



Tacet a Mortuis (The Elite King's Club 3)

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Category: Romance, New Adult, Thriller, Action, Suspense, Dark, Young Adult

Description: Hail to the king, and watch him reign, this game was somewhat fun, until the finale came...

Now we're here, with carnage and despair, and the only questions left to answer, are the ones that do not appear...

A king loses a war, and a swan sheds her wings, chaos collides with peace, as the crows begin to sing...

Enter if you dare, because I swear the end is near, but nothing is as it seems, and everything is so bare.

So what the f*ck is going on at Riverside,
I think, I think... everyone is about to die....

Total Pages (Source): 99

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Recap

The Broken Puppet

“No!” I scream, dropping to the ground. Shaking my head, I clutch my hair and pull at it, wanting to scratch the memories out of my head.

“Madison!” Who is that? It sounds like Bishop. “Brantley—”

Looking toward the bed, I swallowed, slowly stepping into the room. It was a big room. Gigantic. It was dim, almost dark in the room, and there was a big bed sitting to the side. I looked closer, stepping toward the bed, my heart beating in my chest and my throat clogged. All the lights were dim, but there was one shining on the bed. Only when I got closer, I saw it was a camera sitting on a stand with a light pointing toward the mattress.

My eyebrows pulled together. “Wha—”

“Go to the bed, Silver.” That voice. I hated that voice. I felt sick, my tummy not feeling good. Something was wrong, like it was always wrong when he was around. I hated him, but I obeyed because that was what I’d been told to do. I had to listen to adults; they always knew best. But why did he make me feel dirty? No other adult made me feel dirty. He made me sad, hurt, and angry all at once. I was confused, I think.

Walking toward the bed, I stopped at the foot of it. There was a small boy curled up on top of the covers, but he was wearing no clothes. Why was he wearing no clothes?

He must've been cold.

"Silver, on the bed!" Lucan raised his voice at me, and I flinched, quickly crawling onto the soft mattress.

"Hi," I whispered to the boy who was crying. "What's wrong?" I asked, wanting to know why he was so sad. Did he feel like I did? Did Lucan make him feel the same way I felt?

The boy sobbed then buried his head into the blanket. "Go away!" he yelled as he continued to cry. He was angry and sad, so maybe he did feel the same way as I did.

I stopped, sitting on the mattress as Lucan loosened his tie and pointed the camera at us. "Silver, take your clothes off."

"No!" I scream, sweat oozing out of my flesh. "Leave me alone. My name isn't Silver! It's Madison! Madison Montgomery! I'm not Silver!" I rock back and forth on the gravel road, trying to pull myself out of the memory.

"I—what about the boy?"

Lucan looked toward the boy on the bed, his lip curled. "Brantley, make room for Silver."

My eyes pop open and I shoot off the road, ignoring the tiny stones that are embedded into my flesh. "Brantley!" I scream.

Brantley turns to face me, a blank look pulling over his features.

I turn pale, all blood leaving my body. The pain, the anger, the sadness, it's all been cracked open again, and suddenly I'm that scared little girl again.

“What the fuck are they talking about?” Hector booms, losing his cool slightly. “And what the fuck just happened there, Madison?”

Headlights light up the cabin, but I ignore them. I ignore everything.

And suddenly, rage. Pure rage electrifies me like a rush of adrenaline. Squaring my shoulders, I finally look directly at Lucan, the man who abused me as a child. The man my parents trusted. The man I thought I could trust. The man who made me keep secrets by using his “I’m an adult” card on me.

The man I want to kill.

“You!” I seethe.

His eyes join with mine, and he still looks the same, only older. So much older. His head is bald now, his face free of hair, but his eyes. His eyes will forever be the trigger to that feeling. That same feeling I felt when I was a little girl starts slowly slipping into me, but I fight it. I’m not her anymore. I’m older. More experienced. And though I may feel this pain for the coming months after being face-to-face with him, I know whatever I do it will be worth it. Car doors close in the distance behind me, but again, I ignore it. I ignore everything because my focus is solely on Lucan. Everything in my peripheral is closed.

I can hear people, or someone, walking toward us behind me, their feet crunching against the gravel, but I ignore it.

He chuckles. “Ain’t no one gonna believe you, Silver.”

The footsteps stop.

Ice cold wind whips my hair across my face, and that’s when I know. I know those

footsteps belong to Bishop and the Kings.

Lucan lunges at me, gripping my hair and pulling my back up against his front. It happens so fast I barely blink, but when I do, I see them. With my back pressed against Lucan's front, his gun pressing against my temple, I look pleadingly right at Bishop, but he's not looking at me. His shoulders are rising and falling in anger, his eyes zoned directly in on Lucan.

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“What the fuck is going on here, son?” Hector asks calmly, not fazed I’m about to get my brains blown out everywhere. My heart pounds in my chest, and goose bumps prickle all over my flesh as fear ripples through me. No. There’s no way. I didn’t survive through all the memories, all the suppressed bullshit, only to go out by his hands. His hands already took so much from me; I won’t let them take my life too.

Bishop steps forward, his lip curled and his eyes black. So black. I’ve not seen this look before; this is feral. Casting a look over his shoulder, Nate is there, the same position, his knuckles cracking. He starts jumping in his spot, cracking his neck as if he’s ready to fight. Which I have no doubt he is. The rest of the boys are there too, ready to throw down if they need to. Whether they know the story or not, I see it right there. Their loyalty to Bishop. It’s unquestionable. This is The Elite Kings in full form.

“Ah!” Lucan presses the gun into my temple more. “Don’t fucking move. Now, since people will be dying tonight, I want to get a few things out there for Silver so she knows the deal.”

“Don’t call me that,” I hiss, my lip slightly curling.

“Hey, I’m doing you a favor.”

“Fuck you.”

He laughs, his breath falling over my neck. I can’t hide the disgust; I dry heave, ready to spill my guts all over the road.

“What the fuck is going on?” Hector asks again.

Where is Brantley? This was all a setup. He and Khales are nowhere to be seen. I look around again, as much as I can from the position I’m in, and sure enough, they’re both not where they were a few minutes ago.

Hate.

“First, let me start with this. Silver, do you know much about the last names of these boys here?”

What?

“The hell has that got to do with you and what you did to me all those years ago?”

“I’ll get to that part.” He grins. I can hear it in his sick voice how much he’s getting out of this, and that’s the thing about age. The tone of your voice is one of the last things to change. Therefore, Lucan still has the same voice.

“What are you doing, Lucan?” Hector warns. His tone should be enough to put the fear of God into Lucan, but it doesn’t, because he continues.

“Hector and Bishop Hayes... Hayes meaning ‘The Devil,’” he starts, and just as I open my mouth to ask another question, his hand slams over it, pausing me. “Everyone shut the fuck up and let me finish, or I swear to God I will shoot her.”

He clears his throat, before smugly murmuring, “Now, where was I? Oh yes, the names. Lucan and Brantley Vitiosus. I’ll get to the meanings of the names and the English translations when I’ve finished.” He laughs. Then his lips skim over my earlobe before he whispers, “And you know how theatrical I can get, don’t ya, Silver?”

The first teardrops, followed by anger. Rage.

He continues, “Max, Saint, and Cash Ditio. Phoenix and Chase Divitae. Raguel, Ace, and Eli Rebellis.” He laughs at these last two. My eyes shoot toward Nate, who is now being held back by Chase and Cash. He looks absolutely feral. The lack of light and smudged tears in my eyes make it hard to view, but even if I couldn’t see it, I could sure as fuck feel it.

Lucan carries on. “Nate Malum-Riverside.” Then he laughs, bringing his lips to my ear again.

I shut my eyes, fighting the bile that’s about to spew out of my mouth from not just his proximity, but his touch. “Johan, Hunter, Jase, and Madison Venari.”

I freeze. All life drains from my face.

“You hear that, Silver? You’re adopted... you and that schizo brother of yours.”

What? More tears spill out of my eyes. This can’t be true. There’s no way. He’s fucking with me. My dad is my dad and my mom was my mom. Lucan is being what he is.

I look at Bishop, who is finally looking directly at me, and I see it. The look. It’s the look he gives me when it’s just us together. His eyebrows are furrowed and his eyes are zeroed into mine.

Not only is it true, but he knew.

Sobs wrack through my body, and my knees buckle, but Lucan yanks me back up. “Careful, careful... maybe you can talk with your man here about the meanings of those last names and what they mean in regards to each family’s duty in the Kings,

but let me tell you this, Silver,” he whispers so harshly into my ear. “When you know all there is to know about this—they will kill you.”

I don’t care.

I’m adopted. My whole life was a lie. I was wrong. I can’t trust anyone. I can only trust Daemon. Daemon. His face lights up inside my head, but instead of it soothing me, it brings on another set of tears.

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“So I’ll make this easier for you and tell you the big firework kicker!” he yells, laughing hysterically. Leaning down, I pause, my heavy breathing the only thing breaking the silence.

“You—”

A gun fires and Lucan screams, his hand loosening from around my mouth as he falls to the ground.

I freeze, static buzzing in my ears from the gunshot.

Pain.

Anger.

Rage.

Rage.

Rage.

Heat rises inside of me as I think over everything. His touch when I was a kid. What he made me do to Brantley. And what he made Brantley do to me as a kid.

“Stop!” I scream, my eyes unblinking and fixed on the car in front of me.

Silence.

I slowly turn around, noticing Bishop is beside me, kneeling down next to Lucan, who is bleeding out on the road.

I look at Lucan, tilting my head. Smiling, I whisper, “Seeing you in pain soothes my anger.”

Lucan looks at me square in the eye. “I will live in your memories, Silver. Forever.”

Squaring my jaw, I bend down to Bishop’s level, bringing my hand to his boot. I feel up toward where I know he keeps a knife. I feel him freeze, realizing what I’m about to do, but before he can stop me—if he was going to stop me—I unclip the holster and pull out the large hunting knife and slowly raise it into the air. Lucan’s eyes follow it slowly.

“You see this?” I run my pointer finger down the blunt side of the knife. “It’s a Fallkniven A1Pro Survival Knife.” I smirk, admiring how the boys—except for Bishop, he’s still crouching beside me—watch me with awe, or fear, or a combination of both, and are all standing behind me. They have my back—but I won’t need it. I launch the knife into Lucan’s pelvis area until I feel his bones crunching against the blade. He screams out, a loud, curdling scream, his back arching and tears pouring down his face.

I bend down to his ear, running my lips over the lobe like he did to me not long ago. Feeling his blood spilling over my hand, I grin and whisper, “You know, since you love to be theatrical... this knife is a survival knife.” I circle the blade, my hand sticky with his blood. It blankets my anger, soothing it like an ice pack on a burn. Putting out the pain.

Pulling the knife out of him, I inch backward, both hands wrapped around the blade, ready to stab it into his head. Needing it to finally put out the burn I have inside me. The burn has only been temporarily eased when Brantley appears, snatches the knife

out of my hand, and stabs it right between Lucan's eyes. Blood sprays all over me, the tang of blood overpowering every taste bud in my mouth.

Brantley screams, veins popping out from his neck, his eyeballs almost bulging from their sockets. He has anger; I was right. He has anger just like I did, if not more, because Lucan was his father.

My breathing slows, and when Lucan's head drops to the side, his death stinking up the air, I collapse into Bishop, my head resting on his shoulder.

He wraps his arm around me, kissing me on the head as Brantley pulls the knife out of his dad and launches it back into him again. And again. And again. I flinch, burying my face into Bishop. His smell, his just—Bishop. The only sound I can hear is Brantley slicing into Lucan. Again and again.

“Come on, baby,” Bishop says into my hair when he sees Brantley isn't stopping anytime soon.

“Well,” Hector says, and I turn in Bishop's grip to face him but away from Brantley making dues with his abusive dad. “This is all lovely, but do any of you fuckers want to tell me what the fuck is going on and why my right-hand man is dead? Brantley, hear that? He's dead so you can stop that now.” Hector pauses, looking at the mess Brantley has created and then shrugs like he sees that type of shit daily. He probably does. Actually, all of them seem unbothered by it.

Bishop squeezes me into him. “Lucan would rape Madison when she was a little girl.”

Hector sucks from his cigar, but just there, below the surface, I can see it enrages him somewhat, and that surprises me because he's Hector Hayes. I wouldn't think something like that would bother him. He must catch my notice in him, because he

laughs.

“Don’t take it to heart, sugar. I personally don’t like you, for a lot of reasons.” He looks at his son and then back to me. “But I don’t condone rape.”

“And...” Bishop pauses but then continues, “...and Brantley.”

The stabbing sound has stopped; now it’s sobbing. Not the quiet sobbing, it’s the ugly kind, and I turn in Bishop’s embrace, finally bracing myself to look toward Brantley.

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He has his arms wrapped around his knees and is rocking beside what is left of Lucan. Blood drips from his hair, face, and hands, but he just rocks, sobbing loudly. “I didn’t want to. Why? Why did you have to make me do it? All those times...” He shakes his head. My heart snaps. I slowly start to walk toward him, when Bishop grabs onto my arm.

I turn to face him, and he shakes his head. “Don’t.”

“What do you mean, don’t? No wonder he hates me, Bishop,” I whisper, searching Bishop’s eyes. “He needed someone to blame, so he blamed me for what his father made us do that day. He blamed me, because if I didn’t exist, that wouldn’t have happened.”

Bishop shakes his head. “No, babe.” But then his eyes look over my shoulder.

“Thirty-seven,” Brantley whispers from behind me, and I quickly spin around to face him. “Thirty-seven young girls.”

What? I want to ask, but I don’t in fear that he might snap at me. Instead, I remain silent, hoping he will say more, which he does.

He looks at me, the headlights from the car shining on his face now that he’s level with it. Blood paints his face and clothing, the knife gripped in his hand. He tosses the knife over and it lands near Bishop’s feet.

“You’re right though,” he starts, sidestepping around the mangled corpse on the ground. “I hated you. I never understood why you came back. When we were kids, at

my birthday party, I hated all kids, not just you, but my father had already started talking about what he was going to get us to do together.” He pauses. “When you started Riverside, I didn’t know at first whether you remembered me or not. At first, I thought you did remember and you were—I don’t know—fucking with us after some revenge for what Lucan did.” Shit, that makes a whole lot of sense. “But also...” He pulls out a pack of smokes and puts one into his mouth, lighting it. “...You were my first. So there was hate for you from that as well. I didn’t make the Silver connection to The Silver Swan, which I should have. I’m an idiot for not making that connection. I just figured it was because of your eyes. They’re murky green now, but when you were a kid, they were silver.”

I nod because they were. It was always strange.

He steps up to me, leaving the smoke in his mouth. “Do you feel that?” he asks, tilting his head.

I look deep into his eyes, a sense of peace washing over me. The fire I had burning for so many years from undying hate toward Lucan had gone out. Smiling, I nod. “Yeah.”

He blows out a cloud of smoke. “At least that’s one of us.” He narrows his eyes at me.

I frown. “You still hate me?”

His eyebrows shoot up in surprise. “No, fuck.” His eyes dart around the place. “It’s just—never mind. But I don’t hate you. I feel peace with you now.” Then he smiles. The first time I have ever seen Brantley smile, and it’s at me. I want to jump on him and hug him, but that’s probably going too fast for him. Baby steps.

Turning back around, wrapping my arms around Bishop, I look over his shoulder,

directly at Hunter and Jase. My brothers. Biological brothers with Daemon.

Hunter steps backward, shaking his head and walking straight toward the parked car, slamming the door behind him. I frown, my shoulders dropping. I don't know what I expected, but it wasn't for Hunter to act like that. He's always been warm toward me.

Jase just stares at me, his dark eyes glued to mine. The last string in my heart is about to snap when he smiles at me. Giving me a wink. For the older brother, that surprises me. I haven't spent much time with Jase, if any, but I know in that moment that will change.

Bishop tucks me under his arm as the rest of the boys walk back to the cars. He looks at his dad. "Want me to call Katsia about this mess, or do you want to?" he asks his dad, nudging his head toward the destruction on the road.

Hector looks at me and then looks at Bishop. "I'll call her." Then he looks to me. "There was a reason for my bringing you here tonight, and it wasn't that."

I sink into Bishop, and his grip tightens around me. "Though, I did plan to tell you that you're adopted." He looks to Bishop. "But you see, as much as I love my son, he did something bad tonight. Something that is against our rules. And we only have one rule, Madison." Hector looks right at me, and chills break out over my flesh. "So now that your adoption is exposed, I guess it's only fair I find something else to tell you since my son is so trigger happy tonight."

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I look up at Bishop. Trigger happy?

Hector steps forward, putting his hands into his pockets. “I’m sure you’re familiar with the initiation process of a King?” he questions, looking at me. I nod. “Very good. So you know...” He gestures behind him, and Khales reemerges from the shadows. Bishop freezes, his grip turning to steel. “...That Khales was Bishop’s...” My head spins and my stomach recoils. Someone else steps out of the shadows. “...As was your adopted ‘mother.’”

“Lost is not a place. It’s a soul in paralysis...

Waiting to feel moved.”

-Atticus

Bishop

Ten-Years-Old

“I want you to think of a wall, a bulletproof one that no matter how hard any weapon hounds on it, it could never break.” Rob had said, pacing up and down in front of the seven of us. We had been close all our lives, whether by family or by choice, they were my brothers. I chose to care for them, no amount of family influence could have forced the kind of brotherhood we shared—which made us the most lethal Kings created. The generations before us, my father had said they always fought or struggled to get along sometimes. Whether it be by girl or just by personalities not being compatible, it never happened. They never had a generation that flowed fluidly

like we did, so they had big plans for us.

“A wall?” Nate snickered. “You brought us here to teach us about a wall?”

Rob waved him off diffusely and continued his army march backward and forward in front of us. “I want you to start building this wall inside of your brain, but before you do so, I want you to make sure there are six seats there beside you. Not eight, not two, not any other number but seven total,” he paused, looking down at me. I wasn’t a short kid. For a ten-year-old, I was pretty tall, but staring up at Rob in this moment, I felt two-feet. “I want you to start building this wall today. Work on it, I mean really train your brain to build it, because by the time you initiate in, I need that wall to be solid. To be unfuckwithable. This”—Rob gestured around—“was who you trusted. No one else.”

“What about my dad?” I argued, looking at the guys who all glared at me like “shut the fuck up.” Rob was scary, but I didn’t scare easily.

“Even your dad. He went through the same when he was your age, and so will the next ones who come after you.”

“What, as in we have to have kids?” Hunter scrunched up his face.

“Yes.” Dad interrupted, walking around the back of the cabin dressed in one of his fine suits. “You will have kids one day.”

“No, I’m good. I don’t want kids.” I knew at a very young age that children didn’t appeal to me, and I doubted that would change in the future. Call it the only-child curse.

“Oh I bet you will, I bet you and Kholes will have kids by the time you’re sixteen,” Eli snorted, only no one joined him.

“No. I don’t want them.”

My dad knelt down in front of me, searching my eyes. “You will, son, and lucky for you, I have someone lined up.”

My eyebrows pinched together. “What? Who?” I was still not having kids, but I’d ask him who he thought I could be matched with anyway.

He reached into his front jacket pocket and pulled out a small photograph, flipping it around to show me. It was a little girl, had to be around the same age as me or younger—unless she was just really small. She had brown wavy hair, chubby cheeks, a bright smile and blue eyes. A couple of freckles were scattered over her cheeks and she was holding a hunting rifle. “This girl.”

“That girl?” I questioned, obviously my dad was off his meds. That girl wasn’t anything great, I had seen better at my school, but she had something contrastive about her, an imbalance if you will, but her eyes. Her eyes ate up the distance between us, even if it was a photo that she was staring at me from. “Who is she?”

Dad looked sideways at me, noticing the other guys trying to get a look. He folded it and pushed it back into his pocket, shooting them all a warning glare. “Someone who is going to arrive in your life at the exact moment you need her to.”

“Like fate?” I asked. I didn’t really know what that word meant, but I had heard it be thrown around a lot with the adults.

He laughed. “Not fate—karma. Your wake-up call.”

“What the fuck!” I gasped, stepping backward until I’m colliding against a hard body. Spinning around, my eyes shot straight to Bishop. I searched him for more answers, but as per usual, he guarded his emotions with a wall that was probably built from all

the people who died at his hands. His eyes were always evasively beckoning, and could summon me within seconds, but he had kept too much from me for too long. Now I was internally battling with myself on whether I trusted him or not. I tilted my head, scanning his features for something. A simple flick of light to pass over his face—but I got nothing. My shoulders slacked in defeat. I didn't trust him anymore. I could no longer trust any of them. My mother, who was actually my adoptive mother, was alive. She didn't shoot herself, and all my brain could manage to think was: well, shit, I got bullied all those years for fucking nothing! That could have something to do with the fact that she had fucked Bishop, though. And then I remembered who else just arrived back from the dead along with her. Khaled. Nothing was making sense to me—as per usual. My body hummed with a numbness so bleak that the only thing I could feel was the trembling of my fingers and the sweating of my palms. You will not look weak right now. Through all the revelations that had been laid out tonight, and between the bloodshed, I could feel myself slowly slipping again. Losing touch with what was happening in front of me. Was it possible to have a mental break from the people around you driving you so fucking crazy? If not, I was probably going to be the first one to have it happen to.

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Hector raised a cigar to his lip, lit it up and then blew out a cloud of fog. “Madison, my son never killed Kholes, or, so I’ve just found out tonight.”

I turned back to face Bishop. “I thought you told me you did?” I fought to add to that sentence just like you told me a lot of fucking things. I hissed the ‘me’ to accentuate how livid I was by yet another one of his lies.

“Well, this is all grand, but that’s not why I’m here.” Kholes stepped forward and my eyes cut to her.

“Don’t you fucking come closer.” Then I glanced at my mom. The person I mourned for years after her apparent death. I realized, there was a lot that went on between her and my father that I probably didn’t know. But even though my gut churned with distrust when I looked at her, I trusted my dad. Amongst all the chaos that he had put me through, I believed he had a good heart, well, at least when it came to me, anyway. I’d been wrong about this type of shit in the past, so at the same time, I wasn’t entirely sure. I was overwhelmed, so overwhelmed that my hand started to convulse, and my legs quivered. A sharp zap started shooting through my bones, leading to my knees, and then suddenly, I was on the gravel road with stones imprinting into the flesh of my knees and palms. Silent tears began to trickle down my face, and in my peripheral, I caught Bishop sinking down beside me, his arm curling around my back. I froze as every sound, every ounce of talking that was going on, started to slip into white noise. The revelations, this world, it had been slowly breaking me since I first stepped foot into the Riverside Prep marble hall. The finery that screamed elusive, now roared at me in caution. I could feel my thoughts tremble as they slowly started to lose the fight. I thought I had my mom, I thought I’d always have her, even when she was dead, I still thought I had her. But it turned out, I had

nothing but plastic promises that were delivered by a cheap imitation of what a mother should be.

The hands that were clamped around my upper arms tightened and began to shake me. I stared at Bishop instantly, but I had nothing else to give. Nothing. My mouth opened, and in my mind, I was ready to tell him to take me away from all this. To whisk me away from the imposters, and the fakes, but...I didn't trust him. One thing was clear through all of this mess. "You loved her."

His eyes searched mine cautiously. "What?"

"You loved her." This time it came out as though I was more confirming it within myself and less like I was asking him a question, because deep down, I knew. He must have felt something for her to not have ended her life all those years ago.

"Madison." A voice so familiar, it lit up my memory bank like a matchbox full of explosives and drifted through the frosted midnight air, lashing over old wounds that have now opened again.

My eyes closed in reply. "Don't."

"Madison, there's—"

My eyes slammed open and I narrowed them at her, finally, having enough courage to face the monster head-on. I slowly, and on shaky legs, stood from the asphalt, dusting off my pants and squaring my shoulders. I faintly heard a car pull up behind me, but ignored it. All of my focus was on her. I stepped forward and watched as her eyes darted around the place in panic, probably unsure of how I was going to react. I considered lunging at her but figured enough blood had been shed tonight. As much as they were all so used to witnessing scenes so graphic, I was not. She looked the same, too, well, somewhat the same—which angered me further. I guessed I would

have liked to think that while I was mourning her fake death, she wasn't out living a lavish life. My eyes found her wrist, where a white gold watch was fastened around it. It had enough bling sparkling around the face of it to make Flavor Flav jealous. Yeah, she was definitely living a pretentious life.

Laughter cracked out of my throat before I could stop it. I was so incredibly angry at everyone, but I was going to start with her. "You know I've just spent the last few seconds hoping that the reason why you faked your own death, the reason why I had spent months mourning your death, crying for you, was because you were held captive somewhere against your will. Because what kind of mother would do that to her own daughter, right? But it turns out..." My eyes fluttered back down to her watch, and then lazily dragged up and down her body, examining the way her silk top hung off her lean arms, and the pearl beads that fell around her neck were clearly visible, and let's not forget the way her face appeared freshly made up of the finest—probably Chanel—makeup. Nope, no smudged eyeliner here. No sunken black eyes, bruises or scarred flesh. Just another housewife pissing away too much money and pretending like they give a shit. "—You're a fraud all on your own."

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“—Madison...” She strode forward, but I yanked my hand away from her as she reached for it.

“Don’t. I don’t want to see you—or talk to you.”

“Madison.” A voice thundered out from behind me and I stilled. All thoughts, all movements, paralyzed by that imperious tone.

Turning around, my eyes landed on my dad. “Did you know?”

He observed me, and all though I couldn’t make out his expression very well, the headlights from multiple cars that were parked up had somewhat given me a sneak into it.

He exhaled after a beat. “Come home. I will explain there.”

“Madison...” Bishop decided to add in his two cents, his hand coming to mine.

I recoiled. “Don’t fucking touch me, and everyone shut the fuck up and stop saying my goddamn name!”

His jaw clenched, then he dropped his hands to his sides. Taking one step at a time, I headed straight to my dad’s car and slid into the passenger’s seat.

“Kitty, wanna talk?” Nate must’ve hopped in behind me a second later.

“No.” Was all I could manage. Sometimes, I wished I was just a normal hormonal

teenager. Battling acne prone skin the night before formal instead of living through this hell.

Slamming the front door closed, I ignored the constant glaring from my dad and Nate and headed straight for the stairs. Taking them two at a time, I wanted to quickly reach the safe confinement of my bedroom. My bubble. It never failed me. Even if at this moment, I disliked some of the people living under the same roof.

I felt as though my mind was spinning on a never-ending Ferris wheel powered by NOS, and all I could think about was how before this night, everything was starting to make sense. Things were slipping into place a little better. But now, my whole life and what I thought I knew had again, been shredded into itty-bitty pieces—actually, the pieces were looking rather irreconcilable at this point. But like in true me life fashion, just when I thought I had gathered up all the pieces, ready to connect them back together, they get smacked out of my hand and scattered over the fricking Pacific Ocean. Someone is taking the piss out of my life.

Hitting the faucet on the shower, my eyes came to my hands. The dark red blood now crusted over my skin. My chest rose and fell heavily, panic slowly starting to ooze in. Without another thought, and through a shaky breath, I got into the shower and stood under the scorching hot water. Clothes and all. Running the palm of my hands over my face and pushing my hair back, I watched as the water that was pooled at my feet began to slowly run red. Tears pricked the corners of my eyes, descending down my face. Swiping at my cheeks, irritated, I slowly undressed, throwing my clothes into a pile near the sink. I helped kill someone tonight. I dry retched, my hand flying up to cover my mouth as my throat clogged with vomit. I quickly dashed out of the shower, leaning over the toilet just in time to unload the contents into the bowl.

“Kitty...” Nate walked into the bathroom just as I was wiping the residue off of my mouth. He shut the door behind himself and leaned against the door, putting one leg up to rest against it. We were so far gone past the awkward-naked phase, that I didn’t

even bat an eyelash when he entered. He had seen me naked more than any brother should. Step or not.

“Nate, please,” I pleaded, snatching the mouthwash and taking a swig before spitting it out in the sink. I closed the toilet lid and took a seat. “I helped kill someone tonight, my boyfriend is a liar, and owns his very own fucking wardrobe of Narnia, only instead of walking through and seeing lions and shit, I’m walking into a dark smoky past filled with secrets—all of which he is obviously hiding from me—Then there’s my mom, who isn’t really my mom, but I have thought she was my mom all my life—who I thought shot herself, but is actually still alive—and had also slept with my somewhat boyfriend. Did I miss anything? Oh yeah, I’m a freaking Venari, not a Montgomery, so my whole life is a fucking lie.”

Nate came closer until his hand was wrapping around my arm, and then before I could protest, he scooped his other under my upper thigh, lifting me up off the floor. “Get in the shower, Kitty.” I couldn’t control it anymore, sobs broke out and tears spilled down my cheeks. It wasn’t a pretty cry either, it was an ugly cry. The kind people make memes out of.

Nate growled, and then squeezed me into his chest harder before stepping in, under the water with me still wrapped up in his arms.

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“Why are you like this?” I asked through hiccups, lifting my head off his shoulder to look into his eyes. Water was pelting down against mine, but I ignored it, I ignored the sting from the water hitting my eyes, because looking into his felt like home. Nate felt more like home to me than this damn house did. I knew right then and there that I would be okay in life. I’d make it. As long as he and I were always on good terms. I could never lose Nate and survive it.

He paused, seeming to ponder over how he should reply. “I’m not like this with... everyone.”

“Just me?” I asked, even though I knew the answer. Everyone sort of knew the answer to that question. Nate was... picky about who he allowed into his life. It was all part of the charm. In saying that, all of the Kings were like that, and I was beginning to think it had something to do with their heritage.

“And...” I knew that he was about to say Tillie, but I offered him a small smile instead, so he didn’t have to say her name out loud. I knew he loved me. He once said he was in love with me, and I’m unsure if he still felt that way, but I knew without a shadow of a doubt that if it ever came down to it, it would always be Tillie. They had something, shared something, something that I recognized, only because I was the exact same with Bishop. When Tillie disappeared, it pained him. So agonizingly so that he never spoke of it. We shared that common bond, in a way.

“I know,” I broke off in a whisper, patting his big bicep. “and you can let me down now.” He complied, slowly placing me on my feet. I stepped under the water as soon as I was grounded, grabbing the soap and squeezing some into my hand. “Take these off.” I pinched at the elastic band of his basketball shorts, but his hand flew out to

stop me. My eyes snapped to his and a chill shuddered over my spine. His eyes darkened, but remained weak and lazy, yet totally on fire, and that's when I realized we needed to draw the line—again.

“Sorry,” I muttered, turning and rinsing out my hair, my back now facing him.

“You know how much I want you, Madison, but it's never going to happen. It's best we don't tease each other with what-ifs.”

“I know,” I whispered my answer, turning back around and twisting my long hair in one big knot. I reached for his cheek and then gently pressed my lips to his. It was supposed to be the kind of kiss you give your first love before saying goodbye, harmless, tentative, warm, soft, comfortable, familiar, hot, sensual, sexual... oh oh...

I jerked back to search his eyes, my body slightly caught up in the moment.

He groaned painfully, his hand clutching his crotch. “Get out, Kitty, before I fuck you so hard, you'll be calling me Bishop.” That was effective, it was like an ice bucket getting doused over my head. I stepped out of the shower, wrapping my silk robe around myself and then brushing my teeth. My slightly bloodied clothes caught my attention just as I was reaching for the door handle. “What will happen to the body?”

The shower cut off and then Nate strutted out, in all his naked glory out of the corner of my eye. He followed my line of sight, down to the clothes, and his eyes connected with mine again. “That will get handled, as will those. I'll bag 'em, you'll never have to look at that shit again.” His tone was light as if he was talking about football, or who he had slept with the last weekend.

“You speak like you do it every night.”

“I do it enough,” was all he said. I pulled open my side of the bathroom, heading

straight for my bed. Yanking back the sheets and cover, I slipped into the cool, clean sheets. Inhaling through the smell of fresh lemon and lavender, I turned to face my patio door and kept my eyes glued on the stars that speckled through the dark sphere. I had witnessed too many things tonight. Things that I could not explain, and things I'm not entirely sure that I wanted to explain, but I couldn't hide or run from the fact that it was all there, in front of me. As bright as the glittering stars in the sky.

I helped kill someone tonight, and although my soul may be too far gone to save now, tomorrow was a new day, and I wouldn't shed another tear about this night again.

"Bishop..." Dad started, just as I watched Madison and Joseph drive off with Nate. I tried to ignore him, like usual, but it never worked, like usual.

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“What?” I snapped, pulling out my phone and dialing the cleaning crew.

“Son, I could have done that,” he gestured to my phone, but I raised my eyes up to his, unbothered. “This is what you have been training me for, don’t act surprised when I use my initiative.”

“Yo! Bro? We’re gonna take Brantley home, dawg. He needs to rest and shit,” Ace called out, throwing open his car door. Hunter and Jase had long since left, what with Hunter in a shit about Madison being his sister. So from what I saw here, the rest of the guys were jumping in with Ace and Eli.

I nudged my head. “Yeah.” I’d deal with Brantley tomorrow, see where his head was at. I’d been worried about him for a while now because he was always trigger happy. I never really understood why, but because our training covered how to conceal our opaque pasts, I figured that was what he was doing. I never knew the depth of his scars until tonight.

“B?” My eyes closed at that voice and my jaw transmuted to stone. “B, please—”

“Shut the fuck up!” I yelled, cutting her off and finally allowing my eyes to go to her. “Both of you!” I gestured to her and Elizabeth. “Do you both have any idea the shit you’ve caused just now?”

“Actually, me.” My dad stepped closer, slicking his hair back and popping the collar on his suit. “They’ve both been back for weeks now, waiting for you to make a mistake. Tonight, you decided to go on a rampage and shoot up my club. You can’t get away with it that easy. Son or not.” He came closer to me and leaned into my ear.

“You may be a monster, son, but remember the beast you learned from.” Then he leaned back. “Now, your mother is away filming in Costa Rica, so Kholes will be staying with us.”

“The fuck she is!” I roared, fighting the rage that threatened to be unleashed. “No way in hell.”

“Actually, yes, she is,” he answered matter-of-factly. I watched as he slowly made his way towards the Range Rover. “Get in the car, son.” Something wasn’t right. There was something he wasn’t telling me.

We all got into the SUV, and once the clean-up crew had arrived, we pulled out onto the road. I found myself struggling to bite my tongue the whole way to Madison’s house. I wanted to know what the fuck had gotten into my dad, but I knew that there was one person walking this earth who I couldn’t read—and that was him.

Elizabeth got out, shutting the door, and I pressed my middle finger against the glass window. “I’ll talk with you soon, Hector.”

He looked toward her out of the corner of his eyes, and then slowly nodded. “Sure. You have my number.” Anyone that doesn’t know dad would miss what happened there, the silent exchange charged by lack of eye contact.

We pulled out of the driveway and I cranked my head slightly to face him. “So when did you and Elizabeth start fucking?”

13.

Retribution

It had been many months since I had last written a paragraph in this book. I hoped

that one day, it fell in the right hands. In the hands of a silver swan. I pray it does not become the crux of all things to do with the Kings. For days, I'd been conducting a plan to bring retribution to Humphrey, but I'd been struggling with my anger toward him, which had me making not very good decisions when it came to the plan.

"Elizabeth..." My maid, Maree, entered the room, carrying my recent bundle of joy. "Ma'am, Humphrey is back from hunting."

My face fell, as with my gut. "Oh."

I wasn't ready to see him. I headed to Maree and put my hands underneath my son.

"Hello, my dear. Are you ready to meet your father?" I just hoped he liked the name Hector.

What? I slammed the book closed so hard the dust particles from the previous century skyrocket to the ceiling. But, it did make a lot of sense. So Hector was related to Humphrey and Elizabeth—we already knew that. Hector was a far too strange name to bring it down to pure coincidence if you didn't already know.

A sharp knock on my door pulled me out of my thoughts. "Come in!"

It opened, and Nate popped his head around the corner. I relaxed, all my muscles loosening. "Since when do you knock?" Flopping back down, I wriggled under the fluffy feather down cover, pulling it up to my mouth. He sauntered in shirtless with nothing but his Calvin briefs on, his glorious muscles tensing with each step, and then he did exactly the kind of thing only Nate could get away with doing—he slipped right under my blanket.

"Nate!" I whacked him with the back of my hand. "I didn't invite you into my bed."

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He sunk in deeper and tugged the blanket up farther. “Since when do I need an invite.”

“Why are you here?” I’m still reeling from the events of last night. Nothing made sense but I could slowly feel myself growing stronger, mentally. Slowly, being the key word there.

His arms came out and tucked under his head, just as his eyes connected with mine. “Oh come on, there’s a thunderstorm happening outside.”

“So?” I argued, casting a quick look at the alarm clock beside my bed. “It’s eight a.m, haven’t you got some sort of King business to do?”

His eyes narrowed, and then a smirk slowly touched the corner of his mouth. “No, Kitty. I’m all yours. All day.” He pressed each word with the syllables rolling off his tongue.

I groaned, reaching for the remote on my bedside table. “I’ll make you watch The Notebook.”

He laughed, staggering up farther on the bed, his arm hooking around my body. He pulled me closer to him. “You hate The Notebook.” He knew me too well.

I pressed play on Banshee, snuggling into his warm hard chest. Circling the skull tattoo over his rib cage, I whispered, “Why couldn’t it have been you.”

His arm clenched around me and I gazed up at him, his eyes searching mine. “You

don't think I ask myself that same question every day? Fuck, Kitty..." He fixed his focus ahead of himself briefly, and my eyes greedily took in his sharp jaw and soft lips. Why am I looking at his lips? Because I knew how they felt pressed against mine? Because I want to feel them against mine again? It was then that I realized he was back to glaring down at me.

"Kiss me."

"Mads, I—"

"—Nate?" I breathed out heavily. "Kiss me."

He let out a throaty groan, then hooked his finger under my chin, tilting my head up to his lips. They softly pressed against mine, and my heart thudded in my chest, butterflies roaring deep in my belly. My hand went to the back of his neck as I opened my mouth, allowing his tongue to slip inside. I tilted my head to give him a little more access, then he groaned again, his arm tightening around my neck. That feral sound shot straight down to my lower regions. I inched my leg toward his until it was pressing against his thigh, testing how far he'd let me go before ordering me to stop. Only he grabbed onto it and pulled me on top so I was straddling his waist. Without thinking twice, I quickly searched his eyes and he mine. It was a fleeting moment of pause. A quick second guess. But before either of us could protest, our lips were colliding, my fingers were tangled in his hair and my shirt was coming off. He threw it onto the floor and halted, leaning back to take in my naked chest. "Damn, Kitty." My cheeks heated briefly. For some reason, it was different between Nate and I this time. We sort of always knew it was sexual, there was always something there, but we hid behind our family and Bishop to simmer the tension down. Thinking of Bishop had me squirming, so before I could explore that any further, my lips went to his neck. I sucked on his skin, biting down on his flesh in my retreat. He moaned, his hand tugging at my hair to bring my face back down to his.

“We doing this? And choose your next words very carefully because I’m about to tear into that forbidden territory with no fucking shame.”

I pulled my bottom lip into my mouth and nodded. “He hurt me. Too much, Nate. He’s done... too much.”

“This a revenge fuck?”

“What?” His question was valid, but I asked ‘what’ just to give myself a few beats to decide how to answer, but I didn’t have to think hard. “Of course not!”

He grinned. “You sure? I wouldn’t give a fuck. You can ride on my dick for any reason you need.”

I chuckled, my head tilting back. “Nate!” I hit his chest just as he came up and sucked one of my nipples into his mouth, his tongue swirling around it. I felt him harden under me and I moaned, tilting my head back while my hand found his neck again. Slowly I started to rub myself over his length before dropping my mouth back to his, sucking his tongue into my mouth and biting down on the bar of his tongue ring. Reaching to the waistband of his shorts, my fingers slipped under, sweat dripping off my skin from the pleasure the friction was giving me. I saw nothing but Nate’s eyes, rimmed with fire and burning with need. I heard nothing but the deep intakes of our breaths with the occasional moan, and I felt nothing but his hands gripping my ass, hips, and then slowly, he slid beneath my underwear. I went to yank his shorts down as his thumb pressed against my clit, putting everything into first gear and hitting straight into sixth - fuck second, third, fourth and fifth.

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Something caught the corner of my eyes. I screamed, grabbing for the blanket to cover my body.

“Oh, don’t stop on my account...” Brantley stepped forward, pushing his hands into his pockets. His head tilted and his eyes turned hungry as they ran down my body, taking in the scene that was playing out in front of him.

“Brantley!” I snapped, clicking my fingers to pull him out of his pervy state. I could feel Nate’s body jiggling underneath me from laughing, his hand covering his mouth.

“Brantley!” I repeated in the same tone.

“Hmm?” He casually brought his eyes to mine, and they darkened even more. His eyebrows pinched together and his mouth kicked up in a grin. It was the kind of dark grin Brantley usually gives me. You know, the one that sets chills off over my spine? Yeah, that one. My focus was still on him when Nate thrust his hips up to mine, his thick cock grinding against my clit. My eyes closed and my lips parted, my cheeks flashing with heat. Another moan slipped from me involuntarily, and I bit down on my bottom lip. Reality hit me and my eyes slammed open, back onto Brantley. Slowly, like a lion would approach its unknowing prey, he strode backward, his eyes staying on mine and then in one click, he pushed the door closed. My eyes dropped down to Nate. I felt safe with these guys—mostly. Okay, not ever with Brantley, but I do with Nate, so when he nodded his head, I tugged my lips in, looked to Brantley, and gave him a slow approving smile. Brantley waltzed toward the bed, his eyes clouding over in lust. He hooked his fingers under his shirt and tossed it across the room to the pile where my shirt was. His chest glistened in a golden glaze, and both his freaking nipples were pierced. His abs and chest were so defined you could

probably stencil every single line and vein with a pencil and paper. He had the Elite King tattoo over his chest, with the skull and the crown and his last name “Vitiosis” in cursive writing underneath it. I noticed all of the boys who I’ve seen with no shirt on, all had the same king tattoo, but what I thought were scribbles underneath, I now know was their Latin last names. These boys dripped and oozed sex appeal, way too much for little old me. But...

My eyes closed again as I felt the bed dip beside me.

“C’mere, girl.” Nate’s fingers wrapped around my chin as he pulled my mouth down to his. He slowly ran his warm soft lips over mine and whispered, “You good?” I swallowed past my fleeting nerves, just as Brantley pressed a kiss to the back of my neck, igniting a whole new wave—no—tsunami of waves to come crashing over me. I shuddered, my legs going weak and my sex throbbing.

“Yes,” I moaned out my answer as Brantley came behind me, his chest brushing against my back every so often as his mouth and tongue ran circles over the nape of my neck. His hand massaged my breast, his fingers twisting and twisting my nipples between his fingers. A pool of heat slicked between my legs as my thrusting became more urg—the door swung open.

“Hey, Mads, I wanna tal—” Jase cut out and I, once again, reached for the sheet. I drew the line at blood brothers. “Holy fuck!” Jase’s hands flew up to his eyes, but he didn’t leave.

“Unless you wanna add incest into your river of sins, brother, I suggest you back up and forget what you saw.”

Jase’s jaw clenched. “I ain’t going anywhere. Mads, put some fucking clothes on and meet me downstairs.” Then he turned and left anyway, slamming the door behind himself.

“Fuck! What’s a girl gotta do to get laid around here.” I huffed, pushing off Nate and getting to my feet, making a beeline for my shirt. “Seriously,” I muttered under my breath, talking to myself. “I’m surrounded by ten of the hottest guys known to mankind—well, eight now because two are my brothers—some of them already have a connection with me—”

“—all of them...have a connection with you,” Brantley interrupted, but I cut him with a glare, shoving my top over my head.

“I can’t even get laid. My ex-boyfriend is a lying piece of shit, my family are deranged maniacs, my brother—”

“—step, if you’re about to start on me,” Nate interjected, climbing out of my bed. I sliced him with a glare too and finally walked out of my room, down the long hallway and then double stepped down the swivel stairs, still muttering cuss words under my breath. I hadn’t even decided to tidy myself up before I came down, so I’m wearing a shirt that weirdly falls to just above my knees, and my hair was a freaking bird’s nest all over the place. I needed a trim. And a change of color. I’m sick of being brunette, but I’ll never go blonde, so maybe I could think of something else.

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“Morning, Sam!” I chirped, just like old times, bouncing into the kitchen.

“Morning,” she smiled at me, and then went to the fridge. “What do you want for breakfast, Trigger.”

“Hmmm.” I put my index finger to the side of my cheek. “Can you make waffles?”

Her eyebrow quirked in judgment, but before I could say anything else, Jase was blocking my view into the sitting room. I paused and then gestured out toward the backyard patio. “It’s sheltered. We can talk out there.”

He nodded, and then I followed him out the floor to ceiling doors, shutting them behind myself. Pulling out a chair, I pulled my knees to my chest. Shit. I stared down at my chest and realized I was wearing Brantley’s shirt. I discreetly bring my nose to the collar and inhale. Sand, leather, and cigarettes. Interesting combination of smell.

Jase cleared his throat, sitting down on the chair. “That...” he hitched his thumb over his shoulder. “Should not be talked about.”

“I’m single.”

“Hardly...” he began, his eyes slanting.

“Did you come here to scold me like a real big brother?”

He sighed, running his hand over his shaved head. It was actually shaved really short, and it’s the first time that I see his King tattoo is on the side of his scalp. “No. I’m

just saying, be careful. Yes, you have an effect on all of the Kings—which is why I’m here—but you need to tread carefully with how you allow it to play out. If you want more than one, talk with Bishop about it first.”

“Want more than one?” I cut him off, slightly shocked by his choice of words.

He shrugged as if it was the simplest thing in the world. “It wouldn’t be the first time a girl has had to be shared around.”

“What!” I was truly interested to know who this other girl was, not at all slightly jealous that there was someone before me.

He must see my reaction—it would be hard not to—and corrected himself. “Not their generation. Ours.”

“Like yours and Saint’s?”

He offered a small smile. “Yeah, that’s a whole lot of shit you ain’t ready for, but anyway, all I’m saying is don’t hide things from Bishop. You’re playing with fire and it will start a war.”

Now it was my turn to sigh. “You’re right.”

“I don’t even have to ask you to know who it is and who it will always be when it comes to a King, so keep it to him. As much as Bishop is dark and broody, he does have strong feelings for you, Madison, so don’t take that shit lightly.”

“But he lied,” I whispered, looking out to the clearing in the backyard. Behind the pool house, there was a forest. Filled with old log trees and probably more trees. My mind was waiving, trying to run away with the issue at front.

“He did, and he has hidden a lot from you, as he was trained to do, Madison. Remember that before you start any more of that shit.”

“I won’t forgive him. He’s slept with the woman I thought was my mother and he had kept his ex alive all this time. He may have strong feelings for me, Jase.” I braved my eyes to his. “But I wasn’t the first, or the only one.”

He offered me a small smile and then leaned back in his chair, just as Sam walked out with trays of waffles, maple syrup, and whipped cream. She placed it all on the table with plates, knives, and forks, as well as a large jug of iced orange juice and some crystal glasses. I gestured to the food and Jase dug in.

“Actually, you’re wrong,” he added in. “You are the only one.”

“So why did you come?” I asked, deflecting this conversation and pouring syrup on my waffles with huge chunks of butter and cream. He watched me every now and then, loading his own waffle.

“Ah—seriously?” He glared down at my third squirt of maple.

“What?” I questioned innocently, sucking the residue off of my thumb.

“God, I walked in at the wrong time,” Nate muttered from the doorway with Brantley behind him. I popped my finger out of my mouth and smiled softly at them both. “Come eat. Sam makes mean waffles.”

“Want some waffles with that syrup?” Jase continued to judge me, folding his and eating it with his hands. The caveman.

I glared as Brantley and Nate both got comfortable on either side of me, getting started on their waffles.

“Don’t judge my waffle skill. Anyway...”

“I will if you continue that bullshit. One word for you: diabetes.”

He tossed the waffle onto his plate, licking his finger clean. “It’s Hunter.”

My chewing slowed, but Nate and Brantley continued to eat like it was nothing.

“Okay,” I edged him to carry on.

He poured some OJ and took a swig. “He’s not happy about you being our sister.”

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I paused my chewing and I put my waffle back on my plate. “I gathered.” Then I poured some juice. Maybe he just hated me all along and the smooth exterior he held was a fake. Funny that I used to think he was the nicest King and Brantley was the worst. How things can change in one night.

“I’ve come to shed some light on that.”

I waved for him to carry on. “Okay.”

“Hunter, like the others—” he shot a piercing glare and Nate, who, with a mouth full of waffle and syrup dripping down his chin, paused and looked around dumbfounded. “What?” Then he eyed Brantley.

Brantley shrugged. “I know.”

“I don’t!” Yet again, I’m left out of the loop.

“You’re not out of the loop, Madison. From now on, you will know everything we know.”

“Okay well, can you start with Hunter?”

“He, like the other kings, had feelings for you. Strong feelings for you. So when he found out—”

“—I was his sister he got grossed out.”

Jase's face softened.

"Well, he should have come to me, because I too, have had thoughts about him."

"Yeah?" Nate queried, an eyebrow perched.

"Yes... it was, well, all of you, in this dream."

Nate grinned, leaning back. "Do go on, Kitty, I'm quite enjoying this."

I flipped him off as Brantley chuckled beside me. Since last night, I had a newfound peace with being around Brantley. Like I had a deeper connection with him now that I knew our history. A history we still hadn't spoken about.

"He won't. He's too ashamed and he has way too much pride."

"Well, now I know where she gets it from," Nate muttered from behind his glass. I kicked him under the table and his eyes cut to me. "Ow!" he continued to glare at me while taking a massive bite out of his waffle.

Ignoring Nate and his typical childish shenanigans, I looked back at Jase. "Will he talk with me?"

Jase shrugged. "We can tie him up in the basement and make him listen."

I chuckled, picking up my waffle again. He shot me a small wink before continuing to eat his. We all fell into an easy breakfast chat, the talk ranging from Nate wanting to throw a party this weekend, to college next year. It's then I realized we will all be going separate ways—maybe. It made me ask, because terror slowly seeped into my bones about not having these boys with me.

“Um, college? Where—”

“Madison?” That voice made my attention snap straight to the entryway.

“Mother,” I snarled, throwing my waffle back to my plate.

There goes my appetite.

ASAP Rocky was rapping about how he loved bad bitches, and with every pull-up, sweat spilled over my flesh. My fingers squeezed the slippery bar. Thirty-four, thirty-five. I started rapping the words, unlatching and dropping to the ground. The door to my gym swung open, but I ignored it. Part of me knew who it was, and the other part hoped it wasn't. The song continued to drown out the silence as I moved to the bench, laying down and wrapping my fingers around the barbell. Madison was angry with me, for the fucking hundredth time since I've known her. The essence of her anger was probably her mom's shit, and then there's me not telling her about it all this time, but I've been with her long enough to know that she'd be more hurt than angry. Angry Madison I could deal with, hurt Madison was territory I was unsure of. The fact that I kept Khales alive would have only intensified her anger even more too, no doubt.

“B?”

My jaw clenched, anger bubbling inside, so I started pumping the heavy iron.

“I know you're mad at me.”

I hooked the barbell back onto the latches and sat up. “That's where you're wrong, I'm not fucking angry. I'm confused as to why the fuck you let him find you.”

She sighed, taking a seat beside me on the bench. “I had heard you moved on, and

then he—”

I turned to face her, my eyes hardening. “You outed yourself out of jealousy?”

“What? No, well, I don’t—”

“—you better be careful with your next words...”

She stood, running her fingers through her hair. “Well, shit, I don’t know, B! You’ve never had anyone else but me, what the hell was I supposed to do about finding out the one guy I loved, my first love, had moved on with some new girl. Why didn’t you tell me about her?”

My eye twitched.

I sucked in a breath, stood and walked toward her. She stepped back, but I countered it. “You did this out of jealousy?”

Her eyes darted around the room. You could almost hear her brain trying to reach out and snatch whatever excuse she could find from thin air. “Do you not care about me at all, B?”

Her back collided with the wall and my hands came up to either side of her head, caging her in. “Listen very carefully—” my phone vibrated in my pocket and I reached inside, seeing it was Nate before sliding it unlocked. “What?”

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“Yo, so I’m thinking I want to throw a party this weekend since everything has been so fucking depressing.”

“Why?” My eyes remained on Khales’. Hers dropped to my mouth, and then came back to my eyes. I knew what she was doing, and if she tried any shady shit, I’d rip her lips off.

“Well, our girl isn’t doing so good...”

“My girl,” I corrected through a growl.

Khales' eyes slanted, so I brought my hand to her throat. Shock flashed across her face.

I grinned. “Continue.”

“Yeah, you might need to get used to sharing her.”

My grip around Khales’ throat instinctively tightened. “What the fuck do you mean?”

She started tapping at my hand, so I released her a little.

“She’s mad, I get it.”

“Nah, she’s not mad. She’s... numb.”

“What? You feel what she’s feeling now?” I grilled, letting Khales go and stepping

backward. There was something he was hiding, and whatever it was, better not have anything to do with them both fucking around with each other again. My patience was thin. One more misstep with her, and I was throwing in the towel. No point fighting for someone that doesn't wanna be fought for.

"There was an incident..." Nate cleared his throat.

"What kind? She kill someone incident, or she trip and fall on something incident?"

He cleared his throat again. "Ah, well, a Peyton problem...."

My hands squeezed around the phone. Peyton was Tillie's older sister who in short, was messing around with Jase's generation of the Kings. She had four of them wrapped around her finger, and when they were over fighting about it, they all decided they'd just share her.

"You and who."

"Ah, Brantley."

"How far did you get?" My eyes narrowed on Khales', then dropped down her body.

"Pretty far, but then Jase walked in."

"I'm done," I murmured. "I'm done with her, dawg. I've not fucked up once since she's been here, aside from secrets and shit. This is the third time she's run off into someone else's arms. She's your issue now." My eyes connected with Khales', who was smirking in triumph. "Oh and bro? I'll throw the party." I threw my phone against the wall until it smashed into a thousand pieces. Khales jumped in shock but quickly collected herself. I stepped backward, reaching for the door.

“You’re too good for her, B. You gave her too much.”

“Shut the fuck up and don’t touch me.” I shoved past her and walked out the door. She was right in a sense. I did give Madison too much leash. I got too soft on her, cared too much, let her get away with too much shit. If she thought I was an asshole when she first met me, she ain’t seen nothing yet. I took the stairs two at a time, and just as my feet landed at the top, my dad walked out of his office.

“You gonna tell me your plan with Khales?”

He grinned, pushing his hair back. “Have I ever?”

Leaning on the stairwell, I crossed my legs at the ankles. “Well, give me something to go on before I kill her.”

His grin deepened. He knew I wouldn’t, but that’s not to say I couldn’t. “You won’t do that, son.” Sidestepping around me, he made his way down the glass stairs, just as my mom entered the lobby.

“Oh good, I’ve finally got you both in the same room. Come and sit down, please.” A bit rich, considering she spends most of her nights jet-setting all over the world working on new movies, but whatever. I headed down and went straight to the living room, resting in the corner and kicking one leg up to rest on the couch while the other remained spread. I stretched my neck, running my hands through my hair. What the fuck was Madison playing at. I understood her anger. Finding out I had slept with her—who she had always assumed was her—mother, as my initiation process would be a hard pill to swallow, and then Khales. But she didn’t even fucking ask me why I did it. In her defense, she probably assumed I’d just keep it a secret like I had with everything else, but it wasn’t that at all. Khales was under my protection. I always had her under my protection, as kids, we were inseparable. Through me sleeping with Victoria Secret models to A-list actresses, she was still there. I fucked around on her

a lot, fucked with her head even more, but I had never fucked up on Madison, yet, she still did me dirty. It wasn't cheating, because we technically weren't together, but fucked if it felt like it. If what Nate told me was true, they'd just trampled on my stomping ground, and there will be repercussions for that—as they will know it. This was a no trespassing zone, and you know what they say about trespassers...

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My dad sat in his chair, which was the same as my mom's throne—as she and I called it—but only where Mom's was white, Dad's was black. Both of them had high back pieces that wrapped around their shoulders and arms.

Mom started pacing up and down, one hand on her hip and the other over her chin. My mom was beautiful really. She had short brown hair that cut around her jaw and sharp, prominent features. I didn't have much of a relationship with her because she was always on the road. "I don't like this."

"Like, what?" Dad rested his ankle on his kneecap, grabbing his cigar and clipping it. My eyes darted between the two of them.

My mom stilled, her eyes narrowing on Dad. Oh, this was about to get interesting, so I wiggled into the sofa more, resting my head back against the top of the couch, my eyes now directly on the ceiling above.

"You knew I didn't like that woman, yet, you saved her? She was" —my mom faltered, and God, was that emotion in her voice?— "what she did, I will not agree with, Hector!"

"—you don't agree because you have never understood this life, Scarlet."

Their bickering died off in the distance until my mom's voice snapped me out of my slumber. "Bishop!"

I sat up. "What?"

“Get that girl out of my house, too. I don’t like her.”

“Who, Khales?”

My mom just stared at me, or should I say glared. I rolled my eyes. “Yeah, I’d love that, but Dad was the one who invited her in.”

Mom snapped her attention back to Dad. “Get rid of her, Hector. I mean it.” Then she reached into her handbag, pulling out a set of keys. “I guess now’s a good time to do this, then...”

Dad stood to all his six-foot-three-inches. “Not now, Scarlet.”

She threw her hand up to stop him from talking. “Shut it. Since you like to go ahead and make decisions without me, I’m making this one.” She looked back at me and her angry features softened. She smiled a little, and then tossed a set of keys onto my lap.

“Congratulations, son. Happy birthday.”

I picked up the keys, looking at them in confusion. “Wait, what’s the date?”

Mom walked toward me and took a seat on the sofa beside me. “It’s not until this weekend, I know, but I figured I’d give you the keys now.”

I searched her eyes, and noticed for the first time how they looked tired. She had fine lines almost surfacing at the edges of them and her deep dimples looked more like smile lines. “Mom, I don’t think I need another car...”

“It’s not a car...”

My face lit up. “Wait, you got me my own jet?”

My dad turned his back on us. “Jesus fucking Christ.”

Mom giggled, her hand resting over mine. “Not today, honey. It’s your own condo in New York City. Penthouse, because only the best for my boy.” Her hand came up to my cheek. My throat swelled, information floating inside my head.

“You bought me an apartment?”

She nodded. “Yep! The best one I could find that was close to NYU.”

“—If he attends college,” Dad’s interruption went unnoticed.

She pulled me in for a hug before I had a chance to thank her. “When am I going to meet this Swan girl? Color me intrigued...”

I let out a pent-up breath, relaxing back into the sofa with the keys balled in my fist. “Probably never.”

“What’d you do?” Her tone was accusatory, with good reason. She knew me and my father well.

“That’s the thing, aside from keeping secrets from her, I did everything right. Never cheated, never did any shady shit.”

“Keeping secrets is a big thing, son. And I’m guessing she has found out about Elizabeth and you, and also, the walking slut in the next room.” A laugh exploded out from me. Hearing a crass word come out of my mom’s mouth was humorous.

She stood, squeezed my hand again and looked to Dad quickly. “Whatever it is, give her time. But don’t let her make a joke of you.” She straightened her shoulders and carefully straightened her blouse. “Now, hate to love and leave my poster family, but

I have to go back to LA where we're filming." Yeah, I bet. Just before she exited the room, I called out, "Hey, Mom?"

She turned to me. "Yeah?"

"Thanks for the apartment."

"Bishop just texted me," Nate announced, going for another plate. My mom wasn't here for long before I said if she didn't leave, I would.

Leaning back in my chair, I took a sip of orange juice. "Saying what?" I already started to feel confused about how I was beginning to be forgiving, even a little guilty about how irrational I had been with Nate. He wasn't mine. Neither was Brantley, and Bishop had always said time and time again that if anything happened between me and another King, he'd take care of it and make sure consequences were filled. I lashed out. He slept with my fucking mom. This was beginning to get more twisted than even I cared to admit.

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“He’s throwing the party since it’ll be his birthday this weekend.”

“Oh,” was all I could answer with, now that it was just Nate and I, I felt like I didn’t need to hide behind a mask. “What day?”

“June 20th, he’s having it at his new condo in the city.”

“Wait, what?” He got a new condo?” I sunk into my seat, now deeply regretting ever going near Nate and Brantley. I was being a brat, and it wasn’t fair. So what if I was angry with Bishop, I should have handled it another way, not this way, because in all honesty, I didn’t want anyone else’s hands on me. Now learning that it was his birthday soon, I needed to find something to get him.

“Don’t get him anything,” Nate murmured, reading my brain.

“Why?” I asked.

He shook his head. “He’s not with it. Hates it.”

“Too bad.” I swallowed my guilt. “But what do I get the boy who has everything?”

“Easy,” Nate answered. “You get him nothing like I said.”

I sighed. My thoughts were strangling me with the help of my buddy guilt.

“Kitty...” Nate whispered, sliding his seat beside mine. “I know. And it’s okay.”

I shook my head, wiping a stray tear from my cheek. “It’s not okay, Nate. I fucked up—again. Royally.”

“Hey!” His finger hooked under my chin, tilting my face up to his. “We mess around a lot, it was a given because we had chemistry. Bishop knew it, everyone knew it...”

“But I shouldn’t have with you, Nate.” My eyes met his. “You and I both know who we really want.”

His face sobered, and he leaned back in his chair, silence now stretching out. Nate didn’t silence easily, but one mention of Tillie and he would clam up like a shell.

“Nate...” I urged.

His elbows came to rest on his knees. “There’s something wrong with her disappearing act, Mads.”

Mads, not Kitty. He was being serious.

I leaned closer toward him, my hair falling over my shoulder. “I know...”

He shook his head and then leaned into his chair. “I haven’t seen her since we were all out at the cabin. Feels like fucking years ago now.”

Wait. So he hadn’t seen her in that long, which means that when I saw her while I was in the hospital, he didn’t know. My eyebrows furrowed, and I pushed up from my chair.

“I need to, um, go for a second, I just need to see Daemon.”

“Kitty, you know he won’t see you.”

“I have to try, Nate. He’s my brother.”

I walked back into the house, ignoring whatever Nate was about to say and climbed the stairs, taking them two at a time. Heading down the long hallway, I stopped outside his door, resting my forehead against the cool wood.

“Daemon?” I whispered, banging my head softly against it. “I could really do with you right now.” Daemon hadn’t spoken to me since the incident out in the woods, and the handful of times I had seen him, he seemed distant, reserved, and confused. Even more than usual. I grasped onto the metal door handle, and just when I thought about twisting it and opening the door—basically invading his privacy, I exhaled, turned and rested my back against it.

“Well, if you’re not going to open for me,” I started anyway, sliding to the floor, still in Brantley’s shirt and booty shorts that I slept in. “I guess I’m just going to talk and tough if you don’t want to hear it.” I really shouldn’t be testing him. “It’s Bishop, Daemon. I don’t know what to do. I can’t talk to anyone else about him because they all have bias views on him.” I paused, hoping that would have worked. It didn’t. I carried on anyway. “I messed up, he messed up, we’re both sort of just messed up, and I don’t know how to get through our bullshit. It seems whenever we finally start to get things back on track, something else interferes us, and we’re back to square one.”

A ball of emotion rose in my throat, threatening to surface. “I feel too much for him, but he doesn’t feel enough for me.” Before I knew it, a tear had dropped down my cheek. I swiped it away angrily, then chuckled. “So I found out last night that he had slept with my mo—Elizabeth”—I stopped, then corrected myself—“who I thought was my mom, as part of his initiation process, and if that wasn’t bad enough, I also found out that he had been keeping Khales alive all these years, for god knows what reason. I don’t even want to ask him because I already know what he’s going to say.” I sucked in a breath. “Secrets are weapons, and in this world—” Suddenly I was

falling backward, my back hitting the floor and my eyes now in view of—“Daemon?”
He was standing over my body, the door handle still grasped in his hand. I leaned up onto my elbows and pushed myself up.

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“I—I...” Now I was the one rendered speechless. He looked more on edge than normal. His messy fine dark hair was scruffy on his head, his face showed a couple day’s stubble, the lines around his mouth were more indented than normal, and his eyes, so dark, so haunting, like the peak of midnight on a calm bleak night, looked—tormented. He wore a dark hoodie and jeans.

“Madison,” he slurred in his half accent.

“Daemon, I—” I launched toward him, my arms squeezing around his torso. “God, I missed you so much!” I didn’t even realize that tears were pouring out of my eyes, wetting his hoodie. His body was stiff, his arms refusing to reciprocate my hug.

“Adfui etiam...”

I didn’t have my app to translate, and I didn’t care what he had said, just that he had said anything at all meant a lot to me. Finally, an arm hooked around my waist and he buried his face in my hair.

“Sorry. So sorry, Madison.”

“Shhh.” I squeezed him tighter. Daemon hadn’t been a part of my life for very long, but as soon as I saw him, I knew. He knew. We had an instant bond and now I could never imagine my life without him. Probably had something to do with the fact that we were twins. “Nothing matters. It doesn’t matter. Dad is getting your charges lifted, and hell, I’ll lie on oath and say it was someone else that I didn’t see—just to get you out.”

I took this chance to look up at him. God he was beautiful.

“Madison, amore perit.” His thumb softly pushed away my tears, then he leaned toward my ear and whispered, “Love dies.” I really needed to take some Latin Classes If I was ever going to keep up with these boys and the language they all speak so fluently.

I sobered. “I’m starting to realize that.” I walked in farther and he closed the door behind me. Taking a seat on his bed, I drew my knees up to my chest.

“Have you...” he paused, searching for the word he was looking for. His lack of knowledge of English has warmed to me, and I usually just end his sentences now.

“Told him that I loved him?”

He nodded, his brows furrowing in worry.

“No,” I shook my head. “And I guess, he wouldn’t want to hear it now.”

“Why?” he inquired, walking toward the bed and taking a seat beside me. I lay back, my hands coming to rest behind my head. “I guess I messed up. I sort of kissed Nate—again, and Brantley, when I shouldn’t have wanted them all, all this time, and I haven’t wanted them, but there were times when I did want them all. But I love Bishop, and he’s irreplaceable in all sense of the word, but I also have so much anger toward him with this life, the secrets he has held from me, and for the love of God.” I sat up, resting on my elbows. “He knows something about Tillie!” I’m well aware my imbalanced brother probably didn’t give a flying fuck about my teen drama, but I also knew that he probably didn’t know what the fuck I was talking about.

He visibly stilled beside me, and I turned to face him. “Daemon?”

He shook his head and sighed. “She safe. For now.”

“What!” I shoot off the bed. “What do you mean? What do you know?”

“Too much,” was all he said, absently looking over my shoulder. He laid backward and curled into a ball, and my chest tightened. He was suffering so much, and I couldn’t do anything to help him.

Leaving him to get through what he was battling with, I left his bedroom and walked into mine. He knew something about Tillie too. I needed to see her. She needed to come home and keep Nate on a leash. Flopping down onto my unmade bed, I cringed at how it felt. The sheets felt like betrayal and the pillows smelled of deceit. I quickly flew to my feet and stripped my bed clean. I carried the sheets out my door and dropped them in the hallway, walking to the linen cupboard and taking out fresh pillowcases, sheets and then search for a blanket cover.

“Come on,” I groaned, flipping through the masses of linen but coming out with nothing. I sunk onto the floor, fighting tears again. I majorly fucked up.

“You ok?” Nate asked, coming toward me. “No offense, but you don’t look too good.”

I snorted, wiping my nose and swallowing through the swollen boulder in my throat. “I—I’ll be fine.” Then I move my eyes to his. “I need to go see Bishop.”

“Ah, I don’t think that’s a very good idea right now, just saying...”

Standing to my feet, I shove everything back into the closet and close it. “I’m going to see him, Nate. Whether he wants to see me or not.”

“Er, ok, well, I’ll take you.”

“Fine,” I huffed, scurrying to my room to change quickly. I slipped into some hipster white skinny jeans and a little black strap top that showed a slit of my belly. Obviously, Tatum had been rubbing off on me a lot lately. Speaking of—I swiped my phone from the bedside table and quickly typed out a text to her.

R u ok?

I hadn’t actually replied to her since the party before all this shit exploded. I didn’t even check on her to see if she got home ok. Panic started to set in my gut and my eyes darted around the room.

“She’s ok.”

I turned around to see Nate leaning up against my door frame.

“Jesus. I’m a terrible friend, Nate.”

He shook his head, pushing off the door frame and coming into my room. “No, you’re not. It’s only been one day, and you’ve seen a lot of shit in that one day. Cut yourself some slack.” He flipped his cap backward and his eyes glittered with mischief. “Let’s ride.”

I really freaking wish I had spent more time on my hair and makeup instead of being rushed out the door by my own anxiety. I only managed to splash on some tinted moisturizer and mascara. I leaned up from the plush leather seat, grabbing my cherry

lip balm out of my pocket and smothering some on, just enough to make my lips feel kissable. Stupid.

Nate's matte black 2018 Audi-something pulled to a stop, just outside the front doors to Bishop's home. I swallowed the memories that this house raised and reached for the door handle. Nate cut off the loud car, halting me with his hand on my other arm.

"Seriously," I gritted. "How much did this car cost you?"

He shrugged. "Was a present, it'd be rude to not accept."

"Trust fund brat," I muttered, just as his door closed. I pushed mine open and got out, noticing Bishop's matte black Maserati GranTurismo. "Did you make it this low and supped up? Like what is with all of you boys, you all ride in damn near half a million dollar cars and SUV's, then you guys all modify them to look like something fresh out of Fast and Furious."

I eyed Nate's new car. It really was beautiful, even though it was extremely low to the ground. The wheels were splattered with gloss black and the windows were also black.

"Well, dear sister, first of all, have you forgotten we all race?" He quirked his eyebrow, closing my door. "Well, for shits and giggles mostly, and to run shit around town for Hector daddy boss."

"No, I hadn't forgotten, I'm just waiting for the time to bombard you all with my millions of questions. I figure if I ask you separately, you're more inclined to answer me. Whereas if I push all these questions on you all at once, there's a chance you guys will let a few answers slip and I may not catch them. I'm being thorough." We were walking through the side gate now, heading straight for Bishop's pool house. The architecture continued to render me speechless. His pool house was an exact

replica of the main house, only smaller, and it was more like a two-bedroom loft, fitted with an open fireplace, a small bar, lush red marble counters, and the stairs that lead to his bedroom were built with glass. Nerves began to eat at me, and I stopped walking, silently freaking out. What if he was in bed with Khaled? I couldn't be mad at him, but I knew it would shatter me. Besides the fact that yes, I had handled things erratically in the past, I didn't think I'd ever allow another man to physically put his dick in me—no matter how dizzy I may be at the time. Bishop, on the other hand, was a male. And he was—Bishop. Shit.

“Kitty, it'll be ok. Whatever happens from here, just swallow what you see.”

My eyebrows pulled in together, then I let myself get lost in Nate's eyes. The comfort of knowing I could trust him elated me, and I quickly nodded my head. I could do this—regardless, and I needed to do this. I needed to tell him everything and fuck the consequences. We continued toward the pool house and then climbed the little wrap around porch. Adrenaline spiked through me, and just as Nate went to knock (even though I damn well know he never knocked with Bishop or any of the other guys before), I twisted the door handle and pushed open the door. Fuck it. I was Madison fucking Montgomery, and Bishop Vincent mother-fucking Hayes was mine.

There was laughing in the kitchen, then it went silent. Bishop stalked around, my lady parts humming. He looked pissed, and pissed Bishop was always a glorious sight. He was shirtless, the ripples of his tight body on display for me to wander, then my eyes dropped down to his jeans. Slightly loose, with tears and rips in all the right places, bare feet, and then my eyes slowly traveled their way back up again. He had a cap flipped backward, his hair sticking out the edges slightly, a bottle of Jack dangled from between his fingers, and then I zeroed in on his eyes. They hardened on me, and he bared his teeth with a slight hiss, eyeing me up and down in disgust.

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Oh shit.

He was way past pissed.

He sauntered into the little room even more, his swagger mixed between a relaxed soldier getting ready to go to war, and a loose teenage boy who gives no fucks.

He was... was he drunk?

“Bishop?” Stupid first thing to say, but it was all I could manage.

“Oh, shieeetttt,” Nate shuddered, quickly opening the door again. “Yo, Kitty, we should come back...”

Suddenly, I felt an overwhelming rush to run. It was as though Nate and I just walked straight into the lion’s den, and I’m almost certain we were about to be ripped to pieces. Dumbest decision ever. Why the hell did I think it would be a great idea to come and poke the monster that I created? Well, because like the stupid girl I was, I thought the monster would forgive me. Monsters don’t forgive, especially ones who have tattoos and drive Maseratis.

I sucked down my nerves when his chest brushed against my breasts. I stepped backward quickly, my back smashing against the wall, knocking down a painted canvas.

His nose came to mine, and I slammed my eyes closed. I couldn’t open them. I couldn’t face him.

“Open your fucking eyes, Kitty,” he whispered devilishly, his lips brushing against mine ever so softly. So faintly, I fell for it and my eyes opened. Terror seized my muscles when I saw his pupils were dilated, his eyes almost pure black. They looked erratic, deranged and unhinged. This was Bishop not in control. He would always say how he hated getting drunk, and it really just wasn’t in his nature to do so. He was always in charge of his surroundings. It was uncharted territory him being drunk, and I was going in completely blind.

“Leave, dawg,” was all he said, his eyes staying on mine, but his words directed at Nate. His hips slowly pressed into my pelvic area, pinning me to the wall. He raised the bottle to his lips, took a swig, his eyes still on mine, and then dropped his arm, the other coming up to the side of my head, half caging me in. He smelled like Bishop. Minty, leathery, with a slight dose of cologne and soap, but now that was also mixed with whiskey. Shit. He tilted his head toward Nate when he saw he wasn’t moving. “I’ll deal with you this weekend. The way we deal with things. For now? Get the fuck outta my face, bruh.”

“What’s going on in here!” an unfamiliar voice interrupted jokingly. I tried to peek around Bishop to see who it was, but he blocked my view.

“Nah uh, kitty. Don’t want you getting ideas with this one.”

“Nate?” I whispered, my eyes on Bishop’s. There was no way I was going to be able to escape this. So I would stick it out and with him. Anyway, I’d rather I be here with him while he’s in this state so I can look after him. “I’ll be ok.”

Nate’s eyes flew between the two of us, but I witnessed right then and there the power difference between Bishop and Nate. If you didn’t know it yet, you would definitely know right then that Bishop was the alpha.

Bishop laughed, his head going back as he pushed off the wall, his dick pressing into

my stomach roughly before standing straight with his shoulders back. “She definitely won’t be ok, but you can’t do shit about it.” Now he was going toward Nate. “I’d leave right now. We all know what happened last time I was this drunk, huh?”

Nate took a deep breath, and then looked back at me. “Text me if it gets bad. I don’t believe he’d hurt you—regardless.”

“That’s why you aren’t very smart, pup,” Bishop grinned at him, and then headed for the sofa in the lounge.

My head bobbed. This wasn’t the first time I had been terrified at the hands of Bishop, but no matter how scared I had been in my life, there was always a firefly sitting underneath that fear. That firefly held the light of hope.

Nate left, closing the door, and then I finally let my eyes go to the other guy who was in the room. He was shirtless too and was a little older than Bishop. He was bulky in the muscle department, veins popping out everywhere and had a long, thick dark beard. He didn’t look that old, because his body was beautiful, and his face looked young, I would say he had to be around thirty-one, or something. He was eyeing me as if trying to make a decision on me, and then he scoffed and shook his head, leaning forward on his elbows. Bishop lit up a—what I’m guessing—was a J, brought it to his mouth and inhaled before passing it to the big guy.

He hit play on his phone which was linked to the massive sound system set up he had around the entire room. He grinned, leaning back on the sofa, his leg perched up on the coffee table where there was a little mirror sitting on with lines of cocaine laid out and a rolled-up dollar bill. Fucking hell. The song started playing, and it was “#icanteven” from The Neighbourhood. Great. I have a whole night of this shit.

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“You might wanna get into something more revealing than that, Kitty. Go in my room,” he paused, his eyes boring into mine with intensity. His lip curled into an evil grin. “I’m sure Khales left some of her shit in there from today.”

Big guy started coughing and laughing, banging on his chest with smoke escaping out of his mouth and nostrils.

“I’m good. Thanks,” I bit out, ignoring the fire of jealousy that ignited deep in my gut.

His eyes raked down my body. “You really ain’t.”

Ouch.

Ignore him. I took a seat on the floor in front of the fireplace. I forgot all about Khales for the brief second I was here, and I really hoped she didn’t come in.

“Kitty, c’mere.” Bishop looked over his shoulder and patted the spot next to him. I stood and followed his orders, sinking down onto the sofa. “Nice and Slow” by Usher started playing next. Cringe. A little intense.

Big guy nodded at me. “I’m Justin. This little shit’s older cousin.”

My eyes ran over his body, and up close, I could see the silver scars marring into his skin. In old English writing, the word “Lost, don’t find” was across his chest. He was a Lost Boy? I didn’t want to ask any questions, so I just smiled. “I’m Madison.”

Bishop's arm casually snaked around the back of me as his head tilted back with the joint in his mouth.

Justin chuckled, picking up the rolled-up bill. "I know who you are, Swan."

"I guess you would." The slow song was really throwing me off with the setting, and my fingers itched to change it to something more upbeat. I could see Bishop's head tilt toward me out of the corner of my eye.

"What's the matter, Kitty, don't wanna play games anymore?" He curled a few of my strands around his finger, and then stood, dropping the roach into the ashtray. "Too bad." Then he climbed the stairs. "Get changed, cos."

Justin's eyes found mine again. "If I wasn't so pissed at you for putting him through this, I would say it was nice to meet you, but, I'd be surprised if you make it through tonight without getting killed."

He stood up and stretched like he hadn't just threatened my freaking life, and then went to the small bedroom behind the kitchen. With both of them out of sight, I finally let out a huge sigh of relief and reached for my phone. I saw Nate had texted me a few times and quickly opened them.

He won't hurt you, but I can't do jack shit, mads.

Text back, you all good?

Fuck.

I quickly texted out a reply.

I'm fine. We're going out somewhere though.

Then I opened Tatum's texts.

Dude, I think I'm still drunk.

I hit reply.

Wish I was, but unfortunately, I'm on babysitting duties.

I hit send and then opened to send her another.

BTW, if I go missing, Bishop totally killed me.

I tucked my phone back into my pocket and stood to my feet. I started tidying up the glasses and empty bottles, taking them to the kitchen and dumping them in the garbage bin. I knew where everything was, so I pulled down a glass and opened the fridge, trying to find something non-alcoholic to take the edge off, but I'm shit out of luck when I only find Redbulls. I grabbed one anyway and cracked it open.

"Guys! I think I'm finally ready, I know, I know, but perfection takes time," I heard coming from the lounge. I rounded the kitchen cupboards, can pressed to my mouth and eyebrows quirked. I didn't really give a shit if she had fucked Bishop. He was still mine and there was no way I was going down without a fight. Her eyes flew to mine. "What the fuck!"

I waved, and then lowered the can so she could see my grin. "Nice to see you again, too, and I totally disagree, that's not perfection. That's..." I tilted my head. "Fake."

"Fuck you," she spat, her hands coming to rest on her hips. "And who the fuck invited you?"

"Down, girl," Bishop chuckled, walking down the stairs throwing a shirt over his

head. He had changed his faded jeans to darker ones and had military boots on his feet now. He had also lost the cap, his hair now in its normal style, scruffily clean on the top of his head. His eyes came to me. “You really coming in that?” He was still drunk, I could see it in the way his eyes beamed with crazy. “Some of your shit is still upstairs.”

Khales was wearing a short leather skirt that made it almost painful to witness, and an equally leather crop top. Her hair was straight, coming down to her hip bones and her makeup was heavy everywhere. I internally shriveled a little, feeling way too underdressed. And considering Bishop had raised this subject twice now, I figured I better go up and see what he’s got. He sat on the sofa, picked up a rolled dollar bill, snorted a line, and then cleared his nose and handed the bill to Khales, who took it with a grin while sitting beside him.

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Fuck. I really, really, wish Tatum was with me right now. Walking upstairs to his bedroom, there were three things that I noticed instantly.

1 – His bed was ruffled with pillows and blankets were thrown around everywhere.

2 – There were two sets of towels on the floor, with a pile of girl's clothes beside it.

And 3 – The makeup that was scattered all over his dresser.

The floor started to sink below my weight as my vision faded in and out. You can do this. You were kissing, rubbing up on two guys earlier. It's fine. My guilt subsided a little. Now I was sort of glad I had something on him because he obviously had something on me. I looked at the leather headboard to his bed, noticing scratch marks indented in the leather and lipstick smeared on the sheets.

Fuck this.

I felt the last string I had snap inside my head and I went straight for the walk-in closet but found nothing. I wanted sexy. Just as I was diving through the last of my clothes in there, a little red lace bra crop top caught my attention. It was Tatum's "skanky" top. The breasts were covered by lace, and the thin spaghetti straps trailed over my back, crisscrossed and then connected to a thin strap that had lace slightly dripping off it. It was sexy, hot, and totally something I would never wear, but fuck it. I threw my innocent top off, tossing it in Khales' pile of clothes and squeezed into the little bra. My jeans were tight enough, I knew I didn't them, so I fluffed up my long dark hair and went for the makeup. I caked it on, full on contouring (because I watched Tatum), and dark eyeliner. I lined my lips and then filled them in with dark

burgundy that made my green eyes pop. “Shit!” I backtracked as I was on my way out, grabbing a pair of silver spaghetti heels and slipping them on. Thankfully, the heel wasn’t high, so I should be safe, and hopefully, I didn’t start drinking.

I headed back downstairs, checking my phone with my hair falling in waves over my shoulders when I started bobbing my head to the song that was playing. It was “Devil’s Night” from D12, and it reminded me of Halloween night in the woods...

I hit the bottom of the stairs and tucked my phone back into my pocket. “Ok, I’m ready to go,” I announced, looking up because aside from the song, everyone was silent.

Bishop’s eyes were on my chest and then came to my face. “I think I regret that.”

Khales flicked her hair over her shoulder, and Justin grinned from behind his glass.

They started walking out except Bishop, he was still staring at me. He took a swig out of that fucking bottle again.

“Bishop, can we talk?”

He snorted. “Now you wanna talk?”

I winced.

He shook his head, snatching the baggy from the table and shoving it into his pocket. “Get in the car, Madison.” I followed him out into the cool night, goosebumps instantly assaulted my flesh.

I grumbled. “I need a drink.”

His arm went back, handing me the bottle. “Trust me, Kitty, you will need it for tonight.”

I thought about it for a few seconds and then took it, wrapping my lips around the rim and my mind briefly drifted off to how Bishop’s mouth was in this very spot not so long ago. I could still feel the wetness from his lips. Creep, much?

I handed it back to him. “Thanks.” There was a stretch limo waiting for us, and I watched as Kholes disappeared inside, but just as we reached the door, he stopped in front of me and turned to face me.

“Why?”

Shit. “I was hurt.”

“So you wanted to hurt me?” he urged, his head tilting. Then he stepped closer to me, wrapped his hands in my hair and yanked my head back so my face was there for the taking. We probably looked like a messed up couple bordering on domestic violence, but whatever. His lips smashed down onto mine and his tongue invaded my mouth. His lips worked over mine harshly, and then he pulled back, his teeth catching on my bottom lip, biting down. The metallic tang of blood hit my throat. “I don’t get hurt, Kitty, and I don’t get even. I get cold.” Then he grinned, and let go of my hair, my scalp now throbbing from the pain. “And you mean shit to me now. Get in the fucking car.”

Tears prickled the corner of my eyes, but I shoved past him and got inside the limo. He chuckled as he slid in beside me. “Get mad, Kitty, you know how that gets my dick hard. Only you won’t be the one soothing it tonight.” Then he shoved the bottle into my chest. “So as I said, drink. You’ll need it.” I took it, ignoring whatever bullshit Kholes and Justin were talking with Bishop about, and drank. I didn’t take too much, because I didn’t want to get too messy too fast, but at the same time, I

wanted to forget him. This was us, though. It had always been messy. It used to be beautiful, but now it's more chaotic. It's a storm that won't stop and a tsunami that keeps rolling, but I'm addicted. I'm chasing the storm, regardless of the danger.

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Bishop leaned back in the seat and looked at me. “Why you acting hurt? Now you can have any of the Kings you want.”

I ignored him because he’s drunk.

He laughed. “Good thing, since they’re all meeting up with us soon, and your friend Tatum will be there, so don’t worry.”

“I wasn’t worried, Bishop.” I was talking shit right now, but I wouldn’t let Khales have the satisfaction of witnessing how Bishop and I could be. I took another sip, and then Justin leaned forward and handed me the rolled-up bill. I looked at it and then looked at the little table in between us. Reaching for it, Bishop pushed my hand away. “No.”

I gritted my teeth. Okay, I wasn’t really going to snort a line, I was actually going to throw it out the window, but whatever. I huffed and waited it out until the car finally came to a stop outside a club. There was a massive line out the front that ranged from young college people to middle-aged people, to even older moms who obviously needed the break. Just saying, they should always get let into clubs before anyone else. Putting up with little kids has to like, I don’t know, offer some sort of advantage. Free wine and first priority into clubs.

Bishop opened the door and climbed out. I followed, and then saw he was already making his way to the bouncers. He started talking to them and then pointed toward us before walking through the front doors. I walked toward them, thinking he had probably locked me out, but they unhooked the little gate and let me through. I pushed through the doors and loud music instantly blared. The familiar smell of sweat

and alcohol staining the air. There were dancers up in cages above us and the bar was one huge circle in the middle. I headed straight to the circle, deciding he could look after himself, and right now, I just wanted to forget about tonight. I'd talk with him tomorrow—hopefully—or not—Jesus, I was so confused. I banged on the bar. “Hey!”

The bartender came to me. He was quirkily dressed with leather bangles, blue hair, and two hoops in his ear. “What can I get ya, sweetheart?”

He wasn't going to ID me? Score.

“Something strong, please.”

He smirked. “I know just the poison.” I shot it back and ordered another as well as a vodka lime and soda and opened my phone. Tatum had texted me.

I'm here at this club. U here yet?

I got a little giddy.

I'm near the bar. Come alone.

“Boo!” Tatum grabbed my back and I turned to her, smiling. “Hey!” I pulled her into a hug and almost lost it right then and there.

“Are you okay?” she asked into my ear, and I shook my head.

“I don't think so.” She leaned back and threw up her fingers after pointing to my drinks, gesturing how she wanted what I was having.

“I saw Bishop!” she yelled into my ear.

I just smiled.

She leaned into my ear again. “He was with a chick! Shall I kick her ass?”

I laughed. “It’s Kholes! Don’t worry about her, and she’s mine...”

“I thought Kholes was a brunette?” I thought over what she said, but then shrugged. Oh well. She leaned into me again. “Don’t look, but they’re all up in the VIP area above us, that you have access to as well.”

I shrugged again, sucking down my drink. This put a whole new meaning to fuck my life. I started to sway on my feet now, and I grabbed Tatum’s arm, dragging her onto the dance floor. “Closer” by Chainsmokers started playing and we started bumping and grinding on the dance floor. Whatever this night brought, I just hoped that something would come from Bishop and I. A few songs later, we headed back to the bar and got more drinks. My phone vibrated in my back pocket, so I pulled it out, and my heart fluttered when I saw Bishop’s name.

Come here.

I read it, ignoring the way my cheeks heated. God. How can I hate someone and love them, and want to kill them, and need to fuck them, all at the same time? It’s Bishop voodoo.

No

Ha! That showed him. Oh no, I was really drunk. I giggled. Suddenly, the severity of the entire situation meant nothing.

Laughing, I turned to face Tatum. “Dude! We nee—” I was upside down, swung over a set of thick shoulders as my hair fell down and I was face first with a glorious ass.

“Bishop!” I growled, but he continued to take me upstairs to the VIP area. He threw me onto the sofa and then sat next to me, a cigarette sticking out the side of his mouth and picked up his drink, blowing out the smoke. “What were you saying?” he casually asked the blonde, who was looking between the two of us nervously.

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I brushed my hair out of my face and shoved him. “Fuck you!”

“Ignore her, she loves it.” He winked at the blonde and sat back, perching his foot on the table in the middle. I dragged my eyes around the boys and saw all the Kings, except Nate and Brantley.

“Where are Brantley and Nate?” I drilled Bishop, trying hard not to make eye contact with Hunter and Jase. In fact, everything was rather tense. Everyone was watching Bishop like he was Tony Montana and about to shoot up this club. Maybe I need to try a new tactic. He was obviously a lot more angry about this whole thing than I imagined. He hadn’t completely lost his cool with me, but he was off.

“Bishop,” I whispered, just as Tatum came to us. Her eyes found Khales and Justin, and her eyebrow went up.

“What the fuck are you doing here, bitch?”

My girl was feisty as fuck.

I laughed. “Sic ‘em, girl...” Then went back to more pressing issues, leaving Tatum and Khales to argue, but silently praying Khales threw a punch so I could smack her one. Just once. Maybe twice. I needed water.

Bishop ignored me, smiling at the blonde girl, but his jaw tensed and the vein on the side of his neck pulsed. He was mad as shit, so mad that he was masking it with all of this bullshit. I looked up at Jase who was already staring at me. He shook his head, gazing at Bishop worried.

I did this.

Closing my eyes, I opened them and then lowered my voice. “Bishop?” My hands went to his thigh and he stiffened. That was like swallowing a harsh pill. “Can we go for a walk?”

It was as though all the Kings were watching our exchange. This was my fault, so I had to somehow fix it. Bishop’s smile dropped. “Leave,” he said to the blonde, who was so quick out of her seat I barely saw it happen. He turned his head toward me. “Pretty sure we talked about this.”

“Pretty sure we fucking didn’t,” I snapped back, my eyes piercing his in a challenge. He stood up, grabbed my hand, and then started dragging me out of the club.

His grip was tight around my wrist as he dragged me out of the club, tight enough to leave a bruise. We hit the back exit, out onto an alleyway.

“Talk!” he said, too calmly. I looked around the dark alley, empty and cold. At least we were alone. For once.

“I’m sorry.”

He sneered. “You’re sorry?” Maybe I shouldn’t have said that. Shit.

“Yes!” I quipped, coming closer to him. “I—I lashed out. I didn’t, I don’t, God, Bishop! I make shitty decisions.”

He backed me up against the wall, the cool concrete freezing my back, then wrapped his hands around my thighs and hooked them around his waist. “I’m not done with your punishment.”

“Punishment?” I implored, tilting my head. His eyes started getting distracted by my clothes, his head moving all over the place.

“Yeah. And don’t get me started on Brantley and Nate, which you will watch, by the way.” His hand came to my nipple and I sucked in a breath as his thumb swiped over it. He pulled my breast out, the cold night air whisking around it boldly, and sucked it into his mouth. Biting on it harshly, he pulled back and lowered me back to my feet.

“We’re going to a bar.”

“What?” I tucked my tit back into my bra. Damn caveman. Then trailed after him.

“There’s a reason why I don’t drink, Kitty, and you’re about to witness why.”

“Witness? I think I’ve seen enough. Can we go home.”

His laughter echoed off the brick walls and set up shop in my bones. “No.”

I followed him down the main street as we passed clubs and late night restaurants. He tore his shirt off and tucked it into the back of his jeans pocket before stopping abruptly. I slammed into his bare back, trying to ignore the massive tattoo that stretched out wide against his flesh. The skull just below his wings on the back of his neck had a crown sitting on its head and the words “King” was tattooed over his nape. The man was sex on legs. I really needed to take him home. “Now what?” He was a man on a mission.

I watched as the bright red neon lights blazed over his smirking face.

I followed his line of sight. “Oh no...”

“Oh yes...” he mimicked, crossing the road—fuck the cars that are zipping past.

“Bishop!” I yelled, running into the road while dodging beeping cars and following him across. He pushed open the front doors that led into the tattoo studio and I quickly slipped in behind him. A tall man with a long beard and a motorcycle patch on walked out, stopping in his tracks when he caught both of us. His eyes ran over Bishop. “Is this a coincidence, B, or what?”

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Of course he knew this scary man. Why wouldn't he.

Bishop's head cranked over his shoulder, a grin tickling the corner of his lips. "She wants something."

"I do?" I quirked my eyebrow.

Big scary biker dude's eyes flew to mine, then he grinned. "What you want, pretty girl."

"Hey, eyes off."

Biker dude chortled, then nudged his head towards the hallway he just walked out from. Bishop led the way, his bare muscled back taunting me. We passed a couple of smaller stalls, all set up differently. There must be around four artists who work here. I admire the work hanging on the walls as we continue down. Biker dude walked straight ahead, his stall obviously at the head of the hallway.

"Wow," I took in all the art. "This is amazing." Stealing my gaze away from the beautiful colors and grey shading, I looked down at the red seat that reclined into a bed in the middle, and biker dude sat down on his chair, picking up his gun. I gulped.

"You know, I used to work for a studio in New Zealand."

"Yeah?" Bishop interfered, sitting in the chair beside the bed. "What? Do I need to fly over there to add him to the list?"

I hopped up onto the red leather, grasping the edge. “Don’t be stupid. It never got that far.”

Bishop laughed, his head tilting back and his glorious abs tightening from the motion. “Right, because he isn’t a King. I forgot, you only do royal cock.”

“Bishop!” I snapped, then looked back to biker dude who was putting gloves on. “Sorry, he’s a little...”

“I’m fine.” Then he took his attention to Biker dude. “Lemme do this one. I’ll owe you.”

Biker dude’s eyebrow rose, and then he looked between the two of us. “You don’t owe me shit, and sure.”

“Ah!” I threw my finger up. “Hello, but I’ve never seen your artwork and I don’t know what I want. How about I sketch something up right now and let biker guy stencil it up and then you can tattoo me.” Jesus Christ, I was losing my mind. He wasn’t a hundred percent sober, but I was going to let him tattoo me anyway. Usually, when couples go in to do this sort of thing, it’s romantic. Not us though, oh no. I’ll be getting inked out of hate.

“No deal, Kitty,” Bishop pointed to the bed. “Lay down.”

“Jesus,” I whispered, laying back.

His hand came to my bare rib, and his thumb glided over it softly, the tenderness of his touch sending tingles down to my toes. I looked at him, catching his stare right at me. A moment passed between us, my heart thundering in my chest. Then the gun sounded, breaking our eye contact and the silence, and Bishop dipped the tip into the little pot, then stretched my skin out over my rib cage just below my bra line. A sharp

sting sliced through my flesh and I flinched. “Jesus.”

“Yeah,” Biker added, finally jumping in. He stood and tilted his head at the spot. “That’ll be tender, sweetheart. So you’re an artist?” he asked, and I appreciated the attempt at taking my mind off whatever I just allowed Bishop to indent into my skin—for life.

“Yeah,” I cleared my throat, trying to take my mind out of the pinching pain. The gun stopped and then started again. “I drew for him, his custom pieces. I loved it.”

“Why’d you leave?” I didn’t look at him, because I was too afraid to move.

“Well,” I let out an exhausted breath. “I was running away from this psycho.” Biker crackled out a laugh.

“Ah, I see. I’ll have to check out your work some time.” It turned out, I made a misjudgment. Big scary biker dude is actually a nice human and not scary at all.

“I’d like that.” Flinching, twenty minutes passed before the gun stopped and Bishop threw off the gloves.

“Oh God, I’m scared.”

“It’s done.” He stood from the chair, looked down at his work, and then a dark smirk crept onto his mouth.

Biker’s lips pinched together, holding in his laughter and I swung my legs off the bed, walking to the full-length mirror that was on the other side of the room.

“Bishop!” I squeaked. His laugh reverberated in the background. Just below my bra line was the letters B V H. Deep breaths. In and out. I twisted my torso, actually

liking the placement, and it's not like he splashed B I S H O P over me in big letters. It was subtle, yet faintly possessive. He came up behind me and my eyes flew to his in the mirror. His strong, tanned muscles against my tiny frame.

His laughing died out when he saw my face. "You like it."

"I sort of love it."

He seemed to sober a little, his eyes looking less frantic.

I clapped my hands together. "My turn!"

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He froze. “Oh no, nope, fuck off.”

Biker was laughing in the background, and I turned to take the chair Bishop was sitting on. “Behind Blue Eyes” by Limp Bizkit started playing in the close distance, and I nudged my head, a cheesy smile spread on my face. I already knew what I was going to do and I couldn’t wait to see it in person instead of the intricate design being splashed inside my head. Slowly, Bishop started walking to the table, and I leaned into Biker. “He’s had a lot to drink so we might need extra wipes.”

Biker dude’s eyes shot up in shock that I had known that, and then he reached over, grabbing the wipes and handing them to me.

“Guess you’re about to see my work,” I teased, giddy that I was about to leave my mark on Bishop.

Bishop laid back and his eyes came to mine. “Go on then, baby, give me your worst.” Yeah, he was probably hoping I’d do something reckless, but Bishop’s body was a perfectly carved canvas, and I respected art too much to scribble nonsense on him in the name of revenge. Dipping into the ink, I fired up the gun and stretched the skin on the side of his neck. The gun vibrated in my hand, it definitely looked easier than what it was. I totally underestimated artists. Pencils don’t shake. But as soon as the needle struck his neck, it flowed smoothly. My vision became zoned onto the task at hand, and an hour later, I was done.

I sat back, cracking my neck. “Done.”

“Fuck,” Bishop smirked at me.

Biker came in from making himself a coffee and paused when he saw the new ink. “Holy shit.”

“I’m not even surprised, you know I’ll get you back for this, right?” Bishop grunted, getting to his feet and looking a lot more sober than he was a couple hours ago. The time must be pushing close to midnight by now and my weeping muscles would agree with me. Bishop went to the mirror and I watched as his face changed when he took in what I had done. I came up behind him and scanned the crisp new piece. It was a smudged Swan, shaded in a way that made her look silver. She had a crown pressed slightly on top of her head, and shards of broken pieces spraying out everywhere, with a bullet embedded into the metal. It looked peaceful, yet compelling. I was totally taking a photo of this.

“That’s fucking amazing.” His eyes came to mine in the mirror.

I smiled. “Thanks.”

“Hey! Just saying,” Biker called out from behind, breaking our contact. “If you ever need a job, I’m here.”

“Thanks,” I grinned smugly, but I probably wouldn’t take him up on it.

“Or, if you both just wanna come use my shit, I’m cool with that too.”

My grin turned evil on Bishop, and he chuckled. “Bro, don’t give her any ideas.”

We left not long after that, with Bishop handing him a decent stack of cash. I waited outside for him, after learning that biker dude’s name was Malcolm. My phone started ringing in my pocket, so I reached for it, swiping it unlocked.

“You okay?” Tatum called through the phone.

“Yep! We’re good! Hopefully I can drag his ass home now.”

She chuckled. “Dude, he looked so pissed. Nate is taking me home.”

“He’s there?” I straightened. “Put him on.”

There was muffled silence and then Nate’s voice came through. “Hey, Kitty.” He sounded tired, defeated.

“Hey! Are you okay? What’s going on?”

Silence.

“Nate?”

“Yeah, not much, everything is all good. Do you need a ride or anything, since I’m apparently an Uber service.” I could just picture him glaring at Tatum. Poor Tatum. I knew how strong her feelings were for Nate, but unfortunately, his feelings were rooted elsewhere.

“I’m good.”

“You sure?” His tone was suspicious.

“Yeah, I’ll be home later. Maybe.”

“Alright then. Holla if you need me.” Then he hung up. Actually hung up on me.

“Rude,” I muttered, shoving it into my pocket just as Bishop came walking out the door, pulling his shirt over his head. Thank God.

“Home?” I asked, hoping he’d say yes.

“Yeah,” he grunted, suddenly looking tired. He pulled out his phone and sent a text, then looked back to me. “They’ll be here in five.”

“Okay,” I added, my eyes staying on his. I needed to say something. There was so much tension between us, intangible and undiluted tension that I knew the minute we were alone back at his house, hell was going to erupt. He shook his head in disbelief and yanked his eyes away from me, gazing out in front of him.

I went to open my mouth to say something else when the limo pulled up beside us and the back door swung open. Bishop’s smile returned and he slid into the back. I stopped for a second, thinking what the actual fuck I was doing.

“Get in the fucking car, Kitty!”

Guess I was getting in the car.

I squeezed into the limo, because now all the Kings, plus the slut was in the back. Slut being right beside Bishop and me on the other side. Remembering it was close to midnight, I yawned. My body was aching and my eyes were heavy.

“Bishop, can you take me home?” I needed sleep, stat.

“Gladly,” Khales snickered, her hand going to Bishop’s thigh. I turned rigid, then my eyes went to Jase.

“What were you two lovebirds doing? You’re both still alive, which is a good thing...” Jase chuckled.

“Getting tattoos,” I admitted as if it was no big deal. Their eyes scanned me up and down, and then went to Bishop, finally seeing the swan on his neck. That became the topic of conversation and I took this time to gaze out the window, wallowing in the empty feeling that had settled in my gut. I hated feeling like this, I hated feeling like I didn’t matter to him. I still didn’t have any answers, and like usual, everything was moving at Bishop’s pace—not mine.

“Mal is a fucking dope artist,” Cash nodded, gesturing to the swan.

“Thanks,” I muttered, my eyes closing. “I don’t think I’m too bad either, but last I checked, I owned a vag.”

“Wait, you did that?” Jase exclaimed, Hunter was still silent beside him. Probably still glaring at me.

“Yes.” I opened my eyes onto Bishop. “But that was after he stamped his initials over my ribs.”

They all started laughing, all except Khales. He still hadn’t moved her hand from his thigh. His eyes searched mine briefly and then his arm went behind my neck as he pulled my face into his, his lips now pressed against my ear. “I should make you pay, Kitty. Fucking badly, and I will, because you don’t get away with that shit easy, but for now...” His lips dropped to my neck and my eyes closed again as his tongue slipped over the most sensitive parts of my throat. “I’ll play with you a bit.” Then he sat up straighter, moved his thigh out of Khales’ grip and called out to the driver. “To mine, man!”

We pulled into Bishop’s driveway, and when the car came to a stop he got out with Khales, but I stayed in my seat. I needed sleep and food asap.

“Kitty...” he growled.

“I’m tired! Can we do this cat-mouse thing tomorrow? I don’t feel like fighting.”

“Get out. Now.”

I grumbled. “Bye, guys,” then stopped, just as I got out of the car and leaned back in to look directly at Hunter. “You and I are going to have words!” Then I shut the door and left Bishop behind, heading straight for the side gate. I spun around and looked directly at Khales, fuck my aching feet and drowsy eyes. “You can fuck off.”

“What?” She looked at Bishop, who was still looking at me.

“She’s right. Leave.”

“But—”

Bishop turned his eyes to her. “Leave. This is between her and I.”

I grinned, an eyebrow quirked and ran my eyes over her body. “You won’t wanna get blood on that pretty little outfit.”

Bishop snorted and shook his head, then I turned back around and sauntered to the pool house, opening the door and slamming it behind me when I noticed he wasn’t following me straight away. What the fuck was his deal with her. There had to be something else other than the fact that they were friends or whatever when they were young. She had to be of value to Bishop, or she wouldn’t be alive right now—that much I’m certain of. I rummaged through the kitchen pantry and pulled out a bag of potato chips, popping them open and then hopping onto the little kitchen island. I had mad food munchies going on right now.

“Bishop! I’m heading back to LA, can you please—” the voice cut off when it hit the kitchen, probably seeing me on the counter.

“Sorry,” I sucked the salt off my fingers. “Not Bishop.” I swung my eyes to where it came from, to see who it was when I paused. The woman was beautiful. She had razor sharp short hair that hung to her angular jawline, dark honey eyes, and a sun-kissed tan that actually looked natural. Oh holy shit. This was Scarlet Blanc, as in Bishop’s mom, as in A-list star of all time. And I was sitting here, still slightly drunk, chomping down on potato chips and sucking salt off my fingers.

A smile curled her lips. “Well, considering my son doesn’t bring girls home, I’m gathering you’re Madison?”

I beamed embarrassingly, but my damn mouth. “Well, there is one other exception,” I finished with an eye roll. “I’m sorry, I’m still a little drunk and it’s been a long night, which is far from over, and I’m rambling. Yes, I’m Madison, so nice to meet you. I would give you my hand to shake, but it’s covered with salt and saliva, so I guess...” she hated me. I could tell.

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She erupted in laughter, displaying her straight teeth. “It’s alright. I don’t need to. I’ve been wanting to meet you for some time.”

“Really?” I squeaked, slightly scared about why she would be wanting to meet me for ‘some time.’

She nodded. “Yes, of course. The girl who pushed my son into a frenzy, my very unattainable son and stable son, may I add...” The words seemed harsh, but the tone in which she said them was harmless. I heard the door open and then close.

Bishop strolled in and paused, taking in the scene. His mom winked at me and then eyeballed Bishop. “Bring her to Thanksgiving. I’m sure the family would love to meet her.” She paused at the threshold where the kitchen meets the living room. “Oh, and that’s no girl. I believe the correct term for her is... slut?” Then she left. I was speechless, but uncontrollable laughter escaped.

Bishop snatched the potato chips out of my hand.

“Hey!” I scolded him, but he dived in, grabbing out a handful.

I flopped forward, my shoulders hunching from fatigue. “I’m so hungry, and your mom is awesome.”

His eyes remained on me, shoving potato chips into his mouth. May as well get this war over with, Mr. & Mrs. Smith style.

I pulled my bottom lip into my mouth and dropped the smile. “Bishop, I’m sorry,

okay, I messed up majorly and I know that.”

“How far did you get?” He went to the fridge and pulled out a bottled water and then back to where he was standing.

“Um, not that far. Kissing, touching.” His jaw ticked. Abort, abort. “Ah, it lasted like three minutes before Jase walked in.”

“And if he hadn’t?”

Okay, there was his issue. “I wouldn’t have let it get that far, Bishop.”

“And I’m supposed to trust you?” He set the water beside my thigh, the cool moisture melting against my warm skin. I grabbed it, suddenly parched.

“I guess you have every reason not to,” I explained, my head starting to thud from the lack of sleep. “But I’m new to all this, Bishop. I’ve just found out all this new shit about my life, I made a fucking mistake, okay?”

His eyes searched mine. “Yeah, you keep saying that.”

“What the fuck am I supposed to do!” I didn’t even feel the tears leaking out of my eyes. “I find out that my mom wasn’t really my mom and oh yeah, the guy I loved fucked her, and then he had been hiding his first love—whatever the fuck that slut is to you—all these years and didn’t actually kill her like he was supposed to!” I sagged, my eyes feeling heavy. I jumped off the kitchen counter. “I’m going to bed.” I went to brush past, but his hand caught mine and he tugged me into him.

His fingers hooked around my chin and he tilted my head up to look at him, his eyes searching mine. “You love me?”

My eyes started darting around the room. I said that? Shit. I did.

Defeated, I shrugged. “Yes, Bishop, thought that much was obvious. I’m tired.”

He pulled me under his arm and I followed his lead up the stairs to his bedroom. Everything was throbbing so bad that as soon as I belly flopped onto his puffy blankets, my eyes closed and sleep took hold.

A buzzing sound alerted me from somewhere in the distance, but my eyes refused to open. There was no way I was waking up yet. It was still dark, or maybe my eyes were still closed. Deep vibrating motion started shaking over my ass and I exhaled, groaning while reaching for the annoying device.

“You better be dead.”

“Madison,” Daemon? I shot up instantly. “Are you okay?”

Silence.

“Daemon!” I called into the phone.

“Yes, yes, I’m fine. I need a—I need to go. Are you with Bishop?”

I switched the phone to my other ear and shoved Bishop awake. I’d been around my twin brother enough to decipher what he’s usually trying to say.

Bishop’s eyes opened and he gazed at me. Not fair. At all. He looked far too beautiful to be hungover. His light brown hair hit the early morning sun front on, as if it was burning from the heat and turning to the soft ash that settled through his strands. His soft lips were plump and smooth, and his skin glistened with not one single flaw. He licked his lips and his dimples sunk into each cheek.

“Mmm, what?” His arm wrapped around my stomach as his eyes slowly drifted closed again.

“It’s Daemon, he needs a ride somewhere and asked if I was with you.”

Bishop’s eyes opened again and he snatched the phone from me, instantly speaking in Latin. My lady parts weren’t going to survive him. It would be even hotter if I knew what they were all talking about though.

He hung up the phone and slid out of bed, going straight into the bathroom. Tossing the covers off my body, I started stripping and slipped into the shower. Steam eloped me everywhere and I sighed, closing my eyes as the hot water slipped all over my flesh, washing last night’s shenanigans off me. I stilled when the palm of his hand opened on my belly and he pressed down, his lips coming to the back of my neck.

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I shivered, a cool sweat breaking out over my skin, but cranked my neck, giving him more access. His hand traveled down lower until he was cupping my sex, his thumb pressing against my clit.

I bit down on my lip to try to contain my groan and the fireworks that were erupting inside my belly. Only Bishop could do this, only he had the power to completely disarm me while putting me on high alert all at the same time. He licked me across the back of my neck as his fingers continued to play with my clit. One finger slipped inside and circled, hitting something deep that had my toes curling and my back arching. His other hand traveled up my stomach, over my breast as he pinched roughly, biting the back of my neck at the same time. Both sensations unleashed waves of toxic euphoria flushing through my veins. I could feel I was on the edge of combustion, so I went to turn to face him, but his hand flew straight to my throat and his lips came to the back of my ear.

“No, Kitty. You won’t move unless instructed to and you won’t fucking speak unless I ask you to.” Bishop had always been dominant in bed, but something about his rough tone had me thinking this had to do with a lot of other reasons; not just his overbearing alpha male, domineering attitude. He clenched my throat. “Do we understand each other?”

I nodded, but my eyes were still closed and I continued grinding myself into his fingers. “Yes.” Then he let go, pushing me out of the way. All the tightened pleasure I was feeling, snatched from me instantly. It was as though his touch was a distant memory, and like a fool, I instantly missed it.

“Good. Get changed, we’re taking Daemon to the airport.”

“Err...” I went to answer, but he was already getting out of the shower. I grabbed the soap and scrubbed up super fast, and angrily, considering he had worked me up that much only to leave me hanging. I had a feeling this had a lot to do with my punishment. And If I knew Bishop, which I did, this had only just begun and it was only going to get worse, but the joke will also be on him because he’s not getting any sex either.

Unless he does...

I hit the faucet off and grabbed a towel, wrapping it around myself. Walking out to the bedroom, I headed straight into his closet and rummaged through what clothes I still had here—or Tatum’s clothes. Pulling out some cut-offs and a loose off-white shirt, I threw it on and slipped on my Vans before letting my hair back down my back.

I hit the bottom of the stairs and stilled when I saw Kholes was on the sofa eating granola.

“Seriously,” I muttered, rolling my eyes. Stomping into the kitchen, having about enough of her presence, I stopped when I saw Bishop. “Why is she still here?”

He barged past me, walking to the front door. I followed, flipping the slut off on my way. Bishop let me through the door. “She stayed in the house.”

Wait, what?

“Why?”

Bishop’s jaw ticked as we rounded his Maserati. “Because she doesn’t have anywhere else to go, and because of my fucking dad.” Pulling open the passenger door, I slid in and clipped my belt on. Great, so Hector was keeping her around for

some reason.

“I need food.”

He fired the car up and pulled out. “After we drop Daemon off at the airport.”

“Airport?” I asked, an eyebrow perched. “Why is my brother going to an airport?”

“Why do you still ask so many questions?” He retorted.

“Why do you still keep secrets?” I snapped back.

He grinned, seemingly pleased with my wit, then he sobered. “There’s something I’m going to tell you, but it cannot be known that you know about this place yet.” He dropped it into third, looking at me and then looking back to the road. “Am I clear?”

“I get it,” I deadpanned. I was used to secrets now, and regardless of the poor decisions I had made where Bishop and I were concerned, I had never spilled one of the many golden secrets I knew from this world.

“Daemon is from an island called Perdita, it’s Latin for—”

“—lost,” I interrupted, remembering that word from one of the many translation games I played with my phone.

His head dipped, as he turned down my street. For once, I was annoyed about how close we lived to one another. Obviously, Bishop was in the sharing mood, and that was something so rare, so unheard of, that I wanted to take it for complete granted.

He stopped at the entry to our high wired gates, waiting for them to open.

“This island is on the outskirts of the Bermuda Triangle, but remains completely off the radar, because of my dad.”

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“Your dad?” I questioned, and then internally smacked myself. That wasn’t important right now. The gates opened and I turned to face him, needing more answers. “Tell me more before Daemon gets in.”

“This island is run by The Lost Boys but owned and orchestrated by Katsia. This island, Madison”—his eyes collided with mine as we came to a stop outside the front door— “is where things you can’t even comprehend happen. This is the crux of The Elite Kings.”

“Wait!” I paused, trying to gather my thoughts. I was so confused but excited by how he was being open with me. “I thought the cave was on your property? The cave in the book?”

“Oh, that cave is.” His eyes hardened. “But after the war, they all moved to Perdita which was where our families settled until they took back what was theirs, here, in New York and The Hamptons.”

My mouth hung open, still in shock, then the front door opened and Daemon came walking down. He wore worn jeans, a white polo shirt, and a red bowtie. An interesting combination, but it was Daemon. He closed the back door and I turned to face him. “Bishop sort of filled me in, sort of didn’t, but, are you sure you want to do this?”

He tilted his head, his eyes going to my mouth and then coming back to my eyes. Fucking language barrier. I pulled out my phone and typed up google translate—untrustworthy fucker that it was—but it would at least give me something.

Bishop rolled his eyes and floored it out of our driveway, my head slamming into the seat. “Vos certus vos volo facere?”

My tummy tightened and my legs clenched together. It was my secret that Bishop speaking Latin was a major turn-on—goddayum.

Daemon nodded and shot me a tight smile. Daemon always smiled in a way that—either by twin instinct or not—I knew something was below the surface, threatening to spill over. I just hoped he would let me take some of the load. “I’m sure, Soror mea.”

I went to type in that word in google translate, but Bishop did me a solid. “It means my sister.” We traveled in silence, and it wasn’t long until we were pulling up to the airstrip. Bishop handed the security officer his ID, and then the gates opened and he drove in. Pulling to a stop, I gulped.

“Let me guess,” rolling my eyes, I pushed open my door. “The black jet with the gold crown on it is yours.”

Bishop slipped on his aviators, getting out of the car with the sun hitting his tan skin.

He flashed me a grin, his dimples sinking into his cheeks. “Dad’s, yeah.”

I turned around and jumped into Daemon’s arms. “I promise I will get you out of this shit, mmkay? But in the meantime, I think it’s the best to have you out for a while, but I’ll see you soon.”

His eyebrows pulled in, obviously confused, but I yanked him in for another hug. “I love you.”

He froze, and then his arm hooked around me, tightening around my waist. He kissed

my head. “Te amo.”

My heart soared in my chest, my knees weakening. I knew what “amo” meant in most languages, so I already knew what he had said. He let me go, and I watched as he boarded the plane. Bishop was already waiting in the car for me, so I ducked back in.

“Are you sure this is a good thing?” I clipped my belt back on.

Bishop drove us out of the airstrip. “Yeah, it is. Now that the charges have been dropped, he has the chance to settle with Katsia.”

Hold up. “What!” I snapped. “I thought the reason why he was leaving was because of the charges!”

Bishop shook his head, calmly driving us onto the main highway that would lead us back to our neighborhood. “What? No. Of course the charges were dropped.” When I don’t answer, he glanced at me, and then back to the road, letting out an exasperated breath. “Madison, he’s not just a Lost Boy, he’s the Lost Boy. He’s Princeps of the Lost Boys. He has a commitment, and this life is all he knows—you can’t take that away from him. I get that this world is new to you, but there’s some shit that you’re just going to have to understand, while still understanding that you’re never going to know everything. It just is what it is. You’re a Silver Swan, Madison, you’re lucky you’re alive, let alone allowed to roam free amongst us.” I sunk back in my seat, suddenly feeling like a child getting scolded.

“Harsh, but I get it. Which by the way, how am I still alive?”

He smirked before chuckling. “How do you think?”

“You?” Excitement jumped inside of me like a naïve little girl.

He rolled his eyes. “You give me way too much credit. But, yes and no. A lot of it you have to thank your dad for, and the rest is me, and, well—”

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“—well, what?” I snapped, getting frustrated with his snail pace explanation.

“My dad.”

After swinging by In & Out, we’re getting out of the car back at my house when Madison started with her questions again. As long as she didn’t ask why I was keeping her away from her house—I didn’t care.

“What did you mean by your dad?” She shoved a few fries into her mouth and I snatched the bag from her before she ate them all.

I took out my burger. “Exactly what it is.”

“Oh, ok, Mr. Cryptic.”

“It’s not the fucking Davinci code, Madison,” I scolded her, walking to the side of the house that led to the pool house. “It’s just fucking wait and I’ll tell you.”

I took my burger out of its wrapper and bit into it, then handed the bag back to Madison.

“Fine!” She huffed. “But I want to talk about Tillie.”

My chewing paused briefly. I knew it was coming, I just dreaded when she was going to mention it. Just as we came out the side, I saw my dad talking with Justin near the pool. I stopped in my tracks which had Madison slamming into my back.

I pointed to the pool house. “I’ll meet you inside.” Even though Dad had a lot to do with why Madison and her father were still alive, I wasn’t too keen on testing the strength of his patience with her.

Her eyes darted from Dad to me and then back again.

“Now,” I growled, pointedly looking to my room.

She rolled her eyes so hard it made me want to smack her, and then stormed off into the pool house. She made me fucking violent. Once the door closed, I made my way to Dad and Justin. “What?” Biting into my burger, I watched them both carefully.

Dad took out a cigar and lit it, inhaling. “I now understand the Khales’ bullshit.”

“What?” I paid him no attention because Dad liked to beat around the bush a lot. He was powerful—probably one of the most influential and powerful men in this country, but he liked to fuck around before getting to his point. He wasn’t only known by the underworld either—nicknamed Patronus, which is Latin for Godfather, but he also had his influence over the legal system in everyday life. He was more powerful and lethal than any man walking this fucking planet—more than the goddamn president. Madison underestimates his power, which was why I’d always have to shield her—for the most part—from him.

He handed me a photo, and I took it with my free hand. My eyes fell on it and then went back to the both of them, sucking the grease off my finger.

Keeping my poker face in check, I shrugged. “So?”

“So?” my dad exclaimed. Fuck. “The reason you hid Khales was because she was pregnant with your kid?”

Pausing, I looked between the two of them, then once I realized they weren't fucking kidding, I started laughing. Yeah, the image showed Khales pregnant, but— "That was not my fucking kid." My eyes bored into Dad's. "And you know it."

His eyes slanted at me, and then he shot Justin a look. "Leave." Justin, who looked confused as fuck, left and went straight into the pool house. He got thrown into the world of Lost Boys when he was born—but he's a soldier. One of their best. Built for war.

Dad rubbed his jaw. "When the fuck did this happen?"

"Well, about six months after you put your dick in her."

"Now's not the time for your smart mouth, son."

"Hey, I ain't judging." I took another bite. "I mean, it's a little sick considering her age and all..."

"She was sixteen, not twelve."

I deadpanned, "My point exactly." I mean, he wasn't an ugly guy. He had salt and pepper hair, scattered through golden strands. He always kept it short on the sides and long on the top, slicking it back. He had a good dose of ink tattooed on his flesh—including his wings on the back of his neck—identical to mine. Only The King had those wings, and the only ones who could obtain them was of our bloodline, meaning, either me or my cousin Spyder needed to have a kid one day.

Nope.

He sighed, rubbing his hand over his hair. "Shit. How long had you known?"

I chuckled, my head tilting back. “What? All along. You were chasing young pussy and she was looking for a way to get back at me, only I never gave a fuck. Once she figured out that the game she was playing with you had no effect on me, she was pregnant and it was too late.”

“What happened to the baby?” he asked, ignoring my admitting that she only did it to get back at me. Which was true, but I also knew that she had grown feelings for him—and maybe he had too, I wasn’t sure, and I sure as fuck wasn’t about to get into that pool of bullshit. My mom would kill her, but then again, maybe she knew all along too, which was why she had never really liked Khales. My mom may be a hard ass bitch, but she had a heart under the cold demeanor. Probably something we shared.

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“It’s dead.” I wasn’t lying, she had a miscarriage far along in the pregnancy.

He stiffened, his eyes flying to me. “You’re sure?”

I didn’t flinch. “Positive.” Then I bit into my burger again. “Are we done? I got shit to do.”

“With Madison?” Her name coming out of his mouth had all sorts of feral venom rising to the surface. I was completely aware with how protective I was of her, so much so that even my dad saying her name had me wanting to sink a blade into his neck, but that was the exact reason why I needed to be careful with how I proceeded with her.

She was the only person walking this earth who had the power to fuck my head up. I didn’t like that—at all. I was Bishop fucking Hayes, always in control of my shit. Except her.

“Yeah,” I grunted, then my eyes came to his. “She’s not a threat.”

His lip curled into a smug grin. “I wasn’t saying anything, son.”

Yeah, sure.

I turned and headed back toward the pool house, pushing open the front door. I paused when I saw Madison and Justin on the sofa, laughing and watching some bullshit on the TV.

Justin caught my glare. “Chill, neph, we’re just talking.”

Slamming the door, I strolled into the kitchen and yanked open the fridge door, grabbing a drink. “I didn’t say anything.” I wasn’t surprised that Justin had warmed to Madison. It wasn’t hard to do, and at first, I thought it was because she was hot, and not in an obvious way. It was in the way that she didn’t need to push her beauty onto you. She was just that, beautiful. But she was edgy, sexy, weird and quirky, and she shot guns, and had a smart mouth, and it was confusing as fuck. She sent my mind into a spiral the first time I saw her because I wasn’t expecting her to look like she did....

I was heading out of the house when my dad’s voice stopped me in my tracks. “He won’t know, and we will keep it that way.” His tone, which was usually smooth and controlled, was now a little shaky toward the end of every syllable. I backtracked a little, hoping to hear more of the conversation when his voice snapped through again. “Bishop?”

Fuck.

I grinned, even though he couldn’t see me. “Yeah?”

“Stop snooping and get your ass in here now.” Like I usually did, I followed his instructions, pushing through his office doors. He and Rob Rodrigues were near the large window that overlooked the entrance to our house and the long driveway. Dad’s office was always a little outdated compared to the rest of our house. It was all mahogany wood, high ceilings and a bookshelf that was rooted to the tarnished flooring, reaching right to the beams in the ceiling.

“Yeah?” I shut the door behind myself and entered, taking the chair beside Rob. Dad leaned back in his red leather chair, a cigar in his mouth. “I need to talk to you about something important. A new girl. Call a meet.” Even though I didn’t understand why

the fuck he was telling me about some new girl, I reached into my back pocket and pulled out my phone, opening a group message to the Kings.

Dad is calling a meeting. My place - now.

I let it rest on my lap, ignoring the vibrating notifications and took my attention back to Dad. “Why does this matter?” I was raised with secrets, and it somehow managed to morph me into who I was today. But all this time, without even knowing it, I was being engineered to take the gavel when my dad passed. There was a knock on the door and Eli, Nate, Brantley, Hunter, Cash, and Chase slowly walked through the doors, searching between Dad and me.

“Come on in, boys.” I still wasn’t sure what the fuck Dad was playing at, but whatever it was, I’m sure someone was about to die. None of us, though, because it was against the law to do so. Yeah, we had our own laws.

“There’s something I hadn’t told any of you before, not even Bishop. Well, I had hinted at it once before... but, there’s a chance that a Silver Swan has slipped through the system. We know what lineage she has come through, and we know everything there is to know, except what she looks like. Seems there are no photos of this girl. But I wanted to make you boys aware because she is in your generation.”

“How do you know?” I asked, leaning back in my chair and running my index finger over the edge of my upper lip. He was most likely being paranoid—like usual, but I guessed in his life, paranoia came with the job description. Only when he got paranoid, blood was always spilled.

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My dad's eyes shot to Rob and then came back to mine. "A valuable source. In the meantime, we are hunting down this error so we can take care of it once and for all, but just so you boys know, this will be in your jurisdiction to take care of."

"What? That's not what we do..." I began to state, obviously a little annoyed that I'd need to add to my kill count. "I'm not a Lost Boy."

Dad leaned forward, his eyes hardening. "You will do as I say, son." Then he leaned back, his cool demeanor coming over his face—yet again. Pretty sure the old man was a psychopath. "Consider it a test."

"Fine." I stood from my chair. "Is that all?" He nodded, and then dismissed us all with a simple flick of his wrist. We were walking out to our respective cars when Nate, being Nate, was the first one to say something.

"Yo, I can't be all up in this drama. My mom has this new fucking man, and apparently his daughter is moving in today. I can't be coming home with blood on my shit. Might freak her out a little."

"—She hot?" Eli interfered, getting into the back of Nate's pick up. Nate flipped him off. "I don't know—dick." Rolling my eyes at their bullshit, I beeped my car unlocked and got in. My phone dinged and I opened a message from Adriana.

Miss me?

I shot her back a reply. My dick does. Then I floored it forward, shooting past all the boys as we raced our way to school.

The next day, classes went annoyingly slow, I swore every single year it went slower. We were sitting around in the atrium when Nate started. “Dude, I’m not playing, my new stepsister is fucking hot with a capital H. Think Madison Beer—only she doesn’t know how hot she is. But she plays with guns and shit, so I ain’t with it. I don’t think. But fuck me, that’s a fine piece of ass living under my roof. Her mom...” His words drifted off when I noticed a girl walking into the atrium, alone, holding a lunch tray. She was new here, obviously, because not only did I know every single person who attended Riverside Prep, and their social security numbers, but the way her features withdrew and her fingers clamped around the tray nervously was a dead giveaway, too. She had long dark brown hair, fair skin that held a tint of something exotic, long fuck—fucking long legs that I could latch around my waist easily and then, in slow motion, her wandering eyes looked right at me from across the room as though she could feel my gaze on her, like a lion being caught hunting its prey. I didn’t break eye contact, I relished in how her eyes stared back at me with a storm so chaotic it could put a category 5 cyclone to bed. I watched as her cheeks flushed, right before she quickly sat at a table with Tatum. Fucking Tatum. That annoying bitch needed to be put in line. I shook my head, seemingly irked that a fucking high school girl could steal my attention so effortlessly. Pulling out my phone, I sent another text to Adriana.

My house at nine.

“Oh! There she is!” Nate pointed to the table where hot girl had just walked to.

Nah, no way.

“That’s her, dawg, that’s the new stepsister. I wanna play with her for a bit.”

“Play with her, how?” Just the mention of playing and her in the same sentence had my dick swelling in my jeans.

Nate looked at me knowingly. “You know how.”

“Yeah, no offense, but the last time we all shared, we almost killed the girl, so unless you want to kill your new stepsister, I’d say no.”

Nate chuckled. “I don’t know, there’s something different about her.”

I rolled my eyes because gaining Nate’s attention wasn’t hard to do—keeping it was impossible, but gaining it was easy. I went back to my phone. Recognition slowly frosted over my bones, and my eyes leisurely drew back up as I watched her laugh at something Tatum had said.

That smile.

So familiar, so...

“Fuck.”

“What?” Brantley barked, his eyes still on the new girl, but his frown etched so deep into his face that you would think this girl for real insulted his existence.

“She’s the Silver Swan.”

Brantley didn’t jump in shock, but his eyes hauntingly remained on her. Nate sucked in a breath, Eli jumped from his seated position, Hunter, Chase, and Cash both let out a mixture of noises, and then it hit me.

I knew this girl.

My mom knew this girl.

My dad knew this girl.

Why the fuck did I know her?

A French fry hit my face, yanking me out of my memory lapse, which was a fucking good thing, considering what happened next. “Earth to Bishop.”

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“We’re throwing a party. I was going to book the ring at Backyard Bucks, but I have a better idea.”

Justin’s eyes came to mine, worry etched into them. “Dawg, I just—”

“—You know how it is.” Was all I had to say.

“How what is?” Madison asked absently, kicking off her shoes and tucking her legs under her ass. I knew, if I didn’t already know, I knew right then and there, that it didn’t matter what this girl had done. It didn’t matter what she was about to do, and even though my thoughts and feelings were always conflicted where she was concerned, make no mistake, I’d end any motherfucker who dared come near her. With her, it always felt right, and that’s cliché as fuck, but she had a habit of doing that. Bringing shit out of me that I didn’t know was ever there. I just needed her to remain oblivious for now, and I needed to put a wall where my feelings were until I knew I could trust her. I’d never given my heart to anyone, not only because I struggled to give enough of a fuck to pull it from my chest and hand it out, but because I knew no one wanted a washed up, lifeless, damaged mess of what whatever the fuck was left of it.

“The consequences to fucking with what’s mine, that’s what.”

Madison’s body stilled beside me. She looked between Justin and me, and then she opened her mouth. “What? What do you mean?”

Justin chose that time to interfere. “Are you having the party here?”

I shook my head, propping my foot on the coffee table. “Nah, at the condo.”

“Mommy dearest doing you a solid, huh?” Justin grinned.

“You have a condo?” Madison yelped. “Oh wait, yes, Nate said something about that.”

“Yeah, Mom got one in the city, close to campus.”

Her eyes dropped to her hands as she fiddled with her fingers. “You’re going to NYU?”

I shrugged. “Possibly. My mom went there, and her dad and so on.”

Madison’s phone dinged in her pocket. She read something on the screen and then shot off the sofa. “I need to go home.” My eyes darted to Justin, who knew exactly why I was holding Madison here. To keep Nate from telling her what was about to happen at this party.

“I’ll take you.” If Nate bitched out and spilled everything to her, it’ll only make his punishment worse.

I jogged up the steps to my house and slammed the door open. “Dad!” I called out, heading straight for his office. He had his phone pressed to his ear, but his eyes flew to the entrance when he saw me appear. “I’ll call you back.”

My chest rose and fell. “That girl.”

“Yes?” He seemed interested.

“She’s the girl you showed me all those years ago, isn’t she?”

My dad's grin deepened. "You met her? She's at your school?"

I nodded. "Yes."

"Then you know what you have to do."

"You've never seen what she looks like?"

Dad shook his head. "Only when she was around ten. Why? Is she ugly? Not your type?"

"Something like that," I lied. "I'll do what I need to do."

I stopped over at a store on my way home to pick up Bishop's present. It's honestly nothing great, and he probably won't even like it, but it was all I could think of. "Nate!" I hated being back here. Over the past couple of days, I had loved being away. Or I loved being with Bishop, not sure which was more true. Maybe a bit of both.

"Hey, Kitty," Nate called out, coming down the stairs.

I turned to face him. "Hey!" Then I pulled out my phone. "Dad texted me and said he was calling a meeting?"

Nate gave me a strained smile—actually, his whole face was strained. "Yeah. It has to do with your mom coming back and shit."

"Where is she?" I walked into the kitchen, needing a drink. Milk, not alcohol. Finding chocolate flavored, I took it out and then a glass before pouring.

Nate pulled out a bar stool. "She's coming too."

“What!” I snapped. “Nate, I don’t want to see her—ever again. As far as I’m concerned, the bitch can stay dead.”

“Lovely, thanks for that, Madison. Great to see your father has done such a stellar job at controlling that mouth.” I didn’t flinch, my eyes remained on Nate as I swallowed the cool, creamy milk.

I put my glass down. “Did someone speak?” I asked Nate, ignoring her. He stifled a laugh, cranking his head over his shoulder, tensing.

“Madison, come on sweetheart.” My dad gestured to the sitting room. The layout of our home was more traditional than Bishop’s. The sitting room hung off the kitchen which was joined by three big white pillars. Our house sort of reminded me of a modern Greek establishment.

“Are you okay, sweetie?” Elena asked me, her arm snaking around my shoulders. Since I first met her almost a year ago, I instantly warmed to her. She was much like Nate in that aspect. Warm and inviting. Something about their aura just had you craving to be around them.

“I’ll be fine once she’s gone.”

Elena’s lips pinched together. “I understand that, Madison, and I’m sorry.”

I offered her a small smile, appreciating how well she was taking my dad’s ex coming back from the dead. A lot better than I took it, that was for sure. I sat down on the sofa as Nate stretched out beside me, his arm coming to the back of my neck, cradling my body into his more. He was relaxed by the naked eye, but I could tell the stance he had smoothly shifted into he was ready to jump on my mom at any given moment, and I loved him for it even more.

“Can we hurry this along because I had a big night last night.”

Nate stiffened slightly, but I ignored it, hurrying my parents to get this bullshit over with.

“Madison, first of all, your father and I never wanted you to hate us. We—”

“—Wait!” I corrected her with a raise of my hand. “Correction, I hate you, I don’t hate Dad—never will. He did his best, still does his best, and even though he’s...” The words frizzled out in my throat, threatening to choke me. I hadn’t spoken them out loud since finding out. Before I could stop it, a single tear leaked out, slipping down my cheek. Nate caught it with his finger, and my gaze locked with his. Slowly, he brought his finger to his lips and sucked the tear off, while his arm tightened its grip around me.

I looked back to Dad and Elizabeth. “Not my biological father,” I cleared my throat.

“He is more of a parent than you will ever be.”

She flinched, then sat back in her chair. Running the palms of her hands down her hair again, I noticed her eyes darting around the room faster as if she was trying to pull something from thin air. She let out a breath of air. “I get that you’re angry about Bishop.”

“Don’t say his fucking name,” I seethed, my eyes narrowing on her.

“What about Bishop?” my dad inquired, looking at her sideways.

I leaned into Nate, a grin on my face. I was smug as fuck—with good reason. She looked at my dad, and then back at me. “It’s not important. Listen, there’s something you don’t know about him—”

I snorted. “Oh, I’m sure there’s a lot that I don’t know about him. I gave up trying to work that shit out months ago.”

My dad interrupted again, just as Elena sat beside Nate. Her hands rested on her knees delicately.

Elizabeth looked between my dad and me again. “I was his initiation.”

Dad turned rigid.

Elena visibly paused. It never crossed my mind to wonder exactly how much she knew.

I leaned toward her and whispered, “Did you know about all this crazy shit?” I didn’t know why, but I just had never thought she did, but then again, her son was a King.

She gave me a somber smile. “Yes, sweetheart.” She didn’t elaborate, and I could understand why. Time and place and all that, but I did really want to know who Nate’s dad was. He never spoke about him, actually, no one spoke about him, and I think that made me more curious, but I respected his privacy, and hers. If they wanted me to know, I’d know.

“Get out.” My dad’s eyes were focused in the distance, then his head snapped back to her.

Elizabeth swallowed. “I need to talk to you about something.”

“Well, hurry up before I put a bullet between your eyes for real this time, woman.”

“Or me. My aim is a lot better now. Must be from all the anger I’ve caged in,” I deadpanned.

She winced again, before stumbling around with her words. “Listen, what Lucan was going to tell you right before your lot killed him, was that Bishop and Madison were destined to be together.”

“That’s a bit dramatic, even for you.” I rolled my eyes.

Nate growled, “Who told you.”

Her eyes went to Nate, and they softened, but I tilted my head to block her view. “Touch him, so much as flutter those fake eyelashes in his direction, and I’ll kill you myself.”

Nate’s thumb started doing circles on my bare arm, sending shivers over my flesh. She diverted her gaze. “I’ve known since she was born. It was part of the reason why we took her. Johan and Jimima couldn’t keep her, but before Hector allowed her to

come to us, he made us swear on a blood oath that she and Bishop would unite one day and continue the legacy.”

My eyebrows pinched together, then I slowly collected myself again. Well, appeared to collect myself. When she noticed no one was about to interrupt her outburst of honesty, she continued, “So we all took the blood oath. Your father who you trust so purely included.”

“And if she didn’t end up with Bishop? Hmm? What if she ended up with me? ‘Cause I’m telling you now, she was fair game for a bit there, and there have been a couple times—no offense, Pops.” He gave my dad an apologetic smile, and it was the first time I had noticed their easy banter. Had they become friends? My dad smiled weakly at him before cutting his glare back to Elizabeth.

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She shook her head. “No, it wouldn’t have worked. He had to be with her in order for her to live a normal life.”

“What the hell do you mean a ‘normal’ life. This is the twenty-first century, not the fucking stone ages. These people have no power to do such things.” But even as the words left my mouth, I knew that that wasn’t entirely true. They had far more power than what was visible to the naked eye.

Elizabeth let out another breath, and I fought the urge to ask her if she needed a nebulizer. “Madison,” she said sadly, and I looked to my dad for reassurance. Nate’s grip tightened around my thigh. Reassuringly, or warningly, I wasn’t sure which.

My dad’s eyes dropped low, and that was when everything started shutting down. First, my eyes zoned to the glass tiled floor, and then my knees buckled. Had I not been sitting, I would have stumbled to the ground. “I’m sorry, Madison, but he was ordered to be with you. At first, he didn’t care. He swore that he’d kill you himself if you didn’t comply. Then something changed, he must have realized you were pretty, or interesting, and he tried to hide you from Hector—they all did. They were under the assumption that Hector only knew what you looked like by a photo of you at age ten, so they thought they could get away with it. Only, he...” She paused, and everything zoned out.

My memories started crashing into me like a bad movie on repeat. I heard Nate’s voice faintly in the background, attempting to bring me back to the now, but it was too late, everything she was saying was already making sense in my head.

“You goin’ explain or should I?” Nate murmured smugly from the backseat. Bishop

gave Nate a death stare into the rearview mirror. “That night you were with me.”

“Which night?” I added.

“The race.”

“I’m following.”

“You remember how I said something vague like, ‘he won’t recognize you’?”

“Yes...”

“Well, he recognized you.” He dropped the gear into second and floored it onto the main highway, away from the city.

“And who is he?”

Bishop looked into the rearview mirror at Nate before bringing his eyes back to the main road. “My dad.”

I sucked in a breath and shot from the sofa. Nate’s arm snatched out to me, his fingers grabbing mine. “Madison, it’s not exactly as she—”

I shook my head, my eyes going to my mom. “I don’t even care anymore. Regardless of whatever this bullshit life is.” I swiped the tears away from my eyes, my heart aching in my chest. I was a fucking pity bitch. “It doesn’t matter because I’m used to it.” I glanced at my dad. “Why did you bring me back here? You knew the risk.”

“I love you Madison.” His hands dove into his pockets. “But I have an obligation to this life. I hated it, hated it so bad that I couldn’t be here to watch it unfold.” He sighed, massaging his head. “I quickly recognized the look in Bishop’s eyes. It was

obvious his feelings were real, and then I witnessed the way you were with Nate and the rest of the Kings. I knew that something was about to change.”

I was speechless. The words I wanted to scream were caged in my mouth, leaving me parched and pleading for air.

My dad stood and pointed to the door. “Get the fuck out of my house, Elizabeth, and don’t ever come home.” I didn’t entirely understand why he was upset with her because he must’ve played a part in her faking her death, but whatever, I no longer cared.

I marched up to my room, dialed Tatum and sunk into my bed.

“I hate my life.”

“What?” she asked groggily. I must’ve woken her. “I’ll be there in a few.”

“You don’t have to,” I choked out, struggling to contain my pain.

“Fuck,” she cussed, then the line cut out. Dropping my arm to the side of my bed, I let the tears silently run down my face. My life was so messed up. Just when I thought I had something good going, something else was thrown from the left field. My chest tightened every time I thought of how stuck with me Bishop had been, and how he said his dad was one of the main reasons why I wasn’t killed. It all made stupid sense now and I hated it. I wished I was back to not knowing anything. There’s a light knock on my door.

“Mads, it’s me.”

I slid off my bed and opened the door for Tate, then shut, locked, and sunk back to my bed, wiping my tears angrily.

Once the blurs had disappeared, I pointed to the bags in her hands. “Whatcha got there?”

She held up the bags, and it was when I realized she was wearing her cotton pajama pants with little unicorns on them. Fluffy slippers covered her feet, and her blonde hair was piled on top of her head in a messy bun. I smiled, grateful, once again, for my best friend. She jumped onto my bed, took my phone from me and turned it off, and then snuggled into the covers.

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“This is everything we need for at least a couple days. Thank fuck for summer break, or else imagine having to go to school. It’s Monday tomorrow, by the way.” She gestured at my clothes. “In case you’ve forgotten the day just like you obviously have the shower.”

“Tate!” I scolded her through a laugh.

She shrugged. “What?”

I dug into the bag and took out a bag of potato chips. “I found out some shit tonight.” She didn’t say a word, just sat with a tub of ice cream resting on her thighs as I yapped away. At the end of my rant, she handed me the ice cream and went back to digging into the bag.

“Thoughts?” I was worried. Usually, Tatum had a lot to say. Had I broken my best friend? That was it, she finally had had enough of my crazy life. She pulled out a spliff, and put it into her mouth, lighting it up.

“Tate!” I looked at the door. Usually, I would care, but we were on the other side of the house, and anyway, my dad probably wouldn’t care. I mean, you can’t not bat your eyelashes at murder but scold me for smoking weed.

I took it from her and inhaled. I hadn’t smoked since we were out in the forest.

Tate lay back on the bed. “And you and Bishop?”

I shrugged, handing it back to her. “I don’t know. I got him a present for his birthday,

though.”

“Lemme see it! When’s his party?” she asked, sucking on the smoke.

“Tonight.”

“Then we go and fuck shit up.”

I nodded. “We go and fuck shit up.”

I stretched my arms wide, feeling a little better than last night.

Tatum’s ass pressed into me. “Quit it, you know how I get morning horny.”

I chuckled, swinging my legs off the bed. “I don’t forget. What do you feel like doing today?”

“Mmmm.” She pressed her index finger to her cheek. “Avoiding the guys is one, but other than that, whatever you want to do.”

Her mentioning the guys had me slowly drifting back to reality. I was... hell, I wasn’t entirely sure how I felt. I guessed I felt betrayed. None of them thought to mention this to me earlier, which is what hurt. If it never played a big part in Bishop being with me all those times, and us being, well, us, then why didn’t he tell me? I slipped into the closet and pulled down my bikini.

“I really want to go shooting. Maybe go back to the place where I met Katsia.”

“Nope,” Tate muttered, getting out of bed. “That’s way too heavy for today. We can do that next week. Today?” She pulled out a little red bikini from her bag. “We lounge by the pool and day drink.”

“We can’t get day drunk, Tate, we have a party to crash tonight.”

“Shit.” She massaged her temples as though she had just remembered. “Okay fine. She stripped naked and slipped on the tiny little... bikini? Looked more like a hoochie outfit for a Mardi Gras. “We start drinking at a more appropriate time, and we go slow, start with cider, and then we hit it hard before we roll up.”

I laughed, shaking my head. “I like this plan.” Then I took out my white bikini. We were heading downstairs just as Nate was coming out of his room.

“Hey!” he snapped, but I rolled my eyes, ignoring him. “Madison!” he repeated. “You can’t ignore me forever.” I flipped him off over my shoulder, going into the kitchen.

“We can skip food,” Tatum says, pulling her oversized glasses down over her eyes.

“Speak for yourself,” I muttered, reaching for the bowls and pouring some of Jimmy’s famous homemade granola in. Best. Ever. I headed out the kitchen doors, the sun kissing my skin instantly.

I inhaled the fresh morning air. “Today is going to be great.”

“It better,” Tate whisked. “I need to get laid, stat!”

I chuckled, wiping my mouth and taking a seat on one of the lounge chairs. “What’s happening with you and Nate?” I was sort of rooting for them in the beginning, but I had witnessed how Nate was with Tillie to how he was with Tatum. There was no denying he was only using Tate, but Tate was starting to catch feelings. With Tillie disappearing for the past months, Tate and Nate managed to come to an agreement, but nothing else has happened between them after their little “talk.” Nate probably got cold feet.

“Don’t make me laugh. I’m not working out my abs today.”

I snorted, my head tilting back. “We will get you laid tonight. Have you seen Bishop’s cousin, Justin? He’s not bad at all.”

“We have different types.” She gestured to me with her free hand as her other rubbed oil over her leg.

I shook my head. “I don’t know, I think you’ll like him.” I placed my empty bowl on the ground and hit play on the sound dock. “Everybody’s fool” by Evanescence starts playing, and I lay on my back, letting the sun seep into my pores.

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“Mads!” Someone was shoving me in the arm, my eyes slowly peeled opening to the bright sun. I raised my head up to see Tatum passing me a J. “It’s two P.M, you slept most of the day away. I thought about waking you but thought better of it. What’d you do this weekend to warrant such lengthy sleepy time?” She stood up and dived into the pool.

“Jesus, I don’t know, get absolutely wrecked by trying to save Bishop, and then ended up getting this.” I pointed to the tattoo that was over my ribs.

Tatum swiped the water off her face and started laughing. “Girl, you are owned.”

I shrugged. “His is bigger, and he has two.”

“He has two?” She quirked her eyebrow, pushing herself up and out of the pool.

I nodded and then chuckled. I thought I was wide awake before, but that has nothing on how I’m feeling right now. Tatum dipped behind the little Bahama hut bar we had tucked away at the side of the pool and grabbed out some bottles. “Your dad and Elena are gone, Nate is gone, it’s just us and these poor, innocent bottles of wine.”

I bit my lip. “Hand it over.”

She gasped. “No way, we’re at least going to be classy about this.”

“When are we ever classy?”

She paused, pondered over it for a few beats, and then nodded. “Good point, but, I do

want to try my hand at some of these cocktails I saw on Pinterest.” Oh no, Tate and her Pinterest addiction.

“Fine.” I walked to the edge of the pool and dove into the cool water, pushing off the hard floor and coming out the surface. “Just make sure mine is strong!” She started dancing, and shaking, and then dancing more, and changing songs. Tatum moved at speeds that made my head spin. I dried off, straightening my tits in my bikini and headed back to her.

Sinking the first cocktail she had made, I moaned at the taste of silk sliding down my throat. “Damn, that was so delicious. What was it?”

“It was a milky way, be careful, that shit has enough liquor in it to put you on your ass.” She made another one, and then we went back to the lounge chairs, cranking the music higher.

“You know” —she waggled her eyebrows at me— “I think you should talk with him, maybe a little later.”

I shrugged. “I will, just not right now. Right now, I want to be a little angry at them.”

She lifted her glass. “I’ll drink to that.” Tate pulled out her phone, and she shuffled closer to me for a selfie. I pulled my tongue out and crossed my eyes, pulling a silly face as she pouted her lips. She uploaded with a grin on her face.

“What was your caption?”

Tate was famous for her captions. They were either extremely dry or over the top. There was no in between, but either way, they always managed to make people laugh. I wasn’t that active on Facebook or any social media. I had only just started using Snapchat, and even then, I almost always forgot to upload photos and videos.

“Beauty and the Beast have all the treats, with a little cocktail emoji.”

I cracked up, clutching my tummy. “You’re a dork.”

She shrugged. “Maybs, but you love me anyway.”

She was right, I did.

Around four cocktails later, we both began climbing up the stairs. We weren’t wasted, but you could definitely notice that we were under the influence. I think. No, I felt fabulous. Laughing about something Tatum had said, we stumbled into my bedroom. “I need something to wear. Something I know will drive Bishop crazy.”

“Girl, do you like seeing him mad? The man is lethal, I wouldn’t be poking the tiger.”

“Actually, I sort of do, but I am mad at him. I need... answers. I just need answers.”

She sighed. “I don’t blame you.” Pulling out some clothes she brought with her. After getting frustrated with my average closet, I turned in a huff, my eyes falling on the see-through mesh long sleeve dress she was holding.

“What is that?” I pointed to it. It was probably one of the most scandalous things I had ever seen, which meant I had found my outfit.

She threw it at me. “You’re to wear like, a tank or something underneath,” she mumbled, but I was diving into my closet, pulling out a little black lace bra. It had straps that lined over my breast skin and was all held together by lace and scandal. I wiggled on the spot with glee. Oh, this was perfect. Then I paused. What the actual fuck was I going to wear as pants. I couldn’t go in underwear, I didn’t want to get killed, so I took out tight little leather boy shorts from my top drawer.

“Are these yours?” I dangled them in front of her face.

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“There they are!” She went to launch for them, but I snatched them into my chest.

“I’m wearing them tonight.”

“Fine,” she grumbled, taking out a white dress. “I’ll wear this.”

“Good idea,” I nodded, heading to the bathroom. “You look good in white.” I’m setting everything on the counter when Nate’s side opens. Ignoring him because I’m used to doing so, I unclasped my bikini while holding my breasts from his view.

“What?” I snapped.

“Are you coming to the party?”

“Yes,” I hissed, reaching for the faucet and turning it on.

“You can both come with me, and have you heard from Bishop?”

I shook my head. “No. I haven’t checked my phone, though.”

Nate glared at me, and I quickly slipped under the pelting hot water. “Anything else?” I called out, annoyed at his presence.

The door slamming was all I got as a reply.

Daemon

One two three four five six...six...six...

“Shush!” I roared to the internal battles inside of my head. Creeping down the dark and gloomy corridors, I pressed the palm of my hand against the damp concrete wall, my head tilting at the sounds.

Deep breathing was coming from one of the rooms. One of the many rooms in this quarter. The island was separated by quarters, each functioned by your importance to the Elites and your lineage. This was the royal quarter, also known as the Regiis quarter. Then there was the Secundus quarter, Tertium quarter, and finally, the Nihil quarter. Each faction was eloquently designed for their cause. The royal quarter was exactly as it was. I inched farther, closer to the white door where the sounds were coming out from and pressed my ear to the frosted wood.

Deep breathing was coming again, and then a faint scream.

“That’s it, keep going. You can do it. Push.” The door swung open and Jaysena, one of the nurses on the island was staring back at me.

“Sir.” She bowed. “Are you ok?” Her head remained dipped, her eyes searching the floor. So timid. So docile. So “Kill her, I’m sick of seeing her face.”

‘Shut up,’ I shouted in my head, my strength at keeping the voices under control getting better.

“Fine. What is happening?” She got what I was trying to say, and gestured wide, allowing me to see inside the room.

“A Swan, my lord.”

I tilted my head, and a girl with pink hair that hung down to the dip in her waist was

crouched, hugging a baby wrapped in a blanket. Her eyes came to mine, and she whispered, “Please, don’t say anything yet. I’m best friends with your sister, my name is Tillie.”

“I’m done.” I smoothed my hair down. I decided on flat and straight for tonight, sharp enough to slice some Kings. Obviously, the liquor was hitting me at full force, but I swiped my phone off the drawers and tucked it into my bra. The little see-through outfit I was wearing was to die for, but I totally wouldn’t wear this if I were sober.

“I’m ready too,” Tate slurred, standing on her wobbly legs.

“Impressions, we were going to make some impressions.” I was chanting to myself as my door swung open and Nate’s eyes fell on mine.

“What the...” he paused, his mouth hanging open as he slowly took in my outfit. His eyes flew from my face to my breasts, to my feet, and then back again. “You can’t rock up like that, sis.”

I shoved past him. “I can do what I please.” We all headed out of the house and I got into the front of his Audi.

He fired it up, shaking his head. “You’re in fucking trouble, girl.” I didn’t care. At that very moment, I was drunk and pleased with myself. I hadn’t heard from Bishop—at all, since I left his house yesterday, so I was feeling... irrational. But I still had his gift in my pocket. We turned the music loud and started dancing. I hit play on “Sex with Me” by Rihanna and Tatum started singing the lyrics in the back like a twit, accentuating every word. Nate picked up what she was doing and laughed. We all fell into a breezy trip and it wasn’t long until Tate pulled out her phone.

“Yo! Smile.”

I turned my head over my shoulder with a smirk, my hair tricking over my other shoulder, throwing up deuces, and Nate flipped the camera off, his eyes staying on the road.

“What was the caption?” I asked, just as we pulled hit the city.

“When incest looks hot.”

“Tate!” I snapped, and Nate broke out in tears, his laughter not looking to subside.

“Jase ‘liked’ it.”

“Of course he did,” I muttered just as we pulled underneath an underground parking lot.

“And of course Bishop owns a five-star penthouse, I mean, totally logical.”

Nate chuckled, shifting the car into park. “Yeah, understatement of the century, wait until you see this set up.”

We rode the way up the elevator, Nate punching in a code that took us straight to Bishop’s penthouse. The doors spread out and opened onto a sea of young people and rock music blaring through all the bodies. I couldn’t even admire the house as much as I would have liked because there were people everywhere, but from what I could see, it was set up like a three-story loft. I walked to the edge of the little balcony that the elevator opened out on and peeked at the place.

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Nate gestured to the back of himself. “Basketball court, too.” He shot us a wink before disappearing. He was acting weird lately, weirder than usual.

After taking the two steps down onto the main lobby, I snatched a drink from a waiter passing by and took a long swig. I felt people’s eyes on me, but I ignored them all, focused on my search for Bishop. The song moved to “It’s a Vibe” from Ty Dollar sign and I couldn’t fight the eye roll. Obviously, Nate had found the sound system.

I started slightly pushing through the bodies and taking the two steps down from the lobby and kitchen area, down to the open sitting room when my eyes fell on Bishop who was stretched out on the sofa. His bare chest rippled under every movement, his tattoos flexing along with them. He had a red bandana tied to the front of his head, jeans that looked to have been out in the sun for a beat too long, and since he hadn’t actually texted me since a couple days ago, I was trying hard not to make it obvious how much I was checking him out. And—yep, he was drinking again. His eyes collided with mine and I felt as though the air was sucked out from my lungs. Machine Gun Kelly started rapping about being a “bad mother fucker,” just as the rim of his bottle touched his lip. His eyes stayed on mine, as the corner of his mouth slowly kicked up in a grin. I was hoping for a reaction. A caveman Bishop—if you will, but all I got was a brush off. Jesus. Was he still holding a grudge about Nate, Brantley, and I? I guessed it would be valid since he had let me off on it lightly, but I knew Bishop. He was calculated. He did everything for a reason and he performed it with expertise. Or maybe I had broken him a little, but even as I thought those words, I knew that that wasn’t possible. You just couldn’t break someone like Bishop. He was too... unbreakable.

So I did what any sane girl my age would do while under the influence. I yanked my

eyes from his and went in search of my partner in crime. Bypassing the sea of people, I found myself again, annoyed that I couldn't truly appreciate Bishop's new condo, with the influx of women and—few men. Huh. There were more women than there were men. Surprise, surprise. Yet again, I didn't know what game he was playing at, and before I could allow my brain to begin sifting through the possibilities, my toes started to tingle and my legs wobbled like jelly. Maybe I shouldn't have started drinking so fucking early. Searching for a room—any room—away from all the people, I shoved through a pair of black doors and came into what I was guessing was the master bedroom. There was a bed that looked as though it was floating in the center, a large television hanging on the wall opposite, and directly in front of me was a wall of glass overlooking the city. The sheets and blankets were all silken black and red, and even the little seat that was in the corner was more like a throne in blood red leather. There wasn't much else to the room—the penthouse itself felt more like an art studio. It wasn't warm and inviting, and on that thought, I started backing up, ready to get the fuck out of here while deeply regretting even attending. Tate and her stupid decisions. Slowly stepping backward, I collided with a hard wall of muscle and a small squeal leaped out from my mouth. Jumping around to see who I backed into, Hunter's piercingly dark eyes were glaring down at me.

I calmed my erratic heart down. “Hey.” My newfound brother and I weren't really on great terms, so I was still unsure of how I should step around him.

“Figure we may as well get this talk over with.” He tilted a large bottle of bourbon up to me, and then brushed past, heading straight toward the window. For a brief second, I considered running, but I'd been wanting to see Hunter for a while now. Since he found out about us being biological siblings, he had gone more than cold on me, so, I followed him to the window, looking him up and down. He looked good, like they all did. Wearing jeans and a tight fitting black shirt, you could almost make out the lines of muscle in his arms.

“I'm sorry.” Because I was obviously shit at this—being an only child all my life and

all, 'I'm sorry' was the first thing that came out of my mouth.

He snorted and then raised the bottle to his mouth. "What exactly are you sorry for, Madison?" He didn't look at me, he merely kept his eyes forward, watching as the busy streets of the Upper East Side remained awake.

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“I don’t know.” I followed his line of sight. The tension between us was loud. “Existing?” A chuckle slipped out before I could stop it and his eyes slammed into mine.

“This is funny to you?” he accused, his eyes narrowing on me. They dropped to my lips and then to my eyes. “I wanted to fuck you, and then I find out that the girl I used to pull off on is my sister...” he smirked. “I guess that makes me a little sicker than Brantley, and that’s saying something.” His eyes went back to the window.

“You’re not sick, Hunter,” I muttered, swallowing past the emotion that was threatening to surface in my throat. “And you weren’t the only one who had thoughts...”

His movements stilled. I took this moment to reach over and snatch the drink from him, wrapping my lips around the rim and tilting back, letting the warm liquid slide down my throat. “There was this one time,” I laughed, suddenly realizing how bad this was about to sound. I swiped the residue from my lips and handed the bottle back to him. I could feel his eyes watching me as he absently took the bottle from me, waiting for my confession. “I had this very intense dream that involved all of you. In my head, I had already fucked you, so there, I trump yours.”

There was a long pause and I couldn’t bring myself to look him in the eye. “And if you tell anyone, I’ll kill you.”

Suddenly, his laughter cracked through the cold room and my eyes snapped to his, catching him rubbing the tears from his cheeks. “Well, yeah, that makes me feel a little better, but I can assure you, I fucked you in my head too.” After that, I felt a

sense of calm come between us. A lot easier than what it was a second ago.

“Tell me about Daemon and I’ll tell you about your biological parents.”

That was unexpected. I hadn’t thought much about my biological parents, mainly because I didn’t have time to. My life was an information dictionary and I was constantly being fed the unedited version that had to continue to be revised and changed.

“Well,” I started. “I don’t know much about him because he’s new in my life, but what I do know about him I go off instinct. Probably some sick twisted twin thing, but it’s hard to explain. I don’t know him, but I know him. It doesn’t even make sense, it’s like a bond of natural instinct. He doesn’t speak much English, but he’s fluent in Latin—like all of you, only better at it—no offense—”

He chuckled, throwing his hands up. “Hey, none taken. He’s a Princeps Lost Boy. Latin was his first language.”

“So weird,” I added absently. “Anyway, he’s... different. It didn’t take me long to figure that out.” Hunter stepped backward, falling onto the bed. I turned to face him, my back pressing against the brisk glass. I slid down until I was seated on the floor. “I don’t really know what’s wrong with him, but Bishop and everyone keep saying he’s different.”

Hunter searched my features. “I’m not going to lie to you, or hide anything from you because I feel like you’re in this shit way too deep to not know, so I’m going to do you a solid and tell you that yeah, Daemon is different, I guess you could say.” My jaw felt as though it had hit the floor. For once, someone was being straight up with me. Hunter continued, his eyes carefully watching mine as if he was waiting for a reaction. “He has a—I guess you could say—a form of schizophrenia, only, a lot darker.”

I faltered. “Schizophrenia?”

Hunter dipped his head. “Only it’s worse for him. He has six ‘voices,’ only they’re not voices.”

“Okay.” I was totally not handling this very well, but I wasn’t about to disappoint my new brother by being a little bitch, and besides, I didn’t want to make him regret opening up to me. “What are they?”

Hunter gave me a somber look. “Demons.”

“Say what now?” I cocked my head, floored by his response. “Demons aren’t real.”

“To you and I and everyone else who walks this earth, sure, but in Damon’s head, they’re so very real, Madison. His head is a very, very dark place. That’s why we couldn’t trust him with you, and that’s why we know he was the one who shot you.”

My eyes closed from the pain those words caused. I had always questioned it deep down. I mean, the evidence was there, but my denial was stronger than any evidence. I couldn’t believe that he would hurt me, and in essence, he didn’t. The sharp stab to my heart, though, proved that I was still hurt by it.

“I know,” I whispered out hoarsely, wiping away the tears that had come out. “I knew it was him. I guess I was just in denial, and I still to this day don’t think he would hurt me.”

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“I believe you’re right,” Hunter agreed. “About him not wanting to hurt you, but Madison, he’s not always Daemon.”

That hit home for me. Was it going to be possible for me to have a relationship with my twin brother? Or was he just too sick to even know? My heart snapped a little in my chest.

“Anyway, tell me about your parents.”

Hunter snorted. “Well, I wish I could tell you that they were amazing parents and would welcome you with open arms, but, Dad is always away for business and my mom is sick.”

“Sick?” I asked, my head tilting.

Hunter nodded. “Yeah, she only has a few years to live.”

“I’m sorry,” I muttered, realizing that me and these guys have so much more in common than any of us would ever care to admit.

He shrugged. “It’s life. Jase and I have been doing this shit since we were little. Well, Jase was the one who raised me—mostly. My dad just provided the funds.”

“So these Kings, they all grow old and just—stop giving a shit? I see a pattern here.”

He chuckled. “Probably. Not sure where the disconnect is, but yeah, I’d say you were mostly right. Except for Hector.”

“Hector?” I quirked an eyebrow. “He’s a good dad?”

“The best. He may be a scary fucker, but there’s nothing he wouldn’t do for his son. It’s something we could all do with.” Once again, I’m wanting to ask about Nate’s dad, but that would make me a shitty person if I took Hunter’s good deed for granted by using this. Nate would tell me when he was ready. Or until I fought it out of him eventually.

“Which brings me to my next thing,” Hunter announced, standing from the bed and reaching for my hand. “There’s something you probably want to see right now. But, I’m going to say that you won’t like it, but, I’m sorry. Bishop does want you there and as much as I’ve loved our little bonding chat, he’s my loyalty.” These damn boys and their loyalty.

I followed him out of the room and down the long hallway. The crowds of people had died down a little to what they were earlier, so it was a lot easier to surf through. Hunter took a hard left turn, pushing open another set of doors, these ones tarnished wood, and when they opened, the smell of rubber mixed with sweat shot up my nostrils. My eyes went straight to the crowd of people who were bunched in the middle, cheering, yelling, and screaming with their hands flying over their head with cups grasped in their hands.

“What’s going on?” I asked skeptically, my eyes staying on the crowd.

“This is Bishop’s basketball court room, but tonight, it’s also a fighting ring.”

“Oh no,” I muttered, barely above a whisper.

“Oh, yes,” Hunter announced, taking my hand.

“Who?” I asked as we made our way to the crowd, who were now spreading out. It

was making it a lot easier for us to step through the bodies.

“Brantley and Nate against Bishop.”

“What!” I screeched, my feet picking up speed.

“Chill, baby sis, they had to be held accountable for their actions.”

“But Nate fights as a sport! And there’s two of them.” Just as I was babbling off, the crowd parted more, and the scene played out in front of me. Bishop reared his fist back and slammed it right into Nate’s, a loud crush vibrating through the air, and then he roundhouse kicked Brantley in the stomach. I swore I heard the crunching of his ribs from here. I wanted to interrupt, I wanted to scream and stop it, but another part of me knew that this wasn’t my place. These boys had rules and rituals. Even if I may not understand them, it didn’t mean that they didn’t exist. And besides, I had a feeling this had everything to do with me.

“They’ll kill each other,” I whispered to Hunter, but I couldn’t take my eyes off the fight, even when Nate’s blood sprayed through the air. Right before he tried to attack Bishop with a left hook, it got blocked by a massive hand, and then Bishop laid into him one more time. A loud, yet silent, “oh...” sounded out through the crowd, and I froze, the blood pulsing through my veins turning to frost.

“Nawww,” Hunter grinned. “They’ll just play around for a bit.” Then his eyes came to mine. “Hope you weren’t hoping for your stepbrother to be all jiffy with you again.” Then he returned his attention back to the died down brawl. “Because he just got a huge wakeup call.”

I couldn’t watch anymore, so I sunk into the crowd and backed toward the way I came, spinning around and pressing through the doors. The silence that broke through from being in that loud room made my ears bleed. There was no one out here now, I

guessed everyone was in that room watching Bishop as if he was a lion in a circus. This was his circus and those were his monkeys, and Bishop Vincent Hayes was most definitely the ringleader. This place was far more extravagant than I would have ever thought. I knew Bishop had money, and his family had money, but this was extreme—even for him. Making a beeline for the elevator, I press the button anxiously and then press it a few more times. If it could not decide to come slow today, that would be great. Where the hell was Tate, too? She just disappeared.

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“Leaving so soon?” My finger stopped an inch away from hammering at that little circle button again.

Without turning to face him, I shrugged. “You have enough company here to keep you occupied, Bishop.” I realized how sober I was at this point, which was very unfortunate considering the drinks I consumed were for the sole purpose of once again, coming face to face with my high school nemesis-slash-first love. Bishop was my kryptonite, but I was no Lois Lane, and he was no Superman. What he was? Was an addiction I couldn’t break. No amount of time spent at a rehab clinic could help me, because I didn’t want to help myself. I was addicted to the burn that crusted over my vulnerable heart every time he broke it, because sometimes, the very few times that I have seen another side to Bishop, made all those pieces worth breaking for. Made him worth it. I was a junkie chasing my next high, and just hoping, that this wasn’t the time I overdosed on a love so toxic, and so far out of my reach, that I would damn near kill myself just to know how it feels one last time. I wasn’t afraid to die, I was afraid I’d never feel the heat from his hand wrapped around my heart, right before he’d shatter it into millions of pieces. I was, in short, a lost cause.

So, even though I heard the doors to the elevator ping open, I turned to finally face him, pinching my lips together when I saw the cut below his right eyebrow and the blood slightly seeping out from his bottom lip. He still had no shirt on, and his tank, I could see, was tucked into his back pockets. He only wore his military boots on his feet, and sweat glistened off each and every tight muscle he had. I didn’t think I’d ever get used to seeing Bishop in all his glory. He was just too magnificent for the average eye. Finally, my eyes collided with his, and I was waiting for a cocky comeback. Maybe something funny. But I got nothing. I got a blank stare that gave away nothing. I hadn’t received this impassive look since I first met Bishop.

The doors closed, and the longer our eyes remained connected, the more it felt as though all of the oxygen was being sucked out of the room. The walls were closing in, everything in my peripheral fading black, and all that I could see was him. His frighteningly vacant eyes. The kind that holds your interest and has your thighs clenching together, all while sending chills down your spine. His lips. The curve of his upper rim and how it dipped in the middle, while his bottom one seemed plumper. The sharpness of his jaw, that was as though Greek gods had sharpened it with a magical fucking sword of beauty. With that, you had Bishop, who had you second guessing all biblical and scientific history lesson you ever got as a kid, because there was no way someone this perfect was created out of sheer genetics.

I cleared my throat out of my daze when everything came back into real time. Stepping closer toward him, I reached for his cheek, and his eyes dropped to my mouth.

“I’ll clean you up before I leave.”

He didn’t answer, and I searched his features for a clue or any kind of reaction, but again, was met with the same vacant, hazy look. So I hooked my index finger around his, testing the waters to see if he was going to allow it since he hadn’t said anything before then. I felt him still, and then his eyebrows pulled together, and just when I thought he was about to tell me to fuck off, his finger tightened around mine and he pulled me into his chest. I ignored the spraying of blood that was strewn over his flesh as his other hand came to my face. His fingers grasped my chin as he tilted my head up toward him.

“I. Don’t. Share. Madison. Ever.”

I swallowed past the massive lump in my throat. So it was still about that. “I—”

He shook his head, his finger squeezing my chin. His eyes pierced into mine, as his

lips lightly brushed over my mouth. “Ever.”

I gulped and then nodded. “Okay.”

Then his lips crashed down onto mine and all senses inside of me exploded everywhere, unlocking the latch that kept my legs up. His arm hooked around my back as his tongue dipped into my mouth, sliding against my own before he pulled away slightly, taking my breath away but leaving the soft tang of metallic slipping down my throat.

“I’ll get these fucking people out of my house.” He pressed his lips to mine, so softly, so gently, giving one peck of a kiss. That, against all of the other kisses I had been owned by from him, this was the one that seized my heart. I was putty in his hands. He took me out the kitchen, catching Jase’s eye. “Tell everyone to fuck off.”

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Jase stared between the two of us and then grinned. “How long is this little cute act going to last this time?” Bishop’s arm, that was wrapped around the back of my neck, tensed. I thought it was from Jase’s remark, but then he tucked me under his arm farther and kissed the top of my head.

“Has it ever really never been her?”

Jase’s grin deepened, his eyes continuously going between the two of us. “I guess not.”

My heart felt swollen in my chest, but my legs and muscles ached from fatigue, so I was thankful when Bishop led me to the stairs that were in the sitting room. I thought the room I went into earlier was the master bedroom, I guess not.

“Hey!” Jase yelled out, just as my hand landed on the railing. We both turned to look over our shoulders to find Hunter, Nate, and Brantley, all now smiling with eyes sparkling with adrenaline, grinning at us. It was the first time since before Bishop had found out about my shenanigans that there had been any sort of air of peace surrounding us all. I understood now. Why Bishop had to do what he did tonight. It was not only to make a point but to restore the peace within the group. The trust. They were like brothers, and unlike girls, they weren’t catty. They took their shit into a ring, punched it out, and then got over it. I guessed in their world, it was the only way they could live to survive amongst each other. It made sense.

“She’s still my little sister!”

“—Our...” Hunter added, whacking Jase.

“—Our plus me, fuckers,” Nate added, giving them a dirty look as he pulled open the fridge, taking out a drink. People were slowly pouring back into the main living areas now, the silent space slowly being filled with soft chitchat.

Bishop scoffed. “Don’t give a fuck. She’s Bishop’s, her eyes say so, her body says so, her” —he lifted my shirt so they could see his initials on my ribs— “skin says so—”

I interrupted, sending them all a wink. “Her heart sort of says so, too...” It was no secret to Bishop how I felt about him, I knew that, and I’m pretty sure everyone else knew that too, so it didn’t bother me with how forward I was with my wording. His grip tightened around me anyway, and then he led me upstairs.

“We’ve decided we’re too young to be uncles!” Nate called out from down below. Bishop flipped him off over the railing and I laughed, shaking my head. That would be a nightmare. Then it started to sink in...did I ever want kids? Right now wasn’t the time.

“Wow.” I took in the bedroom and all its glory. Where his room back home was all black and disturbed young teenager, his room here was an off-white. White enough to know it’s white, but a tint of cream stirred in to accentuate the pearl trimmings. It was an attractive and clean contrast that was warm and inviting, regardless of the bareness of it all. His bed was to the far left side of the room, so whoever was on one side got a full view of the city while the other could see downstairs. I loved it. I watched as flames from the gas fire licked up the wall opposite the bed, sending out hues of burnt orange to fill the dimly lit room. I let out a soft sigh.

“This place is truly beautiful, Bishop.”

When I didn’t get a response, I looked directly at him, only to find he was already watching me. An interesting look pulled over his features. It wasn’t something I had seen him display before, and made me a little nervous and jumpy. He still managed to

make me feel fear, and I think he always would because that was just who he was, and who he was to his core. It wasn't a front, it was just Bishop. He was real and would never put on a front to make someone more comfortable. You either took him as he was, or you didn't. Either way, it would never bother him. No one bothered him—and that was half of the charm and half of the fear.

“What is it?” My fingers laced with my hands nervously.

He shook his head, running his fingers through his hair. He took a seat on the edge of the bed, slightly leaning over and resting his elbows on his knees.

I followed, sitting beside him on the mattress, silently waiting for him to say something. Anything. For so long, I'd been wanting, praying, for him to open up to me a little. But every time he did open up, it seemed like all it would do is crack open more dark corners of his soul. It was an endless game of hide and seek where the counting was limitless.

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“Goddammit, Madison,” he whimpered with so much emotion, it damn near almost knocked me flat on my face.

“What’d I do now?” I mentally began sifting through my memories with the help of my good pal anxiety, flicking through those pages to make sure I hadn’t done anything else wrong.

“Stop.”

There was that one morning that I had said some bad things about—

“Madison.” His hand came to my cheek and he turned my face toward him. His eyes pierced into mine. “I said, stop.” Then his thumb brushed softly over my bottom lip, his eyes watching the movement. “Stop overanalyzing and overthinking my move, for once.” He paused and then continued. “Usually, this would be the part where I’d say ‘you can’t figure me out, so give it up,’ but I’ve come to the realization that...” he grinned. “I’m a fucking liar.”

“A what?”

“A liar.” His thumb stopped moving and instantly, I missed the caress of his rough touch. “It’s fucking you, Madison. You’re the only person walking this earth that could ever figure me out. You’re the only fucking person walking this earth that I truly know I’d kill a motherfucker for, and you’re the only fucking girl walking this earth that has me.”

“Has you?” I whispered, tears threatening to surface. I wasn’t sure how to fully take

in this side of Bishop. I had seen snippets of it in the past, but as quickly as I had seen it, it had been ripped away from me again before I could fully comprehend, or even enjoy, what I was feeling. “I have you?”

A small smile tickled his lips. It wasn’t a cocky smile or a smug smile. It was genuine. “You’ve always had me, Madison. You know that.”

Do I?

Pulling my bottom lip into my mouth, I take my gaze off him and look to the floor to ceiling window in front of me, this would be my side when I was staying. I didn’t want to risk the chance of breaking whatever moment we were having right now, but I needed to know before I took another step in the direction of what was Bishop and Madison.

“Can I ask you something without you flipping your switch on me?”

“Anything,” he expressed, his voice low and soft.

I took a deep breath. “I know about your deal with your father.”

Pause.

I continued, “So I need to know one thing, and I will only ask you once.” Then I finally let my attention go back to him. He was watching me, and I him. “Is this real, or is this a game?”

He searched my face. “Madison, does this—what we have, the connection and everything that we’ve experienced since we met—does that all seem fake to you?”

There was no second-guessing that answer. “No. But I never second-guessed my

feelings, it was yours I was unsure about.”

His arm snaked around my waist as he lifted me up, placing me down on his lap so I was facing him with my legs straddled around his hips. His hands fell to my ass and he squeezed. “I may not fully understand my own feelings when it comes to you, and I never have, but when I do, you’ll be the first person to know about it.”

I smiled, my hand coming to his face. If that was as close to a ‘I love you,’ that I was going to get for now, I was happy. I wrapped my arm around the back of his neck.

“Now, can you ride on my dick for a few hours so we can sleep.” My head tipped back as I laughed, just as he pulled me down onto the bed and tore off my little dress. “This is sexy as fuck, Mads.” His fingers traced the mesh material.

“You like?”

His eyes flew to mine. “It’s a favorite for sure, but right now, it needs to be on the floor.” Then he threw it across the room before his hands came to my back, and he pushed my chest down onto his face.

“Wait!” My hands came to his chest. “I almost forgot.” I arched my back so I could access my back pocket and took out the 10kt heavy white gold curb chain. The shotgun bullet shell that dangled off of it was lightly engraved. BVH + MMV. It was cheesy, and I was scared.

He took it, his eyes searching mine and then going back to the chain. “Baby...”

“Happy birthday.”

He kissed me hard, wrapping the chain around his fist. He leaned back. “Put it on?”

I nodded and got up, taking the chain from him. When it was securely around his neck, he turned around quickly, shoving me back onto the bed. My laughter was cut short by his teeth catching my nipple. He bit down, and I moaned, my head tilting back. I could feel his hardness pressing against my clit and I slowly rubbed myself over him. His hands fell to my hips and he squeezed tightly, his eyes rolling to the back of his head as his tongue slid out and wet his bottom lip. Sexy. As. Fuck. He caught my smile, narrowed his eyes, and then flipped me onto my back. I screamed out in shock, then his head dove into my neck while his knee hitched my leg up, pressing himself into me while his tongue licked over my collarbone.

I guessed he liked his present.

“I want you to think of a wall, a bulletproof one that no matter how hard any weapon hounds on it, it could never break.” Rob had said, pacing up and down in front of the seven of us. We had been close all our lives, whether by family or by choice, they were my brothers. I chose to care for them, no amount of family influence could have forced the kind of brotherhood we shared—which made us the most lethal Kings created. The generations before us, my father had said they always fought or struggled to get along sometimes. Whether it be by girl or just by personalities not being compatible, it never happened. They never had a generation that flowed fluidly like we did, so they had big plans for us.

“A wall?” Nate snickered. “You brought us here to teach us about a wall?”

Rob waved him off diffusely and continued his army march backward and forward in front of us. “I want you to start building this wall inside of your brain, but before you do so, I want you to make sure there are six seats there beside you. Not eight, not two, not any other number but seven total,” he paused, looking down at me. I wasn’t a short kid. For a ten-year-old, I was pretty tall, but staring up at Rob in this moment, I felt two-feet. “I want you to start building this wall today. Work on it, I mean really train your brain to build it, because by the time you initiate in, I need that wall to be solid. To be unfuckwithable. This”—Rob gestured around—“was who you trusted. No one else.”

“What about my dad?” I argued, looking at the guys who all glared at me like “shut the fuck up.” Rob was scary, but I didn’t scare easily.

“Even your dad. He went through the same when he was your age, and so will the next ones who come after you.”

“What, as in we have to have kids?” Hunter scrunched up his face.

“Yes.” Dad interrupted, walking around the back of the cabin dressed in one of his fine suits. “You will have kids one day.”

“No, I’m good. I don’t want kids.” I knew at a very young age that children didn’t appeal to me, and I doubted that would change in the future. Call it the only-child curse.

“Oh I bet you will, I bet you and Kholes will have kids by the time you’re sixteen,” Eli snorted, only no one joined him.

“No. I don’t want them.”

My dad kneeled down in front of me, searching my eyes. “You will, son, and lucky for you, I have someone lined up.”

My eyebrows pinched together. “What? Who?” I was still not having kids, but I’d ask him who he thought I could be matched with anyway.

He reached into his front jacket pocket and pulled out a small photograph, flipping it around to show me. It was a little girl, had to be around the same age as me or younger—unless she was just really small. She had brown wavy hair, chubby cheeks, a bright smile and blue eyes. A couple of freckles were scattered over her cheeks and she was holding a hunting rifle. “This girl.”

“That girl?” I questioned, obviously my dad was off his meds. That girl wasn’t anything great, I had seen better at my school, but she had something contrastive

about her, an imbalance if you will, but her eyes. Her eyes ate up the distance between us, even if it was a photo that she was staring at me from. “Who is she?”

Dad looked sideways at me, noticing the other guys trying to get a look. He folded it and pushed it back into his pocket, shooting them all a warning glare. “Someone who is going to arrive in your life at the exact moment you need her to.”

“Like fate?” I asked. I didn’t really know what that word meant, but I had heard it be thrown around a lot with the adults.

He laughed. “Not fate—karma. Your wake-up call.”

My phone vibrated on the kitchen counter, pulling me out of the task at hand. Cooking. I wasn’t bad, because neither of my parents were around much, which meant I learned how to make the simple things, like toast, and eggs, and bacon, and that’s all that I really needed to live on, so I stopped my skill level right there. Reaching for my phone, I slid it unlocked and pushed it onto speaker when I saw it was Mom.

“Yeah?” I picked up the spatula and pushed the creamy eggs around.

“I’m just making sure you haven’t scared that girl off?”

I snorted. “Not likely.”

She paused, and I leaned over to check to see if the call was still connected. “Bishop, how much does she know?”

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I checked on the bacon in the oven and licked the juice off my fingertips. “Enough but not all.”

“And how much are you planning on telling her?”

“All.”

“Bishop...” she warned. “I would say some, but all could be too much for her to take in too soon.”

“Mom, I thought you would have been all for this since Dad left you in the dark for so long and you were all ‘don’t keep too many secrets, son.’”

“For her safety, Bishop. You know your father, need I say more?”

I slammed the oven door and sighed. “You don’t need to, but if it came down to it, I’d handle him.”

“My son the knight...” She was playing with me because I could hear the slight humor in her tone, but I could also hear the apprehension. She was afraid. With good reason. No one goes up against my dad, but if there was anyone who ever would—it would be me. As much as I respected him, and obviously searched for his approval in most things I did, when it came to Madison, no one else mattered and I think he knew that.

“Where are you, anyway?” I flipped the oven off and took the pan off the stove top.

“I’m actually on my way home. I’ll explain once I get there, are you in your new place?”

“Yep. I gotta go. Talk soon.”

“Ok. Love you, son.”

“Yeah, you too, Mom.” I flicked it off and pushed my phone into my pocket. I was aware I never had outwardly told my mom that I loved her, but she was one of those women who just knew.

“Cooking? Have you been holding out on me all this time?” Madison was leaning against the entryway to the kitchen.

I grinned. “Nah, probably saved your life.” She ran her fingers through her hair, brushing it away from her face. It fell loosely around her shoulders anyway, and that’s when I noticed she was wearing one of my shirts.

My eyes narrowed. “You wearing anything underneath that?” I asked, gesturing to her legs with the spatula.

She looked down, gripping the bottom of the shirt and shrugging. “Um, no?”

I dropped the spatula into the pan and made my way towards her. She smiled when she saw I was coming for her, a look of shock passing over her eyes. Good. She should feel strange. Gripping her from the backs of her thighs, I lifted her off the ground until her legs wrapped around my waist and tightened. Pressing my lips to hers, I slipped my tongue into her mouth and sucked her bottom lip into my mine. “Fuck you taste good this early.”

“Yeah,” she rolled her eyes. “That’s because I brushed my teeth.”

A rumble of laughter escaped me. I always admired her flare for honesty. It was refreshing that she didn't truly care what anyone thought of her. The sound dock turned on and Marilyn Manson "Killing Strangers" started playing, and I grinned, walking her towards the kitchen island and dropping her onto it. The back of her head smashed onto the marble and she groaned, her eyes rolling to the back of her head.

"That hurt?" I asked, an eyebrow quirked.

She bit down on her bottom lip and shook her head. "Not really." With her stretched out on the counter, I stood between her legs, gripped her thighs and pulled her toward me so her crotch was pressed against my cock. Then the palms of my hands slid up her thighs, pushing the shirt above her head until she was bare naked in front of me. I stepped backward, taking in every curve and slim line that marbled her tanned skin. "So fucking beautiful."

Her cheeks reddened, and I fucking loved it. I loved that I could have that kind of effect on her with my words alone.

"Wait, I'm hungry." She went to get up, but I shoved her back down.

"So am I." Then I dipped my lips to her inner thigh and slid my tongue over her skin. Defeated, she dropped backward and arched her back. I took my tongue out and circled her clit, her taste invading my mouth. I lost it, and wrapped my lips around her, sinking a finger deep inside of her. She moaned out, pinched her nipple with her finger and arched her back farther.

I stood up, my thumb still pressing to her clit, circling it softly. "Wait." Letting her go, I sucked my finger and went to the freezer, taking out a tray of ice. Her eyes lit up brightly, her cheeks flashing red. "I've not... is that dangerous?"

I chuckled. "No. It's not." I banged the ice cubes on the counter until they scattered

out everywhere, then picked one up and slid it up her inner thigh. “Close your eyes, Kitty.”

I pressed my tongue to her clit and pushed the ice cube inside of her. A gasp left her instantly, her back arching off the counter in shock. I continued pushing it up, feeling the contraction of her insides and the melted ice dripping down my finger. Her body confused as my tongue ran circles on her. “I’m—I’m—”

“Come, baby. All over me.”

She moaned and I felt her walls pull my finger in deeper as she rippled through her orgasm. Standing, I yanked her closer to me, spread her legs wide and sunk my cock deep inside. Sweat fell off her smooth flesh and her lips parted, her eyes rolling to the back of her head.

“There’s something weird about Mrs. Winters,” Madison threw out absently around a bite of her bagel. “Like I haven’t seen her since Tate and I got her to get our passports.” Then she stilled, her eyes coming to mine where they narrowed.

“Woah!” I threw my hands up in defense. “I haven’t got shit to do with her disappearing act, so point those eyes elsewhere.” She went back to eating, as did I. I wasn’t lying, I didn’t have anything to do with Tinker doing a runner. She would have done that all on her own as soon as she found out I knew where Madison was. She was a fucking idiot for thinking I wouldn’t know it was her that helped Madison though. We finished up eating and got dressed. I snatched my car keys off the counter as Madison was coming down the stairs, tying her hair into a high ponytail.

“Where we going?”

“We are going to teach you how to fight.”

Her hand stilled, still clutching her hair. “What? Why?”

“Because, all though you have me and the Kings, we may not always be around if you fall into trouble. And now that everyone who is anyone knows your affiliations

with us, you're pretty much a walking target, and I'm not about to take chances. Not when it comes to you."

She seemed to think over what I had just said, and then shrugged, feigning nonchalance. "But I have my Glock."

I forced myself from not rolling my eyes. "That's good and all, but here's the thing about relying on a Glock. That metal bullshit may not always be easily accessible to you when you need it, but do you wanna know what will always be accessible to you?"

"I get your point. But I don't know if combat is my thing."

"Well, we're about to make it your thing." I shoved the car keys into my back pocket and headed for the front door. "Come on, princess."

She flipped me off.

"I don't wanna..." I whined like an annoyed toddler. "Seriously, this isn't fair!" We were back at the cabin and the sun was blaring down on my skin. I had yoga pants and a loose tank on. Too loose. So I wrapped the front into a bun and tied it tightly under my sports bra.

"Oh come on, this will be fun!" That was Nate, grinning from his seat. All of them were here. Nate, Jase, Hunter, and Chase were sitting on the logs that surround the bonfire. Their sunglasses covering their eyes while they sat there, shoving potato chips into their annoying gobs, drinking beer, and basically, looking like they were ready to watch an hour long movie. Bishop, Brantley, Eli, Cash, and Saint were semi surrounding me in a circle. All dressed accordingly. You know, with no shirts and various colors of jeans. Some worn, some not so worn, som—

“Madison!” Bishop snapped.

I brought my eyes to him where they were squinted. “What!”

“Watch those eyes.”

I turned red. I didn’t even realize I was obviously checking them out—without checking them out. “I was looking at all of your jeans, actually,” I mumbled under my breath grumpily. Then I cranked my neck. “I’m really not sure about this.” Saint had laid down some combat mats. Which proved my earlier statement. He was the brains of the group. I heard a car speeding down the long private gravel road and everyone revived to alert. The guys shot up from their seats while Bishop slowly stepped in front of me. Then they all relaxed and mumbled annoyances. I couldn’t see around Bishop’s block of a body but when I heard the voice, I laughed.

“If you think you boys get to beat her ass without me watching, you’re mistaken.”

I giggled. “Tate, tell me you brought vodka or something.” I had a feeling our holiday was going to be fueled by alcohol and poor decisions. Oh, and I have a new boyfriend who isn’t really new, and I guess we haven’t really made it official. Crap. Is he my boyfriend?

“Kitty!” Bishop growled, pointing to my arms that were not so defensively to the sides of my body.

“Oh, I really don’t want to do this,” I whined.

I could hear mumbled arguing to the side of me, so I turned to see what was going on only to find Tate and Nate fighting over a bag of chips.

“Seriously!” I deadpanned at the both of them. “I mean I expected it from Nate, but

not you.” I pointedly glared at Tate.

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She looked around the group innocently, licking the salt off her fingers. “Oh come on.” She rolled her eyes. “You’ve totally got them all. And besides, I haven’t been laid in what feels like, weeks. This will be like live porn.”

“That’s not pervy at all,” I retorted, then turned back to a grinning Bishop.

“Oh it’s totally pervy, and I’m not ashamed to admit it.”

“Wait, you haven’t had dick since mine?” Nate asked, staring at her.

She turned Ferrari red and I relished in the fact that her mouth had once again, landed her ass in hot water.

She shrugged. “I’m fussy, so what.”

Jase was staring her up and down. “I mean, I can rectify that if you want. Can’t guarantee you’d survive a real man, though...”

Nate flipped him off.

I rubbed my forehead with the palm of my hand. “Fuck me. I have idiots as friends and family.”

Music started playing through the big boom speaker that was huddled near Nate, and I recognized the song from one of their parties. “Get Dough” by Dead Obies.

An hour later, sweat was dripping from my skin and Bishop’s body was pressing into

my back with my face squished into the mat. “Okay! Alright! Fuck!” He circled his crotch into my ass. I flushed. “Stop it...”

The entire time we’ve been doing this training-fighting thing, Bishop was going hard on me. And I don’t mean his dick. I will most likely have bruises all over my arms and butt for weeks after this. Brantley was no exception either. He almost knocked me out, waiting for me to get out of the sleeper hold. They weren’t playing around at all, but now I was tired, sweaty, and thirsty. Not for water.

“Can we continue this next week?”

“No,” Bishop answered, jackknifing off me and getting to his feet. “We all have to stay out here...”

I looked around at them. “Why are we staying out here?” I couldn’t believe I didn’t ask anyone earlier about why we were all out here. Bishop’s phone went off in his pocket and he stepped backward, answering it. I turned to Nate and Jase. “Seriously, what’s going on?”

His eyes drifted over my shoulder. “What?”

I followed his line of sight, facing Bishop.

“We’ll leave tomorrow.”

“Leave?” I asked, my eyes darting around the place. “Leave to where?”

“Come here...” He gestured with his fingers, and I followed, hooking my fingers with his. He sat on a log and pulled me onto his lap. “We have to go to Perdita.”

I sat for a beat, thinking over what he had just said.

“Three questions,” Tate yapped off in the background. “What’s Perdita, do they have margaritas, and should I pack my bikini?”

“I’ll answer all those three for you,” Nate snapped back. “One, you’re not coming, two, you’re not coming, and three, you’re not fucking coming.”

“Really?” She shot back with a roll of her eyes. “Because I specifically recall you ‘coming’ all over my tits last week.”

“Jesus Christ,” Jase muttered, getting to his feet. A few guys chuckled, but I was so used to Tate and Nate’s banter, I brushed them off. Even if their banter had intensified over the past week. Must be Tate not getting any sex.

“Ok, why?” I quizzed through more of a whisper, searching Bishop’s eyes, which were on mine, studying my reaction.

“We’re not sure yet, but we know we have to get there.”

My confusion turned to excitement when I realized I’d get to see Daemon. “I’ll need to grab some clothes.”

“Babe, I’d rather you not come.”

“Too bad, I’m coming.”

“Mads...”

“Bishop...” I countered his tone. “I’m. Coming.”

He pulled his bottom lip into his mouth, his eyebrows pulling in softly as if he was searching for what to say, or internally fighting with what he should do. Too bad, I

wasn't giving this up. I'd sneak myself onto that plane if I had to.

"Fine," Bishop agreed. I wiggled in his lap in excitement and his hands flew to my hips where he stilled my movements. His eyes narrowed. "Watch it."

"Wait, she can't come. We can't have a liability on Perdita."

I flipped Hunter off. "I'm not a liability!"

"Nah, she's right. She needs to be near us. She's not safe here on her own and we can't afford to leave anyone here to watch her because we need all the manpower we have over there."

I gave Hunter a Cheshire Cat grin.

His face deadpanned. "I don't like having a baby sister."

"You'll warm up to her." Nate winked at me. I smiled.

"To her or on her?" Hunter snapped back.

"Okay!" I stood from Bishop's lap. "So I want Tate to come with me."

"You do?" Tate's face lit up.

Nate's sunk.

"Yes, I do."

"Ah... I don't thin—" Bishop started to say, but I cut him off.

“—she’s coming.”

“Now do you still think it’s a good idea her coming?” Hunter flicked his wrist in my direction, but his eyes were on Bishop.

“Mmm,” Bishop mumbled and then stood.

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“Please tell me were not throwing a party...”

Bishop shook his head. “Nah, just us out here. If you two need to go home to get some clothes, I’ll take you now since I have to stop at my parents’ and see Dad quickly.”

“Ok,” I nodded, and then hitched my thumb over my shoulder, toward the cabin. “Is there still no food up in there?”

Bishop gave me a look that said “correct.”

“We’ll stop and get food. I’m starving and I need a shower.”

Bishop’s hand sprawled out over my belly and he pushed my body into his, his lips falling to my shoulder. “Shower later. Come on.” He slapped my ass and then made his way to his car. Tatum brushed off her pants and shot Nate a scolding look before following Bishop.

“Just out of curiosity,” I muttered, slowly walking toward where Nate was sitting. “What did you do to piss her off so bad?”

“What?” He threw his hands in the air innocently. “Why do I have to be the one who had done something wrong?”

I quirked an eyebrow at him. “Because you’re you?”

He pretended to think over my reply. “Valid.”

I rolled my eyes and started following Bishop and Tate. “You.” Was all Nate had said, just as I passed him.

I turned back to face him, my hands on my hips. “What?”

He shrugged and leaned back in his chair. “She’s mad about what we did with Brantley, only she wasn’t sleeping with Brantley.”

“Wait, so she’s mad at me too?”

Nate shook his head. “No. She was mad because I got in between you and Bishop. She’s team Madship.”

My eye twitched. “Team, what, what?”

He snorted. “Go do your thang, girl.” I looked at Jase and Hunter, who were watching me carefully, then turned to make my way to Bishop’s car. Was she mad at me for hooking up with Nate? I didn’t even think of her feelings while I was doing what I was doing. Damn. I was such a bad friend.

“You alright?” Bishop asked, dropping to third and flooring it out of the driveway.

“Yeah, I think.” Truth was, I wasn’t sure. I knew that how I had acted in the past was shit, but for the first time ever, I’d made it impact Tatum too. She’s an innocent in all this.

We pulled into Tate’s driveway first and I slid my seat forward to let her out.

“I’ll be in in a sec!” I called out to her as she jogged up her front steps.

I turned to face Bishop. “I upset her, I think, with all that Nate stuff.”

Bishop's eyes followed Tate. "Nah, I don't think she's mad at you. Him probably."

"I won't be a second." I climbed out of the car and followed her up the steps. Closing the door behind myself, I headed straight for her bedroom which was on the first floor. She converted the media room to her bedroom because she hated the sunlight so much. My best friend was a vampire, but it worked for us. Netflix and chill dates were like business class luxury at Tate's. Not that her parents would give a shit. They checked in on her once every three or so months but always kept the trust fund full. I wasn't entirely sure what the crux of their issues was with Tate, but apparently, according to Tate, it had always been like this. There was a cleaner and a cook that lives here full time, sort of like my Sammy and Jimmy, but other than that, her parents never came home. To some, it may sound amazing. A twelve-bedroom mansion all to yourself with a bank balance that could match CEO executives. But to Tate, I knew she craved something more, it was why she always had so much to give. Which was why I was such a terrible friend.

I walked into her bedroom and giggled at the bed. "You actually converted the seats to a bed?"

She halted her packing and looked over her shoulder. "Why of course. Jump on it, it's so comfortable." I took a step closer and sunk into the bed. She was right. It felt like my ass was being caressed by a marshmallow. "Hey, I wanted to talk to you about something."

She continued her packing, throwing in bikinis and short skirts. I was too focused on my apology to stop her. "You're mad at Nate about what happened?"

She paused, then continued. Standing to her feet, she headed out the door and turned toward her bathroom. "Sort of!" she yelled out from the hallway before entering with her toothbrush in hand. "I mean, I'm not mad at him for hooking up with you because I'm jealous. I was mad because he knew what he was doing and knew his loyalty to

Bishop, but continued to pursue you anyway.”

She zipped up her duffle bag. “Tate, it was me as much as him.”

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She slung her bag over her shoulder and glared at me. “Oh, I know. And I’m still mad at you about that—hence the reason I wanted to come watch you get your ass beat today.” She chuckled, but when she noticed I wasn’t amused, her face fell. “Mads, you know I love you. I just didn’t entirely agree with your actions, but I’d never judge you.”

“It sort of feels like you’re judging me, Tate.”

She walked toward me and placed her hands on my shoulders. “I am not judging you. I love you and you’re my best friend, but I don’t agree with what you did—that’s all, and that’s going to happen, Mads.” I didn’t know why this shocked me, but I think it had to do with the fact that Tate was the easygoing friend. The free spirit and well... sexually active. Very active. Tillie was the free spirit, wild friend, but not over opinionated and snappy like Tate. More submissive and easygoing.

She repeated, “I’m not mad at you now. I’m over it.” Then her hands dropped to either side of herself. “I guess if you looked at it like that, I am sort of upset about Nate. God!” She exhaled and dropped back onto the bed, her hands covering her face. “I’m such a fucking idiot, Mads. I knew what I was getting myself into when I jumped into bed with him. I knew he was a slut, yet I did it anyway.” Her fingers spread apart and her eye peeked through. “This is the part where you tell me I’m not an idiot and that he is good at what he does and that my Bishop will come along one day.”

I snorted, and then pulled her up by her arm. “Bishop is complicated, and it would truly terrify me if there were more like him out there, have you forgotten all the shit.” When I saw her face not registering, I rolled my eyes. “Never mind. Get up!” I

yanked her up to her feet and wrapped my arm around her waist as we headed back toward the front door.

“I love you too, Tate.”

She squeezed me. “Are you going to tell me what happened to Tillie?”

I smiled sadly. “I will when I know.”

We put Tate’s shit into the trunk then got back into our seats. Bishop gave us both a cautious stare. “You both good?”

“We’re good!” I said, gesturing to the front of us. “Let’s get my stuff quickly, go to your house, and then get food. I don’t feel like cooking, so maybe we should order some pizzas on the way back to the cabin.”

Bishop laughed. “You got this all figured out, huh?”

“Oh for fuck’s sake, lovebirds. As much as you’re making my heart weep with feelings, I’d really love to listen to music right now.”

Bishop hit the music and a soft song came on with a woman singing a catchy hook. “What’s this song?”

Tate answered for me. “‘Something I Don’t Know’ by Miraz.” She turned her head to look out the small back window, a sad look pulling across her face. I felt for her because her feelings for Nate were obvious, but I knew he wasn’t on the same page as her—and never would be, because he was lost and stuck on the first chapter of Tillie. Maybe if she wasn’t in the picture, he could draw one with Tatum, but she was in the picture, so it wasn’t looking good for Tate.

“Hey, when are you going to tell me about Tillie?” I asked Bishop, turning to face him a bit more.

His jaw clenched as his eyes flew to the rearview mirror briefly, checking on Tate. He took his attention back to the road and dropped down gears. “Soon.”

I guessed that was code for ‘don’t ask me right now,’ so I left it alone. We drove up my driveway. I sighed, hating that I was back here.

“I’m starting to really not like this place.”

“Want me to come in with you?” Bishop asked, his index finger running on his upper lip.

I nodded. “Okay.” Then I turned to face Tate. “Can we leave you unattended for a few minutes?”

She clutched her chest, mock shocked. “Oh, well, I’d never...”

Bishop and I both laughed, getting out of the car. The sweat from the fighting had long since dried over my skin, but the smell was still there.

“I really need a shower. I might have one quickly before we leave.”

Bishop pulled his sunglasses over his eyes, his arm hooking around my waist as he led me to the front door. “Suits me.”

“Oh, hi sweetie!” Elena was coming down the stairs when we entered. Her eyes went to Bishop and her smile softened even more. She rested her palm on his cheek. “Honey, you should have said something about Elizabeth.”

He shrugged. “It wouldn’t have made a difference.”

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She squared her shoulders, her brown hair falling over her shoulder. “Oh I can assure you, it would have. I’m having lunch with your mom tomorrow. Does she know?”

Bishop shook his head. “No, she doesn’t, mainly because, well...”

Elena smirked. “Because your momma is one woman who you do not want to be on the bad end with.”

Bishop chuckled. “Exactly.”

“Well, I can’t lie to her if it comes up. It was her who asked to have lunch with me, so we all know that in this world, that means either a favor is about to be asked, or some information needs bleeding. Or both.” She dropped her oversized glasses over her eyes and gave him one last pat on his shoulder. “Take care of our girl.” Then she left like a hurricane of summer, warm milk and cookies. I swear, she had to be one of the most interesting women I had ever met. She smelled like fresh daisies on a hot summer day and cold ice tea, but to be so deeply involved in this life, she had to be built from the strong stuff too. And I had witnessed on more than one occasion how she could flip from cute housewife to scary mob boss wife.

I walked up the stairs with Bishop hot on my heels and then headed straight into my bedroom. “I’m grabbing a quick shower.”

He went to my closet. “I’ll pack your bag.”

“Thanks,” I gave him a smile and he walked up to me, pressing his lips to mine. It took everything inside of me not to melt into a puddle on the floor if it was physically

possible.

He pulled back, his eyes searching mine. “Some information has come to light about exactly what might be going on over there. Something we didn’t know about until this morning.”

I brushed away my nerves. “Dangerous things?”

Bishop clenched his jaw a couple of times. “Yes.”

“And who did you hear this from?”

Another clench. “Daemon.”

“Is he ok?” Panic set in as it usually does whenever my brother was mentioned. I had a bond with him that was unimaginable and just the thought of harm coming his way was crippling.

“He’s fine, babe, but we need to check on a few things.”

“Why?” I whispered before I could stop myself. “I mean, obviously he has ties to The Elite Kings, but why are you guys all helping him all of a sudden when it wasn’t too long ago that you all sort of couldn’t stand him? Well, aside from the fact that he is my brother.”

Bishop waited, and then sighed. “Because it’s not that we couldn’t stand him, Madison, it’s what he’s capable of and who he is. But he’s your brother, which means he means something to me now.”

“Thank you.” I exhaled, rubbing the palm of my hand over my forehead. “Thank you for understanding when it comes to Daemon. Why didn’t you want Tate coming?”

Bishop's smile faltered. "I like her, and that says a lot because I don't like anyone, but..." He searched my eyes, seeming to swim above the surface on something, then just as his mouth twitched, he shook his head. "It's nothing. I just didn't want to hear her and Nate arguing all the way."

"Word," I mumbled, pulling my eyes from his.

"Hey." His thumb and index finger curled around my chin, tilting my head up to face his. "She's loyal as shit to you, so that makes her a friend of mine. Everything I do, I do for you. Remember that, okay?"

I raised my hand up to his face. My finger curving over his sharp jaw, and then down to his chin. I watched as his lips slightly parted as he sucked in a breath. It was discreet and subtle, but I didn't miss it.

"I love you," I whispered, my eyes staying on his lips. When his jaw tightened, I quickly dropped my hand, snapping myself out of my trance. "Sorry." I knew he wouldn't say it back, and I'd never expected him to, but the longer he goes without saying it, hurts a little more. At first, I was okay. Like, so he needed time to feel his feelings. I could give him that, right? But that was the second time I had told him I loved him and he didn't reply. I quickly dove for the bathroom door.

"—Mad—" I slammed the door on his face, right before he could jump up to stop me and flipped it locked.

Tears threatened to surface and my chest tightened from the rejection. Before I could stop it, one spilled from my eye and I quickly scrubbed it away. Angry that I was getting so worked up over something so sparse and stupid. I hit the faucet and turned the water onto scolding hot then stepped inside. I needed it hot enough to take my mind off what just happened. To remind me that emotional pain isn't real, it was a figment of our imagination. We didn't bleed. We didn't die from the injuries that

emotional pain gave us. But even as I replayed that mantra in my head, my heart was screaming at me and calling me a liar. A sob came out and I reached for the soap, lathering it between the palm of my hand—a loud smash shocked me out of my slum and I quickly pulled the curtain away to see what the fuck had just fallen in my bathroom, only to find Bishop heaving and my door split in two. My eyes dropped down to his combat boots to see the residue from him kicking my door dusted over the leather.

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“Bishop!” I swiped my cheeks and sniffed my nose. “You could have walked through Nate’s entrance!”

He didn’t say anything, he simply stepped toward the shower, his shoulders rising and falling and his teeth clenched together so tightly I was sure his jaw was about to snap.

“You didn’t even give me a chance...” he started as he slowly continued to come closer. I went to answer but his hand flew up to shut me up. His eyes were dilated, his cheeks flushed red. God. He was mad as fuck at me, which slightly pissed me off because the person who should be mad—for once—should be me. He ripped the curtain out of my hand, his eyes staying on mine. He didn’t drop them down my body seductively, they remained solely on mine. They’d darkened to a feral state. I flinched slightly. “Bishop—”

His hand flew to my chin, his fingers spread out over my cheeks. He stepped into the shower, clothes and boots on and backed me up against the wall. His lips came down to mine and softly brushed over them, sending tingles shooting down to my core. “Am I supposed to tell you those three little words in order for you to feel more secure? Mads? Fuck no!” His fists came up to either side of my head, caging me in. His head tilted, his eyes searching my face. “Do you know how many pieces of shit people tell their partner that they love them but go and do some shady shit behind their back? Do you wanna know what I think of the word love, Kitty? I think it’s bullshit. The word is bullshit, the meaning behind why people say it is bullshit.” His hips pressed forward, his jean-covered cock grinding against my bare pussy. My eyes drifted closed. I felt the tip of his nose near my earlobe. “It’s all a fucking fantasy. Putting words to that feeling doesn’t mean shit. I don’t need words to tell me what the

fuck!” he paused, then bit down on my neck. His hands clamped around my upper thighs, hiking me up. I wrapped them around his waist and he slammed me against the wall again, the shower pelting down on us. “I feel.”

His lips went back to hovering over mine. “Open your eyes,” he growled over my lips. Shit. My stomach was doing somersaults and everything south was clenching in angst. “Now, Kitty,” he ordered, his chest rumbling against my nipples. I opened my eyes, ignoring the droplets of water that were slipping through my lashes. His eyes were on mine, his hair soaked from the water and his dark t-shirt clinging to his flesh, curving around every muscle. “I feel something for you, Madison. Something I’ve never felt for anyone—ever. But love isn’t a strong enough word to even come close to what the fuck I feel for you. The word love is the most overused fucking word in the dictionary, and I can say right now that I’ve never told anyone those words ever. Not even my mother.” He paused, and took a breath, his finger brushing over my lips. “But fuck me, Mads. If this is love, then I’ve loved you since the day I first saw you in the cafeteria.” My chest swelled so thick it felt as though my heart was going to pound out of my chest. My eyes were going cross-eyed from looking at his lips. Then his mouth came to mine. I opened up for him slightly, his tongue slipping into my mouth and then he pulled back and searched my eyes. “I love you, too.”

My knees buckled and all feeling below my knees went numb. His grip on my thighs tightened and my head sunk into the crook of his neck. Sobs came slowly.

“You better not be fucking crying, Madison, I swear to God.”

I laughed, bringing my head up to face him. My hands came to his cheeks, and even though it felt as though my throat was raw and swollen from everything that had just happened, I shook my head. “Kiss me.” I had nothing else to say to what he had just said. He hitched me up with one hand and used the other to tug off his shirt from the back of the collar. He threw his shirt out of the shower and his lips smashed into mine. My arms wrapped around the back of his neck as I squeezed him into me more,

grinding myself over his belt. His hand reached down as he unbuckled it and tugged them down. His hand brushed over my sex and I moaned, biting down on my lip from his touch. He chuckled and slowly put me back on my feet.

“What’re you doing?” I asked absently, already missing his touch. He dropped down in front of me, his belt unbuckled, his abs tensing from the motion, and hiked my leg over his shoulder. He smirked up at me from below. I moaned again from the view. I was taking a mental photo of this picture, for later use... then his eyes went straight to my core and his tongue came out to lick his lips. He enclosed his mouth over me. I groaned, my head pressing into the hard wall. “Oh my God...” His tongue swirled around my clit and his finger came to my entrance where he sunk it in and curled it, hitting my spot effortlessly. I rode against him shamelessly, my orgasm building at fast speeds. He switched up, his tongue diving inside, and I lost all of my control as my muscles tightened, then released as my orgasm rippled through me. He stood back up, licking his fingers like you would food.

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“Come here.” Then he grabbed my legs again and wrapped them around my waist. His lips crashed into mine as he sunk himself inside of me. I tightened around him, still pulsing from the aftershocks of my orgasm, but his intrusion was enough to set me off again.

“Look at me, baby,” he growled, slowly pulling out and then sinking back in. “This is mine. Do you understand?” His motion picked up to a faster pace. “Kitty...” he warned, his hand coming to my throat. “I may love you, but I’ll still fuck you until you’re black and blue. Don’t test my shit, Madison.” His grip tightened around my throat and I choked from the lack of air.

“I’m all yours, Bishop. Forever.”

“No one will touch this. Ever.” He pounded into me relentlessly. I was sure there would be bruising inside from his brutality. Our skin slapped together and sweat leaked out of my pores. His other hand went back to my thigh and he clenched down roughly as his pace picked up again to a feral penetrating motion. My inner thighs were stretched and aching from the roughness of his slamming.

His lips came to my collarbone, and it was enough to unleash my second orgasm. My body jerked painfully yet throbbed blissfully as I came down. His teeth sunk into my flesh and he growled out a low groan, just as his cock jerked inside of me. We stood there for a few more beats, collecting our breaths, then he laughed and stepped backward, pressing a light kiss on my lips. “I’m goin’ need to go get some clothes from Nate’s room.”

“Okay,” I smiled, my cheeks red and my body aching from being fucked to the brink

of insanity.

His eyes twinkled, and his lip kinked in a grin. “You ok?”

I rolled my eyes—totally bluffing—“Of course. This isn’t my first rodeo with you.”

He laughed, then got out of the shower, disappearing into Nate’s room. I shut the curtain and bit down on my bottom lip. I couldn’t stop the smile that was spread over my mouth. He loved me. Bishop Vincent Hayes said he loved me. My chest tingled with excitement and it took everything inside of me not to scream in happiness. I felt like a part of me had finally slipped into a puzzle of what was him and I. For almost a year our relationship had done circles, but we had never been here, and it gave me hope for our future. I quickly re-soaped my hands and scrubbed myself down again, even though I really didn’t want to because Bishop’s cologne had left a faint smell lingering over my flesh, then I turned the faucet off and got out, slipping the towel around my body.

“Oh, what the hell did I miss?” Tate said from my bedroom, probably noticing the door. I peeked my head around the broken door to see her entering my bedroom.

Her worried eyes came to mine, and then they softened. “Giiirrrllll... I need to know everything.” I guess I was actually smiling from ear to ear.

“You will, but first I need to quickly pack and get changed.”

“And where’s our GQ brooding caveman?”

I hiked my thumb over my shoulder. “Grabbing some clothes from Nate’s room.”

She shook her head and laughed. “This ought to be good.”

She had no idea.

“Ok, so we’ve got enough food for the morning and for the guys if they get hungry later. Now we just need to order pizza’s!” I figured my chat with the old man could wait. The girls looked tired, and I didn’t have the energy for him right now.

Coming to a red light, I thought over where we could grab pizzas that were on the way and were also decent. I smirked. “I have an idea.” Then I slid out my phone and typed out a group text:

Meet us at CK’s

I put my phone on my lap and floored it to the pizza parlor. The girls were a lot quieter this time around than they were earlier in the day. Madison had every reason to be tired, considering, but Tate, I didn’t know. I was getting tired by just watching her brain tick over with all her overthinking. I gave a bit of a shit about Tate because I knew how much she meant to Madison. So in short, I didn’t want to see her get hurt.

I hooked into the parallel park outside Gengy’s Pizza. The “G” was hanging off an old electrical wire and flicked on and off, so sometimes, it looked more like “Engy’s Pizzas”, but Gengy, the owner, he was a good friend from when I was a kid. My mom would bring me here all the time to get his pizzas. It was probably one of the only real memories I had as a kid with my mom.

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“I won’t be a second.” I could feel my phone vibrating in my pocket, and just as I was about to grab it out, Gengy’s cussing in his heavy Puerto Rican accented voice caught my attention.

“No, fuck you, man, that’s not how it’s going to go down. I’m telling you, McGregor is about to beat some ass!”

I chuckled, shaking my head as I entered the shop. “Good to see you’re still talking shit!” I yelled out, pulling my phone out from my back pocket.

Gengy’s shit talking stopped and his attention came to me. He gave me a shit-eating grin. “Oh! B, my man!” Then he leaned over the counter and pulled me in for a hug. “Where you been, broki? I could slap you upside your head not coming to visit me more!”

“I know, homie, that’s my bad. You still haven’t gotten that sign fixed though...”

“Hey!” He shook his finger in front of himself. “Don’t come up here in your rich pretty boy sports car and your clothes and throw money at me like I’m some stripper and about to give you a lap dance, I told you, I can handle my own.”

“You’ve been telling me that since I was ten, and how much would that lap dance cost me? I got a couple dollars in here...”

“Smart shit!” He laughed, tossing a dishcloth over his shoulder. Gengy was a sixty-year-old, beer belly, pot smoking, foul-mouthed, stubborn son of a bitch. But he and I bonded from day one and the rest was history.

“Whatchu want, B?”

I yapped off the pizza’s I wanted to order and he went about making them. I looked down at my phone, catching up the texts from these idiots.

Nate: Why?

Jase: We haven’t been there in a while, B.

Eli: Got blunts?

Cash: Can I bring Cindy?

Hunter: Who the fuck is Cindy?

Cash: She’s the chick I’m fucking

Eli: What like right now?

Cash: Someone take this kid to school...

Eli: Who the fuck you calling a kid? I had your mom under me last week.

Brantley: I’ll gather the children and be there.

I shook my head. Fucking idiots. The lot of them. Sliding my phone into my pocket, I caught Gengy up on all my bullshit from the past year, paid for the pizzas, and then went back to the car.

“Just saying,” Tate mumbled through a yawn. “If I catch salmonella poisoning—I’m totally blaming you, B.”

I snorted. “Don’t let the outside fool you. He’s cleaner on the inside than most of those pretty thousand dollar strips we go to.”

“Huh, uncanny,” Tatum snickered, more to herself but I caught it. I was on edge about how this was all going to pan out come tomorrow. I’ve kept big fucking things from everyone, and eventually, those big fucking things turn into mountains. You water shit for long enough and it will help plants grow. I had a feeling Nate was about to lose his shit. I don’t know what game Nate was playing with Tatum, but I could see it fucking with her head. Aside from her, he always tried to brush off his feelings for Tillie, but we never bought it.

It was easy to say you don’t love someone when your feelings weren’t being shoved in your face every day by that person breathing the same air as you. It was why long distance relationships never worked. You don’t see that person for long enough, the illusion that your feelings slowly start to dissipate into thin air begins, then suddenly you wonder if you ever really felt anything at all and how could you fall so hard so fast and then just poof, feel like it’s nothing. You move on with your life, put it down to making memories, and live happily. Until you see her again. The air electrifies between you, eyes collide like comets shooting through the sky, and in those moments, your world has flipped fucking upside. Gravity unleashes you and once again, you’re falling. I don’t know about soul mates and all that bullshit that people like to bring it down to, but I know a bit about connection, and that shit never lies. The space between the next time you see each other can be as long as you want, and yeah, maybe you do subconsciously build a shield that gives you false security, making you think you never really had feelings for them to begin with, but that’s easy to do when you’re not seeing them day and day out. Feeling the magnetic pull that brought you together to begin with. It takes a second for two souls to connect. Connections never lie, and that’s why when their eyes attach again after so long, I know for damn sure that Tate will be fucked.

I pulled out of the parking lot and drove us towards CK’s. When we got there, I

watched Madison's face morph into horror.

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“Bishop. I swear to God, if I get a riddle text, I’ll kill you. I’m not playing around anymore.”

I chuckled because her paranoia was valid. “Get out of the car.” I opened my door and stretched out. The old parking lot had hay barrels drifting in the wind and old dirt was kicked up in the air from us driving in.

Madison got out of the car, holding the pizzas. “Wow. How did I not know about this place?”

I walked around to her side and took them from her. “This place used to be the spot to hang out when we were kids. They shut down years and years ago, no one really knows why because business was always good. Tate climbed out, straightening her skirt.

“I haven’t been here in years.” Then she opened a pizza box and took a bite.

Madison was still staring at the old amusement park. I followed her line of sight. The entryway to the park was a rainbow-colored sign that read “Cranksy Klanksy’s Fun Park” in circus font. There was a single chain that linked one side of the entry to the other that had a panel with the words: “Trespassers will be prosecuted” on it.

“Come on.” I took Madison’s hand in mine and walked toward the entry, just as a few cars pulled up behind us. Doors shut and then Hunter and Eli ran up to us, taking a box of pizza as the rest of them laughed, heading deeper into the amusement park. I rolled my eyes.

Madison cranked her head over her shoulder to check on Tatum but she was already under Nate's arm. I shook my head and sighed. He was walking on dangerous ground unless he was serious when he said he was over Tillie

"Is it safe here?" Madison asked me as I led her deeper into the gloomy park. It was a full moon, so it wasn't too dark and the boys had torches and were running around like a pack of hyenas in heat.

"Yeah." I pulled her under my arm and kissed her head. Dropping the rest of the pizzas onto a small table, I grabbed one box and jerked my head toward the old Ferris wheel.

"Nope." She shook her head. "No, Bishop. I don't do heights."

I grinned. "Do you trust me?"

"No. Yes. No and yes."

I stepped closer to her until I could smell her sweet perfume covering the old musk smell of the park. "What is it, Kitty, do you, or don't you trust me?" I tilted my head. My eyes fell to her lips when she licked her lower one and tugged it into her mouth. My dick swelled in my pants. "Fuck," I cursed under my breath, stepped forward and yanked her in the direction of the Ferris wheel.

"Promise me we will stay low."

"I promise." This time. The next time I brought her here, we were going to the top. She finally relaxed and stopped fighting against my hold. I ducked under the chains and she followed.

"Bishop..." she warned as we got closer to the floating chairs.

“Get in, Kitty.”

I stepped in first and sat down. It swung from my weight, but I was forty percent certain it was safe. Madison slowly stepped onto the thick plastic. When it moved, she squealed and then pounced on my lap.

“You’re cute as fuck.” I swiped her hair out of the way from her face and she blushed before sliding off my lap and sitting beside me. After a few seconds, I felt her body visibly relax from under my arm.

“Not so bad, huh?” I asked her, my eyebrow quirked.

She looked behind us, her eyes running over all the metal and hinges—that were no doubt rusted. “I guess not.”

“Next time, we’ll go to the top.”

She faltered. “Sure.”

I laughed again, then my laughter died out. “Shit might get ugly tomorrow, Mads.” I turned to face her. The beam from the moonlight hitting every angle of her features. Her swollen lips, sunken in cheekbones, slightly pointed chin and thick eyelashes. I always noticed that she had two prominent points on her forehead too. She was by far the most beautiful girl I had ever laid eyes on. There wasn’t a speck of imperfection on her, but the thing that I loved most about her, was that she was oblivious to how beautiful she was. She never flaunted it like Tate did, and never tried to hide it like Tillie did. She was just... Madison. Herself, constantly. It was intimidating and inspiring how secure she was in her own skin.

She looked straight ahead, grabbing the strands of hair off her face that had swept up with the wind. “Doesn’t it always?” She smiled briefly, then turned serious, her eyes

coming to mine. “I can’t have anything bad happen to you or Daemon, or Tate, or Nate, or—” she laughed, shaking her head. “Or any of the Kings. God, Bishop.” She brought her attention back to me. “My list of people who I give a shit about has extended extremely.”

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That brought a smile to my face because these boys were my brothers, so to hear that she cared about them took a load off my shoulders. I never doubted her anyway, that's just who she was, but we had done fucked up shit to her in the past. I wasn't sure whether that had done some permanent psychological damage to her. Guess time would tell how deep the scars were, especially the ones that were signed with my initials.

I squeezed her to me. "I know."

She rested her head on my chest and snuggled into me more. She wasn't short, but she was tiny up against me. "Tell me your favorite color." She yawned, lacing her fingers with mine.

"Black. Yours?"

She giggled. "Mine's blue. Well, more like a teal color. A mix of green and blue, but more of a green. It's like that pastel color."

"You couldn't just say red or something simple," I snorted. That was part of her charm.

She shook her head against my chest. "No, I'm not simple, so you should probably run away now."

"Sorry, baby, running shoes don't go with my outfit."

She giggled, the high pitch notes of it hitting the lifeless rides. Her laugh itself could

breathe life back into the dead, let alone this abandoned amusement park.

Her laughter died out, then she tilted her head up to look at me from under my arm. Our eyes stayed locked together until my chest fucking tightened. “What?” I whispered, my eyes falling to her lips.

“Is this real?”

“If it’s not, I’ll kill the mother fucker who created it.”

“I can’t live without you, Bishop.”

“Shhh.” I pulled her head back under my arm. I wasn’t going to tell her that she wouldn’t have to worry about that. At least not until we had come back from Perdita.

We were driving back out to the cabin. The rest of the cars following behind me. Tate had jumped in with Nate, and Hunter tried to jump in with us, but I kicked everyone out. The more time I spent with Madison, where it was just her and I, I started craving more of it. The pups will have to learn to give us some space.

“I love this song.” Madison bobbed her head, turning the music up.

“What’s it called?” I asked. Usually, this kind of music wasn’t really my thing, but the voice, lyrics, and beat was catchy.

“It’s Nikyee Heaton ‘I’m Ready’...” she smiled at me looking out of the corner of her eye. “Most of her songs are about love and sex, mostly sex.”

“Fitting lyrics.”

“Yup!” She popped the P. “Which is mainly why I love this song.”

She turned it up louder and then hit repeat when it ended. By the time we were pulling down the private driveway to the cabin, I was pretty sure I knew every lyric to the song.

We both got out and shut the doors as the rest of the cars pulled up. It was hitting close to midnight, so I threw up deuces to the guys and led Madison inside and up to the master bedroom. The cabin had been in our family for generations. The main level had a full wrap porch, the whole house built from tarnished logs. Then there was the second level that had around five bedrooms, and then the master bedroom took up the entire third level with a wraparound glass wall so you have a full view of the grounds. My dad created this extension, him and his paranoia, but the cabin itself had been in our family for generations. I swore the ghosts of my ancestors still walked these halls, and proof would have it that that wasn't a very reassuring thing to feel.

"Wow." Madison ran her hand down the old four-post wooden bed. The engravings in the wood filled with intricate designs and patterns. "I swear nothing should surprise me anymore." She yawned and stretched her arms above but flinched.

I removed Nate's clothes and tossed them into the corner before pulling the covers back. "You alright?"

She flushed. "Fine." Then tossed her clothes off and onto the floor. I stilled when I saw the blue and black bruising around her thighs, arms, and even slightly around her neck.

"Fuck." I shot off the bed toward her.

"What?" She panicked, then her eyes dropped down to her thighs. She relaxed. "Oh," she pulled the covers back and slid into the sheets.

“No, Mads, not ‘oh.’”

“What’s the big deal?” She yawned again. She was tired, so I didn’t want to annoy her.

I sunk into the bed and pulled her into me. “I’ll try to go softer, but I can’t guarantee it.”

She shot off the bed as if she wasn’t just yawning like someone who hadn’t slept in weeks. “No. Don’t. I love it.”

I paused, trying to pick up any dishonesty, then sighed. “Thank fuck, because I honestly can’t help myself. Now get back here. I won’t fuck you tonight, but in the morning, your ass is mine.”

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“This sort of feels like our last feast...” Tate mumbled around her pancake.

I rolled my eyes.

Nate sneered at her with his lip curled—as if he didn’t have his tongue down her throat last night.

Bishop laughed. “It could be...” Eyes fell on him, but he brushed them off. I so desperately wanted to ask what was about to happen, but the other side of me would rather not know until I got there.

“Girl can cook!” Hunter was onto his fourth pancake. I must’ve made over one hundred pancakes this morning, and match that with pounds of greasy bacon, about twenty-four eggs (scrambled), and an ungodly amount of bread, and you have a casual breakfast for the Kings. It took Tate and I hours this morning, but I was adamant to do it. These guys had turned into family, closer than some of my blood family. When I looked around the table at all their faces, I now understood the saying blood means nothing, loyalty means everything. Because time and time again, it had been these boys who had shown their loyalty to me. Yeah, so they’ve also put me in harm’s way, almost run me over, chased me through a forest in the dark night, fucked with my head, and I’m probably missing a few other things, but above all, they’re my family.

“You ok?” Bishop’s arm snaked around the back of my neck, pulling me into his chest. He was wearing a dark hoodie, relaxed jeans, white high-top sneakers and I knew for a fact that he had his white Armani briefs on underneath. Images flashed through my head of our four a.m. sexfest and suddenly, my thighs were clenching,

my cheeks were flushed, and my bottom lip was being pulled between my teeth. His fingers tightened on my shoulder. “Kitty...” he warned through a growl, but it was too late, I was already back there...

Warmth covered my nipple, and I groaned, slowly coming back into consciousness. Sweat already licked my flesh and my pussy throbbed from being woken.

“Mmmm, what’s the time?” I asked through my sleepy slumber. He didn’t answer, and slowly I cracked my eyes open but was met with nothing but opal darkness with the shadow of Bishop hovering above me. His mouth dropped to mine and I parted my lips, stretching my legs wide. He settled between them, his naked skin rubbing on me. His dick slowly sunk inside of me. Heavy breathing fell over my mouth as he slowly pulled out and then dipped back in. My arms came around the back of his neck. His tongue licked the edge of my lips, then traced down my neck, sucking on my collarbone. He continued his slow thrusting, Beads of sweat dripped from his forehead and fell onto my face, creating a whirl mixing with my own. His arm snaked around the back of my neck. It was humanly impossible to get closer to anyone than what we were right now. He filled me everywhere and engulfed me completely. He slowly rode my body, not saying a word. His mouth came back to mine, kissing me, eating me, relishing me. His kisses turned slow, sensual and tentative as his thirst deepened. The pace was slow, but the depth was brutal. Lights flickered in my head from the pleasure. My core was extracting and my pussy was tightening. He was making love to me and I never wanted it to end. Our bodies slapped together like mush, the perfect melody of sexual perfection. His mouth never moved from mine, his tongue never stopping the deep caressing. My body locked up, my muscles holding on to every single feeling it was receiving until I combusted, my orgasm drowning me with the anchor wrapped around my ankle. Bishop groaned into my mouth as his cock throbbed against my saturated walls, and then his sweaty body fell to mine in deep breaths, pulling me into the spooning position and kissing my head. “Sleep.”

My palms tickled with sweat and my body temperature kicked up to an unnatural level.

“Sorry,” I answered, bringing my eyes to his but hiding my chin behind my shoulder. I gave him a small teasing smile before clearing my throat and getting back to more pressing issues. Like Nate and Tate already arguing.

“Guys,” I snapped at them both. “Please shut the fuck up. I don’t want to have to listen to this shit through a two-hour flight.”

“Word,” Cash muttered, getting to his feet while pulling out a smoke. He put it into his mouth and went to light up.

“Um, and you can smoke that outside.”

Bishop’s body was shaking beside me and I whipped my head around to look at him. He was hiding his laughing behind his hand. “Why are you laughing?”

Bishop coughed, shook his head and cleared his throat. “Nothing, baby. You’re just a little moody today.”

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My face relaxed a little, realization sinking. “Oh.” A wave of guilt washed over me and my cheeks heated. “I’m sorry.”

“She’s either hungry or needs a nap.” Nate pointed to me with a floppy pancake.

My eyes shot down to the cooked flour and then went back to his eyes. “Well, Nate,” I seethed, getting to my feet. “I had a great sleep last night and I’ve eaten enough this morning.”

“Baby girl, you aren’t fooling no one. We heard your moans through the fucking walls early this morning.”

I rolled my eyes and headed for the front door. Stupid boys. Cash was sucking on his cancer stick, his eyes squinting from the smoke. It was a habit I noticed they all shared, except Nate and Jase. I had seen Nate smoke cigarettes maybe once, and that was the night he found out about my past. Other than that, he mainly sticks to pot.

The door closed behind me and Cash grinned, blowing smoke out in front of him.

“Sorry,” I mumbled, crossing my arms in front of myself. “For snapping at you back there.”

He shrugged, flicking the ash off the tip of his smoke. “Not bothered, babe.” I ran my eyes over Cash. I hadn’t really had much bonding time with Cash as I have had with the others. Same with Eli, Ace, and Saint, but all though we may not have a huge relationship like I did with Nate, Bishop, Brantley, Hunter and Jase—I still cared for them. The invisible bond between us all remained tight around my neck, like a noose.

Eli had on dark jeans, combat boots, and a dark shirt. He always had a five o'clock shadow that scattered his fine jaw, and his eyes were as dark as Brantley's, only not as tortured. He had dark floppy hair that he kept shaved close to the scalp on the sides and a beauty spot was below his right eye. He reminded me of one of the One Direction guys, I couldn't tell you which one. The hot one. He flashed his long eyelashes and gazed out straight ahead. "Why are you looking at me like I'm something to eat?"

I snorted and took a seat on the step in front of us. He stayed standing, his legs crossing at his ankles and his shoulder leaning on the beam. "I'm not. I just, I guess..."

"Scared?" he answered for me, and then sat down beside me. His knee brushed against mine.

"Yeah, I guess." I tucked my long hair behind my ear, wishing I had tied it up now. I chose black tights, my white Converse with the red stripes, and a light loose t-shirt that hung around my ass. It was me, comfortable enough to run if needed.

"You have every reason to be scared, Mads. Perdita is no joke, in fact, we were all surprised Bishop agreed to letting you ride."

I looked at him, my eyebrows tugging in. "Really? I mean, that wasn't why I was afraid."

His eyes searched mine. "Daemon?"

I nodded. "Yeah. I just..." I looked out straight ahead. "I can't live without him and it's terrifying to have the fate of your happiness in the hands of someone else, you know?"

Cash kept a straight face. “Nah, babe. I can’t say I do know, but, I can hear what you’re saying.”

I snorted, shaking my head. “Have none of you boys ever fallen in love?” I quirk an eyebrow at him, dropping my Ray Bans over my eyes.

“I didn’t say that...”

“Ohhh...” I lean back on my elbows and stretch my legs out in front of myself, raking my hair out of my face. “You have to tell me the gossip.”

He didn’t look at me, his focus remained solely in front of himself, but I could see the grin that stretched his cheeks. He took another puff of his smoke. “Who would be the King you would least expect to show love?”

I didn’t need to think long. “Brantley.”

His grin deepened and he turned to face me. “There’s your answer.”

Confusion pulled at me. Brantley had loved someone before? No way. He must see the shock—I made no effort to hide it. “Baby girl, you really need to stop making assumptions.”

“Wow, I’m not, I’m just, I guess shocked.”

Cash flicked the smoke out to the dirt at the bottom of the steps. “It was a long time ago and didn’t end well, so we don’t talk about it, but she still haunts him in his sleep.”

“...His nightmares,” I whispered out in realization. It was more for myself than for Cash. That was what Brantley had nightmares about? I always assumed it had

something to do with his fucked up dad.

“And that...” Cash answered my unspoken thoughts.

“That’s deep...”

“The depth of Brantley Vitiosis is an endless pit of lava. Don’t go down that road, baby girl. Only one person could’ve saved him, and she’s not here.”

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I didn't want to press the subject any more than I already had, so I opted to change topics. "I really hope Nate and Tate don't fight the whole way."

"Oh, I have no doubt they will," Cash laughed, getting to his feet. He reached for my hand to help me up and I took it, dusting off my pants.

"Thanks for the chat." He winked and then walked back inside, just as Bishop was exiting.

"You bonding now?" He grinned, carrying our duffle bags.

I smiled at him. "You know, it's amazing the things you learn when one is alone with a King."

"Easy, Kitty..."

He dived for me, his arm wrapping around my waist to pull me into him. He snapped at my lip, his teeth sinking into my flesh and pulled back. His eyes fell to my mouth and then came back to my eyes. "You don't wanna be the next missing person case over the Bermuda Triangle, do you?" He said it with such seriousness that my laughter quickly died out as I turned and watched him carry our bags to his Maserati.

"Not funny!" I hollered out.

His head tipped back in laughter.

Asshole.

I smiled. He was an asshole, and I loved it. I wouldn't ever want Bishop any other way. Even though we're an item now, and even though he's mine and I'm his officially, he was still the same Bishop. He wasn't some watered down version of himself just because of me. A loud slap sounded out just as my ass cheek stung in pain. I yelped and grabbed onto my cheek, turning to see who the fuck wanted a knuckle sandwich.

"Come on, bitch. I'm ready!"

"Tate!" I scolded her as she brushed past me and made her way to the Maserati instead of Nate's Audi. "Um, why don't you ride with Nate so you can both have a chat about how you're not going to argue on the plane ride!" I yelled out, just as she dropped her bag into the trunk of Bishop's car.

"How about no! Because you might be down a brother if I do."

Jesus. Nate came up next to me, shoving an apple into his mouth. "What did you do?" I didn't look at him, my eyes stayed on Tate.

"What did I do?" he asked, turning to me. I finally looked at him as he crunched down on his apple. "What I did was be honest with her. It's not my fault she can't handle it."

"But were you nice, though?" I quirked an eyebrow at him.

His eyes darted over my shoulder absently. "I'm always nice."

"Nate!" I punched his shoulder.

"Ouch!" He rubbed his wound. "That wasn't very nice, sis."

“Pot meet kettle.”

He rolled his eyes and walked down the steps. “I’ve always told her from day one that I ain’t with relationships. It’s her that couldn’t handle it.” Somehow, I feel like there’s something he isn’t telling me, and if that’s the case, I’ll be disappointed. I thought we were all beyond that stage. I headed down and climbed into the front seat, shutting the door behind myself. Bishop was still talking with Saint and Chase, so I turned in my seat to face Tate who was looking absently out the window.

“What is going on? And don’t lie to me, T.”

She sighed. “He pulls me in, makes me feel things, gives me incredible sex and tells me everything I want to hear, and then after all the excitement is done, he goes back to telling me that I’m just a bit of fun and that we can’t go anywhere.”

“Congratulations, you’re sleeping with a male.”

She laughed a little at that, which made my heart a little happier, then her eyes came to mine. “I’m serious, Mads. It’s seriously fucking with my head, and I’m such an idiot because I keep going back to him like a fucking twat. I’ve turned into one of those girls I make fun of.”

“Well, yes, you were a dick for making fun of those girls, but Tate, give yourself a break. Not only is Nate, well, —”

“—Hot, dangerous, sexy wrapped in tattoo’s, piercings, and muscles?” she ended for me.

“Well, yes, that, but what I was going to say is that you’re a girl, Tate. We do this. You’re not alone. My advice, if you want it, is to stay away from him until you can grasp your feelings, or else you’re making this too easy for him and also, every time

this happens you sink deeper and deeper into feelings. It's a pointless dive."

"Because he loves Tillie." Her face fell and she went back to looking out the window. "You know," her tone turned angry. Hopefully Bishop waited until I had cooled her down before jumping into the car. "I don't fucking get it! She is not even here. She ran away and left all of us! He had been with her once! Like they haven't even shared the same memories as he and I have." I wanted to bite my tongue, but she was beginning to get silly over it.

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“Tate, all that shit doesn’t matter when it comes to that one person, and I know that will be hard for you to hear, but when you get that person, you’ll understand. You could have a million memories and good times with someone, but if that someone is in love with someone else, that single memory doesn’t mean anything up against even one memory of the person they truly love.” I turned back to face the front of the car because my neck felt as though it was cramping up. “I love you, you know this, and I do think Nate has feelings for you, but I had seen him with Tillie too, babe, and I’m not saying this to hurt you. I’m saying this so you can prepare yourself for that day she may turn back up, okay?” I looked in the side mirror and she swept a tear from her cheek, not knowing I could see her.

She cleared her throat. “Yeah, you’re right. I won’t go there again. But I hope she comes back in one piece too. I’m starting to get worried.” Something about her tone told me that this time, she was serious about not sleeping with him.

“Me too.”

“Did we bring snacks?” Tate asked, buckling into her seat belt in front of Bishop and I. She was beside Cash now, with Nate at the very back of the jet—alone. Where he should be. I couldn’t be angry at him. He had been nothing but honest with Tate, but if he had been stringing her along too, I’d be having words with him when we get home. Fuck.

“You don’t need snacks. We just had breakfast. It’s not like we’re flying to Europe.”

“There’s a thought,” she muttered, so quiet I almost missed it. “Oh!” She bent around her seat to look at me. “We should do Europe for your birthday, Mads! Oh my God!”

I shook my head at her, giving her the universal glare that silently screamed ‘shut the fuck up.’

She returned my unspoken words with her own dirty stare. “Oh please. He already knows your fucking birthday is in a couple of weeks. Twat.”

“Is twat your new favorite word?” I asked politely once she had turned back in her seat.

“Apparently. But seriously, we should hit Greece.”

“I just want to get through all this bullshit first.” I looked up at Bishop, who was already watching me.

“It’s cute that you thought I wouldn’t know about your birthday.”

“I guess, but I don’t know. I’ve never made a big deal about my birthday before, so I didn’t see the point in telling you.”

“What? You’ve never had a party?”

I shook my head and squirmed. “Oh, no. Contrary to what you may think, I don’t really like the attention on me.”

His arm came around my shoulders as the seat belt light flickered on. The pilot yapped off about preparing for take-off, just as Bishop’s lips came to my ear. “Actually, Kitty, I know exactly what you’re like.” Then he bit on my earlobe and I had to squeeze the armrest to stop from straddling his lap. My eyes darted down to his destroyed denim jeans and how they hung casually off his slim waist. His other hand came to his crotch. He squeezed his junk. My eyes shut and I sucked in a breath of air.

“Like what you see, Kitty?” His voice vibrated over my flesh.

“Bishop...” I warned through a shaky breath.

He chuckled and pulled away from me, leaning back in his chair. “Because I need you focused, I won’t fuck you up against the wall in the back cabin, but on the way home...”

Needing to take my mind out of Bishop and his sexcapades, I pulled my phone out and opened Spotify. Grabbing my ear pods out of my pocket, I untangled them and put them into my ear. The plane began speeding down the runway and I watched as the asphalt slowly started to disappear, and all that was in view was the thick clouds and the sinking city. One of my ear pods getting pulled out of my ear snapped me out of my daydream and Bishop took my phone from me.

“Listen to this song...” Out of any other guy’s mouth, that would be cheesy, but this was Bishop. He wasn’t cheesy. He wasn’t a broken ass loved-up fool. He was just Bishop. Once you knew him, his name alone was like warm, rich hot chocolate sliding down your throat on a snowy winter’s day. With added whiskey...

“Sure.” I smiled at him. He started flicking through my music, and then he pushed play on a song that had an electric guitar opening it. A guy’s smooth voice filled my ears. By the time the hook came in, I had goosebumps breaking out over my skin. The lyrics, the electric sound, the fact that this song meant something to Bishop. I was about to choke on the rock of emotion that had appeared in my throat.

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“What’s the song called?” I managed to choke out.

His eyes searched mine. “‘Torn to Pieces’ by Pop Evil.”

“I love it.” A small smile slid over my mouth, and I took the phone from him, opening a new playlist on Spotify. I thought about it quickly and then smiled while typing out “Madship’s Playlist” I began adding all the songs that we had listened to previously into the playlist. One of them caught my attention.

“This song is one of my favorites.” I pushed play on “I’m Ready” by Nikye Heaton.

He chuckled. “Yeah, you do love this song, huh.” He took my phone back and flicked through.

“I do,” I nodded. “It resonates with me on a deep level when it comes to us, I guess.”

His finger paused for a second, his eyes flicking to me briefly before he continued to scroll through.

The song finished and then Bullet for my Valentine “Your Betrayal” started playing. I giggle-snorted—straight ugly snorted—when I heard it.

“That day at the lake?” I smirked, my eyes coming to his.

“You remembered?”

“Your face was buried between my thighs while our friends were doing backflips off

rocks in the water fifty meters away from us—yes, I remember. I remember this song was playing from Nate’s sound dock.” My eyes glassed over from the memories. “God, it feels like so long ago. Put that in our playlist.” He does something on my phone, and then pulled out his. He started fiddling around with both phones and then tucked his away.

“I joined our playlist to both our accounts. Now we can both add songs to it for the other to listen to.”

The gesture may have sounded normal to most people, but again, this was Bishop, and I’m still warming up to this side of him. The caring side. Receiving love from someone who spent so much time hating you gives you a euphoric high that no drug could ever give you. It was intoxicating, deadly, and completely addictive. I took my phone since he could now use his, then pushed play on “Stupid Love” from Jason Derulo.

“Really?” he deadpanned.

I shrugged, sliding the song to our playlist. “It came on when we were on our way to the airport to fly to New Zealand. It connected with me around that time so it’s going in.”

His eyes narrowed.

I narrowed mine back.

“You wanna play? Okay, let’s play.”

“What are you, Tony Montana,” I teased, and watched as his thumb shuffled through the songs on his phone. “Killpop” from Slipknot started playing.

I tried listening to the lyrics, even though I was acquainted with the song.

“Isn’t this about a drug dealer who falls in love with his junkie?” I raised my eyebrow at him.

A beat passed, and then he slowly raised his eyebrows. Realization sunk in pretty quickly once I had just choked on my own words. “Oh, well, then, it’s perfect.”

“Hey.” He tilted my head to face him. “This shit with you and I, it’s always been messy, fucking chaotic, but that’s just us. Don’t resent that, baby.”

“I’d never.” I shook my head. Halestorm “I’m no Angel” started playing next, and I leaned my head on Bishop’s shoulder. His arm came up again, pulling me into his side so my face smashed into him. I loved his scent. I wished I could bottle it up and carry it around with me. Leather, soap, man, and mint. “I’ve been through a lot of traumatic things in my life, as you know, and up until the point I met you, I would have given anything and everything to change my past. But, if I had to go through all those things to meet you, then I wouldn’t change a thing. You’re well worth it, Bishop.”

He was silent, so I figured he may not have heard me, and before I knew it, my eyes closed and I fell into a deep sleep.

“Baby, wake up.”

My eyes popped open and I stretched my arms wide. “Are we there?”

“Yeah.” He stood, tugging me to my feet. Nate had Tate huddled in his arms, her head in his neck. What the actual fuck. Those two confuse me like no other. Bishop must see my puzzlement.

“She was asleep. Don’t think into it.” As they disappeared out the door, I stepped aside to let Jase and Saint pass.

“Are you trying to convince me that he doesn’t care?”

Bishop took my hand and led me down the walkway. “I didn’t say that he didn’t care—just not enough...”

I rubbed the palm of my hand into my eye, feeling almost defeated by his words. “You boys.”

“Not me. They, and I, always knew with you. Nate, and us, and you, know that’s not the case with Tatum.”

I sighed, then started shuffling out of the plane. “I guess. I just wish she didn’t need to get hurt.” Once we come to the door, I sucked in a breath. “What is this place?” The airstrip was lined with dark bushes and tall accent stone statues, carved with thick patterns shaping weird faces and moss spilling out from the cracks. The air smelled of tropical leaves with a slight spritz of saltwater. I cranked my head to find any sign of life.

“Where’s the airport?”

Bishop snorted, taking my hand and leading me down the stairs. “You won’t find an airport here, Kitty.” I stayed quiet, unsure what to say. I didn’t know what I was expecting, but it wasn’t this. I expected more life. There were three white Mercedes trucks waiting for us that were square in shape and resembled military tanks. I faltered, and just as Tatum was about to slide into one of them with Nate’s hand on her lower back, she sent me a playful wink. I smiled at her reassuringly, but I wasn’t so sure. I felt like a fraud giving her that smile, but there was only so much people could do to help someone before it became too exhausting. Bishop started to lead us toward the truck at the front of the other two and pointed to the passenger door.

“Get in and put your belt on.”

I followed orders, opening the door and quickly clicking my belt on. I felt a sense of urgency rush through me. Like we were on borrowed time. The back doors swung open as Nate, Hunter, and Jase slid into the back. Bishop got into the driver’s seat beside me.

“This feels a little tense.” I glanced out the window, unease slowly seeping in.

“Because it is,” Nate mumbled in the back. Bishop’s eyes shot to him in the rearview mirror before putting the truck into first and flooring us out of there. The silence that fell was comfortable, and actually, I preferred it. This way I could take in my surroundings without having to maintain small talk. I watched as the thick shrubs started to morph and melt into the fat green wild forest, and the asphalt road transformed to dirt. The closeness of the overgrown trees, long grass and wilderness

made it feel like our trip was more of the off-road trip. I turned in my seat to see the other two trucks still behind us, my panicking semi-subsided. My eyes dropped down to Jase's lap, and then to Hunter's and Nate's, all to catch them loading up AK's.

"Why do I feel like we're walking into a war zone?" I turned back in my seat, my hands skimming over the metal door. I bet if I googled this make of Mercedes, it would tell me it was bulletproof.

"Because we are," Bishop replied casually, flooring it. We shot forward faster, so fast that I could no longer enjoy the scenery outside because everything looked like an oil paint mixture gone wrong.

"Nate, what are you doing with Tatum?" I asked.

"Mads, I don't think this is the right time to ask me that."

"Well, why did you put her in with Eli and Saint?"

"Because we all wanted to be near you, and you're my priority."

I sighed, resting my head on the cool window. "Why are you stringing her along then?"

He sneered. "I'm not, and sis, this really isn't the time, but know that she knows exactly where I stand and where I've always stood. I've been nothing but honest with her, it's not my fault if she allows her feelings to control her."

"Nate? Just stay away from her, please."

Silence.

“I need to tell you something, but I didn’t want to until we got here, because I didn’t want you to have to be stressing all the way”—Bishop’s eyes came to mine—“Ok?”

“Ok?” I answered.

“The reason we’re here is because Daemon called me yesterday. He sounded...off.”

I froze. My heartbeat slowed to a thunderous pace. “Wha—what?” Then just like that, everything zipped back into real time. “What!” I screamed, frantically looking around. “What do you mean off?”

“See” Bishop rolled his eyes. “I made the right decision,” he shot a stare at someone in the back through the rearview mirror.

“Someone better start talking...” I warned.

Bishop shuffled in his seat, cutting a hard left turn and onto a track that barely looked like a track. Branches slapped the windshield like thunder and the wheels of the truck dipped us low and high through the bumpy puddles. “He called me yesterday and the call cut out. I couldn’t get through to him after that, but from what he told me, it’s not looking good here right now.”

I massaged my temples. “Bishop, please cut the shit.”

“Through the broken speech, I made out Silver Swan and Madison, and that’s it. Then the call was cut. Hearing that, put us all on high alert. I called Dad and he dispatched us here to check things out. If we need, we can have more back up, but we’ve never needed it before. This island, it’s separated by four fractions, but all within a vast gated community. Nihil (Nil), Regiis (Royal), Secundus (Second), and Tertuim (third). Each faction is chosen by your family lineage and how important you are. Everyone is fluent in Latin, hardly any speak English. I need you to stay directly

beside me.”

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“I’m sure we’ll be fine,” Nate mumbled off more to himself, I was guessing by the volume of his answer.

“People, Nate. They’re just people.”

“So that’s why we’re here? Because it’s a threat to me? Daemon mentioning me and then something about a Silver Swan?”

Bishop nodded reluctantly. “I think so, and because I wanted to check on Daemon.”

My heart warmed a little by his confession. Whether it was entirely true or not, I couldn’t care right now.

“Okay.” I shook off all of my other feelings and straightened my head. “So what’s the worst that could be happening right now?”

Bishop cleared his throat. “The worst would be that Daemon is dead, Katsia has gone rogue, and the Lost Boys have finally taken ownership of the island. There would be riots and havoc, so we do not want this one.”

My eyes closed as my chest tightened. “No. That can’t be an option.”

“The other one is that my instincts have gone to shit and I’m wrong.”

“Shit,” I exhaled, my chest squeezing again. “That’s obviously not an option either, but there’s no way about Daemon.”

Bishop nodded. “Agreed. He will most likely be safe because he’s smart and strong, but I really fucking hope I’m wrong about everything.” The bumps started dipping harder. My head almost smashing against the roof of the truck.

(enter)

“Bishop! This place is fucking creepy!” Kholes ran up behind me, tossing her hair into a high ponytail. “Do you come here often? Is this your secret playground? Is there cake here?”

I chuckled. “Shut up. No, I don’t come here often. I have to run an errand for my dad.”

She looked around the little township in skepticism. “This is an errand?”

I shrugged and pointed to one of the little shops. “There’s cake here.”

Kholes eyes lit up, then she grabbed onto my hands and pulled me toward the cake shop. The bell dinged up ahead as we entered. I shook my head. “You’d be too easy to kidnap you know. Just wave some cake and they’ve got you.”

“Ah, but will they keep me, that’s the question...” She winked and skipped the rest of the way to the counter where a glass cabinet displayed all sorts of different cakes cut into delicate slices and sitting on tiny plates. I turned to look outside, a shiver of terror running through my veins, but I was met with people wandering down the dark street, the only light coming from the fairy lights dangling ahead of them. Some were dressed in gym gear, some were in suits and armor. Perdita was an odd place, but it was all these people knew. It looked pretty on the surface, but most of these people weren’t aware what laid below their feet. They lived, thinking that this was the only life available. Generations back, there was a crock of shit cooked up to make them believe there was an apocalypse that wiped out the rest of humanity. They were caged

in the town, without a clue. It was really just a well made-up story that started generations ago, all for what? Power. Power, money, respect, and order.

“Here!” Khales handed me a piece of vanilla cake, but I shook my head.

“I’m good.”

“Oh, come on, B. You need to loosen up a little. You’re too tense all the time, but I get it, I mean, what...” Her voice died out in the distance as we walked out of the cake shop. People moved and parted like the red sea whenever I was here. They knew who I was, but they didn’t know where I came from. Their knowledge was very limited when it came to Perdita, and they all spoke fluent Latin. No one knew English. As far as they were concerned, English was a dead language. I continued to walk down the main strip with Khales still venting beside me. I snarled at a passerby and bit at her with a grin on my face. She screamed and ran off, ushering her child away from me. I was the monster that lived under her bed.

“B! That was mean,” Khales giggle-snorted, grabbing my hand.

I pulled away from her grip.

She rolled her eyes. “Oh, what, so we can fuck, but I can’t hold your hand?”

“We fuck, Khales. We’re friends who fuck, we’re not friends who hold hands.”

She grumbled something under her breath that sounded like “asshole” just as we reached the entry to hell aka Regiis.

That was the last time I took her anywhere. Fuck she was annoying. Yanking open Madison’s door, I gestured for her to get out, but she remained frozen in her seat, her eyes going up to the building in front of us. I couldn’t blame her, the first time I saw

Perdita I was all of five years old and it looked the same scary now as it did through the eyes of a five-year-old boy.

“Babe, come on.”

She slowly gathered her wits and slid out of the truck. I wasn't sure exactly what we were walking into, but I knew whatever it was, unless the island had really turned to shit, we were safe. The Kings were royalty, and the Lost Boys were the shit on the bottom of our shoe. The reason for our safety was the same reason for my apprehension, though. They had a lot of reasons to hate us, under all their loyalty. There was one other thing that was floating around in my head. Tillie.

Pulling Madison under my arm, we met the rest of the boys in the center, and then I let my eyes come up to the main building on Perdita. The island itself was natural. With bushlands and wildflowers growing through the soil, and animals that were only found on this island, it was exotic, foreign and protected. It simmered behind the fog and mist of whatever you thought you knew about not only our world but our country. Right at the center of Perdita was where the township resided. Where we stood, there was the entry building which was armed with guards and led you into the township. The reason why the island remained for the most part untouched was because The Lost Boys and Katsia's army remained behind the one-hundred-foot brick wall which circled around their entire township. The entry, which was where we were standing in front of, was built by the same stone. Milky white marble with streaks of black slicked through in intricate patterns. The stone was called *de regno diabolic*, which in English translated to The Devil's Kingdom.

“What the hell is this place?” Tatum whispered, walking to the other side of Madison.

“Hell, that's what,” Nate muttered, flipping his cap backward and putting a J into his mouth.

I walked up the thick, long stairs that lead to two heavy metal doors. Reaching for the white button that was strangely put in the center of the door, I pressed it, then waited.

And waited.

I don't like waiting.

I turned back around to see Madison walking up the steps with the rest following her. Exhaling, I rested my head on the door, waiting. A loud lock slid across from the other side of the door, vibrating my head. I shot up and spun around. The door cranked open wider.

“Boys.”

Madison gasped. “Mrs. Winters?”

She grinned, then her eyes came directly to me. “I heard my niece is back from the dead?” Her eyebrow rose. Fucking Khales.

“Your niece is a whore.” I shoved the door open and walked closer to her, only her guard who was dressed in steel armor (like he had just walked off the set of a Game of Thrones episode) put himself between both of us.

“Aw.” I tilted my head at the man in armor. I could see the bead of sweat coming down the center of his forehead between his eyebrows. “Tinker, why don't you tell your Peter to move his shit before I snap his neck.” I ended my threat with a small smile and a wink.

She rolled her eyes, pushing him away. “He's not my Peter, you and I both know who that is.” She gestured, the door opened farther. “Well, come on then. We were expecting you to come, just weren't sure when.”

I walked farther in without looking back, my hand flew out behind myself and caught Madison's. I pulled her behind my back protectively. Tinker gave me a look. "B, you kn—"

"—Shut the fuck up, Tinker," Jase sneered at her. Instantly her mouth slammed shut. She pushed her glasses up her nose, straightening her shoulders. Good to know Jase still owns that shit.

I chuckled, shaking my head. "Some shit will just never change."

"That's a bit rich..." she started, and I swung around, eyebrows raised.

"What's that?"

She shut the door in a huff and then gestured out with her hand. "Well, come on then." We walked through the old building and out onto the township.

Madison's eyes were flying around everywhere. "Wow. It's really, beautiful in here."

"Don't let this shit fool you," Hunter grunted, walking past us and taking the lead behind Tinker.

"He's right." We began following Tinker down the steps and into the small township. There were small stores lined on every side of the main street which was lined with lilac daisies and black roses. Each store had their own signage out the front. Weapons. One read, with the next, Food, and the next, medical supplies, hospital, gym, as we walked past each one, Madison noticed how there were no people wandering around.

I watched as her head turned to me out of the corner of my eye.

“It’s daylight. Everything is backward here. They’re nocturnal. Sleep during the day, and work, shop, everyday shit we do during the night.”

“So strange.” Her interest grew the farther we went in. Slowly, the purple flowers began to sink into the dark roses until there was no more color. We reached the end of the main street and the stone had come back, leading upstairs that once again, brought you to two heavy metal doors.

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Madison turned around with Tatum copying her. “What? Is that it?”

Tinker pressed the button on the door. “No. And girls, if you want to live, I would watch your words beyond this door.”

My eyes cut to Tinker. “Threaten them again and I’ll slice your fucking neck like I did your mother. Open the fucking door. I’m done playing games, Tinker.”

Madison stilled beside me, her hand squeezing mine instantly. The gesture in itself was cute, but I wasn’t mad or raging. I hardly ever lost my cool, which was exactly why I was where I was.

Tinker’s face flushed. “Sorry.” She opened the door out onto the stone floor and lobby to what looked like a normal mansion home entry. Only it wasn’t a normal home. Soft piano music was whispering through the air, and I pushed Madison back, walking in first. Nate was behind me, and then Jase, Hunter, Saint, and whoever else followed. Madison was second to last, sandwiched between Eli and Cash.

“Well, well, well, to what do I owe the pleasure of having the elite in my home?” Katsia came walking down the spiral stairs in nothing but a white silk robe, displaying her black lace panties and bra. Her hair was messed up and falling over her shoulders. She had a glass of scotch dangling from her hand. Running her fingers through her hair to push it out of her face, her eyes raked down my body.

“You’re growing well, B.” She licked her lips and then curled her finger. “Come on, we can talk in the sitting room. You woke me.”

“We woke you?” I rose an eyebrow.

She bit her lip, flashing me a grin over her shoulder. “Well, sort of.” The story of Katsia was a complicated one. Katsia Stuprum. In English, she was Seduction. She oozed sex, even when she wasn’t trying. There were rumors that said she would do things to the Lost Boys, and I wasn’t sure how much of that was true, but Katsia being Katsia, I was sure the boys would be fighting to get into her bed.

She had fucked all of the Kings in our generation and everyone in Jase and Saints generation - bar one, too, but not me. Not from lack of trying on her part, because she had, but she wasn’t my type, and I don’t mean the age. I mean just the her.

She pushed open doors that were at the end of the corridor and they spread out onto a sitting room that looked the size of a basketball court. There was a large gas fire lit and sitting in the middle of the vast space with lazy boys scattered out of order. There was a large U-shaped sofa that faced one cosmic floor to ceiling window. It gave you a direct view to the ocean. The white silica-like sand was immediately right there, and the pearl crystal ocean was crashing against the untouched rocks.

“Jesus,” Tate exhaled, nudging Madison.

I took a seat on the sofa and pulled Madison down beside me. There was a large white leather hand-shaped chair which was opposite us, where Katsia took a seat, with two armored guards standing on either side of her. She crossed her legs, smirked, and then took a sip of her drink. “Good to see you again, Madison. Not surprised but slightly disappointed that you’re still alive.”

Madison didn’t reply, she remained impassive as her arm brushed against mine. I leaned back on the couch, allowing my arm to go over the edge of it, pulling her into me more.

“What’s going on, Katsia? Why the fuck am I getting phone calls?”

She cleared her throat, resting her glass on her knee. “Who do I have to fuck to get out of this?”

“You can’t fuck your way out of this one. You have someone who is one of our own.”

Her eyes came to mine, and behind the seductive glare, I saw a stroke of annoyance. Good. I want her angry because that’s the only way to get truth out of Katsia.

“He is not yours, he is mine.” Her eyes finally rested on Madison where she dropped her stare to icy levels. “Blood or no blood, make no mistake, he is mine.”

Madison shuffled in her seat. “Um, so I’m confused, are you talking about my brother? Because if you are, trust me, he’s all yours, but I just want to make sure he’s safe.”

Katsia’s eyes slowly rolled, her smile coming back to her face. “As safe as he’ll ever be.” Then she looked at me. “But that’s not speaking for all.”

Fuck.

I could feel the slight twitch in Bishop’s arm as soon as Katsia said ‘but that’s not speaking for all.’ I turned my attention to her. “What does that mean?”

Her smug smirk deepened. “Oh, he didn’t tell you...”

“Tell her what?” Nate interjected, leaning forward on his elbows.

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Katsia burst out laughing, her head tilting back while she swirled the whiskey around in her glass. “Oh this is great.” Her eyes cut to Bishop. “You’re quite the secret keeper, King.”

“What the fuck is she talking about?” I whispered, my eyes fluttering closed.

Nate tilted his head, his eyes flying to Bishop briefly.

“I didn’t tell either of them because it’s a distraction.”

“And you gave her your word...” Katsia’s eyebrow quirked.

“My word doesn’t mean shit with anyone else but a King or Madison. I would break it in a heartbeat if I needed to, but I didn’t need to,” he challenged Katsia.

I shuffled uncomfortably. “Well, as much as I’ve gotten really easy with letting you keep your secrets, I feel like I need to know this one.”

“Word,” Nate mumbled, leaning back. Tate’s eyes were going between the three of us.

“Well,” Katsia giggled, leaning forward and setting her glass on the small table in front of her. “As much as I’m loving this little thing that’s going on, I’m on borrowed time, so...” She cranked her head at one of her guards, gave him a direct look and then nodded her head. The guard turned and walked out of the room. The silence that stretched out between all of us was deafening and only made me more uncomfortable. Katsia’s grin was firmly fixed on her face the entire time.

The heavy footsteps broke the silence and my head swung to the opening. The guard stepped away, and— “Tillie!” I shot off the couch, my breathing sinking in shallow heaves. I couldn’t believe it was really her! It was her, wasn’t it? I reached out to touch her.

Katsia giggled, standing from her chair. “She’s been here the whole time.”

Nate stood up behind me, and I chanced a quick stare at him. His eyes were fixed on Tillie, and hers on him. “Did you know this whole time?” was all he said.

“Me?” My hand came to my chest. “No!”

“Not you.” He cut his eyes down to Bishop. “You.”

Bishop’s jaw was ticking under the pressure; his lip was slightly curled at Katsia. “Yes.”

I exhaled, my fingers coming to my temples. “What the fuck is going on?” I started walking toward Tillie, but the guard stood in front of her again, blocking me. “Get the fuck out of my way.”

“Kitty,” Bishop growled.

“You can shut up,” I replied softly without looking at him. I was angry that her being here wasn’t new information to him and that he had known for a long time—probably all of the time. “Tillie?” I tilted my head to try and get a clearer view of her behind the big man of steel in front of me. He slowly stepped aside, and it was the first time I got a real look at what she looked like now. She was in a white gown that cut off at her knees. The straps were thick and rolled over her shoulder, displaying her arms. Her face was bare of any makeup and her eyes looked like ripples of lightening laced in a blue sky. She looked broken. Her hair had been brushed down, falling over her

shoulders, with the pink now washed out to a faded pastel color and her re-growth evident.

“Tillie?” I stepped toward her again. Her face fell. “Are you ok?”

She raised her head and her eyes came to mine, a single tear sneaking out. “I—I’m, I mean, I was...”

“That’s enough!” Katsia snapped, and then quickly composed herself. “Take a seat with Nate, Tillie.” Katsia rolled her eyes. “Before he kills me.”

Tillie came toward us and as soon as she was within reach, Nate’s arm snaked out and pulled her into him. He sunk her down next to him and I dropped down on the other side of her. She smelled like bleach and antiseptic. Something was going on, something that I couldn’t understand—again, and until I found out exactly what it was that Bishop was hiding from me this time, I wasn’t sure how I felt with him. Again. Yes, I loved him, but love should never be used as a doormat. When will this shit end. Right now, Nate needed me more than anyone else, so when his hand went over the edge of the couch, I brought my right hand up to where his curled around my shoulder and laced my fingers with his. At the connection, I felt a jolt of power and anger. Anger amongst all that Nate was a King, yet something was held from him about Tillie—why?

“Why?” I snapped, suddenly having enough of the song and dance and ready to put her on a plane with Daemon and fly the fuck out of this place.

“Why, what?” Katsia quirked an eyebrow at me. She was an expert at making you feel inferior, but this time, my anger wasn’t going to allow me to cower to her like I had in the past.

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“You know what, Katsia, cut the bullshit. Why was Tillie here?”

“Oh,” Katsia waved her hand casually. “Well, she was pregnant, of course.”

I sucked in a breath. My head pounded and colorful little dots danced in my bleak vision. I felt Nate’s hand still in my grip. He let me go and leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. “What?” The depth of his tone was enough to put the fear of the Lord into the devil.

Tate stood from the corner of my eye and walk to the window. Bishop’s leg pressed against mine roughly and I could hear the shuffling of a couple of the Kings who were standing behind me.

“Suddenly, shit makes sense,” Jase mumbled, rubbing the scruff on his jaw.

Tillie swiped away the tears that were streaming down her face. “Was being the correct word there.”

I stilled.

Bishop’s leg stopped flat, and Nate shot up off the couch. An armored guard stepped forward, grabbing Nate’s arm. “What do you mean was.”

Katsia’s eyes flashed to Tillie, and then to Nate. For once, I saw fear flash through them briefly. “You know the rules, Nathan.”

“Fuck you, tell me right now what the fuck is going on or I’ll snap all your guards’

necks and then feed them to you through a fucking straw!”

Katsia swallowed, shot the rest of her drink back and stood. “She couldn’t exist.”

I buried my face in my hands as realization snuck in. “What?” I whispered to myself, and then my hand came to Tillie’s. I was going to be strong for her. I didn’t know what she had been through and I don’t know why, but I didn’t care. She was my best friend and no matter what, I would stand by her. She sniffed, looked at me, and then squeezed her fingers with mine.

“I’m not walking out of this place without answers,” I whispered to her, squeezing her fingers.

“Did you kill my kid, Katsia?” Nate asked, stepping closer to her.

Katsia laughed. “Oh, wait, what made you think it was your kid?”

“And the plot thickens,” Hunter grumbled, standing from the couch to check on Tatum.

“Because I fucking know, Katsia, quit the fucking games. I’ll give you ten seconds.”

Katsia snickered. “You give her too much credit.”

“Nine.”

Bishop stood, walking beside Nate. Bishop tilted his head, pulled a smoke out of his pocket and lit it up. “Eight.” He blew out a cloud of smoke.

“Jesus Christ,” I whispered. “There’s going to be a war.” I could smell the heavy scent of spilled blood already.

Tillie's hand squeezed mine. I looked at her. She shook her head.

"What? What's wrong?"

"Nate! The girl had to be taken care of. You know the rules! We can't have another"—Katsia paused just as I caught her glaring at me—"mistake out in the open."

"Fuck you." I flipped her off.

Bishop took another drag of his smoke, biting down on it. "Six."

"What?" Katsia's eyes flew between him and Nate. "I answered!"

"Yeah, but you see, we had a deal." That was Bishop.

"The deal went out the window when she was born a swan," Katsia retorted.

Bishop shook his head, taking the smoke out of his mouth. "The deal was that when the baby was born, I would say what happens—not you. You think you can run around and act boss bitch, Katsia? You forgot one thing." Bishop threw the smoke onto the beautiful marble floor and squashed it with his dirty boot. "I'm the fucking boss around here." Then Bishop's elbow flew out to the guard beside him, knocking him onto the floor. Nate squeezed the other guard's head and slammed it into his knees. Suddenly there was a swim of violent chaos lurking at my feet.

"We need to go!" Tillie pulled me up, but I yanked at her hand.

"No! I can't leave them!"

"They'll be fine, Mads, we need to go. Now." Her eyes searched mine pleadingly like a silent conversation was being passed. Now, Madison.

Tatum came up behind Tillie. “Let’s go with her and let the boys finish the job here.”

My eyes went to Bishop just as his fingers dived into one of the guard’s eye sockets and he ripped out the balls of mush. Jesus. I watched in fascination as he then slid his blackout from his back pocket and slit it across his throat. Blood sprayed every, dancing in the thick breath of the Reaper.

I scrunched my eyes closed and nodded.

“Madison! Go with Tillie!” Bishop ordered. “Now!”

“Okay!” I snapped back at him, a jolt of shock rippling through me. My legs began following her out of the sitting room of carnage with Tate close behind me.

Tillie looked from left to right, checking the corridor, and then grabbed my arm. “Quick, we don’t have long.”

“Don’t have long for what, Tillie?”

I was answered with silence as she continued to jog down the hallway. We passed artwork knotted in serpentine strokes brushed onto blank canvases. We were all born as a blank canvas, perfectly untouched. Then life happens, and the more you age, the more paint you need. In the end, some of us would escape with our morals, leaving beautiful paint strokes from a tractable life behind on our canvas. But others, like me, will be ending with brushstrokes far too acrimonious to warrant us a ticket through the golden gates of whatever the fuck was waiting on the other side. No matter how unpleasant our canvas may be at the end, all that mattered was who was willing to gape appreciatively at us. My eyes caught a cabinet nailed to the wall. Quickly, I pulled it open and smiled when I saw it was lined with shotguns. Snagging the AR15, I checked the rounds and then quickly caught up to Tatum. Tillie pushed open a door at the end of the hallway and disappeared inside. I followed behind her and then

Tatum, who I was hoping wouldn't be too affected by not only Tillie being here but the fact that she had a kid with Nate. My head was spinning from the overload of information that it had collected over the past few minutes. I couldn't dwell on it too much right now—couldn't decipher my feelings in the middle of a war, but I wasn't sure how I felt about it. About everything. All I knew was that I needed to follow Tillie. There was obviously something important that she needed to tell me or show me. She flicked the light on and I squinted from the influx of the brightness. Shading my eyes with my hand, I gazed around the room. It was small. No bed, a pile of boxes to the side. It smelled of dust mite corpses that had suffocated horrific deaths by the contained space and lack of oxygen. That's when I saw hands clenched around the opening of a window.

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“Daemon!” I whisper-screamed, just as he climbed up. He lifted the rest of himself through the window, and then gave me a small smile before turning back.

“What’s going on?” I asked, confused with the movements.

Tillie rushed towards him, her hand going around his waist as she peeked over the windowsill. I slowly started walking towards them, my eyes going around the room. They eventually landed on Tatum, who looked as confused as I felt.

“Dae—” a baby crying broke through. I paused, leaning outside.

Tillie took the baby that was wrapped in a soft pink blanket and cradled it to her. When I looked back out the window to see who it was that passed the baby through, all I could see was the back of a retreating Tinker.

“Figures,” I muttered, snickering at her retreat.

“She’s the good in this, Mads. I promise.”

I brushed her off, which I guess I didn’t have much evidence to do that. She did help Tate and I escape, and she’s been nothing but helpful, but there was always a nudge in my gut when it came to her. Confusion, or something else, I wasn’t quite sure yet.

“Okay,” I breathed out, leaning against the windowsill. “Okay,” I repeated.

“She’s not okay,” Tate mumbled under her breath.

My chest tightened and the grip I had around the wooden edge compressed. A cold sweat broke out over my brow, my breathing coming in shallow heaves, then a cool, yet familiar hand brushed against my arm. I slowly whistled out the pent-up breath, my eyes going to Daemon. “What do I make of this, D?”

His Adam’s apple bobbed as he swallowed. His eyebrows crossed. “I don’t...” then he paused, before continuing. “All good things, Madison.”

“We’re going to work on your English when we get back,” I mumbled my reply grumpily under my breath.

There was another cry. Turning around, my eyes fell on the little bundle that was wrapped up tightly in Tillie’s arms. I couldn’t see her face, and I wasn’t sure whether I was capable yet. Something told me I should wait—until Nate at least gets to see his daughter first. I felt as though I was trespassing on his turf by just looking at his baby before him.

“I’m sorry, Mads. The whole thing is so complicated, and I—”

“—don’t have to explain right now.” I offered her a small smile. “We have a two-hour flight you can fill me in on. For now, we need to go look for the boys.” Just as the words left my mouth, the door smashed open and Bishop stood on the threshold, shirtless with blood splattered all over his abs and his chest drawing in and out. His shoulders lifted and dropped as he sucked in each breath. I jolted to him, going on instinct to see if he was okay, but his eyes cut to mine and I flinched. His eyes were black orbs of hell and in that moment, he was barely recognizable. I stilled, my fists clenching together.

“Bishop...”

He shook his head at me, and then kicked the door open wider to let Nate, Jase,

Hunter, and Saint walk in behind him. They looked like they had just stepped out of World War III.

“Fuck,” Nate coughed out, stepping backward to stabilize himself.

There was a long pause until Tillie finally broke the silence. “Do you want to hold her?”

Nate’s eyes closed, a hiss escaping between his teeth. He dropped to his knees, the silence was enough to haunt me.

I began slowly drifting to Nate, ignoring the pull I was feeling between Bishop and I. “Nate?” I whispered, although my voice came out shaky. “You can hold her...”

“Can’t.” He shook his head, choking on his words and standing back to his feet. “Not like this. We need to leave. Now.”

“He’s right,” Bishop agreed. “We only got rid of who was there, and amongst all the bullshit, Katsia slipped away.”

“Well, of course she did.” I rolled my eyes. I hated her.

“She doesn’t know Micaela is alive. We just have to make sure we can sneak out before then.”

“And what the fuck makes you think you should be alive?” Nate seethed, his eyes cutting to Tillie. The energy in the room immediately shifted. Unease oozed through me.

“Nate!” I snapped. “She’s the mother of your child and my fucking best friend!”

“She was nothing more than a walking sack of amniotic fluid. She doesn’t need to be alive anymore. Her job here is done, oh” —he cut his eyes to me— “and I don’t fucking trust her.”

“Trust her?” I yelled, a little too loudly because Bishop came closer to me. “You fucking loved her!”

Nate barked out a laugh. “Watch the way you use that word, sis. You and I both know that if I loved her, I wouldn’t have been sinking my dick into Tatum every day of the fucking week.” His eyes narrowed at me, and I shot daggers back at him. He wasn’t only being rude, but he was lashing out. I expected something to happen with him in the brief moments we were standing here waiting to decide to find the guys, but I didn’t expect him to lash out quite like this—I especially didn’t expect him to take his anger out on Tillie. I could see it now, though. The change in his demeanor. The monster that always lurked beneath the surface, cloaked under his cool swagger, was now prowling back and forth with fire seething between its lips. The rage that was pelting off him was igniting smoldering flickers of anger inside of me.

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“That was a shit dig, Nate,” I mumbled in disapproval, shaking my head. Bishop threw a shirt on, and it was then that I realized why he didn’t wear one. So he didn’t get blood on it. He was way too good at this, obviously.

“We need to leave, now,” Tillie said, not giving Nate a reply. “There is underground access that can take us straight to the airstrip, but we have to leave out this window.”

“Done,” Bishop started to the window, grabbing my hand on his way.

“Nah uh.” Eli shook his head. “I’m with Nate. I don’t trust this bitch.”

“Trust me or not,” Tillie finally said, giving the baby to Daemon. “But I’m all you have right now.”

Eli looked to Nate, who then looked to Saint and Jase. I shot Jase a glare who then nodded. Hunter joined him.

“You ambush us, woman, and I’ll show exactly why you should be afraid of me—you hear?” Nate answered, slowly making his way to the window.

Tillie nodded, her eyes going to her feet before she’s leaping out the window. Daemon handed the baby out to her and then followed. Nate went to jump out, but my hand flew to his chest. “Hey! I get that you’re angry and confused but try to simmer the anger down. We don’t know what she has just endured, Nate. Try not to be an arse.”

He winked at me, gripping onto the edge. “I’m always an arse, sis.” Then he leaped

out the window.

“That’s it. I’m calling it. He has schizophrenia.”

“Your turn.” Bishop pointed out the window.

“Bishop...” I whispered. “Look at me.”

He wouldn’t, his eyes remained on the window. “Get out of the fucking window, Madison.”

“What have I done now!”

“Jesus Christ, girl! For once, just once, can you do as you’re fucking told!” Hunter gripped my arm and shoved me toward the window. “Get out. Now!” I shrugged my arm out of his grip and jumped out. My feet hit the dusty ground with a thud and vibrations shot up my leg from the impact. Nate took my hand and pulled me into him.

“What’d I do now?” I asked, looking up at him. Daemon was on the other side. He took my other hand.

“He’s had real life hit him in the balls over the last thirty minutes.”

“What does that mean!” It wasn’t my intention for my question to come out as a whine, but it did.

“It means don’t fucking ask until we’re back on our soil.”

Then Nate pushed me into Daemon and scrubbed his eyes with the palm of his hand. Nate had never handled me in any threatening way, but again, the energy felt

different tonight. There was an obvious change in the dynamic and I was dreading coming to terms with whatever was about to go down. Bishop was the last one to exit the window and as soon as the soles of his feet touched the ground, we all shot off, following Tillie and Daemon, who still had the baby in his arms. It was strange, but I sensed a story there. The Lost Boys had a job to do when it came down to it, and that was to end all of the Swans—or get rid of, as they would say—and I knew for a fact that Daemon had done it before, so why was he hesitant with this one? My legs continued to carry me forward in the silence with nothing but the heavy pity patting from our shoes hitting the road.

Tillie stopped, and that's when my eyes flew around the place, taking in everything. We were outside, running through a meadow, which was odd, considering. But if I had to guess, I would say we were in the backyard, only the backyard looked to be the size of a damn football field. Tillie pointed toward a barn that was hidden discretely at the back of the house. "In there. There's a manhole in the floor that leads underground. It's where they transport stuff that they don't want documented—ever."

"Are you saying that some shit has been going on here behind the Kings' back, or are you saying my dad knew about it and they're hiding it from The Circle?" Bishop asked from behind me, where he had been the entire time. He had barely touched me since coming back from his slaughtering, and if it wasn't for the dire situation we were all in, I'd overthink the fuck out of it.

"The latter and then some," Tillie admitted. She started jogging toward the metal barn. We all followed and waited as Daemon opened the heavy tin door. There was a loud creaking sound that filled the deserted meadow, but once it was open, we all ran inside. Tillie kicked off the manhole cover. It was large enough for us all to jump down and walk through. She went first, and then Daemon handed her the baby before jumping in himself. The order went much like the window, and before I knew it, we were all walking down hidden tunnels. The walls were made of dirt and there were rail tracks that lined the clay ridden rode. Smaller than what you would find for a

train, but definitely big enough to hold a small cart.

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“These tunnels have areas that curve off to not only all four factions of Perdita but every section too.”

“Every section of this area of Perdita?” Bishop wanted to clarify.

Tillie shook her head, hiking the baby higher. “No. I mean, everywhere on the island.”

“That’s messed up. What the fuck is going on here.”

We continued our trek deeper into the tunnels. Twenty minutes later, the air was tight and sweat was falling off my flesh with every step.

“Tillie,” I called out, wiping away some fallen dirt that had dropped onto my face. It smudged into my sweat and turned it to soft clay. “Is the baby ok?”

Tillie gave me a small smile over her shoulder. “She will be fine once this is over.” Then her legs picked up. “There it is!” We all jogged to an opening archway to the left of the trail. I looked up above, seeing a small metal plate that had “Airport” engraved into it. I let out a sigh of relief just as Tillie pushed open a door and walked through. The space was small, so small that we couldn’t all fit inside at once. Tillie banged on the manhole above her head, and then banged another three times. A lock slid open and daylight slammed into the small enclosure.

“You’re all ok?” Tinker asked, worry evident on her face. “Come on, you’re running low on time.” She reached down and pulled Tillie out, and then Daemon, again, they both switched who was holding the baby—who hadn’t made a sound through the

whole way. I was impressed, she obviously got that side from her mother. I grabbed Tillie's hand and she pulled me up until I was out of the hold and sucking in crisp air again. My chest loosened and relaxed. I turned back to pull Tatum out and then we both grabbed Nate. While the guys were coming out, I took this moment to turn to Tinker.

"What's your deal?"

"My deal?" Tinker smiled. "Not all of us get to choose our path, Madison, so" —her eyes went over my shoulder before coming back to me— "choose yours wisely."

I turned my head over my shoulder to see who was there. Bishop.

"Thank you for the advice, but it seems, I can't choose mine either."

"You can't." Bishop shoulder barged past me. "But I can."

I swallowed past the hurt that crept up from my chest and into my throat. Sadness gripped to my bones. He cannot be serious.

I hung toward the back on the way home. My hands sunk into the pockets of my hoodie and my eyes squeezed shut. I think over the day. I was stuck between two fucking walls in my life. One was the path I knew I should take, and the other was the selfish part of me. I couldn't say I was battling with either side, because the truth was I wasn't. I loved Madison, which meant I wanted to be with her at all costs, but when the equation was made up of eighty percent being the risk her life, I wasn't with it. My mouth felt dry and my palms were sweaty. My shirt clung to my flesh, the residue of blood acting as glue.

Fuck. I hit my playlist. I was being unsociable, considering I really should be asking Tillie how she was holding up. I needed a moment to gather my thoughts. The

Weeknd “I Was Never There” started playing and my fingers tapped to the beat. My hoodie remained low, above my eyebrows. I continued to chew my gum as thoughts flashed through my head with the song. Madison. Without her, none of this would fucking matter. I shuffled in my seat. Gripping her ankles, I tugged her body down the bed, flipped her onto her stomach and grasped her hips. Her ass perched in the air, her legs spread wide. “This sweet little cunt is mine, Madison.” She rubbed her bare ass into my dick and I grunted, biting down on my bottom lip before dropping to my knees and turning. I began slowly running my nose up the back of her thigh and felt as her muscles twitched with uncertainty. I would too. She was getting used to being blindfolded under my command, but there was always a small part of her that would never fully let go. Was probably her survival instincts. They were, after all, always right. I smirked at that thought. I rode her ass so hard about her instincts being shit with me when all along, I was just throwing her off. The tip of my nose came to the curve of her ass and I inhaled, the sweet scent of her pussy igniting every dominant strand I had hanging inside of my body. My eyes flew open and I drew my tongue out, licking the split of her pussy from her clit, all the way to the skin that separated her ass. I growled out when the tang of her arousal assaulted my taste buds, licked my lips and then dove back in. I stretched her legs wide, laying onto my back and then wrapped her thighs with my arms. My hands came to her ass cheeks as I pushed her weight down onto my face.

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My chewing was harder, my knee jiggling at Olympic speeds, and my finger still tapped at the song that was now playing. “It’s a Vibe” by Ty Dolla Sign. Fuck. I shifted in my seat again, stretching my neck up but keeping my eyes closed and pulling my hoodie lower to cover my eyes. I let my head rest back, so I was facing the ceiling. My other hand came to my jean covered cock and I squeezed the bulge that was fighting to rip through my zipper.

“Ride my face, baby.” Madison started rubbing herself against my lips, her hands still bound to her back and her eyes still covered in the red silk blindfold. Her hair was up in a high messy bun with loose tresses falling around her face. Sweat covered every inch of her lean body, and her abs tensed as her thighs clenched around my face. She was close, I could feel it in the way her legs trembled and her pussy squeezed my tongue. I flicked it inside higher. My hand came to the back of her ass as I rubbed the nub of her from behind. I sucked and licked her like she was my favorite fucking dessert. And she was.

“Bishop!” she exhaled, her slow ride now turned harsh. Her pussy lips rubbed over my mouth and I pushed my finger inside of her ass. She tensed but carried on. “I’m goin’—I’m—” I pulled away and stopped.

“You’re what?” I growled from underneath her.

“Bishop! she screamed out in utter frustration.

“That’s right, you’re Bishop’s. You’re mine, Madison. Play any kind of shit like you did with Nate, and all these punishments will look like child’s play, are we clear, baby? ‘Cause make no mistake, I will fuck your shit up if you ever so much as bat

those pretty little eyes in the direction of anyone that has a cock.” I slapped her ass loudly and she squealed out in shock. “Do we understand each other?”

She paused, her hips slowly grinding against air.

“Mad—”

“—yes! Fuck. We understand each other.”

“Now tell me what you want.” I slowly ran my hands up her thighs, my eyes burning with need as I watched her cum slide down the inside of her thigh.

“I want you to make me come.”

“Come where?” I grinned, even though she couldn’t see me.

“In your mouth,” she semi-snapped. There was my sassy little bitch. I squeezed her ass cheeks until it felt like jelly in my hands and pressed her pussy down onto my mouth. I feasted on her like a starved man, licking every inch, my mouth salivating as I took in more. She was made for me. Only not in a romantic way, in a way poison was made to kill a specific person. She was my goddamn anti-venom and I was the serpent that hunted. She was everything pure and I was everything bad.

A groan escaped from my lips slightly, my cock pulsed in my jeans. I need to get fucked, but since the only girl who I’d want to do the fucking with is not on board right now, I’d have to make do. Ripping the ear pods out of my ears, I shot out of my seat. Not looking at anyone else, I turned straight into the small confinement of the bathroom, flicked the lock down and looked down at my crotch. My cock was swollen and pressed against my jeans, throbbing to be sucked, fucked, or touched. Yanking down the zipper, I pulled out and slowly tugged. My eyes rolled to the back of my head as memories flashed through my brain. Madison.

The sheen of sweat that soaked her skin and dripped onto mine as she rode my dick. The head of my cock massaging her entry before slamming against her cervix. The little cry she would make as I hit the border. My pulling sped up and my breathing was heavy. Sweat tickled my temple. "I'm yours, Bishop. I always will be." My balls tightened and my cock jerked as hot cum shot out of me and toward the toilet. My racing heart slowed to a deep throb and I quickly cleaned up, washed my hands and went back to my seat, feeling a lot less tense than I did a few minutes ago.

"B, you ok?" Hunter asked over his seat. They were all scattered everywhere, but I could see Nate was on the other side of Madison who was near Tillie, looking at the baby and chatting with her. So much had happened over the day that I couldn't process it all with everyone near me. First thing's first, I needed to text Madison's dad.

"Yeah," I answered Hunter, picking up my phone and putting the ear pods back in. I slipped that Weeknd song into "Madship's" playlist, and then clicked on his new album. Opening up a new text, I quickly shot one to Joseph.

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You're right. I'll try to let her go.

Then I opened up Spotify again, ignoring the notification that pinged almost instantly after. Thanks or no thanks to Wi-Fi in the air. I pressed play on "Hurt you" by The Weeknd and let it play, closing my eyes again.

"I don't know what to do, bro," Nate exhaled, burying his face in the palms of his hands. We had dropped everyone else off. Me without saying shit to Madison, but managing to sneak a look at Micaela—as did Nate. I could see it, even if he couldn't, I saw what happened when he laid eyes on his daughter. It was love at first sight, which was why I knew what his issue was right now.

"What do you mean? About Tillie or about Micaela? Which by the way, I need to talk to you about that."

He shook his head, bringing one foot up to rest on the dash. He ran his index finger over his upper lip. "No need to explain, B. I know that there's always reasoning to your chaos." He said it as if he would explain the weather—with ease.

"Alright, but just so you know, what happened tonight was always the plan. Daemon had been helping Tillie since she gave birth. Apparently, he, Tinker, and another nurse were the ones who helped her through the birth. He called me up and let me know what was happening," I paused, my eyes flying out to the side window before I took the onramp to a new highway. I needed to get the fuck out of here for a while, and going home right now wasn't an option. Out of all the Kings, it was no mistake who my numero uno was, and he earned that on more than one occasion. If there was anyone whose company I didn't mind when I was feeling this fucked up in the head,

it was Nate's.

Nate let me continue as I drove. "I didn't know she was pregnant before that point, dawg. On my life. When Daemon told me, I cut a deal with Katsia. Only the bitch tried to get Micaela killed." I shot him a quick look to see his eyes zoned out.

"I believe you." His jaw turned rigid.

I focused on the road again. "Anyway, I should have picked it up. A few months ago, after that shit went down with Madison and Daemon and she was in the hospital, I caught Tillie trying to sneak into the room."

I could see Nate look at me out of the corner of my eye. "I asked her what the fuck she was doing and she said she couldn't talk but that someone had told her that there was an incident and that Madison was hurt. I didn't even think to look at her stomach because she was so fucking small, but she was wearing an oversized hoodie, which now that I think back, was fucked up, but her, in general, was fucked up. She was off, different. More than usual. I knew she cared about Madison, so I let her see her, but before I did she told me that Katsia had captured her after that night at the cabin." I chanced a glance at him now. "Katsia couldn't have known that she was pregnant at this point." I looked back to the road. "Anyway, I said I'd get in touch with her when I need to and I let her see Madison."

"This shit doesn't make sense anymore. Lines are getting blurred and I don't know, bro, I just feel like there's a war brewing."

I nodded. "Agreed which is why I've come to this conclusion." I sucked in a breath. "The girls need the fuck away from us."

"Madison, this is bad. Just having her here with that baby is putting all of us at risk."

“Dad!” I snapped, putting my hands on my hips. “I need to do this.”

His eyes glassed over. His brows were furrowed. He was worried and my heart sunk more. I was being selfish.

“I have a solution, but you’re not going to like it.”

“What?” I asked, defeated. “At this point, I’ll take anything.”

“Actually, we have a solution.”

Bishop’s voice launched butterflies in my chest. I turned to the door. “What is it?” He and Nate walked inside and then came into the kitchen. They both took a seat on a bar stool.

“Bishop?” I urged him, leaning against the kitchen island.

“You need to run. All three of you, and the kid.”

“No.”

“Madison...” Bishop sounded exhausted, rubbing his hands over his head in frustration. “Look, not for long, just until we sort out this war. We have never had to worry about casualties until you three came into the game. Now? Now we have you and Tillie and Tatum and for fuck’s sake a newborn baby who has a damn hit on her head, Madison. Think, be smart. You know it, we all know that this has to happen.”

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Tears spilled from my eyes and rolled down my cheeks. I didn't even bother to wipe them away, because I couldn't bring myself to move. My arms felt like they were weighted down on either side of my body and my legs felt like Jell-O.

"Why, what's happening? I'm going to need to know one hundred percent of what's going on if you want this to happen."

Bishop nodded, his palm cupping his mouth and his eyes boring into mine. My eyes stayed locked on his, as though he and I were the only ones in the room. "Katsia is rebelling against the Kings and has gone rogue. We have reason to believe she's trying to build her own army and plans to either expose us, or fight us, or both." He leaned forward, his eyes darkening. "You see, I can't have you here when all this shit blows up, because she will come for you first, and then? She'll find out about Micaela."

The realism of everything hit me like a ton of bricks. My legs finally gave way as I curled up on the cool kitchen floor, drawing them to my chest.

"Madison," my father started, since he had been quiet. "This has to happen. You're too important."

Bishop's boots came into view, but I didn't look up at him. He knelt beside me and his finger hooked under my chin, tilting my head up to face him. He searched my eyes. "Do you see the importance of this, baby? I could have gone another route to drilling things into your brain, so I really hope you listen to the orders I give you."

"You were going to break up with me?" I whispered, searching his eyes as more tears

overflowed.

He gave me a small smile. “Almost.”

“I’d kill you,” I stated matter-of-factly.

He laughed, his straight teeth flashing, lighting up the room. I didn’t laugh. I didn’t even smile because I wasn’t kidding. “You laugh, but I’m not joking. I can’t—” I shook my head as terror crippled through my veins at the mere thought of Bishop not being mine.

“Hey!” he snapped me out of the spiral that had started to spin inside my head. His thumb pressed over my bottom lip. “Yes, I was going to do that.”

“What changed?” I asked, wiping the tears from my cheeks with the back of my hand.

His lip kicked up in a grin. “I remembered that I love you and I promised you that I would change the things I could change—that’s what.”

My heart warmed, and the hiccups that had formed slowly started to subside. “Ok.” I nodded, standing to my feet. “We will go, but where? I’m not leaving the US.”

Bishop shook his head. “No, but I need you way the fuck out of here, somewhere no one would guess... so I have a plan...”

I narrowed my eyes. Nate couldn’t contain his laughter anymore, his chuckles practically vibrating off the walls.

“Good to see your taste in décor is still as shit as ever, Joseph.”

I spun around to see Bishop's mom standing there, pushing her sunglasses over her short dark hair. Then her eyes came to me. "Hi, sweetie."

"Oh," I purred, and then when I registered what she was doing here, my eyebrows shot up. "Oh!"

"Yes! Oh!" She smiled, and then walked to Nate, leaned down, pecking him on his head. "Lucky your taste in women has improved, Joseph."

My dad rolled his eyes. "Always a pleasure to see you, Scarlet."

She smirked. "I know."

Sometimes, I forget that my dad and their generation probably had stories on stories of the drama they lived through being Kings and associates.

Tillie chose this time to enter the kitchen. My eyes automatically flew to Nate.

"Oh, who is this!" Scarlet started toward Tillie with a smile on her face.

"Mom..." Bishop warned. She pulled back, a pout on her lip.

Nate slowly went to Tillie, his eyes remaining on her. I didn't realize I was holding my breath until Bishop said, "Breathe, you're turning purple."

I let out my breath.

Nate started. "I hate you. I will always hate you. You didn't once try to contact me and tell me what the fuck was going on." Tillie went to open her mouth but his hand flew up to silence her, just then I noticed Tate and Daemon sink into the background. "I'm not finished. I fucking hate you, Tillie. More than I've ever hated anyone, and

for as long as you live I am going to make your life a living fucking hell, and hey...” His eyes dropped down to Micaela before coming back to Tillie with a sadistic smirk on his face. “Looks like you’re stuck with me for at least eighteen years.” Then he took the baby from Tillie who was visibly shaking as tears rushed out of her. As soon as Micaela was in Nate’s arms, he coos sweetly at her. As if he didn’t just verbally annihilate the woman who gave him his daughter. I get his anger, I understand why, but I’m still fuming for my best friend.

“Nate!” I snapped at him.

He was mouthing “shhh” with a smile on his face as Micaela curled her little hand around his finger. “What, sis?”

I stared at him in disappointment, and when I opened my mouth to cuss him out, I came out flat. Exhaling, I shook my head. “I’m disappointed.”

“And I don’t care,” Nate responded, taking Micaela out of the room.

My eyes flew to Bishop who was watching me carefully. “Give him time, baby. It’s a lot to take in, and with all the circumstances around it.”

I rested my head on his shoulder and he pressed a kiss to the top of my head. “Mom’s going to take you all somewhere safe. She’s shooting her movie right now and I think it’s the safest place you could be because Katsia wouldn’t expect it.”

“Why would she not expect it?” I mumbled into his shirt.

“Because I hate all of Bishop’s girls,” she shrugged, putting a grape into her mouth. She’s such a fucking queen.

I giggled.

Then I pushed off Bishop’s shoulder. “Promise me a couple of things?”

Bishop moved my hair out of my face.

“First one, is don’t die.”

He threw his head back in a laugh. I punched him in the shoulder. “I’m serious.”

“Ow.” His laughter died out, rubbing the spot I just assaulted. “Okay, next thing?”

“Look after Daemon, please...” My heart ached as the words left my mouth. The thought of Daemon being in the line of any danger was enough to not only make me sick but have my head spinning and bile rising in my throat.

Bishop sobered. “Done. Anything else?”

“Kick Nate’s ass and drill some sense into him.”

He laughed again. “Can’t promise that, but I’ll try.”

“Hunter and Jase...”

“Baby, no one is dying under my time. I promise you this...”

I relaxed, my shoulders falling. “Ok. I feel better.”

“Good, because the car’s here to pick you up. Don’t miss my texts or my phone calls, and I want a song a day added to the playlist while you’re gone. Deal?” he asked, an eyebrow quirked.

I smiled, my arms flying around his neck. I leaped up onto him, my legs latching around his waist. “Promise.” I kissed him, and then I kissed him another hundred times.

“Madison, honey, I love you, but I don’t want to see this...” Scarlet said, hustling out

the door. I was still pressing kisses to Bishop's lips when he started walking us toward the front door.

"Kitty, maybe we should start calling you Koala."

I flipped Nate off while squeezing Bishop. When we reached the door, I dropped down and Bishop hitched his thumb over his shoulder. "I need to show you your present before you leave, so I'll be back in five."

I nodded, watching Bishop's retreating back. Daemon came into view and my smile dropped. I walked to him, my hands lacing with his. "Daemon?"

"Yes?"

"Please look after yourself."

A sad smile pulled over his mouth as he took me into a hard hug. "Always."

Tears threatened to surface. I hate that we haven't had a smooth run of getting to really know each other, but it has always just been easy instinct when it came to him and I. "I love you."

"I love you too, Madison." My throat throbbed and my eyes welled with tears again. For Daemon to say that meant everything to me because not only was he void of emotions, but he—apparently—had a demonic case of schizophrenia.

"Alright, baby, come here." Bishop walked back into the foyer. My eyes shot up to him. "You didn't need to get me anything."

He chuckled. "That's cute." Then pulled me under his arm. "I'll see you on the day, no doubt, but I wanted to give you your present now."

“How come?” I asked, snuggling under his arm as he led us outside.

“Because it’s fucking over the top,” Nate muttered, following behind us to go to Tillie. We headed toward the garage where all our cars were. It looked more like a show-car garage because the entire front—including the door—was glass. The cars were always parked neatly in their homes. It was my dad’s thing. He loved cars. Bishop opened the garage door as if this was his house. I shivered.

“Bishop, why—” the door opened and in front of me flashed a pastel teal colored Lamborghini. I gasped. “Holy shit!” My hand flew to cover my mouth as my legs slowly carried me toward it. “Is this mine?” I squealed in excitement. “Bishop! I love it, and I love you, but this is too much! Most people just get roses or something...”

He walked toward me and wrapped me in his arms. Kissing me softly on the top of my head, he whispered, “You’re not a most people kinda girl. You’re my people.”

I looked up at him, wrapping my arms around his waist. “Thank you, I love it so much.”

He handed me the keys. “Go take a look before you have to leave. I got everything custom. The paint job and the interior is all custom.” I walked around the side, it was so beautiful I was at a loss for words. It had black tinted windows and black mag wheels. It also sat so low to the ground. The teal color was a splash of sass on a car you would take seriously—my favorite color. I slid up the doors and took in the inside. Black leather encased the seats with bits of teal in little nooks and crannies. The steering wheel was teal too. The rich smell of leather and fresh rubber told me this was new.

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“No words.” I shook my head, shutting the door and turning to face him again.

“Your mother-in-law is cracking the whip, Mads—” Tate rounded the garage and paused when she saw the car.

“Oh yaaaasss!” She clicked her fingers. “Oh my fuck! This is perfect! Girls trips...” She jumped in the spot.

Bishop rolled his eyes, leading us out the garage and back to the limo that was awaiting us.

“Mom...” he warned, leaning into the window. I climbed in behind him. Nate closed the trunk and tapped it.

“Packed some good panties in there, sis.”

Bishop glared at him, and then came back to me. “Behave yourself, baby.”

I offered him a smile. “I will.”

“She won’t.” Scarlet was fast becoming one of my most favorite people.

“Mom...” Bishop warned again, his eyes staying on me.

“Oh calm down, Bishop. I’ll take good care of her.”

He leaned in and pressed his lips to mine. “See you soon.” Then shut the door,

stepping backward as the limo pulled away.

“Yeah,” I cleared my throat. “See you soon.”

“Everything is going to be fine, sweetheart.” Scarlet patted my leg.

I smiled, looking out the window. I wasn't sold on if this was going to be fine. I had just left a whole bunch of guys that I love to fight a battle, while I went off and hid. It felt wrong and went against everything I stood for. Every fiber of my being was screaming to jump from this car and run back to them. I didn't want to run. I understood why Tillie and Tatum did, but not me. What if something happened to Bishop. My heart cracked in my chest and sweat broke out over my flesh. I needed to squash all thoughts that involved Bishop in harm's way. Or any of them, for that matter.

“So,” I exhaled, hushing my thoughts. “Where are we going?”

She looked up at me from her phone. “Just to LA. Trust me, if the baby had a passport, we would be flying out of here.” She went back to tapping on her phone as the limo continued to drive us toward the airstrip. With every mile that we took, it felt like my heart was being ripped from my chest.

Resting my head against the headrest in the chair, I looked over at Tillie who was with the baby opposite me. We still hadn't had a chance to talk, I guessed I was just waiting for the right time. Hopefully I'd get that time in LA. The jet engines fired up and I pulled my ear pods out, putting them in my ear and opening up a text.

Just about to fly out. I miss you

Seconds pass and I don't get a reply, so I turn my phone into airplane mode and open Spotify. Pressing play on Luav “The Other,” I sink into the tune and engulf myself in

the lyrics. The smooth sound of heartbreak. Looking down, I quickly add it to our playlist. That's song one in my song a day. Hitting repeat, I let it put me to sleep like a soft lullaby.

With Nate riding shotgun and Daemon in the back of my Maserati, I drove us back to my house. I'd been running away from this place because I knew Khaled was there, but I needed to call a meeting with Dad to get to the bottom of whatever the fuck was happening within the Kings.

"A Lambo? Like, really?" Nate hadn't stopped going on about my present to Madison since we left the house.

"Yes, really," I deadpanned.

"Why do you have to show us up like that? Now it's going to make my one look shit not to mention Hunter and Jase, and I heard Saint, Eli, Chase, Brantley, and Cash all got her something too."

"Nate, it's not a competition."

"Oh but it is, though! You know I'm an overachiever."

I sighed, hitting the indicator to my street. I looked in the rearview mirror. "Bonum est tibi?" Asking if the kid was okay seemed like the least I could do—since he was stuck with us for however long. I still wasn't sure how to characterize him yet, and if it wasn't for his relationship with Madison, I'd kill him myself for shooting her—but I couldn't. When it came down to my rage, there was only one other feeling that trumped it. Her. I didn't trust him, I couldn't. I trusted no one outside of my circle.

He nodded, then took his glare back out the window. "Ne putes illa erunt discedite?" Asking me if Madison would stay away was a given. You didn't have to be a

Madspert to know the girl goes down with her own. I open my mouth to answer, but Nate cuts me off with a scoff.

“Ney!”

He was fluent in Latin as we all were, he was just being a smart ass—per usual.

I shrugged, pulling into my driveway. “Nos autem non scire nisi runs.” Because I would know if she did. I’d have my mother grilling me. I jumped out of the car and my feet hadn’t even hit the asphalt when I heard Kholes’ voice.

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“B?”

“Oh for fuck’s sake!” Nate slammed the passenger door after letting Daemon out. I turned to face her and watched as her eyes widened on Daemon.

“Holy shit, is that?” Her attention followed them as they passed her and headed to the side of the house.

I shut my door. “Daemon? Yes.”

“I’ve heard so much about him. They call him Six.”

“Who are they?” I narrowed my eyes.

She crossed her arms in front of herself, finally looking back at me. “Everyone in The Circle.”

“The Circle is full of shit, and what the fuck do you want?”

“I was coming to say hi and to see if you were ok. You haven’t been home—”

“When do you leave?” My eyebrows rose.

“Um, well—”

“She’s not,” Dad interrupted, walking down the steps with his hands in his pockets.

“What the fuck do you mean she’s not?” I threw my head back.

His arm rested on her shoulders as he pulled her into him. “She’s staying, son.”

“Oh, you’ve got to be fucking shitting me,” I deadpanned, and then grinned. “You’re getting more senile with old age. You don’t buy her shit, do you? And what about Mom?”

“Son, you know deep down that your mother and I haven’t exactly been together for some time, and you’re grown. Swallow the fucking pill so we can move on.”

My eyes flew to Khales before they went back to my dad. “Huh.” I stared off into the distance, and then smirked, looking back to Khales. “And how do I taste? Since she’s licked my balls more than once...”

Dad chuckled, pulling out a cigar and lighting it up. “About the same as I do, apparently.”

I shook my head in disgust.

He blew out a cloud of smoke. “Now back to business, get in the office so we can talk.”

I looked at Khales one last time, and she watched me in worry, but her shoulders were relaxed under Dad’s handle. She wasn’t faking it. I knew this girl inside and out, and she seemed to genuinely love my dad. My eyes slid to him, but there was no use in me trying to analyze him. He hid his emotions better than me. I can decipher and read any human walking this earth, but not him. He trained me to be like that. I think the only person who could read him was my mom.

I shot Khales an evil glare and shoulder barged past her. I didn’t give a fuck that she

had moved on with my dad, but I gave a fuck that she was now going to be around a lot more than I ever wanted her to. I saved her all those years ago because she was a friend. As much as I hated her now, I wouldn't pretend that I hated her back then, because I didn't. I didn't love her, but I didn't hate her. She was just there, and I cared about her, so I saved her. Now I wish I hadn't. Now that I see what's going on between her and Dad, though, I'm thinking there's a lot more that he isn't telling me either.

I sunk into one of the leather chairs in Dad's office as he watched me from behind his heavy mahogany desk. "What happened?"

I leaned back. "Well, a fucking lot, but first I need to ask you if you knew about the underground tunnels on Perdita?"

"Yes." He nodded, leaning forward to flick off his ash in the ashtray. "Of course I knew."

"And you used them?" I shot back, watching his reaction.

His eyes squinted from the smoke. "Yes."

"What for?"

"Why all the questions?" His eyebrow quirked.

"Why all the secrets?" I shot back.

He sighed and ran the palm of his hand over his slicked-back salt and pepper hair. "There are no secrets." He flicked his ash again, and I watched as his suit jacket rode up to display the edge of his sleeve tattoo. He had swagger for his age, I'd give him that, and girls—of all ages, apparently, gravitated toward him. The smart ones ran

after sex, the dumb ones like Khaled stayed and thought they could tame him. He could never be tamed. Before him, was my pops. He rode a Harley until the day he died and ruled the underworld just as my dad does and as I will when he passes. Some days I miss my pops though. He was the only one who really understood the shit that I felt. He was still hard like Dad but wasn't cold like him. He had a heart when it came to family, but was ruthless with everyone else—my dad wasn't like that. He was just flat out ruthless to everyone, fuck family.

“That underground pathway is used for a lot of things. Weapons, bodies, and anything else there may be.”

“Drugs?” I asked flat out because I needed a straight answer from him. I'd never known the Kings to be in drugs, and Pops would turn in his grave, but the way my dad was, one could never be too sure.

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“No. You know that.” So money, trafficking woman, and other “things,” I thought to myself. I wasn’t going to press the issue anymore, so I continued with the conversation at hand. “Katsia got away.”

“I see that, but why was she running?” he asked, tilting his head. “She’s sacred, son, you can’t go around killing everyone who threatens Madison.”

“It had more to do with Nate.”

Dad sucked in more smoke. “What of Nathaniel?”

“He has a kid.”

He faltered, only slightly. “And?”

“And it’s a girl.”

His eyes closed, his nostrils flaring. “Jesus. Who’s the mother?”

“Tillie.”

Dad sighed and leaned forward. “I can’t be hiding any more Swans, son. It’s going to make me look weak. Something has to give. Right now? We have a war brewing because Katsia wants retaliation on you lot, and she wants to expose the Kings and The Circle. Generations of hard work is about to crumble.”

I leaned in my chair and tilted my head. “Then we kill her before she can.”

“She’s sacred, son. We can’t.”

“Sacred to who? She’s the shit on the bottom of my shoe as far as I’m concerned.”

Dad massaged his temples then put out his cigar. “Bishop, not everything is black and white. We can’t touch her because of her lineage. If we end her, we would end her family line, and we can’t be held responsible for that.”

“But she’s fucking testing both the Kings and The Circle.”

“The Circle isn’t our business, son. They will handle her accordingly, as we will.”

“Alright.” I pulled out a smoke and lit up. Dad narrowed his eyes at it and I smirked, edging him to tell me to throw it away, but he didn’t. His features relaxed. I blew out a thick cloud of smoke. “So what are you thinking, then. Because I know you have a plan.”

“I do.” He nodded. “But first, where is Madison and Tillie?”

I chuckled, flicking off the ash. “Guess.”

He shrugged, his attention drifting to the side like he didn’t give a shit. “I don’t know, holed up in a hotel somewhere?”

My grin deepened. “Wrong. Try again.”

“Bishop, riddles are your thing, not mine. Cut the shit.”

“One more guess. Come on, entertain me...”

“How about I’ll buy you some strippers to entertain you and you hurry up with

whatever you're getting to."

A laugh shot out of me, my head tilting back. "Alright, old man." Then I pressed my lips around the end of my smoke with a smirk. "With Mom."

"What!" he snapped, his eyes shooting directly to me. "What do you mean with mom?"

"They're with her, Tatum too and the kid."

Dad seemed to mull over what I had just told him, then realization set over his features as they softened. "Well, shit, I would never guess that. It's no secret how much your mother hates all your girls. She takes every chance she gets to mention it in every magazine interview she does."

I snickered. "Exactly why they're with her, and it never scared girls off."

He snorted. "You're my kid, that's why."

Dad and I hadn't thrown around banter in a while, and it felt good to pull out the verbal boxing gloves with him. "Khales..." I went on. His face fell. "I'm just saying... she's young."

"Don't get into it with her."

I shrugged. "As long as you know what you're doing. Just means I'll be in the city full time come this war being over."

"You can be wherever you need to be. For now, back to the plan." I noticed he didn't say college. It was because he didn't want me to go. He had plans to have me under him full-time and learning the depth of the family businesses and how they're run.

My mom, on the other hand, was all for college. She never wanted this life for me. She didn't realize how much she didn't want it for me until I was much older. Little do they know, I'd already decided what I wanted to do. This was my life, I'd take over after my old man. I don't know what the dynamic is between my mom and dad, but I'm almost certain she wouldn't be cool with Kholes banging her husband in her house.

“What's the plan?”

“Katsia is still in Perdita, which is good. We don't need this drama spilling out on our turf, which means we can fly there with all of the Kings who are willing, and settle this as it is.”

“Or?” I asked, skipping past the part where he said he'd have all the Kings on the same island.

“We will cross that when we get there.” He stood from his chair. “We can plan to leave for Friday, that way we have a couple of days to organize everyone.” The Kings before our generation were my cousin Spyder, Jase, and Saint's crew. A few of the others who rolled with them scattered all over the place. All though I know Jase kept in contact with them, they had pretty much moved on to live their life, having fulfilled their duty.

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“You can talk with Jase and make sure he can gather his Kings, and I’ll get to the rest.”

I stood up. “Dad...” I called out, just as he was about to leave. “Does Mom know about you and Khales?”

“Son, she’s known for a long time, now.” Then he left. As quickly as he comes, he goes.

I stretched out my neck, annoyed at both my parents now, but sympathizing with my mom. It must’ve hurt her to some extent, surely. Aside from Dad’s words, he loved her once. She was his entire world, I knew this because I’d seen the photos and heard the stories. They were their era’s modern-day Bonnie and Clyde—mafia style. So whatever the hell was going on between him and Khales, there had to be something in it for him. I headed toward the pool-house, ready to fill in Nate and Daemon. Thank fuck this house was so large, it ran the risk of running into Khales less. I headed inside and shut the door. Both Daemon and Nate were on the sofa, speaking in Latin.

“We need to talk.” Then my eyes fell to Daemon before realizing I needed to switch to Latin.

Women. Some read that word and think beauty, assholes read it and think sandwiches, but those who bathe in intellect read that word and feel power. Our bodies, built in all different shapes and forms, all bared one thing in common; power. Without us, humanity would not exist. We bear our flesh and our bodies to create new humans, and then continue to nurture and care for them, that’s why when I’d see the word “women,” I thought of power. Despite my rocky relationship with my

mother, and not knowing my birth mother, I was beginning to explore more of this mindset each and every day, and I think Bishop's mom had a lot to do with that.

"Hi, honey." Scarlet walked into the room, leaving the door slightly ajar. She wrapped her light mesh throw around her slender waist. "Can I come in?"

"Of course!" I tucked some of my hair behind my ear and shut my nail polish. Sliding off the side, I tucked my hands under my thighs, slightly nervous about what our conversation could lead to.

She took a seat at the end of the bed and turned to face me front on. "I know we haven't spoken much, but I want to always be completely transparent with you." She cleared her throat and tied her short hair to a small bun at the nape of her neck. "I met Hector when I was around your age. I was new to town, and he was the born and bred rock star of The Hamptons," she paused and sent me a small wink. "Like father like son. Anyway, I caught his attention pretty much instantly, which, like Bishop, was always hard to do. He, again like Bishop, only dabbled in slightly older women who were either models, actresses or singers. Just to clarify, the reason why they choose A-listers is because those people understood the dynamic of privacy. The Hayes men are taught at a very young age to keep their business out of drama and to eliminate that, they never messed with high school girls or college girls." She paused, pulling her lip into her mouth. "I thought he loved me. He made me feel wanted and chased. I mean" —her face lit up like the Fourth of July— "obtaining the unattainable, sets off endorphins similar to running ten miles. So we fell in love. My parents struggled to like him. They knew there was something he was hiding, but I ignored all the warnings. I met his family and bonded greatly with his dad. He was everything Hector wasn't."

My eyebrows shot up. She shook her head, a horrified expression falling over her face.

“Oh! No! God no. I just respected him so much. If he were still here, he would have loved you.” Her eyes fell to her hands before coming back to me. “Anyway, I got my first acting gig on a small TV show, and Hector was supportive. There through it all. We have great memories together.” Her smile fell, and suddenly, the room felt smaller than what it was a moment ago. “Two years later was the first time he cheated on me, and I’m not telling you this because I think my son is the same, I’m telling you this because Bishop is a lot more like his grandfather than he can see. I thank the Lord every day that Bishop got twelve good years from his pops, because he planted the seed of good in his heart. Yes, Bishop is cold and calculated like his father, but I see the way he looks at you, and it’s not the way Hector used to look at me. It was how his pops looked at his gran.” She swiped away a stray tear and reached for my hand. I didn’t know what to say, I was rendered speechless.

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“His pops may have planted the seed of good in Bishop’s heart, but you water it every single second that you’re in his life, and for that, I will always be on your side, Madison.”

Emotion caught in my throat and my tummy flipped inside. “Thank you,” I whispered harshly.

“No need to thank me!” She swatted at me playfully.

“No, I do,” I answered, fighting the tears. “Just before you walked in here, I was having an internal battle with myself. I loved my mom, and when I thought she died, I mourned her death every single day. I couldn’t imagine my life without her, but I dragged my feet through it every day, waiting for the ache to subside. Anyway.” I pulled myself away from the downer I was headed to. “When I found out I was adopted, she was alive, and that she had slept with Bishop, I lost it. I lost all and every single feeling I had for her. Now I can’t even stomach to be in the same room as her, let alone look at her. So just before you came in here, I was thinking about the word ‘Women’ and what that might mean to some people. I think of power every time I see it, and I don’t know why because the only mother I had ever known was a fraud and a skank, but I knew it when I looked at you.”

She smiled at me sweetly. “Well, thank you, but I’m not that strong.”

I snorted. “You’re married to Hector...”

“True!” She nodded. “About your mom, your adoptive one, when and if you want to learn about your birth mom, I’ll be here, but your adoptive mom... she’s a piece of

work.”

I tucked my feet under my butt. “Tell me more.”

She laughed and got more comfortable. “Nothing too juicy. She was the mean girl at school. Everyone was scared of her—except me. I was her sworn enemy. She hated Elena too, and Elena is my best friend. She was the wild, crazy...” she paused and thought for a second. “Elena was my Tate.”

I chuckled, my hand coming to my mouth. “Did you have a Tillie?”

Her smile dropped. “I did.”

“Did?”

Her eyes flicked to the door. “Let’s just say that it didn’t end well, and it’s still not going well.”

“Sounds like a Tillie,” I smiled. “I don’t know what to do about her.”

Scarlet stood from my bed and patted my leg. “Everything will be revealed soon, I promise, but know this. Tillie loves you, Madison. She’s a good friend. She’s not like my Tillie. Maybe while we’re here you could spend some time with her? Hear what happened?”

“I’m that obvious, huh?”

She inched her fingers close. “Little bit.”

I sighed. “Ok. I’ll make the effort tomorrow.” She leaned down and kissed my head like a mom would kiss her child goodnight.

“Sweet dreams.” Then she walked out of the bedroom and left me to my thoughts. I didn’t think I was being that obvious about my reservations with Tillie. It wasn’t that I was even upset with her, well, maybe I was. I wasn’t sure why, but I felt hurt that she didn’t come to me, I guess. She should’ve known I would have done everything for her, but at the same time, she would do the same, I guess. If I was in her shoes and I knew telling her something would put her in danger, would I do it? No. Not at all. And with that thought bouncing around in my head, I tucked myself under the blankets and flicked off my light.

I opened my messages to see (0). Bishop still hadn’t replied to my text from earlier, but I sent him another one anyway.

Goodnight x

Then I tucked my phone under my pillow and let my mind sink into unconsciousness.

“This air BNB is nice. Why did I think those things were old and run down?” she asked around a spoonful of granola.

Tillie bounced Micaela on her lap softly, tossing her fruit around in her bowl.

“You ok?” I asked her, taking a small bite out of my pancake. Scarlet had to go to work early this morning so we ordered breakfast online. Buttermilk pancakes, fresh fruit, crème fraiche, and warm chocolate milk. Spiked with whiskey. I was starting to worry about Tate’s alcohol intake.

Tillie looked at me. “Not really. We haven’t talked much—”

“—I know, I’m sorry. There’s just so much going on.” I got to my feet and rounded the table. “God, she looks so much like Nate.”

Tillie chuckled, a small smile coming to her face making her deep dimple pop. “She does, right?”

“Can I hold her?”

“Of course!” Tillie turned and handed her to me.

“Wow! She’s heavier than she looks!”

“That, is like her mama,” Tillie chuckled back.

“Lies,” I whispered against her small head that smelled of milky soap suds.

I went back to my seat and continued to slowly rock her with one hand and pick my food with the other. “So when you want to tell me anything, you can, Tillie. We’re your friends. Ok?”

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Tate agreed beside me. “Yes, we’re your friends, but while we’re on the friend thing, um, about Nate...”

Tillie shook her head, cutting Tate off. “Don’t. It’s okay, Tate, and he’s all yours. I just hope he won’t hate me all of her life, if you know what I mean.”

“He’ll come around.” I looked up at her. “I know him, and he’ll come around.” I don’t bother to brush off her giving Tate the green flag on Nate, because I didn’t want to hurt Tate.

“No, nope. I won’t go there again,” Tate said.

“So anyway.” Tillie shuffled in her seat. “I’m ready to spill everything. So the night at the cabin, after Nate and I had, you know, he went downstairs to make us something to eat. I got up to wander around the room to burn time and ended up finding myself in the closet, where I found a small lock box. I opened it and all these photos were in there—that I still have. So I came across this one, and it was a woman. Young, tender, beautiful. She had long blonde hair and gentle but mischievous eyes. She was extremely young. There was a man standing beside her, double her size with his arm draped around her shoulder. There was something about the woman that drew me to her. She felt—familiar. In the photo, she was visibly pregnant, and I turned it over to see if there were any names on the back, and there was.” She took a deep breath. “It said Katsia Steprum—pregnant with expected due date: November 18th. I remember just... being rooted to the ground. I couldn’t move and I couldn’t think, and I didn’t know why. So her expected due date was my birthday? I mean, how many times do babies come on their due date...”

“Jesus...” I whispered, chills breaking out over my skin. “Keep going.”

“So I put the rest of the photos into my back pocket and waited on the bed for Nate to get back to ask him about the photo I found. When he came back in, carrying two plates filled with food, his eyes dropped to the photo that was in my hand and then he cussed, his head tilting up to the ceiling...

“Fuck.” Nate walked farther into the bedroom and kicked the door closed so hard a photo fell from the wall and smashed.

“Is this? Has this got something to do with me?” I asked him, lifting my hand that held the image.

He put the plates on the bedside table and took a seat beside me on the edge of the bed. The blankets were still ruffled from our two-hour binge fest, and I wore nothing but his shirt with my hair wild all over the top of my head, but in this moment—none of the feelings I was feeling earlier mattered. I needed to know about this image and why I was so drawn to it.

He looked back at me and licked his bottom lip. “Yes.”

“Yes—what?”

“Yes, that is you, and yes, that bitch is your mom.”

“What!” I shot off the bed and threw the photo away like it had caught on fire.

“Nope. No way!”

Nate stood up and readjusted himself through his grey sweats. His skin still glistened.

“Yes way, can we do this tomorrow?”

“So yeah. We didn’t do it tomorrow, I urged him for answers until we had a huge fight— ”

“—I remembered that fight. I could hear you both from upstairs.”

Tillie nodded. “Yep. Then I texted Peyton to see if she knew—which she did, of course.” Tillie wiped the tears from her face. “Turns out, Katsia had both of us and gave both of us to the same family. Why? I don’t know. My adoptive mom was a junkie and my dad used to beat me—and Peyton. I don’t know the depths of why, and the story which centers around her, but—”

“Holy fuck, Katsia is your mom. How old was she when she had you and Peyton?”

Tillie laughed. “Huh, very fucking young. Must have been thirteen with Peyton and around seventeen or sixteen with me. I don’t know what the age gap with Peyton and Jase is, but I know they’re not born in the same year.”

“What about the man in the photo? Do you know who that was?” I asked, pushing my plate away. I had suddenly lost my appetite.

Tillie shook her head. “Something else I haven’t gotten to the bottom of yet, either!”

“Well, this is a little messed up. So what happened and how did you get to Perdita?”

Tillie leaned into her chair and tucked a loose strand of faded pink hair behind her ear.

“She came for me, and I don’t know why. I still don’t. I was almost home and a white van pulled up and threw me inside and then I woke up in Perdita. She didn’t know I was pregnant at the time, but when she found out, it only made her more interested,” Tillie paused. “Just for the record, worst mother ever.”

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“Bet mine could give her a run for her money.”

“And mine,” Tate mumbled, taking a sip of her orange juice.

“So where is Peyton?” I pondered aloud.

“She’s with The Circle,” Tillie let out bitterly.

“I’ve heard that name be tossed around a lot, but still don’t know who they are?”

“So there’s the Kings, and you know what they do and why they do it, but obviously there has to be someone sitting in the Pentagon and White House who foresee everything. I mean, they run a damn island. Anyway, The Circle is just that. They’re a clan of people, who only very few people know about, that are scattered all over the world and sit in high power positions that make sure everything King related flies under the radar. They’re sort of like the CIA, I guess, but far dirtier.” Interesting to see how deep the Kings’ circle ran, and terrifying at the same time. I wonder why Bishop never thought to tell me about them, probably the same reason why he has always hidden everything from me.

“Why the hell is she with them?” Tatum asked, shock evident in her tone.

Tillie shrugged. “She was always going to go the political way, she only stuck around for Jase.”

I cleared my throat. “About that, I’m not sure if anyone has told you, but since you’ve been gone a few things have happened on this side, too.” I exhaled. “Hunter and Jase

are my brothers, as is Daemon who is my twin, but I'm sure you already knew that part."

She gasped. "Wait, Hunter and Jase? Blood brothers?"

I nodded. "Yeah, turns out I was adopted into Dad's—or Joseph and Elizabeth's family. I'm actually a Venari. Daemon got the shit side of the stick and was tossed into The Lost Boys with Katsia."

"I swear, sometimes I wonder what the fuck I was thinking bringing her into this world." Her eyes fell to Micaela.

"Well, she's in it now, and not going anywhere."

My phone vibrated on the table and I snatched it, seeing it was Bishop.

"Hi, are you ok?"

"Yeah, everything's fine. Sorry I didn't text you yesterday, we've been getting some shit in line."

My eyes went to Tillie, who got up from her chair and came to take Micaela. "What sort of shit?"

"I'm gathering all of the previous Kings that I can find, and bringing them in, because on Friday we're all flying back to Perdita to settle this."

"I want to come."

"No."

“Bishop...” I whined, even though I knew that it would never work on him.

“No, Madison. No fucking way. You stay there and stay alive.”

“And what about you?” I whispered, anxiety taking a hold of my airways and trying to suffocate me. I never thought I’d end up being one of those girls who put all her feelings into one guy, but Bishop crushed those assumptions. The thought of anything happening to him would almost put my heart into cardiac arrest.

“I’ll be fine, baby,” he answered smoothly. “I gotta go. Listen, I need to talk with my mom about something...”

“Oh?” I shuffled up in my chair. “She’s at work right now.”

“It’s my dad. Him and Kholes, they’re...”

“Oh ew!” My face scrunched in disgust. “He would never!”

“Nope, he had, and is...”

“That’s disgusting.” I shook my head.

“Yeah, but don’t tell her yet. I’ll tell her when I see her. I just wanted you to have a heads up. Looks like she might be hanging around longer than I would have hoped.”

“That sucks.” Another phone call beeped through and I looked down at my screen. “Carter is calling me...”

“Mathers?” Bishop asked, shocked. “What the fuck for?”

“I don’t know. Call me later?”

“Yeah alright.”

After hanging up on Bishop, I answered my phone, giving Tate a confused look.

“Hello?”

“Madison?” He sounded desperate.

“Carter? Are you ok?”

“Are you in town?”

“What? No. I’m out of town right now, why?”

He sighed. “Can you text me when you get back? I need to talk with you.” And he hung up.

“That was weird.” I put my phone back on the table and pushed it to the middle. “I haven’t heard from him in months and then he calls me out of the blue.”

Tillie shook the baby bottle, her eyes going between Tate and me. “What ever happened to him?”

“Nothing,” I answered, picking up my plate and carrying it to the sink. I rinsed it quickly before turning and leaning on the counter.

“I don’t know what to do,” Tillie whispered under her breath, feeding Micaela.

“How so?” Tate asked, her head tilted.

Tillie shrugged. “I think I need to leave.”

“Leave—where?” I tried hard not to sound critical, but it came off as that instantly. “Elena doesn’t know that Micaela is her granddaughter, and then there’s Nate...” I added.

“Exactly!” Tillie shrugged. “I just think that he would prefer I not be in his hometown, if you know what I mean.”

“No, I don’t, and please don’t tell me you’re thinking of running because honestly, Tillie, he would kill you if you took his daughter away.”

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“He’s going to kill me anyway, Mads!”

“Why!” I threw my hands up, suddenly annoyed at the whole situation. I loved Tillie, but sometimes we didn’t exactly see eye to eye.

“Because I—I may have met someone else, and I don’t know, I think that he would hate that some other male would be a big part of her life, ya know?”

“I need a holiday.” I rubbed my temples with my fingertips. “Ok, here’s what we are going to do.” I pushed off the counter and made my way back to my seat. “We are going to all sit the fuck down when all of this is over, and have a flat-out chat about what we are going to do with little princess. Tillie.” I brought my eyes to hers, drilling them into her. “I do not, under any circumstances, think you should run from Nate. He will find you, and the erratic way his behavior has been since finding out he is a dad, I wouldn’t trust his intentions with you once he does find you, so I honestly think you should take my route, and ju—”

“—Ok!” she snapped at me with a smile on her lips. “You’re still persistent.”

“That shit will never change,” Tate muttered, standing and going to the sink to rinse her plate.

“Now,” I grinned. “Who is this man you’ve met?”

Her face fell.

“What?”

She shook her head. “Honestly, it would never work out. We had a moment, and I don’t know... I just, I don’t think it’s a good idea.”

“Well, who is it? Do I know him? Please don’t tell me it’s one of those weird guards at Perdita.”

She shook her head. “No. I’m wasting my time because it could never happen. He’s too involved with Katsia to look at me again, and we had a moment or two, but then he went cold and I honestly think it’s a waste of time me even mentioning it. It just made me realize that if something ever did happen between me and someone, Nate wouldn’t allow it.”

“I do have a plan, though,” I said.

“Oh goodie!” Tate bit into an apple. “Let me guess, you want to gatecrash this war?”

I smirked.

“And how are we supposed to get past the wicked witch of the west?” Tatum asked, crunching on her apple loudly.

I skipped toward her. “Well, the wicked witch isn’t as wicked as she seems.”

We finished up breakfast and washed the dishes. The house we were staying in was a two-story loft air BNB. There were two bedrooms upstairs and one downstairs. Tillie and the baby stayed downstairs while Tate and I crashed in here. Flopping onto the bed, I bring my phone up to my face and send Bishop a text.

Weird conversation with Carter.

What did he want

I flipped onto my tummy. I don't know. He said he wanted to talk with me when I got home.

I waited for the three little circles to pop up, but they didn't. Two minutes pass before I decided to send him another. The thirst was real. How are your plans going?

Fast. We have a good lot of people coming in today and tonight. We will be all flying out tomorrow night. You? How's Mom?

Okay, so they were going to be leaving Friday night, not morning, which put a slight dent in my plans. I was hoping that they would leave in the morning so we could get there later that day.

Mom is awesome. I want a swap. Mine for yours.

I realized my bad joke as soon as I hit send and cringed. My face was scrunched and my cheeks were on fire when Tillie walked in.

"Hey! Do you—" she stopped when she saw my face. "Are you ok?"

"No. I just sent a really stupid text to Bishop. Anyway! What's up?"

She walked in farther, stopping near the end of the bed. "Did you ever hear from Ridge?"

I leaned up on my elbows. "I did. I sort of bumped into him at a bank a few months ago before Tate and I ran away to New Zealand, why?"

She paused, her face falling blank. "Okay, I need to know one hundred percent what happened while you were there, but it's just that, I don't know, I thought maybe he would have looked harder for me?"

“He probably did, like I did, but always came out with dead ends. It makes sense now that I know now, though. Katsia hiding you and all that...”

Her finger came to her lip. “Can I ask you something?”

“Of course?” I scooted up the bed, tucking my legs underneath me.

“What was Nate like after I left?” Out of all the things I was expecting her to ask me, that was not one of them.

“Honestly, he was off.”

“Off?”

I nodded and pulled my bottom lip into my mouth. “There were a few times when he would say something about you, and, okay, I’m not good at this. He had feelings for you, Tillie, real feelings. I hadn’t seen him with any other girl like he was with you, and I witnessed my fair share amount of Nate-hos in the months you were absent.”

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A sad smile came to her mouth. “Thank you. When I was away, I became obsessive with the memories I had of him, of us. I’d replay every little thing in my head.”

“I know.” I leaned forward and patted her hand. “We do that, replay the memories we have of someone because it makes us feel closer to them. We try to grasp onto every piece we have of them because we were afraid that they’ll disappear.”

She sighed heavily, getting to her feet. “Is it weird that the fact that Tate and he have history doesn’t affect me?”

“Yes...” I teased. “Because I know you’re lying. You may not feel it right now, but if you saw them together it would hurt, Tils. And that’s not because you’re a girl, that’s because you’re a fucking human.”

“I don’t deserve you.” She wiped away a stray tear.

“Say that again and I’ll use your ass as target practice.”

She laughed, and walked out of my room, just as my phone started ringing on my bed. I blindly reached for it, swiping it unlocked and bringing it to my ear.

“Hello?”

“Hi, sweetie! So I finished early today, are you girls home?” Scarlet asked. I could hear the echo in my ear, signaling she was in a car.

“Yes! We’re home, and perfect! There’s actually something I want to talk to you

about.”

“I’m almost there!” Then she hung up, and I slipped off the bed and jogged downstairs.

“Scarlet is almost here. We need a plan!”

The door swung open. “I have an idea!” Scarlet closed the door behind herself, removing her glasses. She stepped toward me. “I don’t feel right about Bishop going into this alone, and like I told you last night—Hector and I have...”

I smirked. “You want to gatecrash their war?”

Her eyes shot to mine. “How’d you know?”

I snorted. “I was about to pitch you the same idea.” Would Khales be there? I hope so. Maybe I could accidentally push her in front of a stray bullet. I hate how this is going to go with Scarlet.

“See, this is why the Hayes men are dangerous because look at the women they choose?” Tate mocked, gesturing to both Scarlet and I.

“She’s not wrong,” I muttered under my breath.

“Ok, so here’s the deal. You,” Scarlet pointed to Tillie. “Obviously will be staying behind with the princess, but us three will be flying there around four hours after everyone has left.”

“How?” I asked, my legs tingling in adrenalin at this sneaky plan.

Bishop was going to kill me.

“I have a friend,” Scarlet announced, sitting on the edge of the chaise. “He owns an airline and has a private jet we could use.”

“Oh,” I chimed. “Of course you do.”

She gave me a dismissive smile, and then looked to Tate. “You don’t have to come if you’re not willing.”

“Are you crazy? Someone has to make sure Batman over here doesn’t upset the Joker...” She hiked her thumb toward me.

I chortled. “This is actually true. So, when do we leave?”

“That was probably the longest flight ever!” I exclaimed, sliding out of the back of the limo. It wasn’t good to be home, because this place hardly felt like home anymore.

“That’s because you couldn’t stop giggling with excitement.” Tate got out of the car and helped Tillie. “Seriously, your love for danger has me second guessing our entire friendship.”

“Like you’re one to talk!” I shot back. It wasn’t until the silent engine of the car behind us cut off when I realized someone had pulled up behind. Crap. We got caught.

I turned around slowly, biting down on my lip and hoping I could sweet talk my way out of this— my face instantly fell into disgust. “What the fuck do you want?” I snapped, just as Elizabeth shut the passenger door. She was in a pearl white Lexus with chrome wheels and her driver looked half her age.

“Got yourself a new boytoy, I see.”

She winced but straightened her shoulders. “I understand why you’re mad at me, Madison. I guess I wanted to come see you before I left, to see if there was anything salvageable with our relationship.”

“Well, there’s not.” I flicked my hand toward the car she arrived in. “You may leave.”

My eyes went to Scarlet, who was shooting daggers at Elizabeth. She glided closer to her like a butterfly would if it had fangs, and her voice dropped to deathly tones. “I would listen to Madison, Liza, because if I so much as get within an arm’s reach of you, I’ll strangle you myself and bury you in an unmarked grave at the back of my home” —Scarlet grinned, whispering— “and you and I both know who your neighbors will be.”

Pain flashed over her face, then she looked back at me. “I do love you, Madison. I always have. When you’re ready to forgive me, I’ll be waiting for you.” Then her head bowed and she retreated back to the car. A twinge of guilt pulled inside of my chest, showing my humanity. I spent most of my life loving her, and now I’ll probably spend the rest hating her.

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“Okay, so if we could get organized that’d be great as we are supposed to be at the airstrip in two hours,” Tate ordered, going straight for the front doors. Just as she was about to open the door, it flung open and Elena stood there with an apron wrapped around her waist and flour embedded through her hair, smudged on her face.

My lips widened, but before I could start spewing a whole bunch of excuses, she interjected, “Come on, you’re on borrowed time!” My eyebrows shot up in surprise. She knew? Then I remember the conversation Scarlet and I had last night. The Tate to her Madison.

“Come on, Swan,” Scarlet tapped my butt while walking past, and just as I was about to take the steps up to the front door, I noticed Tillie wasn’t following. Turning around, I looked at her. “Coming?” Then realization washed over me, and I spun back around to look at Elena, who was watching Tillie with interest. Her eyes flew between Tillie and the baby and then back again, and just when I thought the level of awkwardness couldn’t get much worse, Elena gestured into the house.

“I’d love to meet my grandchild.”

I exhaled a loud breath of air, shaking my head and walking into my house. “I’m not cut out for this lifestyle.” Dropping my bags near the front door because I knew I’d need them again, I headed straight into the sitting room where Tate was hunched in the corner suite and Scarlet was helping herself to my dad’s scotch.

“Cheers, Joseph, you fuck.” She lifted her glass in the air and shot the amber liquid back. I could almost taste the hard liquor hit the back of my throat just by watching.

“You don’t like Madison’s dad?” Tillie asked, slowly handing Micaela to Elena.

Elena smiled adoringly down at Micaela. “Aw, she has never liked Joseph.” Then winked at me and took her attention to the baby. “I’ve baked pie.”

“You did?” Scarlet snorted, one eyebrow lifted. “Judging by the amount of flour on you, I would have to debate.”

“Don’t listen to her, she’s just scratchy!” Elena said in a baby voice to Micaela, then brought her eyes up to mine. “Before you do this, honey, you need to realize that your birth mom and dad will both be there. Are you prepared to face them?”

The room fell silent. I mulled over her words. I thought I was. They gave me up, which was probably the only thing I would struggle to come to terms with. I miss my guys and my guy. I feel unwanted from people who were planted in my life through blood. Jesus was obviously on crack. I’d struggle with it, though. I’d come from being quite secure in my family home, single child, with both parents being married and in love, to finding out they weren’t in love, I was adopted, had three brothers, and one was a schizophrenic who had demons whispering in his head.

I gulped. “I have no choice.”

Elena looked at Scarlet, a silent conversation quickly passing through them before Scarlet got to her feet and came to sit beside me on the sofa. Her hand grasped around mine. She tucked her short jawline hair around one ear. “Honey, when you are ready, I will be here to talk with you about anything.”

“We both will be,” Elena added, and that’s when I realized that it didn’t matter if Jesus was on crack and put me in the wrong family, because what made these people special was they didn’t have obligations to me. Their loyalty didn’t come from some false sense of need because we were blood—it came from the purest form. Friendship

and love.

I gave them both an appreciative smile. “Thank you both so much.”

“Power.” Scarlet winked at me and then shot to her feet. “Right, so...” she glared down at her watch. “We’re meeting Miller in an hour. Tillie? You’ll be okay here with Elena, okay?”

Tillie looked between all of us. “Okay.”

“You can both stay in my room and keep using my clothes and whatever else you need. When we get home, we will all sit down and talk about what we spoke about, mmkay?” I was really hoping that Elena would work some grandmother magic and make Tillie see that she wasn’t alone. She had me and Elena, and Nate—even though he hadn’t realized it yet—but she had him as Micaela’s father, and that was what was important for right now.

Tillie pulled her lip into her mouth. “Ok.” And just when I went to leave to get some last minute things organized, Tillie quickly jumped to her feet. “I’m really sorry!”

I paused, tilting my head in confusion. “Sorry for what?”

Tillie shoved her hands into her front pockets, her eyes falling to the ground. She patted down some of her hair that had fallen over her shoulder, her silver bangles jiggling in the movement. I noticed she still had her silver dream catcher diamond necklace on through it all. “For messing up your guy’s dynamic, I guess.”

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“Tillie,” I started, but Elena stepped in for me.

“You, sweet girl, are not a nuisance.” Elena wrapped her fingers around her chin, lifting her face. “You and Micaela are family now, just like Madison, and Tate, and the rest of the Kings. Just like Scarlet and I. You will find that no matter how much we may hate each other at times, we always take care of our own.” She pulled in a breath. “I believe my son loves you.”

I gasped. Even though I knew it was true.

Scarlet grinned.

Tate shuffled in her spot.

I began to think Scarlet was more of Tate and I was more Elena.

Elena continued. “But right now, he’s so clouded in hate and confusion that he won’t allow any other emotion in. Time, please just give him time.”

Tillie’s shoulders relaxed slightly before she nodded. “Ok. I can give him time.”

Wrapping my belt on, I leaned to the side, catching Scarlet staring at me. “Hey, so how many people affiliated with the Kings are actually going to be there?”

I was getting comfortable, scanning around the plane. It was a lot different to the Hayes’ jet. Theirs seeming more superior.

“All of them.”

I froze. “Shit.”

“When we get in there, I need all of you to pay attention to my body language. You don’t move unless I fucking say, or fucking incline that you are going to move, do we understand?” I called out, facing all of them. The trip was fast because we had two jets flying here with around forty or so men.

“Yes, boss,” Spyder teased, cocking his head. Fucker.

“Son, it’ll be fine.” Dad came up beside me.

“I know.” I inched my head over my shoulder. “But I don’t want any mistakes. I don’t want to lose anyone.”

“And you won’t. Hey, I’m proud of you, kid.”

I gave him a small smile. For my dad to say that, it meant a lot, but right now wasn’t the time to relish in it.

“Remember,” I added, looking around at all the faces that were here, ready. Some I hadn’t seen since I was a young pup, and some I had never met, but we all had one thing in common: loyalty. “The Lost Boys are not standing with Katsia, mainly because they’re smart, but also because they’re very black and white, and they know who is in charge and who merely acts in charge. Katsia has her guards, but not that many. I’m not worried about what’s going to happen when we enter these gates, but I am stressing that you don’t make any irrational moves. We don’t want to kill her. Yet.”

Everyone mumbled in agreement, so I turned to face the high gates, pulled out the

card that my dad gave me earlier which gives us access to wherever we need to get to on here, and swiped it over the laser panel.

Daemon

One, two, three, four, five, six...six...six....

Quiet! I ordered in an attempt to hush them all. Trickery, War, Rage, Deceit, Evil... The six demons were running wild in my thoughts. They had names, because they had their own voices. I became aware of this very young. There was no love, I had no love in me, but when Madison was around, I felt the closest thing I could ever feel that came close to love. She engulfed me, completed me and brought joy to my life. I knew not of joy, or happiness, until I met her. The bond between us both was unshakeable, unbreakable and as strong as a rip current in the middle of an ocean. I would die for her and then come back to life to kill whoever tried hurt her and then die for her again. The day in the forest was still a blur for me, but I figured out quickly that Deceit had taken over. His presence was still on the tip of my tongue hours after his retreat. I hated myself, still hate myself, and I will never forgive myself for that day. How do you kill the very things that haunt you in your head? How do you strangle something that morphs into smoke the second you try to mentally grasp around its neck? How do you kill someone that essentially is you? I was sick. So very sick. I didn't deserve to share the same blood as Madison, let alone the same womb for nine months.

“Daemon, don't you think?” Bishop asked, leaning against one of the panels that were outside the shops on the only street of Perdita. The war was no longer brewing; it was ready to be served.

I shoved my hands into my pockets and walked toward where Bishop was, beside Hector but front-on to Katsia and her small army of men. We weren't outnumbered, but it would be a good fight should the war erupt. “Of what?”

“That Katsia would look better with her blood spilled over the ground.” I felt the energy shift before I saw her. The room fell silent as I turned to see who it was, and my gut clenched. Scarlet, Tatum, and Madison were walking toward us, breaking through the thick gathering of Kings and others. Oh yes, she’s here, let’s kill her. Get it right this time. I ignored Deceit.

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“Madison!” Bishop shouted, enough to cut the silence. Madison winced. My fists clenched at her discomfort. “What the fuck are you all doing here?”

“Oh!” Katsia taunted. “This is perfect. The Elite ladies, all in one place...” Katsia stepped forward. I leaped in front of Madison, shielding her.

Katsia snorted. “The stray Lost Boy, move, Daemon.” As much as she tried to sound strong and demanding, the edge of each syllable fell off her tongue with a small shake. She knew what I was capable of—truly capable of. She sat with the therapists when they diagnosed me, then turned me into her own weapon. I was always loyal to her, right up until the point where Madison came back into my life. She was the game changer.

“No.”

Madison’s hand came to my arm. “It’s ok, Daemon.”

Bishop pulled Madison behind him, his eyes slanting on her. “I will beat your ass for this.”

Madison smiled. “I count on it.”

Turning back to face Katsia, Scarlet stopped beside me, her arms crossed. “I have a bone to pick with you, oh sacred one.” She tilted her head. “Turns out, you’re not the final line of your blood. Congratulations, you’ve just made yourself disposable.”

Katsia stilled.

I smiled.

Hector pulled Scarlet into him, but she shoved him away. “Don’t touch me.” Then her eyes went to Kholes. “Ever again.”

“As much as we all love this song and dance,” Spyder announced, walking between us all. “I have a party to get back to, well the fuck away from all you fuckers!” Bishop’s wild older cousin who led the Kings in the previous generation with Jase, Saint, Ace, and Ollie, announced. There were only five that year, where there were seven this generation.

“Your pussy fest can wait,” Bishop snapped, his head turning over his shoulder.

“Cause, they really can’t...”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Scarlet.” Katsia played dumb, stepping forward.

This is getting boring. Let’s kill someone. Start with her. Start with Katsia. Always hated her. It will start bloodshed! Yes, let’s do it.

Quiet! I roared inside my head, but they continued to push.

Yes, now. Let’s do it now. Now, Daemon, enforce it, let it happen. Feel the power seep into your fingertips and embrace it. My eyes slammed shut, my lips pursing. Shut up! A loud round of hyena-like giggles erupted in my head, bouncing off the empty walls of my scarred soul.

Mine.

“As much as I’d love to continue this cute little chitchat” —darkness cloaked my

vision, and my lip curled— “I’m feeling like I’d prefer to see the color red.” I slowly slipped my knife down from under my sleeve, grasping the heavy metal handle, then launched forward to Katsia, slicing it across her neck until her blood sprayed across my clothes and her death danced on the tip of my tongue to a metallic melody. My eyes rolled back in euphoria. It was like my first hit of heroin, the feeling of clouds seeping into my bones. A charge erupted through me at the same time as relaxation drifted through the air.

“Oh my God!” Madison screeched, and then hell broke loose. I smirked as one of Katsia’s guards hit Nate square in the face with his fist, and a loud crack sounding out. Nate fell to the floor. The guard jumped on him, pulling out his own knife and sinking it into Nate’s stomach. Madison started screaming again in the background. Scarlet jumped in front of a stray bullet that was heading straight for Madison. It hit her in the throat with a loud clap and she fell to the ground, Hector’s arm shooting out to catch her. “Scarlet!”

I pounced forward, grabbing hold of the guard’s throat that stabbed Nate and twisted effortlessly until the snap vibrated through my bones. My head whipped to where Bishop was fighting with two of Katsia’s men. One had a knife and the other had nothing but his hands. I was about to walk towards him when a sharp pain ripped through my leg. I paused, slowly turning around. My attention went down to the long machete that was sticking out of my leg, and then I smirked, bringing my eyes to Katsia’s man. I pulled it out, flicked it around on my fingers, and then launched it into his neck, where it sliced it right off. A puddle of blood bubbled where his head was once attached before he finally slid to the ground. I could see Tate lying on the floor heaving, blood was coming out of her mouth and she had a knife sticking out of her upper thigh.

“I’m fine!” she snapped at me. “Go help Madison!”

Spyder pulled Tate into his arms and flicked his wrist to Bishop. “Fucking go, demon

boy!” I spun around, just in time to see Madison weeping near Scarlet, holding her hand.

Bishop roared, “Mom!” shoving one of the men off him. More Kings flew in behind Bishop, after fighting off more of Katsia’s men and taking out the two that he was fighting.

A gunshot fired.

Silence.

Bishop stopped, his face falling, his expression unreadable. Madison instantly stopped crying, wiping the tears from her cheeks with her blood-ridden fingers. Red.

“Bishop?” she asked softly, before carefully standing to her feet. Bishop’s head tilted downward. I followed his movement, and my eyes caught the red stain of blood slowly seeping through his white shirt. His hand came to his stomach before he fell to the ground.

“Bishop!” Madison screamed with such high pitch tones that it shook the street. Whoever was still fighting instantly stopped mid-air, the last of Katsia’s men took the distraction as a time to escape, all scattering off quickly into the wild bushes. Madison flew to where Bishop laid and dropped to the ground. Hector ran, following Madison. Nate used his arms to drag his body along the pavement in an attempt to make it to him.

Bishop’s chest was heaving up and down. Nothing was heard but the crackling of his own blood caught in his throat. The curdling desperate attempts of breathing. The hopeless endeavors at staying alive.

Madison’s screaming grew more frantic. “Don’t you die on me!” Red.

I started walking toward him.

Madison's cry slowed to a desperate plea, and when Hector pulled Bishop's shirt up to inspect the wound, I knew instantly it wasn't good. Blood was gushing out of his wound, trickles leaking out between his lips. He struggled to string any words together, but his hand flew to Madison's and he pulled her down to his chest, burying his face in her long hair.

"Bishop! Don't you fucking die on me," she continued to howl into his neck. I tilted my head.

"Son, I need you to hang on tight, you hear, we have a medic team here. Don't you fucking go anywhere, son! I just lost your mother, I can't lose you too!" Hector roared, his palm tightening around Bishop's other hand.

Blackness slowly started to fade with the electrifying color of vibrancy coming into view.

The smug smirk I had so proudly worn slid off my face instantly. "This is my fault." Guilt slammed into me as Madison's grief shook my bones.

"No!" she screamed. "No, no, no!" She banged on Bishop's chest. So much red.

Nate tried to pull her away as Tate sat down beside her. "Madison, honey, come here."

"No! Leave me alone! No, he's not dead. He's—he's, Bishop!" She howled again, her screams sending birds to dart from the trees. Her weeping pulled so much emotion that tears fell from the grown men who were huddled around Bishop.

My heart broke into two. Te amo, soror mea.

"This is my fault." I slowly lifted my hand that held the thick heavy knife and

launched it into my throat. Pain shot through as my own blood started to slip over my hands like slime.

“Daemon!” Tate yelled from somewhere as I fell to the ground.

“Daemon?” Madison screamed again, her voice coming in and out.

“I’m—I’m sorry,” I gurgled, blood filling my throat as my vision blurred. The clouds in the sky swirled with the soft blue endless sphere, and my eyelashes fluttered. I tried to suck in more air, but I was drowning. Drowning in my own blood. I deserved it. Red.

“Daemon!” Madison’s voice was coming in quick, her face hovering over mine. My vision was now completely vivid in color, no more stygian.

A hyena laugh ricocheted off the lifeless walls inside of my brain.

My eyebrows pulled in, confusion seeping into every nerve.

We. Win.

“Trickery!” I roared, my back arching off the ground just as death’s grip took hold of me.

“What the fuck!” Nate pulled at his hair, stepping backward.

“Daemon?” I wiped the tears that were pouring down my cheeks. I cradled his head under my arm and kissed his forehead. “No, no,” I wept, slowly rocking him. Something snapped in my chest, opening up and seeping its pain through my veins. My heart was lifeless, my fingertips numb and my legs aching. “No!” I screamed when his eyes lifelessly fell to the back of his head.

I squeezed at the wound on his neck, not wanting to take the knife out. “No. You’re going to be ok. It’s ok. I’ll fix you. I’ll always fix you,” I mumbled to myself, pawing at his wound like a cat would.

“Madison...” A hand came to my arm.

I reared back. “No. He’s not dead.”

Heavy combat boots came into view. “Baby...”

My eyes flew to Bishop. “No! He’s not dead!”

Bishop watched me carefully. “I’m going to tell you about a demon called Trickery, one of his six...”

I shook my head, wiping the tears off my cheek with my blood-soaked hand. “No. I don’t want to hear any more. I don’t” —my eyes cut straight to Katsia— “You...” then I slowly put Daemon’s head back to the ground. When he was safe on the pavement, I gripped the knife that was in his neck and pulled it out. Flicking it around in my fingers, I flew toward her. “Bitch!” I pounced on her like a tiger would on a gazelle, wrapping my legs around her waist.

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Her eyes popped open in shock. “Mad—” I reared my hand back that held the knife and stabbed it deep into her jugular.

Her guards knew they were outnumbered, and they knew she had done wrong. There was no way they could have fought us and lived, and they knew that. It was then that I realized they were mere peacekeepers—as such.

Blood sprayed over my face and retribution sunk into my pores as the sweet taste of revenge slid down my throat. Thick choking sounds vibrated from her throat, her hand coming up to the wound. Arms wrapped around my torso from behind, pulling me off her.

“Shhh, baby, it’s going to be ok.”

I hiccupped and pushed away from Bishop.

Spinning back around as Hector started chatting with Katsia’s men, I ran back to Daemon and cradled his head again, swatting away the flies that started buzzing around.

“It’s okay. I got her. She’s gone, you can wake up now. I took care of her, I—I—” I wheezed through my breaths, my chest tightening again. When my throat dried from my rushed breathing and adrenaline shot through me, a guttural scream erupted from my chest. I dropped my head into Daemon, weeping the loss of my brother. My other half, my constant. “I love you. I love you, I love you, I love you, goddamnit, Daemon! Why!” I continued to sob into his chest. “I just got you back,” I whispered. “Te amo, frater.” My swollen eyes scrubbed against his shirt.

“Baby?” Bishop sat beside me and I could hear Tate sobbing somewhere. She loved Daemon, too, even though she didn’t display it that much.

I didn’t answer Bishop. I couldn’t form words. I didn’t want to move, I didn’t want my mouth to move, I didn’t want to talk. I wanted to stay here forever and rewind what had happened. I wouldn’t let go of him. Ever. Te amo, frater

“I’m going to tell you about Trickery and circa 2014. Daemon’s biggest slaughter,” Bishop’s voice beamed with something. If you mixed fear and pride into a bowl, your finished product would be his tone. “Trickery was one of Daemon’s demons that he lived with. In April 2014, he was sent to one of the biggest jobs for The Circle. He was told to do one task, bring in the men, and leave. Shake them up a bit, but not to harm anyone. There were twelve grown men, and none of them lived. Up until he came back into your life, we all believed that he had snapped and just gone full schizo, but he hadn’t. That night when he and I had that talk, he told me the truth on what happened the night he brutally dismembered twelve men three times his size, sending the pieces back to The Circle in circular shaped suitcases...” He took a breath, and even though I knew there was no way he was about to get a response out of me, I wanted to hear his story. “Poetic, got to give him that. So we had the talk, because I wasn’t completely comfortable with him being around you, like you could probably remember. He told me about his demons. Trickery, Deceit, War, Evil, Rage, and Death. They were numbered, and Deceit was the strongest voice of all, he had said. It was probably the one that took over him the day he shot you...”

I didn’t wince. I didn’t move. I’d trade places with Daemon in a heartbeat, and a part of me wished I did die that day, then maybe he wouldn’t have been here today. It was my fault.

“Trickery took over him in 2014. Daemon saw the man who raped him as a small boy when he looked at all their faces and annihilated each and every one of them. It wasn’t until they were dead that Trickery finally released him, but by then, it was too

late.”

I didn’t answer.

“That’s what happened today. His greatest war was within himself, baby. He will be at peace now.”

His words were like rubbing salt into a wound. The tears started pouring out again.

“Mads?” Tate came closer to me. My eyes went to hers. She was rubbing the tears off her cheeks, but I noticed a guy with a big spider-shaped scar on his neck standing closely behind her. It was so big that it was one of the first things I noticed. Then it was all the tattoos. Then it was his blatant resemblance to Bishop, only with dark hair and bright blue eyes. “Please stand up. We need to take him home.”

I shook my head, my fingers gripping around him. Her attention went to someone beside her, who I was guessing was Bishop. She nodded, and then someone was pulling me off Daemon. Inhumane screams exploded out of me as tears soaked through my shirt. “Come here.” Bishop’s arms wrapped around me tightly.

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“Bishop, take her to Miller. The jet is ready. All of you, go with her.” I stopped fighting when I realized it was no use. My muscles throbbed and every inch of myself ached. My arms swung around the back of Bishop’s neck where I clung on tightly. Silent sobs broke through again, and unable to contain them anymore, I let them flow. Te amo, frater.

“I don’t think she’s going to be ok,” Nate said, just as the seatbelt light turned off. She had fallen asleep long before take-off. We had waited for Spyder and Ollie to board the plane, both of them fucking around.

“What the fuck took you so long?” I asked Spyder, my eyes drifting to both him and a guilty looking Ollie. “If you tell me you were hitting on a chick, I swear to God, I will punch you.”

“Aw,” Spyder grinned, winking at me. “You and I both know I hit harder, little cos.”

“Our last fight was when I was five...”

He nodded. “Exactly.”

“You make no sense.”

He pretended to think over what I had just said, then slowly smirked. “Exactly.”

I hated him.

I looked back to a nervous Nate. “She’ll be fine. It will take her a while, but she’ll

pull through. If anyone can, it's her."

Nate squeezed his eyes closed. "I can't ever see her in that kind of pain ever again, so you're not allowed to die."

"Ditto," I muttered before Spyder's voice stole my attention.

"We were helping your old man." He tilted his head up to the ceiling, his eyes looking at me. "He has a lot to clean up after your girl there went firecracker and killed the only Steprum walking this earth."

"She's not the only one." Nate shook his head, his finger running across his upper lip. "Scarlet was right, Katsia was lying. Tillie is her daughter, who is a Steprum, which means my kid is half Steprum." His eyes closed again, I could see he was battling within himself to come to terms with everything he had just learned over the past few days.

"Well, shit," Spyder grunted, closing his eyes. "I should have stayed around here, seems like more drama happens."

"You can stay in New Orleans," I corrected. My cousin and I were actually close, the banter was just what we always did since we were kids.

"I don't know." A slow smirk crept onto his mouth but his eyes stayed closed. "I might have just met a reason to stick around." Ollie's attention flew to where Tate was sitting, a smug, knowing look passing over his features.

"Of fucking course," I snorted.

Brantley sat on the seat in front of us. "She'll be ok, man. No one is as strong as that girl there."

“That’s what I’m worried about, though,” Nate said, gesturing to where she was curled up under a blanket toward the back of the plane. “She shouldn’t have to deal with this bullshit. She fucking loved Daemon, man. Like full on fucking loved him. They shared a sibling bond that I had never seen before, and now he’s dead? I don’t know.” Nate shook his head. “I don’t know if she’ll come back from this. She barely came back from her little trip around the world stunt. She’s about to feel real loss, fucking crippling loss. Not the superficial kind, the fucking life shattering, earth moving kind. Not many people can survive it.”

Brantley looked at me. “She survived the shit that went on with my dad. She survived being fucking raped as a young girl, Nate. You’re wrong. That girl wasn’t born capable of dealing with that kind of loss, because she built the wall around herself to handle it, and do you know how she did that?” he asked, his eyes finally settling on Nate, who was watching him back eagerly. “By collecting every fucking brick that was thrown at her from this shitty life.”

Nate gulped. I swallowed, and Spyder’s eyes cracked open. “That’s some rough shit.”

Brantley’s eyes glassed over. “You have no idea.”

We all watched him, and it was like watching someone relive their most horrifying memories in full HD. Brantley was haunted every day by what his dad put them both through, and none of us truly knew the extent of it, but I did know that it was worse than what we knew. He refused to tell us anything else and lived with the shadows of it all every single day.

Ollie cleared his throat. “It was good to be back, I gotta admit, even though the circumstances were fucking shitty.”

“Ollie?” Nate muttered under his breath. “Stop fucking talking.” Those two cousins, on the other hand, flat out hated each other. Wasn’t sure why, Ollie seemed like a

down to earth guy. As down to earth as you can get within us all. He lived to surf and had the jaw length blonde locks to go with it. He had the blue eyes and tattoos all over his skin to go with that, too. He looked like he had just fallen out of the set of The OC.

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I pushed off the seat and made my way back to Madison, pulling up her blanket and resting her head on my lap. I moved hair off her face, my thumb circling her hard cheekbone. I wanted to know what was happening with my dad and mom, and why they both stayed behind. Actually, all of the elders stayed behind. My thumb halted its movements as I looked around the plane. All of our generation and Spyder's generation were here, while the rest were back at Perdita. Odd. But whatever their reasoning, I'd hear about it when they came home.

"B? Can we talk?"

My jaw clenched.

"Please?"

I looked down to Madison before slowly getting back to my feet and placing her head on the seat. I led Khales toward the back of the plane, away from any ears just in case no one knew about her and my dad. "What?" I snapped, unable to stop my jaw from clenching.

"I'm sorry about what happened back there. I misjudged Madison, and you, and I guess—" She stopped, her eyes falling to her fingers. "I'm sorry, Bishop. When I first came back, I was so angry and enraged by how you had moved on. I hated her so much." She took in a deep breath, and I took this time to study her face. I knew Khales inside and out. I knew when she was lying, when she was happy, sad, or both. I knew if she was hiding any emotion from me. She was transparent to me, unlike Madison who was like a closed fucking book.

“I lost my shit for a bit, B, but you know me, you know I’m not vindictive, and I see it now.”

“See—what?” I tilted my head at her.

“I see how you are with her.”

I leaned on the wall. “She doesn’t like you.”

“I know.”

“Which means our friendship will never go back to how it was.”

Her face fell. “I know.”

“Then I wish you and my dad well.” I pushed off the wall and headed back to Madison. Just as I slipped back into my seat, I chuckled. “Oh, and good luck with Mom.”

Khales flinched but slowly went back into her seat. I did care about her once upon a time...

I liked riding my bike. I liked riding it even more when it was heading in the opposite direction of my house. I couldn’t stand it. So there I was, on my silk black BMX, equipped with handlebars that had been dipped in chrome, riding toward the other side of town. With my hoodie thrown up over my head, and my jeans hanging off of my hips and my skater chain dangling off my belt loop, I was riding to where I always went when it became too much at home. When the air became tight and the tension would be close to snapping. Most parents loved each other, whereas mine barely tolerated each other. A car honked from the other side of the road and I kicked my feet back to hit the brakes, skidding to a halt. Turning toward the car, my eyes

narrowed. I knew that I shouldn't have stopped. I was young—pretty much still a child. Eight, to be exact. I'm not exactly legally allowed to be riding across town on my own, so without a second glance, I peddled forward and made my way to Newtown Beach. It always took around twenty minutes to get there, and today was no exception. I came to a halt, kicking my bike stand out and looking out to the trailer park.

In a clean layout, there were roughly around twenty metal moveable homes all parked. All with different designs, and obviously, you could see who had the most pride. It ranged from old OCD grandma with florals and cats, to old bins strewn over front yards and rusted swing sets that had seen one too many days in the sun and rain, and not enough being ridden on. My attention went straight to the metal grey trailer I was familiar with. The dents and scratches were clearly visible, even with a brief glance. This trailer was a neglected as the child who resided in it. Not to stereotype trailer parks, because some of them here had blossoming flowers lining their walls and gardens, along with a couple of lazy chairs and tables set up nicely, this one didn't. There wasn't a spec of pride that whistled off of this trailer, and like always, I headed straight for it. I was just about to tread across the fake grass that had long faded from its unnatural plastic of green to a dingy shade of yellow, when the metal door swung open, smashing against the side of the beat-up oversized shit-hole as Khales stormed out, her long brown hair sticking to her heart-shaped face.

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Her eyes connected with mine. Her frown turned soft. “Bishop?” She scrubbed the tears off of her cheek, sniffed, and then put her nose up. That pride was going to kill her one day. “You shouldn’t have come, Bishop. He’s angry today. Like, extra angry.”

My heart pinched a little for her. I hated my parents, but they’d never do the things Kholes’ dad did to her, and I despised the expensive architecture I called home, but it wasn’t a run down, beat up, dingy metal on wheels shit-box that on a good day, stinks like beer, sweat, and stale cigarette smoke. Where on a bad day, it smelled of whiskey, sweat, stale cigarette, and Kholes’ tears mixed with her dried blood. I felt my anger drop to its knees inside of me and beg to travel through my veins and rest on the slight tingle at my fingertips.

“What’d he do?” I asked her, pushing my hands into my hoodie pocket to hide the way my nails sunk into the palm of my hands. I wanted to protect her. She was the first friend I had outside of the Kings, and I’d known her since pre-school. I’d had a front row ticket to this same shit-show since we were kids, and I was about ready to punch our ticket and end it once and for all.

“He’s just drunk, Bishop.” A smile, so weak, so placid, came onto her face. “Can we go to your place? Or have you taken the pegs off your bike?”

My anger simmered out a little, and my shoulders slightly rested. “I haven’t. I won’t, not until you don’t need them anymore.” She pulled her hair into a high ponytail and then snapped a fluorescent pink band around it before she gestured to the bike. “Let’s go then.”

“And your dad?” I questioned, watching as she bounced over to my bike and turned to wait for me.

“Screw him.”

“He will hurt you, Lees, and you know it. I don’t want him to hurt you ever again.” I headed toward her, taking the handle bars into the palm of my hands and sitting on the chair. She stood on the pegs, her hands coming to my shoulders. “I can’t stop him, B.”

Maybe she couldn’t stop him, but I could.

And I did a couple years later. He was my first kill. I remember calling my dad, panicking with the gun hanging on the tips of my fingers. Dad, my uncle, and Johan came. I thought I would have been in trouble. I just committed murder at age thirteen, you would think that was a big deal. It wasn’t. It was a part of my initiation process, and I was the only one to ever begin at that age. My dad was proud. The Kings were proud.

I pulled my phone out when Madison’s head was rested back on my lap, and pulled out my ear pods. I pushed play on “Whoring Streets” by Scars on Broadway, and slipped it into our playlist, closing my eyes and reliving, soaking every inch of what I remember of her.

“What are you doing here?” Madison asked, stepping outside cautiously and shutting the door. She was somewhat smart to be cautious around me, that was for sure. I took a seat on one of the marble steps, and looked directly at her, only hers were on my car.

“I told you,” I answered matter-of-factly. “We need to talk.” I didn’t even hide the fact that my eyes were undressing her. She wore cute little shorts and a tight tank that

rose up to display her belly. When my eyes fell to her socks, my eyebrow rose in shock. “Is that Banksy’s work?”

“I’m shocked,” she snorted sarcastically, and I had to fight the urge to rip her fucking clothes off and eat her on her parents’ doorstep. My fingers twitched, and just when I was about to throw my ‘talk’ out the fucking window, she fucking insulted me. “You know Banksy?”

“I know his artwork,” I retorted.

I could see her trying her hardest to not meet my gaze, so she flipped the box of chocolates open and gestured them to me. “I can share.”

Her eyes finally came to mine, and I leaned into my shoulder, using it to shield my mouth. My attention stayed on her, studying, trying to crack open every single cage she kept hidden. What the fuck was it with her. I fucking wanted her. “What?”

I shook my head, breaking our eye contact and looking straight ahead. “You’re different.”

“I’ve been told that all my life.” My jaw tensed. I knew that she meant that as an insult, but I didn’t say it as an insult, it was a good thing. A fucking dangerous thing, but a good thing nonetheless.

“Is that what you wanted to talk about?”

“You and Carter?” I threw her off track.

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“Are none of your business.”

“Really?” My lip curled. “Pretty sure you made it my business the second you were screaming my name and clawing up my back.”

I fought the smirk that was possessing my mouth and leaned back farther into my chair. Just thinking about that night was making my dick hard all over again.

My karma may be a bitch, but damn the bitch is beautiful.

“I’ve felt loss. I’ve suffered and lived through what felt like my heart being ripped from my chest. Death was a brutal thing. Its behavior could be unrestrainedly ferocious, and at times, radiated toward the people who didn’t deserve to be at the receiving end of its wrath. It tore your heart into two by taking your loved one and replacing them with nothing but the sweet whispers of their memories. Those memories will become the shoulders you cry on.”

– Amo Jones

(on losing the most important father in her life)

The trip back to my house felt long, and the hours felt as though they stretched into days. By the time we reached my driveway, I was tired again, my eyes struggling to stay awake through all the trauma. Bishop’s arm never left me, and I snuggled into him deeper, burying my face into his chest. He leaned down and kissed me as the car came to a stop.

“Come on.”

Finally, my mouth opened and words left me. “I love you.”

“I love you too.” He searched my eyes. “You’re going to get through this.”

I nodded, even though I didn’t believe a damn thing he said.

“Oh, um.” My eyes flew to Nate, who was taking off his seatbelt. “We’re having a meeting today, with Tillie.”

Nate softened, his hard features instantly changing. “Why?” he whispered.

“She wants to leave.”

“Like fuck!” he roared. I winced from the sudden lash out.

“Nate!” Bishop scolded him.

“Sorry, sis, but she can’t leave. I’ll k—” He paused, his eyes going to Bishop and then changed his tactic. “Too soon. She just can’t leave with my kid.”

“She won’t, but that’s what we need this meeting for.” I waited for Bishop to get out of the car then slipped out behind him. “And then, I’m going to plan my brother’s funeral.”

A second car pulled up behind us with Jase, Hunter, Eli, Chase, and Brantley inside, and then another behind theirs with Spyder, Ollie, Tate, and someone else I didn’t care to recognize. Tate tried to come with us, but Nate kicked her out.

I left everyone behind and went to the front door, pushing it open. “Tillie?” I called

out, but my voice was weak. It physically hurt to speak, and the sooner this day was over, the better. Bishop, Nate, and Jase walked in behind with the rest of the gang. I headed to the sitting room.

I looked at Elena. “Where’s Tillie?”

I didn’t want a shower. I wanted to stay as I was, with the last bit of Daemon left on my skin, so when Elena’s eyes went to my hands, she flinched.

“Daemon,” I whispered, my throat swollen.

“And Katsia,” Nate added, climbing onto the couch with his mom.

That’s when I heard Nate ask, “What’s wrong?”

My eyes swung back to Elena, who met mine. “I’m sorry about your loss, sweetheart. I know how much Daemon meant to you,” she paused. I winced, tears pooling again. She stood, wiped her pants and squared her shoulders, putting on a fake smile, even though tears were threatening the corner of her eyes.

Her eyes went to Nate. “She’s gone.”

“What!” Nate flew off his chair. My throat swelled, my eyes closing. “When?”

I shook my head. “She wouldn’t leave, Elena. She was happy that Micaela had her dad.”

“Stop defending her, sis, not everyone has the same thought process as you.”

Elena’s eyes came to mine. “No, she’s right. Something doesn’t feel right, Nate. I took her and the baby to register Micaela. I dropped them at the front and told them

I'd be right back after finding a parking spot. Tillie wasn't erratic. She left the diaper bag in the car and asked me to bring it in with me because her hands were full with the papers and documents she needed." She paused. "I just got home. I spent hours there trying to find them. I demanded to look at CCTV footage but without a warrant, they can't show me anything." Her eyes came to me. "Something is not right, Madison."

"And if she has run?" Hunter asked, coming closer to me. Jase followed him when suddenly, I had my two brothers behind me, Bishop beside me, Tate coming up closely, and Nate sitting directly in front of me. I exhaled a shaky breath. "First, I want to bury my brother" —I paused, my head tilting over my shoulder to Jase and Hunter— "our brother." Then I looked at Nate. "Then we can get her back."

His knee jiggled. "We better bury him tomorrow, then, sis, because if she's missing, that means my kid could be in danger."

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He was right.

I pulled my phone out of my pocket and dialed my dad, who was still on Perdita.

He answered. “Madison? Are you ok?”

I cleared my throat. “Yes. How long until Daemon can be here? I’d like to bury him tomorrow, and we have a situation here where Tillie may be missing with the baby.”

Dad paused. “Jesus. Ok. Yes, I’ll have everything sorted for a burial tomorrow. Do you have any requests on caskets?”

“Black, and Dad?”

“Yeah, baby?”

“I love you.”

There was a long pause. “I love you too.”

Hanging up, I sighed, massaging my temples. “Dad will have everything sorted for a burial tomorrow. I assume he will be buried in our family plot here.” Bishop pulled me under his arm.

“We will find her, Nate, I promise.”

Later that night, I’m climbing the stairs after a long hot bath when I hit the top of the

stairs and head into my bedroom. Bishop and I wanted alone time but didn't get it, because now my bedroom was filled with not just the ten Kings I was familiar with, but the other three who were from the previous generation, too.

And Tate, of course.

They all paused watching their tv show and their attention came to me as I opened my door. "Thanks for all being here, but honestly, it's not necessary."

Tate perched up on her elbow. "It's okay, Mads. Let us."

I internally battled with myself, but when my eyes went to Bishop, who was freshly showered with grey sweatpants on and no shirt, my brain seized. His gaze assaulted my body, and I flushed before going to the bed. It felt empty not having Daemon here with us. I slid under the cover and Bishop pulled me under his arm. Kissing my head.

The next morning, my muscles felt tight, unmovable. My eyes slowly cracked open, and I sat up slowly, looking down at the mass of bodies that were still snoring on the floor. The patio door was open all night, allowing a soft breeze to maintain its calmness through my bedroom.

"You ok?" Bishop asked, leaning up on his elbows. I turned to face him over my shoulder, my eyes falling on his soft lips.

"I will be. I think." I got up from bed and strategically made my way to the door that led into my bathroom. I slowly teased at sliding my shorts down and nudged my head toward the tub. "I could do with a bath though?"

He bit his lip to try to hide his grin and then followed behind me, shutting the door behind us. His hand sprawled out over my tummy, his arousal pressing into my back. "Stay there."

I closed my eyes, and soaked up every touch, every whispering movement that he cascaded over my flesh. Tilting my head, his lips came to where my neck met my shoulders. He sucked on it softly, his hand slowly moving under my panties. His thumb pressed against my clit in slow circles. My mouth opened as a gasp left me. My chest rose and fell as his kisses on my neck became more desperate and his index finger slid inside of me as his thumb continued to rub my clit. His other hand came to the bottom of my tank and dipped underneath, his thumb and finger finding my nipple. He twisted it—hard, the pain and the pleasure both intertwining together in an intimate embrace. My orgasm ripped through me and stars exploded inside my head as my breathing came down slowly. He pulled out from inside of me, dipping his finger into my mouth. The sweetness coating the tip of my tongue. Turning around, I wrapped my arms around his neck, and his hands came to the backs of my thighs, lifting me off the ground. He stepped farther into the bathroom, my legs still wrapped around him like a vise. He leaned over, flicking the tap of the bath on. Our silence was broken by the loud splashing of water as it filled the tub.

“Am I going to be ok?” I asked him, searching his eyes as he busied himself pouring all sorts of oils and bath salts into the bath.

He didn’t answer, he put me on my feet and continued to undress me. I stepped into the hot scolding water, wincing from the temperature before slowly dipping myself into it. The pinching slowly started to dissipate and the steam rose, swimming around my face in a mix of sweet lavenders and fresh cut green grass. Bishop slid in behind me, opening his legs and pulling me against his bare chest.

“I don’t know, baby, no one knows.” He cleared his throat, kissing my head. “If you are, then I’ll be here, and if you’re not, then I’ll be here. I’ll always be here, Madison. Through the good times, but most importantly through the ugly times. I’m not going anywhere, and I can’t promise you that I’m not going to fuck this up somewhere along the way and piss you off epically, but I’ll always be loyal to you. There was no one before you and there sure as fuck won’t be anyone after you. I begin and end with

you, baby.” He kissed my temple. “So I don’t know if you’re going to be ok, but I do know that I’ll be here regardless.”

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Tears fell down my cheeks. I sniffed, clearing my throat. “That’s all I need.” Then I turned to face him, and his arms fell to the side. I climbed on top of him and watched his features soften as I lowered myself onto his cock. His eyes rolled to the back of his head, his bottom lip pulling into his mouth and a soft groan vibrated from him. I slowly lifted, and then circled my hips, my walls clenching around his thick length. It felt natural, like a piece of my puzzle was now in place every time he was inside of me. I was addicted to the feeling of him being inside, filling me. His hands came to my hips, his fingertips gripping my hip bones, then he tapped my thigh. “Get up.” I stood, following his orders, and he leaned my body in half, propping one leg on the edge of the bath. I hung onto the bathroom sink for support and he gripped onto my hips again, pulling me into his cock. He pulled out and sunk back in, then one of his hands came to my hair, wrapping it around his fist as he pounded into me. Water splashed around our ankles and sprayed all over the floor. Moans were leaving my mouth, and his hand flew to my throat, where he clenched down roughly, using it as a handle. He continued to lay into me relentlessly.

He pulled out, and I stood to my height when he sunk back into the bath and I sat down on top of him again, reverse cowgirl. Using his legs to lift myself up, I slowly rode his cock until sweat beaded off of my flesh and the water turned cold. His thighs clenched under my palms and my body vibrated from the lead up of my orgasm. When his cock stroked my pussy once again, I let go, my core exploding inside of me. His cock throbbed, emptying himself with every thud. I dropped into his chest and he pulled me into him, kissing my head.

“You’re going to be fine, baby.”

I remember the day I bought this dress. I saw it in a storefront window. The way the

black lace weaved over my chest and the tight material curved over every bone, and muscle on my body. It was held together by lace, with the middle strip missing, displaying the edge of your abs—if you had them, which I didn't. My lack of food intake was beginning to show, and it was the first time I realized my collarbone was sharp enough to cut through rock. I stared back at myself in the free-standing oval mirror, really looking deep into my own eyes.

“Te amo, frater.” Tears formed at the surface again, on the brink of spilling over, but there was a knock on the door and my head tilted towards the entryway.

“Hey, Mads, I have a couple people who want to meet you,” Jase said, hinting to who it could be. “Is that ok?”

I stomped down my feelings, cleared my throat, and then ran my hands down my dress. Black. The color was symbolic to death, which was why I chose to wear white. I refused to believe my brother was dead. He deserved more than what the color black could give.

I nodded, wiping my eyes. He opened the door wider, and a man and woman stood there. The woman was dressed in a black long dress and was holding a large hat that had lace hanging off the front. She was beautiful, had honey brown eyes, skin that held a tint that no amount of sun could give you which told me she had something else in her blood. Her eyes met mine and her eyebrows pulled together. My own went to the man standing next to her. He wore a dark suit and a dark tie. He was tall, towering over her small frame, had grey hair and aged skin. He had to be pushing his early fifties. He looked somber and held a different softness on his shoulders than most of the other Kings.

“Madison,” she started. “I’m Jamima, your—” she paused, her fingers twisting around her hat. “Birth mom.” She stepped forward, and that’s when I caught Scarlet leaning against the wall behind them. She sent me a sneaky wink, and I knew what it

meant. She had my back if I needed. Jase stayed, opening the door wider. I appreciated it because it didn't feel like I was closed off in this room with nothing but the parents I didn't know who, essentially, gave me and Daemon away.

"Why?" I asked quickly.

The man cleared his throat. "I'm Johan, Madison, I'm sorry we had to meet like this. Jamima and I understand that you will have questions, and we don't want to hold back on answering those for you. You deserve honesty," he paused, and his eyes went over his shoulder, straight to Scarlet, who gave him a look I wasn't sure how to decipher. It was like a mother bear protecting her cubs. My heart warmed instantly, and with that small notion, I knew I could handle whatever they dished me, because they didn't matter to me right now. What mattered was the strength I felt radiating off of Scarlet. She was the only mother I needed, anyone else didn't matter. I nodded. "Thank you. I'd appreciate that."

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He looked back at me. “I’m sure you’re familiar with how our world spins by now. When your m—Jamima found out she was pregnant, she was ecstatic, when we found out that we were having twins, we were even more pleased. Twins were rare in any case, but there had never been twins born into our world. When we found out that one of you was a girl, we kept it quiet, though we were shattered. We knew we couldn’t share it with anyone because the risk was too high. You were a Silver Swan; you were sure to die.” His hands dove into his pockets, and Jamima finished it off.

“We were close to Elizabeth and Joseph. They were cousins, so they agreed to take you and run. Run for the rest of your lives. But when your brother was born, Elizabeth didn’t bond with him, so she sent him to Katsia’s mother where he was raised on Perdita, speaking only Latin. They tried to teach him English as well, like they did with Katsia, but he refused.” She cleared her throat. “I understand that you have a lot of love around you, and we don’t deserve a nick of your time, but we wanted you to know.”

My eyes went to Scarlet. “What will happen now? Now that Katsia is dead? What happens to little girls now?”

Scarlet smiled at me. “Now they will be welcomed.” She pushed off the wall and came to me. “That’s why we stayed behind, to have a conference with The Circle. Your father pushed for it, as did I. Hector on the other hand.” She rolled her eyes, but her hand found mine. “He came around, though, and now? Because of you, sweet girl.” Scarlet’s hand came to my face. “No King needs to worry about having a little girl. Nothing else would change, only that the girls would be accepted into the family alliances now.”

“Jesus take the wheel,” Nate muttered from somewhere in the background.

I snorted, my hand coming up to cover my mouth. “Thank you, Scarlet. For being everything I ever wanted in a mom.”

She wrapped her arm around mine. “You can call me Mom.”

Scarlet’s eyes went to Jamima and Johan. “Are you done? We have a funeral to attend.”

They both nodded and exited the room.

“You don’t like them?” I asked, not looking at her.

“No. I never have. I don’t agree with what they did and how they went about it. You suffered greatly as a child and even as a young adult. They failed you as a daughter, and failed as humans.”

I swallowed. “I don’t care now. I can’t or it will consume me.”

She patted my hand just as Bishop entered my room. My mouth watered and my jaw almost hit the floor. He wore black slacks and a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up, displaying his tattoos. His hair was styled perfectly on the top of his head, and his skin had a light sheen over it, glistening against the light.

“Are you ok?” he asked, tilting his head. His eyes flew between his mom and I. “Do I need to be worried about this little bond you two have together? Like are you going to team up on me a lot?”

Scarlet and I both looked at each other, then back at him. “Every chance we get,” we both answered in unison, then laughed.

Once everyone left my room, and only Bishop and I remained, he leaned into me. “I know you don’t want to talk about this right now, but it’s your birthday next weekend.”

I shook my head. “I don’t want to celebrate anything this year. Please. I really don’t. Maybe next year.”

He nodded. “Okay, baby. I respect that.” Then he leaned forward, his hand going under my bed and pulled out the book. “You need to finish this.”

I took it from him.

His eyes searched mine. “You’ve made history, baby. You’re a damn hero. Now because of you? This Katsia gets her final wish.”

I opened up to the final chapter.

16.

Legacy

Today is the final time I write in this diary. I can no longer live through this crippling pain Humphrey inflicted on me and my family on a daily basis. My thoughts had turned dark, like an infectious disease he implanted into my cranium, it slowly spread like cancer, consuming my thoughts with dark depression. Days were harder to come by, I could no longer live with the guilt of knowing what was happening amongst our world. I could no longer live with what my husband was doing to baby girls or their families. No one would ever confront him, this would continue for years to come and I could no longer live a second more in this hideous place we call life. The Lost Boys have turned evil.

No one stands with me.

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To Maree, my maid, my friend, my confidante, I plead you live a life full of happiness and freedom. Please leave Phillip, becoming a Venari would seal your fate of living behind an aging cage. You will never grasp true happiness by being confined to the palms of his hands.

My son's:

I wish that you both always rule with more love than power. Use the light to see you through, as darkness could never lead you through darkness, only light could do that.

I wished for a better world. Where the Silver Swans could be unleashed to bathe in the crystal water of purity and not be crucified.

Signed, Katsia Hayes

Katsia put her pen down on top of her desk for the final time, stood on the chair she had sat at numerous throughout the years, wrapped the noose around her neck, and took her final leap.

I sucked in a breath, my hand coming to the front of my throat.

Bishop came to me, pulling me into his arms. "You gave Katsia her final wish, baby."

I wiped the tears from my cheeks and sunk into him as he slowly rocked me. "You're my little hero."

We made our way downstairs, and then outside. Bishop beeped his Maserati, but I

froze. “Wait!” My hand dug into my handbag and gripped around a set of keys. I dangled them in front of my face.

Bishop grinned.

“I think Daemon would have loved to see this.”

We both slipped into my Lamborghini, and Bishop gestured to the pedals. “I trust your driving, but just saying, you need to go easy—” I floored it forward and flew out of the driveway, passing everyone who were on their way to Daemon’s funeral. “Or not.”

Adrenaline spiked through my veins as my fingers clenched around the leather steering wheel. I turned to face Bishop. “We’re going to be ok.”

He grinned back at me. “Always, Kitty.”

My phone vibrated, and I opened it, slowing to a safer speed.

Bishop: Riddle me this, Kitty, what’s round, smooth, and is home for a sparkling stone?

My eyebrows pinched together.

I looked at him. “What?”

His lip kicked up in a grin. “Don’t worry about it, baby. Don’t worry your pretty little head about it, I’m sure you’ll figure it out someday....”

I put my phone back down and floored it to the funeral.

If you had told me that I'd be where I was when I first started Riverside Prep, I would have laughed at you. I struggled to make friends, let alone turning a whole bunch of friends into family. I smiled, even though today was one of the saddest and hardest days I would have to face, I recognized the amount of support I had around me. If it weren't for these people, I may not have survived losing Daemon. I now understood the name "Silver Swan." I was built to handle any and everything life threw at me.

As graceful as a floating swan, but as deadly as a silver bullet.

People gathered around the burial ground like I'd seen in so many movies before. The parts that they don't show in the movie though, is the feeling of your world stopping as it's happening. Micaela twisted in my arms and tears streamed down my face. My heart snapped in my chest. I struggled to keep my emotions at bay.

"You see, sister." Peyton leaned forward as we watched my friends and family mourn the loss of Daemon. "You don't belong with them. You belong with us."

She sat back in her seat. She was so wrong. I deserved to be there, with them. They were my family. Daemon was my family.

I glared at her from across the dark black limo.

"It's for the best, Tillie, those people aren't good people," Carter added, his eyes coming to mine.

"Why are you here, Carter? You were Madi's friend. How could you?"

His laughter was smug. Mocking. "I never was her friend. She killed Ally."

"You and Ally?" I asked, confused.

He leaned back in his chair. “That’s right. Ally didn’t send the video—I did.”

“Let me go,” I deadpanned.

Peyton shook her head and laughed. “Never. They will get what’s coming to them, and then some. You see” —she leaned forward again— “The Circle doesn’t even know that I’ve been working with Katsia all along, our mother. You need to learn your loyalties, sister.”

Carter’s eyes came to mine again. “They’ll get what’s coming to them.”

I wanted to scream, to demand they let me and my daughter leave, but then an excruciating pain thudded on the side of my head and everything went black.

“I think I love you, Daemon.”

His head tilted, but his eyes studied my lips. He always watched me with importance. He made me feel like I mattered. Cherished, loved.

“Te amo?” Then his eyes glassed over as he slowly rocked Micaela. “I—I’m not—not good.”

I shook my head, my hand falling to his thigh. “We can make this work. I know we can.”

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His eyes connected with mine, and I saw something flash over the surface. Since Daemon walked into the room the day I was in labor, he hadn't left my side. He refused to leave us here to go home, even for Madison. I could never tell her. I would never want to steal that away from her because I knew how overprotective she was of him. I had heard stories about their bond. But our bond was unique, too. It was instant, and easy. He moved, I moved. Even though we lacked communication for the most part with the language barrier, his eyes gave me what his words could not.

His touch.

He placed Micaela into the little crib Tinker stole for us, pulling her blanket up to her chin. I wrapped my arms around his stomach. His body, so still and stoic, relaxed in my embrace.

"I love you, Daemon." My heart beat for him. I knew his did for me too.

His hand came to mine and he turned in my embrace. His eyes searched mine, his finger coming to my lip. He slowly kissed me, his warm lips caressing mine so softly it stole my breath. "Te amo, amans."

The End

Continue reading for a deleted scene... READ AT OWN RISK.

DELETED SCENE

Do NOT read past this unless... you know... those dirty fantasies were on the

Reverse Harem side...

Two Feet “Go Fuck Yourself” was thumping through the boom speaker. The smell of charcoal BBQ drifted through the air and my sunglasses dropped, covering my eyes.

Nate staring up at me caught me off guard. He had his cap flipped on backward and wore shorts that cut off at the knee. Bishop, Cash, Brantley, Chase, and Nate were all here at our favorite waterhole. Eli decided to stay with my brothers.

“Why are you staring at me like that?” I asked.

“Like what?” Nate teased, his eyes going from my lips to my eyes.

“Like you want to eat me.”

His tongue caught his bottom lip and he grinned. “And if I do?” His hand slowly trailed up my inner thigh. I bit my lip, ignoring the tingle that followed his touch.

“I’d say how hungry are you?” I should stop teasing.

Bishop came over, dropping to his knees in front of me and shaking out the water in his hair until it was sticking up above his head. He pushed past Nate, resting in the middle of my thighs. I laid back, ripping my sunglasses off. “What are you doing?”

“Oh come on, Kitty. Don’t act like you haven’t played out this fantasy before...”

“This is my dream, isn’t it? I’m dreaming again...” My eyes narrowed.

Bishop smirked, tilting his head. I couldn’t read his expression because the sun beamed behind him, shading out his features. “Is it? Or isn’t it? Does it really matter?”

Cash sat down on my other side with Brantley. “Go with it, Kitty.”

I swallowed.

Bishop’s lips came to mine, the soft cushions opening my mouth. His tongue slipped inside. I moaned a little, and his teeth caught my tongue.

He stood, stepping backward and putting a smoke into his mouth. “Brantley, show me how you’ve always wanted to fuck her.”

“What!” I snapped, looking at Bishop.

Brantley came into my view just as Bishop blew out a cloud of smoke.

His hands came to my thighs, spreading them wide. His face dropped down to my middle and he inhaled roughly, the tip of his nose sliding up my slit. “You smell the same. Only dirtier.”

My cheeks flushed bright red. “Brantley...”

His finger hooked under my bikini bottoms, yanking them off. The warm summer day breezed over my swollen clit. Brantley’s face dove between my thighs, his tongue licking me, and then circling.

I moaned, lying back down, my back arching off the sand.

Nate’s hand came to my breast and he yanked my tit out of my bikini. The coolness of the air was soon replaced by his hot mouth. His tongue circled my nipple roughly as his hand came up to my other and twisted. His teeth scraped over my nipple as Brantley’s tongue assaulted my pussy.

Cash came into view, his blonde hair shimmering from the sun. He grinned his million-dollar smile, dropped beside me and took my mouth. A soft moan left me, my hand flying to the back of his neck, pulling him closer. My pussy throbbed as Brantley continued sucking and licking, and Nate's bites got more aggressive.

Cash let up just as Brantley stopped. I propped up on my elbows and saw Bishop standing near Brantley, watching me with his heavy cock in the palm of his hand, stroking himself. My mouth watered, and my hips circled the air.

"Easy, tiger," Brantley whispered, gripping my thighs roughly and yanking me down. He rubbed his cock from the outside of his shorts. "Want my dick, Madison?"

My eyes shot to his, my eyelashes fluttering. "Wha—what?" I looked at Bishop.

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“Don’t look at him. Right now, you belong to all of us. So I’ll ask you again...” he paused, his head tilting. He wore my arousal like lip balm, glistening in the sun. “Do you want my dick, Kitty?”

My hips circled the air again as my eyes dropped to his hand. He squeezed and rubbed the thick bulge from outside his shorts. Nate continued to suck on my nipple, and Cash’s hand came over my stomach, down to my pussy, rubbing my clit and then he slid a finger inside of me.

“Oh my God,” I moaned, tilting my head back.

“You do?” Brantley asked again. My eyes were closed and my hips were grating against Cash’s fingers. He pulled out and then raised his finger to my mouth.

“Suck if you want this, Madison,” Cash said, his lips coming to my ear. “I’ll pretend like you have a choice.”

“And if I don’t?” I quirked an eyebrow at Brantley, the sweet scent of my pussy on Nate’s finger.

“Then I’ll rape you,” Brantley said, his eyes coming to mine.

Fear slid into my bones, but all it did was feed my desire. I wanted them all, and the thought of them being rough with me only spiked my need.

I kept my eyes on Brantley, then slowly turned my head and sucked myself off Nate’s finger. I circled it with my tongue, my eyes still watching Brantley.

His eyes darkened, his hands falling. “Fuck.” He stopped his groping and crawled back over my body. “I’m going to break you, little girl.”

“Again?” I teased. “Break me, and then fuck me, and then break me, and then fuck me...”

His hands came to my thighs. He ripped me off the ground, turning me onto my stomach.

I arched my back, my hair falling over my shoulder and my eyes catching Nate’s. “Come here.”

He bit his bottom lip, pulling his shorts down until his cock sprung free. Thick, long and heavy, like him. A bead of cum surfaced at the end of his dick and my mouth watered. I turned my head, relishing in Brantley massaging my ass. He slapped it loudly and I screamed out from the impact. Nate came to the front of me, his eyes watching me. I bent down and took him in my mouth, salt and soap hitting the back of my throat.

His hand came to my hair and he tugged on it roughly, pinching my flesh. “Fuck.”

Brantley’s mouth fell to the back of my pussy, his tongue diving inside and circling. “I need to eat this forever.”

“You can’t. Just for today,” I heard from somewhere.

Brantley’s cock circled my entrance, just before he rammed himself into me.

“Oh my God!” I bellowed out in pleasure, veins ripping out of my neck and Nate’s cock resting on my lower lip. I spat on it, circling it with my hand. Dropping my lips to his balls, I sucked him into my mouth. Marilyn Manson’s “Sweet Dreams” started

playing from the speaker. I sunk him deeper into my mouth, as Brantley's cock continued to fuck my pussy. I throbbed, and pushed, and throbbed against him. His fingers gripped around my hip bones as he smashed me back and forth.

Brantley sat me up, hiking up my leg. Cash came closer, my eyes connecting with his. He slid under me, sucking my nipple into his mouth as Brantley continued to fuck me from behind. I sucked Nate deeper into my mouth, and then a hot mouth covered my clit.

"Shit, shit, shit, shit!" I screamed out in pleasure again, sweat dripping off of my flesh. Brantley pounded into me as Cash's tongue circled my clit again. Brantley's grip on my thigh tightened. I moaned again, my muscles clenching, tightening. I could feel myself get closer to my peak. Cash wrapped his lips around my clit and I lost it. My pussy throbbed and cum trickled down my thighs. I looked up just in time to see Bishop's hands wrap around my hair, yanking my head back. He stood to the side, just as Nate's cum shot on my face, soaking my lips. I licked him off.

"You like that, huh. Because you're my little slut," Bishop grunted, he replaced Nate's position. Now in front of me. He rubbed Nate's cum off my face with the tip of his cock and then shoved it into my mouth. "You like the taste of him, Madison? Hmm? You like being a little slut." His hand gripped around my hair roughly and he shoved his cock deeper into my mouth. I gagged on the intrusion, tears pouring down my face. Wrapping him in my hand, I sucked him roughly while trying to suck air in every few seconds.

Brantley's cock pulse inside of me on his release, and then he slapped my ass, pulling out, but he was only replaced with Cash.

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Cash's cock circled my entrance, wetting his tip. Then he slipped into the opening of my ass. "Open wide, princess. This might hurt a little."

My eyes flew to Bishop, who was grinning down at me. "Nah, I've been there, dawg." Cash pushed inside deeper.

"Ouch! Fuck! Fuck!" I screamed, my eyes slamming shut from the tightness and pain. It felt like knives skinning me from the inside.

"Suck my dick, Kitty." I sucked Bishop into my mouth, circling his delicious cock with my tongue, groaning against him. I was full from Cash, but it was delectable. My ass pulsed but my pussy wept from want. Cash pounded, shoving me into Bishop's cock so that with every movement, Bishop's dick was sinking deeper and deeper into my throat.

Cash slapped my ass so hard I yelped out. That was sure to bruise. Bishop's hand came to the back of my neck and he yanked harder. "Take it like a slut, Madison. This was what you wanted, now take it." Cash pulled out of my ass and shot cum all over my back. He swatted my ass again. "Good girl, Kitty."

Bishop yanked me to my feet and then gripped the backs of my thighs. I wrapped my legs around him and then felt Nate behind me. Nate's lips pressed against the small of my neck. "Ready to get fucked?"

I gulped.

Bishop lowered my body onto his cock, his mouth coming to my breast where he

sucked on my nipple. Then Nate's cock pressed against the entrance of my ass again, his arm snaking around my stomach. I could still feel Cash's cum sliding out and down my crack. I moaned, licking my lips.

Nate's dick filled my ass, with Bishop owning my pussy. Being loaded by both of them was a fulfillment like no other. "You're going to break me."

"Then you better fucking hold on," Bishop whispered in my ear. He thrust into me as Nate pounded from behind. We stayed like that for minutes. I moaned, and then bit down on Bishop's lip as another orgasm exploded inside of me. Bishop slowly began laying down, and Nate unlatched. They all hovered with perfect fluid-like movements, like they had done this before. I was straddling Bishop now, riding him. Nate came up from behind me again, bent me at my waist until my hands flew to Bishop's chest, keeping me upright. Nate's cock sunk into my ass again. His hand came to my hair where he tugged on it roughly. He continued to pound into me. Brantley smashed my pussy, his mouth sucking on my tit until it pinched with pain.

"I'm—I'm..." Another orgasm ruptured through me. My muscles were severed. My eyes were shutting. Bishop's hands came to my hips and Nate's gripped my ass. They both hammered into me like a ragdoll until I felt them both empty inside of me. Filling me to the brink. I dropped onto Bishop's chest, my breathing heavy. Nate withdrew from me, and I sucked in heavy breaths.

"Holy shit."