folding and refolding a pair of pants. Scoffing, I throw it into the suitcase before zipping it up.

“Does he know it was your birthday?”

“What’s with all these questions?” I snap back. Gabby doesn’t know why I hate my birthday; he just knows I do. I can never tell him that Reaper and Tiger both stole that one day away from me.

“Damn, I’m just trying to make conversation before you leave. I’m not going to see you for a while, and I don’t know...”

Looking over at Gabriel, I sigh when he won’t look back at me. Of course, he’s scared, I don’t blame him. If we were switched, I’m not sure how I would handle him being gone away from me. I’d probably kick my feet and end up tagging along or just following.

“I’ll be okay. Zion won’t let anything happen to me. And... hey, how about I call twice a day? When I wake up and before bed, that way you know I’m okay?”

“Twice a day.” Gabriel nods and walks over to me wrapping his arms around my shoulders. “And I swear if he doesn’t protect you, if you even have a damn mosquito bite, I’m punching him in the dick.”

Laughing, I wrap my arms around him. “Why the dick?”

“It’ll hurt worse than the throat, and he’ll know I mean business.”

“You’re the best sibling I have!”

"I'm the only sibling you have." Gabriel chuckles just as Zion steps into his room.

After things between us escalated I tried keeping some sort of distance, staying in my own room, keeping my belongings in that room. It took all of twenty minutes of us arguing until he moved all my clothes into his room. There is no fighting that man when he makes his mind up on something.

Not that I'm complaining much. It's nice sleeping in someone's arms, something that makes me feel safe and warm.

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“Are you ready?” Zion asks, his eyes darting between us. Zion understands that it has always been Gabriel and me. I love that he never gets mad when Gabriel pushes his way between us, or when he talks non-stop. He even accepts that he’s gay. Gabriel tells me when they went to the store to get my period cravings, that Gabriel admitted he was gay, and Zion was fine with it. They even made jokes about it.

I cried like a little baby later that night, confiding in Zion that Gabriel was scared to even tell me. Thinking I wouldn't accept who he was.

“Yeah, I just need to grab another toothbrush.” Pulling away from Gabriel, I turn to the bathroom.

“I have mine,” Zion mutters. It’s probably gross for most, but since he saved me, I’ve been using his toothbrush. It does sound gross. And I’m not sure why I never took the time to get another one or ask him. It’s just... it’s weird. I have no excuse.

Gabriel gives Zion a look of pure disgust, but thankfully doesn’t comment on it. And neither do I. Realizing he knows I’ve been using his toothbrush.

Yanking my suitcase from the bed, Zion takes it from my hand. “I’ll take this downstairs.”

“Okay,” I murmur.

“Promise me.”

“What am I promising?” I ask. Gabriel and I follow behind Zion. Grabbing my arm,

Gabriel stops me from moving.

“You’re coming back. Promise me that you’re coming home.”

My chest squeezes at him calling Zion’s house home. Knowing we’ve never had a home before. But that’s what this feels like. His house is home; Zion is my home. We’ve been more comfortable in the two months than we had been our entire lives in Dan’s clubhouse.

“I promise. I’m coming home.”

Nothing is going to happen.

“Are you sure you still want to do this?” Zion asks for the millionth time since we left an hour ago. Before we even left his driveway, he asked if I was sure. Of course, I told him I was. Then when we stopped down the road to fill up and get me snacks, he ended up asking again. Now that it’s been an hour he’s asked at least once a minute, and I’m barely holding onto the thread of patience to not smack him upside the head.

“I’m not answering you.” I mock glared at him, shoving another dill pickle chip in my mouth. What can I say they’re addicting.

“We can turn around.”

“Didn’t I just tell you? I’m not answering that ridiculous question.”

“But you are,” Zion mutters under his breath.

“You’re annoying,” I tell him, though I still find myself chuckling under my breath.

“You sure about that?”

“Yes,” I snap.

“I just, I wanted to make you know what you’re getting into, and you know I’m not going to be the same person.” I know that it’s one of his biggest fears, that I will see him for who he believes he is. A monster. He just doesn’t know that no matter what he does, the amount of people he kills, I can’t see him as the monster he views himself. The real monsters are my family and those who hurt me growing up. Yes, he kills people, but he doesn’t hurt children and women.

He just doesn’t know I’m more damaged.

“I know, I’m asking for this. I’m not going to change my mind,” I reassure him.

Zion doesn’t say anything for the rest of the time. Letting me pick the music, we drive in silence for hours, only stopping once for gas and to use the restroom before he pulls into a motel. Staying in the truck, Zion goes in to get us a room before reappearing and driving us around the building. Pulling into a spot, he gets out, walking around and opening my door.

“Thank you,” I mumble. Helping me down, he tightens his hold on my hand leading me to the room.

Once he unlocks the room, he keeps the door open with our suitcase before he checks the room out. I watch him flick the lamp on by the bed, pulling out his phone.

“Call Gabriel, I’m going to shower,” he mutters, handing me the phone and pulling the suitcases in. I don’t bother saying anything, watching as he flips the locks, entering the bathroom and shutting the door. It’s not long before the sound of the shower starts to fill the quiet room.

Dialing Louise, she answers on the second ring.

“Hi, darling.”

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“Hey, it’s Izel,” I murmur, sitting down on the bed.

“Oh, hey, sweetheart, let me grab your brother. How was the drive?” she asks.

“Um, it was alright.” I don’t bother with the small talk. I just want to tell Gabriel we made it before I crawl into bed and go to sleep. Something’s wrong with Zion and I can’t help but feel like it’s my fault.

“That’s good to hear, sweetheart. Ah, here he is.”

There’s a faint ruffling around before Gabriel’s voice answers, “it feels weird with you being so far away.”

“I know what you mean.” My eyes lock onto the bathroom door, the unsettling feeling low in my stomach. I hate feeling like I did something to upset him. I have no idea what I could have done. But it wraps around my head, drowning me with worry.

“Izel?” Gabriel’s voice breaks through.

“Sorry, Gabby. I’m tired. I’ll call you in the morning, okay?”

“Yeah, okay. Love you.”

I don’t bother answering back before hanging up. Tossing his phone onto the bed, my feet carry me to the bathroom door. Hand raised, I go to knock but stop at the last second. He doesn’t want to see me, so he ran into the bathroom, getting away from me as quickly as he could. But why?

I rack my brain, trying to remember what I could have done. Everything had been fine leading up to this trip. Christmas, we went to his moms, went home, and spent time by the fireplace watching movies. It only took him three days to find a contract he was willing to take with me. Two days to get everything in order, and now here we are.

Why is he pulling away from me? I hate it. I can't stand it. Is he doing it so he could just get rid of me? Did he think if I saw him torture and murder someone I would just leave? That I would run away from him?

I mean, I have no idea where we are even headed. Honestly, I have no idea where we are right now. I should probably know, just in case. Just the fact I trusted him enough to go blindly into this, that should say something. Shouldn't it?

Yanking the bathroom door open, I slam it shut. Steam fills the bathroom, but I don't stop. Peeling my clothes off, I pull the shower curtain back, finding Zion standing there with his back to me.

"What is your problem?" I ask, climbing inside.

Zion doesn't say anything, not that it comes as a surprise. He never wants to answer my questions when I ask. It's frustrating and downright annoying. I want to ask whatever I want and not have to fight him on answering.

"Zion, ans—"

"I promised you, I promised and now I'm breaking it." Swinging around, Zion drops to his knees, wrapping his arms around my waist. I flinch when I know his eyes are level with the scars around my stomach.

"What are you talking about?"

“I promised you I’d protect you, and now I’m taking you with me to kill someone. I don’t care if you’re willingly wanting me to take you. I am, I’m taking you into a place that’s dangerous, Izel. I shouldn’t be doing this.”

Twirling my fingers in his hair, I pull his head back, forcing him to look up at me. I’m not sure what takes over me, I don’t have a dominant bone in my body. But having him on his knees, confessing that he’s scared for me, it takes over my mind and I’m overwhelmed with feelings that I told myself I’d never have.

“You’re doing this because I asked you.” He pulls his head from my hand, burying his face into my stomach, planting feather kisses along my belly button. “You’re doing this because despite the war inside your head you know I need to see who you are underneath. Because you need to know that no matter what I’ll still love you.” Because no matter what I still will. He’s shown more kindness than my own family, shown me that it doesn’t matter if you’ve just met the person, you can fall in love with them. And that’s what happened with Zion. Even if I want to fight the little voice in my head, deny that I can love him while trying to protect my brother.

I can love him.

“You love me?” His voice strains as he asks me.

“I think I have since you pulled me out of that basement.” I smile. I can’t pinpoint the exact point, but the trust I have that he will keep his word. It must mean something.

He pries my legs apart, and lifting one over his shoulder he dives in. His mouth latches onto my clit, sucking and eating me. Emotions swarm around me, gripping my throat. My hands latch onto his hair, pulling him into me.

“You’re the best thing I’ve ever tasted,” he growls, pulling my pussy lips apart before licking me once more. “Hmmm, the best tasting meal I’ve ever had.”

I swear I get wetter at his words. The uncontrollable need for him.

“Fuck me,” I moan, trying to pull him up.

“I plan to do more than just fuck you,” he says moments before I’m lifted, my arms wrapping around his neck.

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“Just love me...” Those words do the trick. The thick head of his cock pushes against my entrance, eyes locked on mine as he slowly enters me.

“Fuck.” He hisses the moment he bottoms out. “Fuck, I love you.” Pulling out, he’s thrusting back in, shoving me against the shower wall. I love being wrapped in his strong arms. Love being fucked against the wall by him.

His face falls into my neck, groaning, filling me with his thick cock. Deep satisfied moans rip from his throat. “Fuck, Izel, fuck.” His hand travels down between our bodies, his finger working my clit. “It’s just you and me, you feeling me inside you. It’s where I belong.” I’m not sure where this is coming from, but my body reacts to his words.

A strangled cry leaves my mouth, my eyes pinch shut, and my orgasm takes me to another place. The air struggles to fill my body, and my fingers dig into his shoulders, moments of pure bliss. Zion bites down on my breast, and I scream while he roars his release. His thrusts don't stop as he empties himself into me.

“Say it again,” he demands.

Blinking my eyes open, I glance down, finding him already staring at me. “I love you,” I whisper. Slamming his lips against mine, he’s thrusting into me again. “F—shit.” I groan, my oversensitive clit rubbing against him.

“We’re not leaving this motel until I’ve had my fill of you,” he growls, shoving his way out of the shower and into the bedroom.

“What a dangerous game.” I smile against his lips.

“What a beautiful game.”

23

Zion

An hour into Texas my phone goes off again. When we woke up earlier this morning, Izel had barely gotten any sleep, and the moment we left Kansas she fell asleep. That was five hours ago, and now we are half an hour from Dallas. I want to let her continue sleeping, but with us being close to our destination, I know this will be the only time for her to speak with Gabriel.

Softly, I shake Izel awake.

“Hmmm?” Izel yawns, stretching her arms above her head.

“Gabriel is calling again, and we’re almost there.” Handing over my phone, Izel takes it just as the ringing stops.

Tapping away she puts the phone back to her ear. “Fuck, I thought something happened to you!” Gabriel yells into the phone.

“Gabby, calm down. I’m fine, I was just sleeping in the car.” Izel’s eyes shift to mine, blushing as she covers her face with the sleeve of her shirt. “Yes, I’m safe, I’m okay, promise. Uh, I’m not sure, hold on.”

“How far are we?” she asks, pulling my phone from her ear.

“Ten minutes,” I mumble, hating the idea of her even getting close to the fucker

we're going after. When she asked me, I knew it was a bad idea then, and I know it's a bad idea now. But no matter what she asks me I find myself unable to tell her no. Even when I know it's dangerous, even when I know things can go sideways, she wants to know what I do, wants to see who I am, and I have to show her.

"Yeah, of course, Gabriel. I'll call you when we get to the hotel tonight. Okay, yes, love you too, Gabby." Dropping my phone into the cup holder she shifts her body towards me, taking my hand in hers. "Where are we even at?"

"Texas."

Suddenly she tenses, and her hand that just grabbed mine rips away, gripping the door handle. Izel is moments from throwing herself out the moving truck door before I grab her hand, stopping her.

"What the hell?" I growl, pulling off to the side, throwing the truck into park. "Izel, what the hell is your problem."

"I can't," she hisses, reaching for the door handle once more.

Grabbing my knife I jam it into the door handle, stopping her from reaching towards it again. Izel's eyes widen, slowly turning her head towards me. "You better start talking and talk fast."

"I can't be here. I can't be in Texas, Zion." Tears glisten in her eyes, darting everywhere around us. Review mirror, side mirror, into the fucking back seat like somehow someone got back there.

"You've got about two seconds, two damn seconds, Izel, to tell me what is going on."

"Zion," she says, flicking her eyes towards me. "I can't be in Texas. I will tell you

everything,everything,I just... Can we please just get this job done and then leave? I don't want to be anywhere near Texas.”

Izel shifts uncomfortably, squirming around as I stare at her. I don't know what her problem is, but the idea of getting out of Texas sounds nice right now. And the idea of finally getting to the reason of who she's running from is everything.

“I want to know everything, who you're running from, what happened to you, everything, Izel.”

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Izel reluctantly nods her head, twirling her fingers together. I don't comment as I shift into drive and take off down the road. It's not long before I'm pulling off once more by the driveway, taking my gun from the middle console. I check the magazine before placing it in my thigh holster.

"Izel."

"Hmm?" Her eyes are trained outside the window.

"Look at me."

Finally, she does as I ask.

"I'm not going to let anything happen to you..." I don't know why I feel the need to tell her this. But the fear in her eyes makes me regret this entirely. I shouldn't have brought her. I know this. "How about you just stay here? I'll make this quick and then we can go okay?"

Izel nods, not uttering a word. Grabbing her hand, I kiss her knuckles, climbing out of the truck. Locking the doors, I take off towards the house. I refuse to think about Izel and what's freaking her out so much. I have a job to do and a job that could go wrong at any given minute.

Crossing the lawn, I keep out of any window eyesight as I creep onto the back porch. Grabbing the back door, I twist hoping he left it unlocked. You'd be surprised how many people leave their doors unlocked, thinking bad things will never happen to them.

Sliding the door open, I look around, finding myself in the kitchen. Easing the door closed once more, I take a calming breath, shake the nerves of leaving Izel out there and make my way into the living room.

What I don't expect is a man almost my size holding a baseball bat that smashes into my groin. I go down, my hands barely catching my fall.

"Fuck." I growl, the bat connecting with my back before he's wrapping his arms around my neck and wrestling me into a chokehold.

"Who are you?" he grunts, the air being knocked from my lungs as he holds a tight grip around my neck. My feet kick out, knocking into a table causing something to crash to the ground. Twisting and turning, I try to break his hold but nothing I do works, and that's new for me. Along with the pain in my nuts, I swear I've lost a ball.

Movement catches my eyes. Izel crawls around the couch, blocking me from being able to tell her to run. If I'm about to die, she doesn't need to see this nor can she fight him off. I'm struggling and she's so much smaller than me.

I can't yell at her to go because then he'll see her. I hold my breath, willing her to run, to just get away when suddenly his grip loosens.

"Fuck," I grit out, twisting my body ready to fight the fucker when I'm so shocked that I can't move. Izel stands above him, the knife lodged into the side of his neck. Before I can tell her to just leave the knife, she drags it out spraying blood everywhere.

"Shit." Stumbling over the man's body, I grab Izel dragging her back. "It's okay, it's okay, I got you." I breathe her in, not believing that Izel just stabbed someone.

"I'm fine, Zion," she mumbles into my chest. Though I don't believe it, it's harder to

kill someone than you think. “Zion, really, I’m okay.” Pushing me back, I glance down. Expecting to see her crying, only there’s not a single tear in sight.

“We’ll talk about this in the truck,” I scold. Grabbing her hand, I drag her behind me to the truck. Now that he’s dead and I’ve had time to get over the fact she risked her life, I’m fuming. I’m barely holding onto the anger that’s wrecking my body. And my nuts.

The moment we’re near the truck, I drop her hand spinning her around until her back is against the passenger door.

“Do you have some sort of fucking death wish?” I growl, hands fisted at my side.

“No, but he was going to kill you!” she screams.

Gripping her chin, I force her to look at me. I can’t even imagine what would have happened if he’d finished me off and she was left out in my truck. Or if she was left in thathouse.

“I promised you I’d protect you,” I grit out. “You’re not supposed to be saving me. So next time don’t fucking move. Don’t risk your FUCKING LIFE FOR MINE!”

“Zion,” she whispers, her hands gripping my hand that slips around her throat.

“No. Don’t argue with me.”

“I’m sorry.”

I don’t want her to be sorry. I don’t want her to go into dangerous situations.

“Don’t do it again.”

“Okay,” she whispers, her tongue darting out to lick her lips. Her eyes widen as I’m ripped away from her. My back hits the ground with a grunt, the barrel of a gun pressed against my temple. Everything blurs together, happening too fast.

“Ah, ah, ah, there’s my girl,” a man says behind me, I twist my head to see who it is when the gun presses harder against my head.

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“I wouldn’t move if I were you.”

Izel stands there, tears rolling down her face as another one grabs her around the waist holding her against him. I growl, hating his filthy hands on her. Confused on what is happening, who these men are.

“You’ve been missing for quite some time darlin’,” the older man says, walking around the truck heading straight towards Izel. “Where have you been?”

Izel shakes her head, refusing. And as much as I want her to answer his question, because I’m even curious about things, I don’t want her speaking to him. She doesn’t answer to him.

She’s mine.

“You’re going to tell me one way or another, Izel. It’ll be much easier on the both of us if you just answer the question.”

“Fuck you,” she spits at him. Oh, my feisty girl. If it weren’t for the men standing here, threatening our lives I’d fuck her into the ground. But then he rears back, punching her directly in the face.

Pure fucking rage and fury race through my veins, and I shift trying to get to my feet. I’m going to end all their pathetic little fucking lives. Only I’m shoved back to the ground, the gun goes off, and pain shoots from my thigh through my body.

“Stop, stop!” she screams, sobs leaving her body. “Leave him alone!”

“Who is he?” the man asks again. Wrapping my hand around the bullet that lodged into my thigh, I take a calming breath, refusing to let the pain overtake my head. I need to stay clear-headed to get out of this.

“He’s no one, no one.” Izel's voice breaks. “Just leave him, just please leave him. I’ll go where you want, just please...” Our eyes connect, and I slowly shake my head. I won’t let them take her, I can’t. “I’ll go.”

“You’re coming with us either way,” he says moments before Izel screams, and everything goes black.

24

Izel

I wake when someone's deep laugh echoes around the room, startling me. I attempt to rub my head, searching for what happened when I realize my arms are tied behind my back, and that I’m lying on the cold concrete ground.

"Oh, look who's awake." I recognize that voice. I told myself I would never hear it again, and yet here I am. Lying at his feet. I squeeze my eyes closed, refusing to see them, I can't. “God, I’ve missed you so much.”

A sob wracks my body, and I try to wiggle away. But I can’t fight. No matter what I do I know I’m not strong enough, and I know what will happen if I fight him.

“Open those eyes,” Reaper grunts as he drags me across the concrete.

“NO!” I scream, but it’s useless. It’s always so useless.

I’m slammed against the ground, my shirt ripped open exposing my body to the cold

frigid air. It's not until my pants are being ripped down my legs and I hear the belt buckle do I scream at the top of my lungs, begging and pleading with him to stop.

It never works.

He slams into me, shoving his dick into me over and over again.

"Stop, please." I cry, tears streaming down my face. I can't see, not that I want to. I don't, much less do I want to feel. But Reaper refuses to let me sink back into the black hole I created for myself.

"I've missed you so much, baby." His hot breath strangles me as I cry, and something digs into my stomach. And I shouldn't look, but I can't stop myself. My blurry vision locks onto what Reapers doing, the knife digging into my skin. Dragging around my scared stomach. "Ah, yes, baby." He thrusts into me. "You're mine again."

Shaking my head, I refuse. I'm Zions... and just like that I realize I have no idea where he is or what even happened. One minute I'm begging Zion to leave Dan's fathers house, my grandpa, the one who looked the other way while Dan's men abused and raped me over and over again. I didn't have time to tell him why we needed to leave. Not before Dan's men appeared, knocking us out.

"He's going to kill you!" I scream. "He's going to kill you all!"

"He's dead."

No. No. He can't be.

And now I'm back in a place I told myself I'd die before I came back.

"Fuck, fuck you're so tight."

Source Creation Date: May 23, 2025, 3:16 am

I gag, willing this to be over. But Reaper loves playing games, loves waiting, and loves even more forcing me to take his cum, all of it.

“Shit, she’s going to make me cum before I even get going.” Reaper laughs. Men surrounding us laugh. I didn’t even realize people were down here. I don’t even know how many there are, before I hear him grunting above me, shoving his dick into me. He stiffens, roaring his release before he shoves himself off me.

“Next.” He laughs just as someone else steps up and pounds themselves into me.

“Stop!” I’m crying, my voice rough. I open my mouth to scream but someone is wrapping something around my face, forcing my mouth to stay open. I don’t have time to think before another one is stuffing their dick into my mouth.

Laughing.

Grunting.

I hate them all.

I’m nothing but a toy, a fuck-toy.

My hair is yanked as I’m forced to choke and gag on some prospect dick while another fucks me. I can’t breathe, the force of hitting the back of my throat over and over again. Suddenly I’m being lifted, placed down on top of someone.

A hard slap to my thigh jolts me, and the worst pain of it all. I’m being split in two; a

cock is shoved into my ass.

“She’s loving this...all three holes filled.”

I would cry out if I could, but I can’t. All I can do is hope this is over soon, hoping I die and that I never have to see them again. Muffled screams, pain shoots all over my body.

The voice drowns out, letting myself escape to the black hole that once was the only way of surviving.

I’m nothing again.

I’m fucked over and over again, laughter filling the air. I’m no longer screaming or crying. I’m no longer living.

Zion

Pain races through my veins, ripping me apart. My heart speeds up as I limp around the small living area. My brain works in overdrive, the thoughts making everything too loud, the clinking of Killian and Aziza on their laptops making my skin itch.

“Have you found anything?” I grit out. Biting my cheek, I flex my fist over and over again. My fingers itching for my gun.

“Not in the past two minutes since you asked,” Aziza snarks back. Stopping in my steps, I glare over at her. Moments from shoving the gun against my old best friend's temple and pulling the trigger. Killian must sense this because he nudges Aziza who glances up. “Shit, sorry. We’re working, I promise.”

Going back to pacing around, I twirl the knife in my hand. It’s been fourteen hours

since she was taken, thirteen since I pulled that bullet from my thigh, ten since I called Gabriel to tell him his sister was taken, five since Killian and Aziza arrived to help track her down.

So far nothing.

I should've trusted my gut and not gone. I should have told her no, told her a million things. I just wanted to make her happy, and now I've failed her. Failed her and Gabriel. I didn't even know what happened until it was too late.

The front door barges open, and a very angry Gabriel marches in throwing a punch into my face. I'll give it to him; he corrected his thumb, and the punch is solid. But what I don't expect is another punch to my dick.

I stumble, gripping the wall to hold myself up.

"Where is she!" he screams, tears streaming down his face.

"I'm so sorry," is all I'm able to mumble before he's shoving at me. I hit the wall, sliding down as his knee connects with my nose. "Fuck," I hiss. My nose is definitely broken now. But I don't stop him. I let Gabriel kick and punch me over and over again. Blood pours down my face.

"Gabriel, stop this!" Ma yells somewhere behind him.

"Where is she!" Gabriel is yelling.

"Get off him!" Killian moves Gabriel off me, dragging a kicking and screaming teenager across the room. "Jesus' fuck, is this what I have to look forward to?" he mutters.

“Honey, I don’t think any boys will even be going near her, don't worry.” Aziza laughs, tapping away at her computer.

Source Creation Date: May 23, 2025, 3:16 am

“Shut up!” Gabriel yells, knocking Killian off him.

“Watch it,” Killian growls, his temper moments from getting the better of him.

“Shut up!” he screams at Killian again, turning his attention to me. “What happened! Tell me, Zion.”

Taking a deep breath, I stay seated unsure of how to tell him what happened. “I don’t know what happened, Gabriel...She stabbed the guy, and then we got ambushed, they... Fuck, it was too late. One minute we’re getting ready to leave and then I was knocked down.”

“Who was it? Someone after you?” He hisses, “You’re the fucking Butcher for fucks sake!”

“What?” Killian and Aziza both snap their heads towards me.

“Damn, they don’t even know who you are?” Gabriel laughs, glaring at me.

“You... you’re, you?” Aziza furrows her brows, while Killian cocks his head to the side studying me.

“No, there was no one after me. They... they somehow knew her.”

Gabriel suddenly tensed, eyes wide, before he looked at the window and the door. It’s the same expression Izel had when she realized we were in Texas and moments from booking it. Getting to my feet, I snap my fingers at Killian.

“Keep looking. You,” I say, pointing at Gabriel. “We need to talk, and you need to tell me everything. Whoever these people are knew her, and I’m guessing they know you. They said, ‘you’ve been missing for quite some time darlin.’” So, my question now is who is after the two of you?” Crossing my arms over my chest, I ignore the twinge of pain radiating through my body. My poor fucking nuts.

Gabriel sighs, dropping down onto the small chair. “What do you know?”

“Nothing.” Shrugging, I debate on telling him, deciding on telling him I probably needed to, so he knows where to start. “She told me what happened to you the night you two left. Besides that, I don’t know anything.”

“Look into the Bones Motorcycle gang in Dallas.” Gabriel motions at Aziza and Killian. “It’s a super long story, but Izel’s father is Dan. I unfortunately don’t know his last name. It’s different from ours, which is Hollow if you need that. Dan hates me because our mom cheated on him with someone and got pregnant with me. I’m a bastard child. In a rage he killed our mom and my biological father. And since then, he beat both Izel and I, her more so because she’s a loudmouth and took the heat away from me. I don’t know a lot about what happened to her, she refused to tell me what they did. But I’m sure it’s worse than you can imagine.” Taking in a deep breath, he blows raspberries, tears leaking down his cheek. “The night we ran she overheard something, something I don’t know, she refused to tell me. But they were going to rape me, I tried to fight Ken and Fisher off, but I was no match for them. That night is somewhat of a blur, but she killed them. That’s why she wasn’t scared when you killed those people in front of her. Because we grew up around murder and she’s seen more than I have.”

I try to wrap my brain around the damage Izel grew up with. Remembering that she hadn’t screamed when I killed that guy in the bus station. Why she was okay with me taking her from the basement. Everything suddenly makes sense and I hate that she never felt like she could tell me. She never once told me anything, that she didn’t

trust me.

“I found something... Does Blue ring a bell?” Aziza asks Gabriel.

“That’s his VP, Dan is the President of the gang.”

It’s silent, deathly quiet until Aziza says the only thing I need to know.

“He just checked into a hotel ten minutes down the road.”

Time to find my fucking girl.

25

Izel

A single bulb hangs above my head, giving the dark cold concrete enough light that a person with full eyesight can see. I, on the other hand, can barely see two feet in front of me. But I’ve been in this room enough, been beaten in here so often that I know this room like the back of my hand. My body lays across the cold metal table, while my legs are tied to the side of the table, my arms stretch above my head. I wish I could say this was the worst pain I’ve been in, but it’s not.

“He’s not dead,” I mumble into the cold dark air. Willing myself to believe Zion didn’t die at the hands of Dan and his men. He can’t be dead, I won’t believe it. It’s the only way I’ll survive this. He has to be alive; he has to be.

“I’ve already told you darlin’, he’s long gone.” Dan, my father, who I refuse to ever refer to as that laughs. It’s cold and hatred filled. “This can all be done if you just tell us where your piece of shit brother is.”

I shake my head, refusing to speak. It's been a game of twenty questions, all containing "where's Gabriel." I won't tell them where my brother is so they can sell him off to the highest bidder. I don't care what they do to me. They've done it all anyway. If I can save Gabriel from this pain, I'll do it. He deserves a better life.

"Where is he, Izel?" Dan asks, moving closer. When I don't answer I'm rewarded with a smack across the face, pain radiating through my jaw down my neck. I'm surprised I can even feel it due to the number of times I've been hit in the face.

"You stupid stubborn, stubborn girl. Maybe if I get Reaper in here, you'll think about telling me where I can find that bastard," he screams, smacking me again. Ringing echoes through my head, and tears leak down my face.

"She's all yours, get her to tell me where he's at," Dan hisses to Reaper. I'm aware of him moving around as the door closes, and keys jiggle before I'm dragged further down the table, my legs bent and retied.

"Stop," I mumble, my cracked lips breaking open, bleeding down my chin. I don't know why I tell him to stop, he never listens. Hasn't since I was eleven, he won't now.

Source Creation Date: May 23, 2025, 3:16 am

I can barely keep my eyes open. His footsteps echo around me, before his grimy hand grips my chin, forcing me to look at the monster that stole my innocence away. I jerk away, wiggling my body to get away from him. Even though it's useless, I'm tied down, the ropes bite into my skin. Tearing at my skin.

"I've missed this body, my sweets." His hand grips my breast, pinching my nipple.

Screaming at the top of my lungs, I jerk and twist my wrist, trying everything. But it's all useless. I'm nothing to him. Nothing but a play toy and that's exactly how he's going to treat me.

"Get off me!" My voice cracks as I try to scream. His hands smash against my cheek, forcing the side of my head into the table.

"Where is Gabriel?"

"He's going to kill you!" I grit out, blood filling my mouth.

Reaper's hand shoves against my sex, shoving two fingers into my dry cunt. I scream at the pain, trying to bite down on his hand still holding my face against the table.

"Your little boy toy is dead. Now answer me or I'm going to fuck that tight ass you got again and make you tell me."

He presses my face harder into the table, his fingers working their way inside me. I cry harder, hating myself for this. I don't have time to comprehend, before the tip of his cock presses against my ass. I scream, pleading with him to stop. His hand smacks

against my cheek.

“He’s going to find me and he’s going to kill you all!” I scream, snot and blood running down my face.

He shoves into my ass, ripping me apart. Pain blinds me, and my wrists bleed as I rip against the ropes, begging for him to get off me. The burn of my ass, blood being the only lube as he drills his cock into me over and over again.

He grunts above me, tells me I’m being a good girl, and no matter the amount of tears, or blood, the begging I’ve been screaming, he never stops. It only makes him dig his hands into my thigh, laughing above me. I’m vaguely aware of something cutting into me again. My body numbs.

The black void fills my head, reminding me that I’m alone in this. I’m always alone.

I don’t have the strength to keep my eyes open. They punch me again. My face snaps to the side but I don’t feel it, I don’t react, I don’t cry out. Tears leak from the corner of my eye mixing with the blood dripping from my nose and mouth. I don’t even remember what it was like to taste something that’s not metallic.

"She still hasn’t said a word?" Dan asks Reaper.

My stomach clenches at the fear of what they’re going to do next. I don’t know what time or day it is. It feels as though I’ve been down here for weeks.

“All she says is we’re never going to find Gabriel, and that fucker she was with is going to find her and kill us all.” Reaper grabs the back of my hair, pulling my head up from the ground. My limbs are no longer tied down due to me not being able to even hold my own weight up.

“Your little bitch is dead! Now where is your fucking brother!”

"Just kill me," I whisper, knowing death is the only way out of this. There's no way I'm making it out of this alive.

Dan and Reaper laugh. “Oh, darlin’ we’re not going to kill you. You’re going to stay right here where you’re at. You’re going to be my little toy for the rest of your pathetic life. You’re going to wish you’d never ran away in the first place you stupid fucking cunt,” Dan hisses somewhere near my face. Reaper’s breath hits my face, licking the side of my face. I cower away, whimpering as he yanks on my hair.

Someone's phone rings in the distance, and there's a faint answer before Dan is yelling. “Fuck, fuck, fuck. Reaper finish this. I don’t care what you do to her, something happened to Blue.”

Dan leaves, slamming the door closed. I don’t know what Reaper plans to do, but he throws me onto the cold ground. My head bounces off the ground, my head rings, and I can feel myself being taken over, blackness invading my mind just as he kicks me in the stomach again.

26

Zion

“You ever used one of these?”

“Uh, onceish...” Gabriel mumbles, peering down at the gun.

“Shit.” Taking out my knife, I hand it over to him. Izel is going to kick my ass for bringing him here. Not that he gave me much of a choice. He knows Blue, he knows this motorcycle gang. And as long as she’s alive, I’ll let her kick my ass, she just

needs to stay alive. “Take this. Anything happens, stab, and don’t stop until they’re dead.”

Reaching behind the driver’s seat, I grab my rifle, checking the magazine before climbing out. Gabriel hot on my heels, I raise the gun, aim for the door handle, and shoot. I couldn't care less about the innocents or the cops right now.

“Oh, fuck,” Gabriel mutters behind me as the door handle flies off. Raising my foot, I kick the door open the rest of the way in.

Someone yelps inside. A guy lays in his underwear on the dirty motel bed with a beer in his hand as the TV plays loud. His eyes widen as he takes me in, his hand reaching for the gun on the side table. Aiming, I shoot, and his hand explodes. Screaming his beer goes flying, falling off the bed.

Source Creation Date: May 23, 2025, 3:16 am

“Where is Dan?” I ask, pointing my rifle at him.

“I don’t know.” He swallows, and his eyes dart towards Gabriel, recognizing who is behind me.

“I won’t be lied to, where is he?” Swinging the rifle to my back, I take my other knife from my pocket and plunge it into his thigh.

His eyes dart back towards Gabriel. “Don’t look at him, don’t talk to him, don’t even think about him. You look at me only, now where is Dan?”

Blue howls in pain, sweat beading around his hairline. “I don’t know, man, he—fuck, he moves locations all the time.” Which is why we were here. Gabriel told me he had three places he would go, and I wasn’t spending my time racing around to each.

“Where. Is. He?” I yell, my muscles tightening, my sanity barely clinging to my body. My blood boils as I stare down at this piece of shit.

His bloodshot eyes dart from mine to behind me once again. “Gabriel...”

My pulse accelerates, my vision blurs, I yank the knife from his thigh and jab the tip into his eye. His screams are like music to my ears. Blood runs down his face, dripping onto my hand. Pulling out, the eye comes out with a “pop” sound, and his optic nerve hangs from his eye socket.

“Oh, fuck,” Gabriel mutters behind me.

Gripping the nerve, I flick it before jamming the knife into his other eye. He thrashes around, his entire face covered in blood, slipping into his mouth. Choking on his own blood, he gurgles.

“I said don’t talk to him...now where is Dan?”

Plunking the knife out of his other eye socket, my knife holds two bloody eyeballs.

“Where is he?” I demand once more, pinching the other nerve hanging from his eye socket.

“Gabr—”

“I said DON’T SPEAK TO HIM!” I raise my fist, ready to punch the fucker when Gabriel steps forward grabbing my hand.

“Where Blue, where is my sister?” Gabriel begs, his voice cracking.

“Two-fifty-three....” he mumbles, blood leaking from his mouth. “They’re holding her th—there.”

Gabriel nods, telling me he knows where she’s at. Stepping back, I raise my rifle once more, shooting him in the head. Blue falls to the side.

Blood drips from my hand as we exit the motel, the faint sounds of sirens come closer. Climbing in the truck, I back out as Gabriel lets out a laugh.

“You’re scary, my guy.”

My head spins, my need for Izel growing.

“Are you scared of me now?” I dare to ask, not knowing what I’ll do if he fears me. Izel has seen me kill multiple times. Gabriel has only seen two from the bus station, but this is different.

“No.”

"No?"

“You’d never hurt me, I trust you. Just like I trust that you’re going to kill every one of the fuckers that hurt my sister.” Gabriel turns towards me.

“Oh, I plan on it.” I smile underneath my mask. They’re all going to meet The Butcher, and they’re all going to understand why I’m the worst hitman for hire.

Each step is in slow motion. Gabriel drives my truck and like most children, he can’t drive worth a shit. Driving fast and a little crazy. My rifle aims out the window as I take men out, I don’t know how this seems so easy, but I don’t question it. Bodies lay behind us as Gabriel rams the gate and takes off to the compound.

“Anyone worth saving?” I ask, tires squealing to a stop.

“Not at all,” Gabriel grits, grabbing the gun from the middle console. Shoving the door open, Gabriel stands behind me as I make my way to the compound door. My nerves tense, uncertain on what lays behind the door before I use the barrel of the rifle pushing the door open. Dim lights hang from the ceiling, and a few people lay on the ground and around the couch.

Grabbing the gun from my thigh holster with the silencer, I don’t care who they are. Shooting five dead, I make my way through the main living area, checking behind the bar, before we head towards the hallway. This has to be too easy.

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“Goddamn, Z,” someone hisses behind us.

Swinging around, my finger lays against the trigger before I realize Killian stands before us.

“Don’t shoot.” He laughs. Hands raised, he smirks at me.

“What are you doing here?” I hiss, eyes trained in front.

“Aziza would murder me if I didn’t help save your girl, especially since Izel saved Aziza before and all. Plus, she really wants to see her.”

Rolling my eyes, I don’t utter a word, and continue on moving room from room. Silently killing the men in their rooms. Too easy. It’s not until the last door on the left that Gabriel pokes my shoulder and shakes his head.

I cock a brow, realizing he can’t see me before he’s whispering, “That’s Dan’s office, he has to be in there.”

Dan.

Raising my foot, I kick the door in. Imminently someone stands from behind their desk, white powder covering his nose, gray hair, and a thin form. He reaches for the gun on the desk. I shoot into the ceiling causing him to mid reach.

“I wouldn’t,” I growl.

Killian walks around me, grabbing the gun.

“Where is she?” I ask, widening my stance so he can’t see Gabriel.

“You’re dead.” His face pales, as if he really thought one of his guys could kill me. I’m harder to kill than you think.

“I won’t ask again,” I growl, taking a step towards him. Gabriel steps around me, and Dan seems shocked to see him here.

“Gab—”

“Where is she!” he screams, and before I can stop him, he raises the gun, aiming and shooting Dan in the stomach.

“Oh, shit,” Killian gasps, stepping back from Dan just as he falls back into his chair, pressing a hand against his stomach.

“You’ll never find her.” He laughs, blood trailing down his mouth. “He’s going to tear her apart...”

Fuck.

My hand tightens against the rifle, and my blood boils as I stare at Dan’s dead body. I know I can’t get mad at Gabriel for killing him, I can’t. But knowing this could be the only lead to where she is, I step towards Gabriel. My hand latches around his neck, squeezing. I could easily choke him out. He’s the reason we’re not going to find her, and I can’t live without her. I won’t.

“I—I know where she’s at,” Gabriel chokes, no fear in his eyes.

“Where?” I growl, our faces inches apart.

“Reaper has her. He has to be in the basement, that’s where they always took her.”

“Lead the way.” Pushing Gabriel off, he runs out into the hallway, both Killian and I hot on his heels. He runs through the compound back into the main living area. A door I missed hides behind the bar, and Gabriel yanks it open. The smell escapes, and instantly the three of us gag. I know that smell. I’m usually the reason behind that smell.

I refuse to believe it.

“If she’s dead, Gabriel, put that gun to my head and pull the trigger, because I’m not living in a world where she doesn’t exist,” I tell him before I’m running down the stairs. Taking the door on the left I slam it open. The hinges pierce my ear, the stench causes me to gag, and I try to swallow the lump in my throat.

“Fuck!” I’m barely aware of someone yelling. My eyes are glued to the body lying on the concrete floor.

I drop the gun onto the ground before my knees buckle. I slump to the ground, my hands barely catching me from falling face first.

I crawl over, yanking my gloves off, pulling Izel into my lap. Brushing her matted hair from her face, her face is unrecognizable. Bruises and blood litter her skin. She’s completely naked, blood, dirt and bruises cover every inch of her body. There’s not a clear piece of skin on her.

“No, no, no....” Gabriel cries, dropping beside me. “Izel...” He sobs, grabbing her hand and squeezing her.

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“He’s going to find me and kill you,” her broken whispers break through. “He’ll kill you.”

It’s not possible.

“Shit, Izel!” Gabriel yells.

Her eyes barely flutter open before she's mumbling again, and though I can't make out the words, I lift her, hurrying for the stairs. I have no idea where Killian went, or if Gabriel's even behind me as I run up the stairs and through the compound.

“Nearest hospital, Gabriel,” I order, the truck coming into view. I have to save her, I need to.

Just as we reach the truck, Killian rounds it and glances at Izel in my arms. Something passes over his face before he's yanking the door open. Pulling my keys out, I'm not sure who takes them. I climb into the truck, holding her against my chest, unable to look away from her blooded face. Killian and Gabriel converse. But I can't focus on their words, my eyes glued to Izel.

Izel's limp body lays in my arms, and every few minutes her breathing stops, and I tense. I know I'm losing her. I can feel it. I can't live without her.

My eyes can't move away from her broken nose, swollen eyes, the bruises that cover the entirety of her face and neck. Handprints around her throat. Bruised fingerprints around her breasts.

It's not until we're pulling into the emergency room that I finally look up, and Gabriel opens the back door helping me out. We're both running into the waiting room. A few patients gasp while two nurses who are talking behind the desk stop mid-sentence the moment they see us.

"Page Dr. Mills, Sara, grab a gurney!" one of them yells, and nurses rush around, before the gurney is in front of us where I place her down.

My pulse jumps, watching as they wheel her away. Following closely behind, I can hear the nurses ask questions, but I can't answer them. My fist tightens as I watch them hooking equipment up, IVs into her arm, BP around her bicep, an oxygen mask.

"SIR!" someone yells, grabbing my arm.

Glancing at the hand, I rip their fingers off me. "Don't fucking touch me!" I scream, knowing I sound crazy. But only her, only Izel touches me. "She was attacked...I don't know."

The silent beeping is the only thing keeping me grounded, knowing she has a pulse. Knowing she's alive and for now so is the person who hurt her.

27

Izel

"He's going to kill you all," I mumble, twisting my face when I realize something feels different. The concrete ground is replaced with something warm and soft. There's a faint beeping in the background, and death no longer lingers in my nose, it's clean.

"Izel," someone whispers. A gentle brush of their finger on my cheek causes me to sob. I'm so tired of crying, so tired of being used, so damn tired.

“Red, it’s okay.”

“He’s going to kill you all,” I repeat, unable to open my eyes and face the monster again. “HE’S GOING TO KILL YOU ALL!” I shout, thrashing around. Panic rips me around. I know what’s going to happen and I’m not going to be able to stop it. I’m weak, I’m useless, I’m nothing.

The dream of Zion coming in here and saving the day is nothing but that, a dream. He’s not coming, I never told him the truth. I never told him anything. He won’t be able to find me. He’s never going to, he’s dead.

“Izel, please, shhh, it’s okay, calm down!” Their hands grip my arm, and I can’t bear it anymore. I’m thrashing, clawing, and screaming at the top of my lungs.

“HE’S GOING TO MURDER YOU!” I shout just as loud hard noises fill my ears, then something pricks my arm. I sob, unsure of what hits me. “He’s going... he’s going... kill you all.” I become sleepy, as my voice breaks as unconsciousness takes me under.

The faint sound of repetitive beeping wakes me from what feels like the best sleep I’ve gotten. Only the moment I’m barely aware of my surroundings, my body hurts, and the fogginess eases away. Swallowing the lump in my throat, I hold on to the pain that courses through my body. I try to drag my eyes open, only to be blinded by the bright fluorescent lights. Squeezing my eyes, I blink, ignoring the tears leaking from the corner of my eyes as they slowly adjust to my surroundings.

IV’s hang near my head, heart monitors, and much more that I have no idea what they do hang around me.

I’m free. I’m in the hospital.

It takes more energy than I like to pull my hand up from the bed, gently touching my face. I hiss when I touch my cheek. I can feel the bruises, but the cuts are new to me. White gauze is wrapped around my wrist. I try to wrap my head around what happened, trying to remember how I even got to the hospital but it's a blank state.

The door opens and my heart breaks as Zion walks into the room. My skin crawls, and I can feel myself wanting to disappear. Devil never beat me like this. Sure I had bruises and cuts, but I can't imagine what I look like right now. And I don't want to.

He's at my side in an instant. I want him to grab my hand. Tell me everything is going to be okay, but when he doesn't my heart shatters. He doesn't want me anymore. He knows what they did to me. I'm not clean. I'm disgusting, and he sees it.

"Leave," I find myself whispering. I don't need to see him to watch me break. I don't want him to see me like this. I twist my face away from him, sobbing at the pain that shoots down my neck. Everything feels like too much and I don't want this.

I don't want to feel.

“Re—”

“Leave!” I scream, my voice cracking, unable to look at him. I can't see if he's relieved that he doesn't have to protect me anymore. “Just leave, leave me. Go!” My tongue darts out to my cracked lips, tasting blood.

I'm crazy, I know this. But I can't deal with this pain, I can't handle knowing what he thinks of me now. I'm used. Reaper and Dan got what they wanted. I'm broken and beyond repair. They should have killed me.

I should have died.

The door opens and slams shut.

And I break, crying into my hospital bed. Hating myself for not dying, hating myself for letting Dan kidnap me. And most of all hating myself for falling in love with Zion. I'm not strong enough for him. I'm weak and useless, I hate myself. I'm nothing but a disgusting toy for men to play with.

And now Zion sees that.

I cry so hard I don't hear the door open or close. It's not until a familiar body lays next to me that I take my first full breath.

“You kicked him out?” Gabriel asks, running his fingers through my dirty hair.

All I manage is to nod into his chest. My brain thuds against my skull, everything hurting.

“Why?”

“He doesn’t need to see me like this.” I mutter.

Gabriel takes a deep breath before I feel his own tears drop onto me. “I thought we lost you.”

Which only makes me cry harder and causes him to shake, each of us holding onto the other. We cry for ourselves. For our childhood that was ripped away from us, and for the shitty parent we had to escape.

“You’re safe now, you’re safe,” he repeats, coaxing me back to sleep.

Only if he knew I wasn’t. I was never safe again.

“With lots of rest, I suspect you’ll make a full recovery.” Dr. Mills smiles before he leaves the hospital room.

“How long was I gone?” I keep my voice emotionless as I ask Gabriel. Zion hasn’t come back while I’m awake. He thinks I haven’t noticed him lurking in the halls, hiding in the corner of the room while I try to sleep. Only to disappear when I wake up in the morning. I hate him being here, but I can’t hide the fact I secretly love him being close. He makes being here bearable.

Glancing up at Gabriel, he hangs his head, refusing to even look over at me. The thing about Gabriel and I is that we never shy away from telling each other the truth. Sure, I might not indulge in the whole truth of what happens to me. But this, this is different.

“Gabriel,” I snap.

His head jerks towards me, tears filling his eyes. “Four days.”

Four days.

I brace my hands on the bedside table, clenching and unclenching my fists. My knuckles bruised, my fingernails are ripped and turning my palms up, burns lay heavy against my fingertips, and my wrists have rope burns around them.

“We have nowhere to go.” I don’t know what causes me to say this. But it’s true. I’m too afraid to ask about Dan or what happened. I’m too scared to ask about Zion and how he survived. I was told they killed him. I never wanted to believe it, but everything has been a blur since I killed that old man.

“What are you talking about?” Gabriel asks, frowning at me.

“We shouldn’t be wasting away in the hospital, Gabby, we need to leave.” I try lifting the blanket off my lap, only the pain in my stomach intensifies.

“Izel, stop. We don’t need to leave; you need to rest and get better...the doctor said to rest and you’ll make a full recovery.”

“We can’t just stay here; we’re sitting ducks, Gabby.”

“What are you talking about?”

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I wasn't really sure, but what came out of my mouth was, "Dan and Reaper. They're going to find us." Surely, I knew that Zion wouldn't have left them alive.

"Izel, stop." Gabriel rushes to my side, focusing on fixing my blanket as he says, "Dan's dead."

I feel like I should know this, but for some reason I can't process the words he's saying. Dan can't be dead; he seemed unkillable. The number of nights I dreamed about just slitting his throat, shooting him. About doing anything to just get away from him. And now for him to just be dead, I can't breathe. I can't believe it.

"Reaper, he uh, well, he got away, but Zion's doing everything he can to find him. He's got Aziza, that girl you saved, apparently, she's this genius and can hack into anything. She's really good at finding people. But, well, I guess she's looking into Reaper, and promises to find him."

I must be frowning because Gabriel taps my nose, gently but enough that I jerk away from his touch.

"Sorry, did I hurt you?"

"No," I blurt out. Hating the fact that physical touch is something I grew to love, and now the idea of anyone touching me causes my skin to crawl. I want to scream and cry for no one to touch me.

"Why won't he come in here, Izel?" Gabriel asks, glancing at the hospital door before raising his brow at me.

I can't look at him, because I won't cry about a man that can't even look at me. He couldn't even touch me when I woke up. I'm used. I'm disgusting. I'm nothing.

"I just, I can't have him looking at me with pity," I finally say, willing the tears to leave. I'm so tired of crying. So damn tired of feeling.

"Izel..."

"I'm disgusting! Okay, Gabriel? I don't want him seeing that part of me. I don't want him seeing the broken parts of me!"

Gabriel rears back like I've hit him. And in a way I might as well have. I've never lost my temper with him. I've never once yelled or acted like something was wrong. Even when I was beaten at the clubhouse before, Gabriel would help clean me up and I'd act like nothing happened.

I can't do that now.

Zion made me a different person, made me depend on him, and now I feel like I'm breaking.

I don't look at Gabriel, not when he sighs, and not when he's stomping through the room and slamming the hospital door behind him.

Sucking in a shaky breath, I lie down until I'm on my side, relishing in the pain. I don't want any of them to see me like this, a fucking mess. Closing my eyes, I let the tears soak into my pillow. I want to sleep and never wake up. I should have died.

They never should have saved me.

Zion

Peeking through the window into Izel's room, she lies on her side and even from here I can see her body shake as she cries. It takes everything to not crawl into that bed with her and chase the bad dreams away. I feel completely helpless as I stare at her through the small window, remembering the black and blue bruises that cover her entire body. I begin pacing in front of her door trying to calm the monster inside, but nothing is working. Every time I think I can be calm enough to go into the room and be with her.

I can't.

She lost weight, a lot. There isn't a pale piece of skin that's not marked by a bruise, cut, or burn. And I hate that I could have stopped it. I could have told her no to the whole thing. I should have been prepared more. All this, all the pain she's in, is because of me.

Near punching the wall, I storm to the stairwell, making my way outside for the millionth time. My knees buckle the moment I hit the cool air, the wall being the only thing that stops me from falling to my face.

I can't breathe.

It's all my fault.

"Zion?" I jerk as someone touches my shoulder. "Shit, sorry."

Looking up, Gabriel's red-rimmed eyes meet mine. And I'm hit with waves of anger, knowing his tears are my fault. My actions put Izel in danger, got her kidnapped, and now in the hospital.

“Are you leaving us?” he asks, sitting down on the ledge. I’m taken back at his question, unsure of what to say. “Izel thinks we need to find another place to stay, to live, because she thinks you’re going to throw her away.”

“Why? How?”

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I don't understand why she would think that. I rack my brain trying to understand where she would come up with these ideas. But it's just that, she doesn't have a reason. She makes things up in her head. She's trying to protect herself.

"She thinks she's broken, and she doesn't want you to see that." Sighing Gabriel leans back, not able to look at me as he explains, "they used to beat her for no reason sometimes. She would come into my room at the clubhouse, and I would help bandage her wounds, but my sister refused to talk about it. I never pushed because she always seemed to be too far in her head to even answer simple questions. She's always been strong for me, for us. Taking on more than she can handle, but refusing to ask for help, refusing to lean on anyone."

Nodding my head, I see everything he's talking about. Izel is strong, but sometimes even the strong need help. Izel runs away with her brother because they were going to rape and sell him. She put herself at risk all the time to save her brother.

"We trusted one person, a new prospect, Kiwi. He was nice, kind of like a big brother in a way. He would flirt wit--"

I don't realize I'm seething until Gabriel begins laughing. "Calm down there, buddy, she didn't want him. Honestly, the only person she's ever shown interest in is you."

I smile behind my mask, finding myself more pleased with the idea of Izel never liking anyone until me.

"He betrayed us. He was playing nice because Dan felt like something was up, and I put my trust a little too much into Kiwi. He ended up selling us out. I didn't see Izel

for a week, and when I finally did it was when two of Dan's men were going to... well, they were going... You know?"

The words die in my throat. I'm nodding because I do. I know what they were planning on doing.

"She killed them. I don't even know how it happened. I was so out of it. One minute I was crying, begging them to stop. And then the next she was covered in their blood, and we ran. We were chased and honestly, I'm not sure how we got so far. Days passed, and she saw someone was following us, so she stashed me in some house and ran. It was almost two weeks before I saw her again. Until you brought her to me." Gabriel looked up, turning towards me.

"You saved her twice now. You might not see it that way. I can tell you're beating yourself up, thinking it is your fault this happened. But it's not. I could easily just blame myself. I'm the reason we were on the run. It was because of me that I told Kiwi, and because of me Izel was forced to kill two people and get kidnapped not once but twice. And because of me she was tortured." Gabriel sucks in air, breathing hard as he frowns at me.

"It's not your fault," I muttered.

"You're right, it's not my fault. And that means it's not yours either."

Snapping my head towards him, he smirks. This whole discussion was him trying to convince me that it isn't my fault for her getting kidnapped. And as much as I want to fight and argue with him, he is right. Izel is going to do what she wants, and she was protecting her brother from dangerous men.

"You love her?" he asks.

"Yes." I was confident about that.

"Even with her eyesight going? One day she's going to wake up and probably never see again. You okay with that?"

"Of course." I don't care if Izel never sees again. I'll be her eyes. I'll show her not everything needs to be seen.

"Can you handle her being jealous and irrational?"

Remembering how she acted towards Rachel, my stomach clenches and I feel all warm. I like the idea. I like her being jealous and irrational.

"From the weird look you're giving me I think you can. So as long as you choose her and don't stop, I think that's all that matters," Gabriel says, getting to his feet. He doesn't say anything else before he's heading back inside the hospital.

Pulling my phone out, I dial Killian.

"Hello?"

"You disappeared." After arriving at the hospital, Killian left, sending a text that he had something to take care of. I haven't thought about it until now.

"It's a long story, but someone else was hiding in that clubhouse. I don't know why they were, but it's someone that is important to Salem."

"I don't care." I sound like an asshole, but I couldn't care less about Salem and her problems. "I need to find some guy that was there but left before we arrived, goes by the name Reaper. I don't know much else."

“Hold on.”

Swallowing my irritation, I start pacing around the sidewalk. I’m not good at waiting for others, and Killian being the little bitch he is—

“Give me the details you can.” Aziza comes onto the phone.

“I don’t have much. He goes by Reaper; they have stupid road names. But... the girl, Izel Hollow, I don’t know her middle name.” I hear clicking around and before I know it Aziza is answering my unasked question.

“Mabel.”

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“Brother, Gabriel Hollow. They’re not full siblings though and her piece of shit father is Dan.”

“Gabriel Hollow, hmmm no middle names from the looks of it. Gabriel, twelve, birthday April ninth. Izel, twenty-two—”

“She’s twenty-one,” I interject. She told me she was twenty-one, unless...

“Birthday, oh interesting, December twenty-fifth. A Christmas baby, how nice.” Aziza laughs and continues on talking. Only I can’t hear her because I’m stuck on the fact her birthday just passed, and I had no idea. She never said anything, why?

“Z?” Aziza breaks into my thoughts.

“Find him,” is all I say before hanging up and heading back to Izel’s room. The moment I step inside, I find her crying and speaking low to Gabriel. Both of them snap their heads to me as soon as the door closes.

“Zion,” Gabriel mutters, standing from the bedside. I know what he’s trying to tell me without the words. Izel refuses to meet my stare and that enrages me. I shouldn’t get mad, but the simple fact is she thinks I’ll look at her differently because grown ass men attacked a female.

“Let me talk to Izel,” I say, crossing my arms over my chest. Gabriel stands, kissing the side of Izel's head before walking around me and leaving us.

She still refuses to look at me, her hands trying their best to intertwine with each

other. Her nervous habit she often did, and yet nothing enrages me more than her doing that because she's nervous of me. She won't even look at me.

"Are you scared of me now?" I find myself asking, not sure what I will do if she is actually scared of me.

Izel shakes her head, glancing over before dropping her head once more.

"Then look at me."

When she still refuses, I'm at her side instantly in her face. Her breath hitches, wide-eyed, and as much as she might try, she's not scared of me.

"You weren't scared of me in that basement, when I murder people in front of you, and not when I showed you who I really am. So don't be afraid of me now. I didn't like when you screamed at me like you were scared, and I won't tolerate you not looking at me anymore." Ripping my mask off, I throw it against the wall before I'm in her face again. "You wanted to see my face so fucking bad, you begged me. And now you won't look at me. Well, too fucking bad, Izel—"

"Stop calling me that," she mumbles.

"I can't hear you."

"Don't call me that," she hisses, gripping the covers in her fist. If she had enough strength, she'd probably smack me. The idea turns me on, knowing how sassy and feisty she gets.

"What am I supposed to call you, huh?"

She grits her teeth, glaring at me.

“Come on, tell me. What am I supposed to call you?” I say, brushing my nose against her.

“Red, you’re supposed to call me Red....” She sighs.

“Well, Red, if I’m supposed to call you that, then that means you’re mine. And if you’re mine, you know what that means?”

Shaking her head, she drops her head slightly until her forehead brushes against mine.

“You don’t hide yourself from me,” I growl, tipping her chin up. I try to avoid the bigger bruises, not wanting to cause her pain. “You’re worth everything to me; you are everything. You’re not disgusting, you’re beautiful to me.”

“I’m used, I’m dirty.” She hiccups, a tear dropping down her cheek.

Against my better judgment, I swipe my tongue around her cheek, licking her tears off. “What they did to you doesn’t make you used or dirty. It doesn’t make you anything but a survivor for what they’ve done. And I’m going to kill him.”

“Promise me?”

“I promise.” Whatever she wants she gets. “I’ll burn the world down for you, and I’m going to start with him.” Kissing her forehead, I take in a deep breath finally, breathing her in, knowing she’s alive.

Climbing beside her, she presses her face against my side. Stroking her head, I begin rubbing circles into her head.

“Your problems are my problems,” I whisper into her ear. “I knew you were the one when I realized I could handle your problems. When I wanted to take them on as my

own, I knew you were it for me.”

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Izel only cries harder; her body shakes as I hold on to her. My arm presses against her beaten stomach, and anger threatens to take over. Only her soft snores fill the room, and I'm reminded she trusts me. She's finally getting the rest she needs, and it's in my arms.

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Zion

Idon'tliketheidea of us leaving the hospital so soon. But after being in there for a week and a half Izel is persistent on wanting to leave. It wasn't until she ripped her IVs and began throwing a fit like a toddler that Gabriel told me it was probably best if we went home.

Home.

That's what it is now. The house I built, the house I spent a lot of lonely nights in, is now home to a teenage boy and a girl I found myself wanting to spend the rest of my life with.

So here we are, four days later, driving from Texas back to North Dakota. Izel lays in the back seat, my jacket covering her while she holds my mask against her face. Gabriel sits in the passenger seat, munching down on donuts while humming along to the radio.

She's been sleeping most of the drive, every so often gasping awake before she's falling asleep again mumbling, "He's going to kill you all." I have yet to ask her who

she's talking to or about. I'm afraid to. She's too fragile and I'm scared I'm going to say something that's going to cause a breakdown. And I don't know how to handle that.

I'm no good with emotions and when she breaks down, I'm not sure how I'm going to handle it.

Holding my breath, I pull into the garage. Gabriel sighs before climbing out and closing the door. The moment it slams shut, Izel shoots up and screams.

"Hey, hey, Red." I'm out and climbing into the backseat. Gently pulling her into my chest, she tightens her grip on my mask, eyes squeezed shut.

"He's going to kill you."

"Who, Red, who's going to kill me?" I ask, grinding my molars.

She pauses, pressing her nose against my chest before working her way to my neck. Taking a deep breath, her body relaxes suddenly.

"I'm okay," is all she says, wiggling her way out of my grip. I don't say anything, I don't want her freaking out. Nodding my head, I help her out of the truck and into the house.

"I want to lie down," Izel mutters, stepping away from me. Gabriel and I watch as she leaves the kitchen until we hear the faint sound of the bedroom door closing.

My phone starts to ring, thankfully breaking the awkward tension between Gabriel and I. Holding it up, he nods his head before I head off to my office.

"I found him," Aziza says before I can even say hello.

“Where?” I ask, gripping my desk.

“Z, I... I don’t really know how to say this.”

Rage burns through me. I don’t have time for this.

“Spit it out,” I snap. Pacing around the office, I hold my breath waiting for her to answer me.

“From the looks of it he followed you. I’ve been tracking your whereabouts and his. He checked into a rental about an hour outside of town. I don’t know how or—”

“Give me the address,” I growl, making my way to the closet. I rip the door open, pulling out my weapons.

“Zion, I don’t think—I really don’t think you should go there alone. Who knows what type of person he is?” Aziza sighs, and for the first time I can hear the fear in her voice.

“Then give me the fucking details and the address. I’m not letting him live!” Putting her on speaker, I begin my process of checking my guns. Magazines are full, knives sharp.

“He was in the military for ten years before he was discharged for multiple allegations. But the main one when he was on deployment, he... he, shit, Z. He raped and murdered countless girls over there, and not just girls, children. He murdered and raped children, Z.”

"Yeah, and Izel was one of them."

She might not have come out and said the words, but I know.

“Z, are you saying?”

“Yes.”

I read over the notes the doctors left, three broken ribs, bruises, burns, cuts, a nose broken. Severe dehydration, starvation, damage to her sex and stitches to her anal. I might not know everything he did to her, but I know he’s going to die painfully. Very fucking painfully.

“I can send Killian, he can help. I would have Salem and Zane, but she’s...”

“No. I don’t need help,” I grit out.

“Okay, just please, please be careful. I want to know. I want to know when you have him, and I want to know when you’re safe.”

I’m not used to others caring about my safety, so when Aziza's voice breaks, beginning to cry on the other line, it makes me uncomfortable, and uneasy. But I remember what he did to my girl, and I’d do anything for her. Even if that meant walking into a trap and getting myself killed. I’d do anything for her.

“Okay,” I mutter before hanging up and dropping my phone.

Making my way to the living room, Gabriel stands in the fridge searching for something.

“Where’s your chocolate milk?”

I stop in my tracks, narrowing my eyes at his question. “I don’t have any,” I lie. They

still have yet to see the other side of my garage that holds my large fridge, filled with chocolate milk. And I don't expect to tell him today.

“I need to head out. I’ll only be gone for a few hours; I won’t have my phone.” I hate the idea of leaving. But I refuse to let him be this close, knowing he’s closing in on her.

Gabriel slams the fridge closed and glares at me.

“Where are you going?”

“Out.” I don’t bother telling him. Slamming the garage door closed, I climb inside and leave my property.

I don’t care what happens to me, as long as I drag Reaper down with me.

Shifting my rifle behind my back, I climb over the fence, dropping to the ground. The sun setting helps disguise me as I shift through the bushes to the main breaker. If I were thinking better, I’d be more prepared to cut the power. But I wasn’t.

I was thinking of Izel, and the way she looked in the hospital bed. The screams she made, the pain.

Shaking my head to clear the noises, pulling my gun out, I shoot into the main breaker, cutting the power out. I sneak to the back door and wait. Reaper doesn't take long to open the door and step out.

Stupid fuck.

Twisting his arm, I yank, pulling his elbow from his socket. Reaper bellows. Using it as my advantage I kick his knee, sending him down. Where I grab him from the back

of the head and smash my knee into his face, breaking his nose, I pull back ready to shoot him when he grabs a hold of my ankle and moves himself out of the way.

“Fuck,” I growl, catching myself on the railing. Grabbing the back of my head, he catches me off guard, smashing my face into the railing. Blood pours down my nose, and my vision blurs. Ramming my elbow back, I hit something causing him to yell out.

Turning, I ram my fist into his face, once, twice and the final time he falls back. He gasps for air, but I don’t stop. Her screams. The marks left on her skin. I see everything. It all is too much, and I can’t stop.

“You left me for this?” a familiar female voice says close behind me.

Dropping Reaper to the ground, I can’t turn around. If I don’t see her, then she can’t be here.

“Look at me,” Izel growls.

Turning around, I face a very angry redhead. Arms crossed over her chest, my clothes hang from her body.

“This isn’t what it looks like,” I try to defend myself. But what else can it look like? I look like a toddler with my hand in the cookie jar.

“No? Because from where I stand, you’re beating my rapist.” Izel chuckles, eyes darting down to Reaper. The hatred is shown as she continues to stare at him, her fist tightening on her bicep as she grinds her teeth.

“Then I guess it does look like that.”

"How'd you find him?" Izel asks, stepping forward.

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“Aziza, she’s been tracking him, and he was following you.”

She doesn’t stop until she’s in front of me. “So, you thought, what, you’d get to him before he got to me?” That same intense stare she had when we first met, she has now, refusing to back down, and I can’t hold it in anymore.

“Yes. He’s going to die tonight, and no one else is ever going to touch you,” I vow.

Nodding her head, she looks out towards the house behind me. I open my mouth to ask what she needs, demanding she not get stuck inside her head. I don’t get a chance when she walks around me towards the house.

“Bring him in here,” she orders climbing the stairs.

Bending down, I reach into my back pocket. Pulling out my handcuffs, I put his hands together handcuffing them. Ignoring his moaning before I grab a hold of his feet and drag him inside the house. Dropping his body once we get into the kitchen, Izel puddles around the cabinets, unsure what she’s looking for.

"Tie him to the table, face down."

Listening to her, I haul him up, zip tying his limbs to the kitchen table.

“Stop,” he groans trying to wiggle his way off the table.

Izel turns at the sound of his voice, murderous eyes before she’s quick to stand near his head. Gripping his head, she pulls his head up.

“Why?” she hisses.

“Get off me, Izel,” he growls, blood dripping from his nose.

“I don’t think so. You’re going to answer my questions, and if you lie or don’t answer, my boyfriend over there is going to break your bones, rip your fingers off and shove them in your ass.” Izel smiles.

I barely catch my breath at her words. Boyfriend. Is that what I am? Her boyfriend. Because that doesn’t seem like enough. I can’t breathe without her; I can’t stand not being near her. I want to wrap myself around her and never let go. When she was gone for those four days, I felt myself dying. I couldn’t breathe, couldn’t sleep. I couldn’t live.

“I want to know why?” she once again asks. When he doesn’t answer, she eyes me. Taking it as my cue, I step forward, grabbing his right pointer finger and snapping it.

“AH, YOU BITCH!” he screams, thrashing against the binds.

“I told you, answer or he’s going to break your fingers. Now, why!” she screams, yanking on his hair, then he screams.

He doesn’t say anything, glaring at her. When her eyes flick to mine again, I step forward and break his middle finger. And repeat, six fingers broken before he’s an inconsolable mess.

“Dan told us to!” he yells, sobbing. She drops his head, letting his face bounce off the table.

“I was a fucking child! I was eleven I was supposed to be worried about boys my own fucking age! You and he ruined my life, you ruined me. I hate you, I HATE

YOU. FUCK YOU, FUCK YOU!” she screams into his face, grabbing his head and smashing his head into the table.

I worry she’s going to rip a stitch or cause even more pain, but I let her go. She needs to do this, even if I hate her getting her hands dirty. Izel needs to face him and let go of her anger. And if that’s by smashing his face into the table before he dies, then so be it.

Izel drops his head, and breathing hard, she steps back. Flicking her eyes to mine, she says, “Pull his pants down.”

“NO!” Reaper cries, pulling against the zip ties and hand cuffs.

Stepping forward, I grip his jeans, yanking them down until they reach his knees. His naked ass is on full display. Izel steps towards me. Reaching into my pocket she pulls out my knife, and my keys drop onto the ground.

“Sorry,” Izel mutters. Bending down I grab them but before I can pocket the keys, Izel snatches them from me.

“You still have the turtle?” she asks, eyes glancing between the ugly turtle and my eyes.

“Of course. I love it,” I mumble, smiling behind my mask.

Izel reaches up, placing her palm against my cheek. My eyes flutter closed, easing my damaged soul. “You love me.”

“Yes.”

Izel steps back, flicking the knife open. I think I know what she’s about to do, but that

doesn't prepare me.

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“Do you remember when I begged for you to stop?” she asks Reaper trailing the knife's tip up this thigh. He begins to wiggle, causing the blade to slip off him. Slamming his shoulders down, I hold him in place for her.

“Thank you, Pup.” Izel blows a kiss at me. Nodding my head, I’m thankful for this mask hiding the blush.

“Don’t, please. I’m sorry,” he pleads, trying to look back at what she’s doing. Only he can’t, not with me holding his shoulders down.

“Do you remember what I told you over and over again?” she asks, pressing the knife into one of his ass cheeks. On reflex, I tense my own ass. This isn’t going to end well.

“He’s—he’s going to kill y—you all!” he sobs, dropping his head.

“That he is, but first you’re going to feel what I felt for years when I begged you and him to stop. When I begged and cried.” She doesn’t give him a chance to cry anything before she pulls his ass cheeks apart and rams the knife into his ass hole.

Reaper screams at the top of his lungs, and his cheek clench, which only causes more pain. Pulling the knife out, she rams it in again.

“Feels good don’t it? Isn’t that what you asked me? It’s okay, my sweet, I know you love this. Feel that cock in your ass while you think of your dead fuck buddy.” She laughs, jamming the knife further into his body. “How’s it feel, baby?” Pulling up, she rips his ass hole open, and blood squirts everywhere. Reaper doesn’t respond, not that he could. His face collapses, as he slowly stops breathing. She lets go of the

knife, leaving it lodged in his body.

“Let’s go,” she mutters, stepping around the table and out into the night air.

I’m not one to get nervous or scared, but watching Izel barely spare me a glance and leaving Reaper’s dead body behind, I question what I just got myself into, yet I still follow my Red out to the truck.

Rounding the truck I stop in my tracks as she stands by the passenger side, waiting for me.

“He and Tiger, the one you killed at the bus station, they raped me on my eleventh birthday.”

“Christmas,” I mutter.

Izel nods, leaning against the truck.

“Anyone else after you?” I’ll kill them all, I don’t care who or how long it takes. No one else is getting to Izel or Gabriel.

“No. It was just Dan and his men.”

“I’ll kill them. Anyone who tries to hurt you.” Stepping forward until I’m right in front of her, Izel looks up.

“I know, no one will hurt me again.”

“You need to trust me.”

“I do tr—”

Shaking my head, I close my arms around her placing my palms against my truck. “Trust that I will protect you, no matter what. No one is going to come between us, I need you to trust me.”

Izel visually swallows, rubbing her lips together before nodding her head.

“Okay,” she whispers. Reaching up, she grips the bottom of my mask, ripping it off. “I can’t run to jump into your truck with being in pain and you don’t have a step stool, but I imagine you like lifting me up an—”

I don’t let her finish. I bend, grabbing her thighs, just like I did the first time. Only instead of hurrying to get her inside, she wraps her bloody arms around my neck.

“I’m damaged.” Her finger traces along the scar from my eye to mouth.

“That’s okay,” I mumble around her fingers.

“I’m going to have bad days. I’m still haunted, I’m never going to want it to be rough, some days I’m going to need love. I’m not going to be whole.”

“I’ll love you even if you never want me to touch you again.” I’ll be anything for her. Anything.

“It might take some time,” she whispers.

“I’ve loved you since you called me an ogre.” How could I not? She took my breath away then and now she might think she’s ruined, damaged. But she’s my ruined, damaged red head.

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“Good because when I’m all healed, and ready for physical touch again, I’m tying you to our bed and having my way with you.”

“Promises, promises.” I laugh, smashing our lips together.

She might be a bloody beauty, but I’ll be her weapon, her oge, her Butcher. As long as she’s alive and in my arms.

I’m hers.

Epilogue

Zion

Basically, a year later

Izel rolls over, the covers falling off her luscious thick body. Her pink nipples harden in the cold air, her legs falling open. I can see her slick wetness between her legs from here. My hand drops to my hard cock, running my hand up my length. I groan at the contact.

Rolling over, I drink in her curves, the thickness of her hips, the thighs I crave to have around my head again. Even if it’s only been a few hours since I’ve tasted her pussy, I’m dying for another taste. Izel used to be nervous being naked around me, hating the scars on her body. But since she got two large flower and vine tattoos that cover most of her stomach, she’s learned that I love her body, scars and all. Now she’s practically naked all the time.

Slipping between her legs, I spread her open, pushing a finger into her wetness. Izel moans at the intrusion. Her pussy swallows my finger. Adding a second, I work her open enough to take my cock. As soon as she's ready, I rub my cock against her lips, trying to stop the deep groan building.

"Fuck." The word slips from my mouth as I push my thick cock into her. Izel's eyes flick open, smiling as she moans again.

"I know you're awake." Covering her body with mine, she smirks, dragging her nails down my back. I thrust hard into her causing her eyes to snap open, the air leaving her lungs.

"Zion," she breathes out. Capturing her mouth, I can't help moving my tongue along hers.

"Yes, Red?" I say, slowly moving in and out of her body. Moving my hands between our bodies.

"Fuck, faster." She hisses the moment my thumb touches her clit.

"What do you say?" Whispering into her ear, I lick the column of her neck, thriving when she grabs my shoulder, pulling me further into her.

"Fuck me, fuck me like I'm yours." She tries bucking her hips.

But I'm at a loss, anything she wants I give her. Moving back, I grab her thighs, shifting until her legs meet her chest. Opening her nice and wide for me, I groan as I watch her eyes roll into the back of her head. The rolls on her stomach jiggle, and her tits bounce as I pound into her.

She moans loudly, filling the air as she tries to catch her breath. Never looking away

from me as I take over her body, controlling her just the way she likes.

“Cum,” I demand. “Be my good girl and fucking cum for me, Red,” I grit out.

Letting go of one leg, I pinch her clit causing her to cum. Izel coming always triggers my own, emptying myself in her. I see stars, my vision blurs. I nearly drop onto her, rolling at the last minute. Izel climbs on top of me.

“Be a good boy.” She giggles, climbing up until her pussy hovers over my face. Sitting her cunt down, my tongue darts out. Our mixed release drips onto my tongue down my throat. When she first did this, I hadn’t expected to enjoy it so much. I thought I’d hate it, honestly. But when she moves her hips against my face, fucking my mouth, I grab her thighs and go to town.

Oh, Godddd,” Izel moans, cumming once more into my mouth the moment I bite onto her clit.

Dropping onto the bed next to me, she grabs my hand, interlocking our fingers. Another thing she started to do instead of twirling her own fingers. When she gets nervous, she grabs my hand and plays with my fingers instead of her own.

Since killing Reaper, it took Izel longer to heal mentally than she thought. Physically she healed well. She still doesn’t like anal, which I don’t blame her. She says her brain takes her back to those four days. Three months ago, she finally broke down and said she wanted to get a tattoo to cover her scars.

I only agreed if she would tattoo her name on my hand.

She did, and then had my tattoo artist put her nickname on the side of my neck.

Gabriel went back to school, and though he had to take extra classes to catch up with

the level he wanted to be at, he found his love for drawing and painting, an outlet that helps him deal with his past trauma. It's the reason the library is now half an art studio. It's where Izel spends her time reading a lot and where Gabriel draws and paints.

Izel hasn't decided what she wants to do. Between wanting to go to school but getting anxiety whenever I'm gone for too long, it's been a battle.

Her eyesight still upsets her when she has her bad days, which is more often than not. Her left eye is worse than her right, and though she tries to hide it, I know she struggles with accepting it. I do my best to remind Izel that her problems are mine, and I'll take them on any day.

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“What are you thinking about over there?” Izel asks, rubbing her hand against my cheek.

Glancing down, I can't help but smile. Being thankful that she took a chance on anogrelike me.

“Do you remember the first thing you ever said to me?” I ask.

“I think it was something about you being big,” Izel murmurs tracing along her handprint tattooed across my heart.

“Wow, you're big,” I finally answer, placing my hand over hers against my heart.

Izel giggles, causing me to chuckle myself.

“I mean you are, Zion.”

“I fell in love with you then, and I never stopped.” Suddenly Izel snaps her head up at me.

“You're the brightness in my dark world,” she mumbles, pressing her lips against mine.

“You saved me.” It's the first time I told her, but it won't be the last. Izel might have brought baggage into my life, but her problems I can and want to deal with. I don't care what they are or who is after her. She will always be mine.

Mine.