



# The Wraith & Her Killer

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**Category:** Erotic, Romance, Adult, Crime And Mafia, Dark

**Description:** Question: What do you get when your heart still beats, yet it feels as though you're no longer living?

A Wraith.

A living ghost among mortal men—or in her case— a certifiable psychopath serial killer-slash-hitman for hire. That's me, Adris—aka The Cupid Killer, just in case you were wondering. And the Wraith I mentioned? That's Odessa. My very own obsession. I'd even marked her as mine, but she ran from me like her life depended on it. For ten years she was gone.

But as the fates would have it, she emerges back into my life... at the wrong end of my arrow. The fury I feel for the woman who cost me my sanity has me ready to snuff out her light. The kicker? That's what she's after, too.

My little wraith is ready to meet her maker and suddenly the script is flipped and I'm determined to make her want to live.

We just have to take care of the pesky threat looming over our heads first.

Turns out, Odessa never ran.

She was stolen from me.

And it's like the saying goes,

"I marked her, so she's mine."...or something like that.

And I intend to collect.

\*The Wraith & Her Killer is a dark romance novella with graphic elements but an HEA. There are themes and content within these pages that can be triggering for some so please check the TW page before reading.

**Total Pages (Source):** 45

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

## Prologue

My entire life, I've been surrounded by monsters, but I was taught that the worst of them were always lurking just outside of my home. I was born the bastard child to the Pakhan of the Kuznetsov bratva in upstate Chicago. My mother was the help, and she died while trying to run away with me when I was thirteen years old.

It wasn't my father who pulled the trigger, though. Mikhail Kuznetsov was a brutal man, but I believe he loved his family fiercely. From what I observed, he loved me and worshipped my mother behind closed doors, but she didn't want to live a life of lies and secrecy. She would always have to hide me from danger or hide her love for my father, since he was in an arranged marriage with a Bratva princess—who happens to be a raging, spoiled cunt.

So Mama took me and ran. But leaving that life behind wasn't just leaving my father and the secret family we'd built.

I was also ripped away from him.

The boy who had claimed my heart.

Literally.

He was the son of the enforcer. I'd never learned his name, and he didn't speak much, but he was always there. For years, he was my constant, always hovering. There was a moment when I awoke from a nightmare to find him sitting cross-legged at the end of my bed, his head tilted to the side like my screams were the most interesting thing

in the world. He wasn't concerned with comforting me, but reveled in soaking up my terror.

As odd as he was, he swallowed my fear until I had none left inside of me. He consumed it all. Consumed me. Like a delicacy.

It's like he decided in that moment that I was his, because he crawled over to me and placed a careful hand on my chest, right over my heart. He dug his nails into my skin to the point of bleeding, like he wanted to reach into my chest to actually touch my heart as he whispered, "This is mine," before moving his grip to my throat and squeezing hard enough to feel my pulse stutter. "Every beat of it, mine."

Everything about him electrified me as much as he terrified me. Night after night, he watched over me, but that last night before my mother took me and ran, his voice ingrained itself into my memory for life.

"Ty moy, malen'koye privedeniye." You're mine, little ghost.

I didn't know how to process his words or the fact that they made me feel more at peace in my whole life than I'd ever felt before. He up and left my room without so much as a backward glance. Little did I know, that was the last time I would ever see him.

Unfortunately, Mama and I didn't make it far before her life was taken by one of father's many enemies. I didn't even get to properly grieve her when I was stolen from the wreckage and sold as a housemaid to a man who was as cruel as he was devilishly and deceptively handsome. Santino Ferrero. A true wolf in sheep's clothing. At twenty-four, he was one of the youngest men to head the Italian mafia chapter, located somewhere on the west coast. I've never been able to figure out where I've been taken and held captive with the language barrier of everyone speaking Italian around me and having never been allowed to step foot outside the

house.

The housemaid position lasted until I turned eighteen, then Santino had other plans for me. I'd finally grown a decent set of breasts, my waist slimmed, and my hips rounded out. Santino definitely noticed. It was then that I became his subservient rag doll. A sex toy. A punching bag. I had to become whatever he needed for his beast to be satiated.

I'd heard him use the wordsadismoaround me, which wasn't hard to translate, but what he was doing didn't feel like sadism at all. Most times his touch was only intended for pain. An outlet for Santino to unleash a day's worth of pent up frustration and anger. Eventually, I hated myself because he trained my body to crave the pleasure hidden within his pain.

He wasn't a good man, and he was an even worse leader from what I've gathered. The few moments he spoke English and I was forced to kneel naked at his feet during meetings, it sounded like he was a backstabber; a traitor and tyrant. A man who never followed through on his side of his business dealings. He knew what he was, and yet he didn't like being called out by the other leaders.

I tried my best to make myself small, sweet, and submissive. If I withstood his brutality, I was occasionally rewarded with a gift of some sort for being hisbrava ragazza. His way of keeping me from fighting back. That's how I earned my floral tattoo and my bright, pastel hair. The small acts of rebellion were nice, but really it was my silentfuck you to Santino. He hated them.

Lately though, he's been more violent than before. He's twitchy and is constantly looking over his shoulder, like he's waiting for someone to strike. It's not abnormal for mafia and bratva men to have enemies, but this was true fear. That fear results in him hurting me beyond what I've trained myself to handle.

I swear I've heard my father's name amidst his Italian rumblings, but I can't be sure. A small part of me had hoped he would come for me, but after ten years, that hope has fizzled out.

The truth is, I'm tired. I'm so tired. No person should have to endure what I have in my life, and today broke me. He broke me. I can't remember much of what happened after he nearly broke my nose with his flying fists, but every part of me hurts. Every part of me wants to end it all.

There's nothing left of the heart that's supposed to beat within my chest and my will to live, to escape to another life, disappeared years ago. Tonight was the first night that I let the tears fall freely. I wept for the life that was stolen from me. From the family that I was taken from. I cried for just how alone I am because in all these years, my father never came for me, never tried to rescue me.

A minuscule part of me even hoped that he would come for me—the boy who claimed my heart for his own— but we were barely teenagers when my mother took me and ran. Why would he come for me?

Now, at twenty-three, I've lived about as much life as I can handle anymore. I'm ready to sink into the ether. After all, how many times can a soul shatter before it's turned to dust?

1

Have you ever heard the sound a heart makes just before it stops beating? No? Well, fuck. It's my favorite sound in the universe. The muscle that's so precious and essential for life, yet I crave the power that comes with snuffing it out.

I think I had a heart once... but I lost that and my sanity right along with it.

“No, please! Let me go!” The bloody, garbled screams of humble, local businessman Joe Cantorelli echo off the walls of his bedroom, his wife laying lifeless beside him. “I-I s-swear I didn’t know!”

A normal man would perhaps pause and listen to the voice of reason here. The one that says maybe this man is innocent, and we need to hear him out before stabbing him through the heart. But I’m not a normal man and I don’t own one of those little feathery-winged angels that sits on my shoulder and encourages me to do the right thing. I think I’ve even scared the little horned fucker who’s supposed to sit on the other shoulder off, too. It’s just me calling the shots in here and that’s the way I like it. You don’t need a fucking voice of reason when you follow the evidence and facts laid out before you.

It’s always the same with these assholes.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

I'm innocent.

I didn't know.

It wasn't me.

They were asking for it.

Joe continues to spit a string of mixed curses and pleads for his life. He doesn't even know why I'm here yet, but he's clearly guilty because he's trying to cover his ass already. Probably has something to do with the dead wife at his bedside.

That wasn't me, though she was supposed to be one of my marks. Judging by the bruising around her throat, I'd say old Joe here beat me to it. Why? My guess is that she found out the shit he's been up to, outside of the black market drugs he's been pushing under the table at his bait shop.

Selling anything in Volkov territory without the say-so of its Pakhan is a no-no. I was sent here to Washington by Kuznetsov when I couldn't keep my hands clean. I'd practically turned the state of Illinois into a bloodbath while searching for a ghost.

Joke's on that depressed, old bastard because I'm finding all kinds of creative ways to paint Washington red, too.

Joe and his corpse of a wife were in on the underground, forbidden drug trade. Their dealings cost the lives of fifteen young adults, from ages sixteen to twenty-three, all disappearing over the last three months. It's enough to piss me the fuck off, and that's

just unacceptable.

What put the final nail in their proverbial coffins, though, were the four women who have disappeared within the last year. All upstanding citizens that just vanished seemingly into thin air? Suspicious as fuck. Their bodies were never recovered, but you'd have to have the mind of a killer to know where to find a hidden body.

So naturally, finding them was fairly easy. Joe here had taken them to a string of cabins on Lake Mana that he and his wife rent out in the summer months. Except he'd used these buildings as a hiding place for his sick and twisted fantasies. Four women were hurt beyond recognition and their lives were claimed long before their time.

This world is in need of a fucking cosmic cleansing of the filth that pollutes its terrain, and I'm the man tasked to clean it up.

I continue to whistle "Rollercoaster of Love" whilst taking my time in sharpening the point of the broadhead arrow that's gripped between my leather-clad fingers. I'm not one to play with my food before devouring it, but sometimes it's fun to drag out the inevitable. The metallic shing of each pass is like music to my ears. The sharper the point, the quicker the job. I hate it when it gets stuck and I have to use more muscle than necessary to shove the fucker through my target's heart.

Testing the point with the tip of my finger, a sinister smile takes over as I turn to face the piece of shit tied to the bed behind me. Of course he doesn't see it, though. The mask that covers my face and the hood of my black jacket pulled up over my head completely conceal my identity from him. I may take pride in my killing habits, but I'm not dumb enough to get caught.

The sight of my glowing mask in combination with the arrow twirling between my thumb and forefinger has Joe writhing and wailing like a banshee from his side of the



bed.

Ah, he finally realizes who I am.

The world has so affectionately named me the Cupid Killer. Why? I have not a fucking clue since I don't solely target couples, nor do I wait for Valentine's Day to strike. I'm more of a year-round heart-stopper kind of guy. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that I leave my targets with an arrow through their heart, and when I'm feeling "extra," some conversation hearts on their eyelids in lieu of coins when sending their asses down for an eternal ride on the River Styx.

"P-please," he stutters through a mouthful of saliva and blood, the concoction spraying out and peppering his chest. "I didn't know..."

I roll my eyes behind the mask. "Didn't know what, Joe? I haven't even asked you a question yet." I keep my voice low, not that he'd recognize it.

His lips flubber but no intelligible words come out. I tilt my head to the side when I reach him, studying his pathetic demeanor. "I'm sorry," I murmur, sarcasm oozing through my tone as I bend down to his face, cupping my hand behind my ear. "Couldn't quite hear you there, Joe. But you know what? I don't care. Whatever bullshit that is quite literally spewing from your flaccid lips, I don't want to hear it. So I'm just gonna get right down to it, yeah?"

He opens his mouth to berate me or curse my name to hell and back, I'm sure, or maybe even plead for his life. Before he can utter a syllable, I pick up a dirty sock from his bedside and stuff it in his mouth, making sure to shove it far enough back that he gags multiple times before I remove my fingers.

He tries to headbutt me but misses, his reach too short. His wrists are bound to the headboard with the feathered handcuffs I found in his nightstand, so he's completely

at my mercy. Him using these is an unpleasant mental image that I'd rather not see. I shiver, trying to rid myself of that particular thought.

Joe's muffled shouts around the cotton and polyester blend are giving me a headache right between my eyes. I'm bored and I've fucking had it. Time to wrap this shit up so I can get the fuck out of here and go blow off some steam. His cries quiet the moment I lift the arrow to his eye, holding it just millimeters away.

"I usually like playing this little game of back and forth with my marks, where you beg and cry "Why me?" and then I tell you to take a wild guess, and then you beg and cry some more, but you've been a real fucking thorn in my side, Joe," I taunt, dragging the arrow from his face, down his cheek, and over his sweaty chest until I reach the space within his ribcage that houses his rotten heart. "I'll just cut to the chase so I can get on with my night."

He thrashes and bucks wildly against me, which isn't the smartest move since the tip of the arrow is now digging into his skin, causing blood to bubble up and trickle down. He shouts something that sounds an awful lot like wait and please.

Boo-hoo, motherfucker.

"You and wifey-poo here are responsible for the death of fifteen people, thanks to your drugdealings. Add the lives of the four women you assaulted and murdered. You've been a dead man walking for some time and now the devil's caught you. It's time to drag your ass to hell, motherfucker."

I press the arrow deeper into his chest, the sharpened tip now about halfway through his skin. I rip the sock from his mouth and lean in, angling my head toward him. "Any last words?"

"Fuck y—" His eyes round to saucers in shock and pain when I slowly push the

arrow the rest of the way down, giving it a little shove to get it between his ribs.

I grin, a dark chuckle echoing behind the material covering my face. “Fuck me?” I shake my head, straightening. “Nah. Not in this life or the next, asshole.”

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

His body convulses and blood rushes from where the arrow protrudes from his heart. The arrow gets stuck, and it annoys me to no end, so I quickly rip it out. It sprays and spurts, blood landing on my hoodie, gloves, and mask before I throw all of my weight into stabbing the arrow back into his chest. This time it hits the fucking bullseye. A hefty sigh parts from my lips at the mess he's made. Backing up, I feel nothing when the fight slowly leaves him and his body falls limp against the bed.

Fucking finally.

I watch him for a full minute to make sure he's actually dead before plucking the box of conversation hearts from the pocket of my hoodie. Her favorites. I snag two random pieces from the bag and stash it back in my pocket again before popping the hearts over his eyelids.

I leave the wife exactly as she is because I'm not the one who took her out, so no candy hearts for her.

Ready to be done with this shit for the night, I grab my bag from the floor where I'd dropped it and make my way out the back door, heading into the woods through their backyard. Leaves and sticks crunch beneath my feet and the warm, sticky evening air has my clothes clinging to my skin and sweat dripping down my face in no time. I wait until I'm in the clear before I unzip my hoodie and stuff it in my bag. The mask is next, then the gloves follow.

Reaching my bike that's hidden just inside the tree line, I throw my bag over the seat and take a second to run my fingers through my sweat-dampened hair, pushing it out of my face.

I don't feel much by way of emotions anymore, but jobs like this do have a way of either draining me, or getting me wound up tighter than a coil that demands immediate release before I go on a killing spree from the tension that builds up. Right now, I'm the latter.

Pulling my phone from my pocket, I pull up the number of the only duo I trust to help me find release without bloodshed, and dial it.

"That was quick." Calix—the playful one of the two—sounds entirely out of breath and his voice cracks on a moan when he answers on the first ring. I hear the dark, rumbling voice of Rune in the background before Calix hisses through his teeth.

"I need your help," I grit out, slinging my leg over my bike and starting it. I put on my helmet and switch the call over to the internal Bluetooth system. The sounds of their foreplay amplify and it only serves to further singe my already-frayed nerves. "I'm thirty minutes out."

"Shit," Calix hisses. "We're home and ready."

That's all I need as I peel out and onto the winding road.

2

"Fuck.Suck harder." I grip Rune's white hair in a tight fist when my cock hits the back of his throat and he swallows around me. He sucks at a vicious pace like he's angry at it, his teeth scraping my cock with every stroke of his mouth. The bite of pain amplifies the pleasure and only spurs me on to fuck his mouth harder.

Calix waits patiently on his knees for his turn like a good boy, his hands resting on his thighs that are spread just far enough apart to see the metallic glint of the cock cage keeping his erection at bay. He's not allowed to touch himself or come without

Rune's permission, and Calix is just enough of a shit disturber to defy him if given the chance.

Rune and Calix are adoptive brothers who have been fucking for about as long as they've been family. They're extremely possessive of one another. I've been the only one they allow to join them, because they understand every interaction with me is merely transactional. They're in the same line of work, so they know what I do and why I get so pent up to the point of needing release. They've seen me go off the rails and what the trail of bodies that I leave in my wake looks like when the tension gets to be too much for my mind to handle. I have a bloodlust that needs to be satiated, and when I'm not getting it on my hands, that's when my control starts to slip.

A psychiatrist would have a fucking field day taking a deep dive into my mind and dissecting my brain, but I'll spare you the money for the session and just tell you: I'm a psychopath. I'm "broken." Fucked in the head, as it were. But whatever. C'est la vie. Can't fix what wants to stay crazy, or however the saying goes.

Rune pulls back, his tongue flicking out to lap at the tip of my cock, hitting the magic cross piercing before he bites down on one of the metal barbells and tugs lightly. The heavy pulling sensation zaps through me and I growl at him, needing his mouth swallowing me down again. Not fucking teasing me.

He and Calix were in the middle of their playtime when I interrupted. Clearly, he hasn't slipped out of his domineering role yet. Too bad he's not in charge when I'm here. A smirk plays at his lips when he kisses the head while his hand strokes me firmly from root to tip.

I grip his hair tighter at the base of his skull and bend down until I'm in his face. His blue eyes glint in the lowlight, the promise of misbehavior written all over his face.

"Are you enjoying yourself?" I question as I use my free hand to grip his cheeks in a

tight hold until his lips pop open. He grins but says nothing, knowing who the maestro is in these moments. I give his cheek a slap before gripping his jaw tight and jerking his face closer to mine with a snarl on my lips. “Open.”

I can tell he wants to defy me, but I’m a second away from fucking stabbing him with just how close to the edge I am. He must see it in my eyes, because his entire demeanor shifts and it’s like a switch flips. Rune’s eyes glaze over as he slips into submission and parts his lips, his tongue darting out. I look him right in his eyes as I spit directly into his mouth. He doesn’t even get a chance to swallow before I’m gripping the sides of his face, fucking his mouth at a punishing pace once again.

It’s a brutally erotic sight, to see all the spit streaming down Rune’s chin and coating his chest. Calix squirms next to him, whimpering and moaning at the sight of his partner getting his throat so thoroughly used and abused by me.

Feeling my release beginning to coil in my gut, I free myself from Rune and turn toward Calix, who is waiting eagerly. His naturally submissive nature paired with his big, dark eyes, soft curls, and freckles do well to hide how he likes to be treated like a filthy little rag doll during sex.

I slip into his mouth, fucking him just as roughly, though not as deeply, as his gag reflex only allows me to go so far before my piercings have him heaving uncontrollably. I may be a fucking monster, but I know my sexual limits, and to keep their trust in me, I honor theirs as well—never pushing past what they can handle. It just so happens that these two can handle my brand of rough, so it works.

I’m seconds away from coming. The all-consuming feeling of release snakes its way down my spine and tightens my core. I pull out, stroking my cock with a tight fist while Rune and Calix press their faces together, mouths open and tongues out.

Just before it hits me, my phone chimes incessantly from the other side of the room

with rapid-fire notifications. It's the sound dedicated to my encrypted email, solely for kill contracts.

It doesn't stop. The notifications are fucking grating my nerves, but Rune and Calix wait patiently on the ground while I storm across the room, my cock throbbing heavily, and grab my phone. I'm nearly crushing it in my grip while I read over the notifications. I have one from the Pakhan, confirming my kills for the night and asking if I made a fucking mess big enough for a cleanup crew. I tell him no.

Let the media see what they've done. The Cupid Killer doesn't target just anyone, after all.

The next notification is a rush kill contract.



## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

Intended mark: O

Age: 23

Gender: Female

Payout: \$30 million—half upon acceptance and remainder to be paid with POD

Reason for elimination: N/A

Instructions: I'll be out of the house tonight and need Target eliminated ASAP.  
Payout will be doubled if eliminated before midnight.

N/A? I don't fuck with that shit.

But O? The initial sparks something uneasy in my chest. Those goddamned pesky alarm bells start sounding off in the back of my mind.

This contract is sketchy as fuck and I don't trust a damn thing that isn't backed up with facts or evidence. This has neither. The target doesn't even have a last name listed. I'm about to delete the email when my phone chimes with a notification from my banking app.

NEW DEPOSIT REQUEST: encrypted direct dep. \$15 million.

ACCEPT?

I click out of it and back into my emails, checking the next one. This one is a little more urgent.

I need her eliminated tonight. First half of payment has been sent. I will pay the second half immediately upon receiving POD.

“Fuck.” I swipe a hand through my hair, my erection rapidly deflating and my blood pressure rising.

“What is it?” Rune asks softly from across the room.

“Come look at this contract,” I say, pulling my boxers and jeans back up over my hips, knowing I won’t be getting what I need right now.

They each rise and walk over to where I stand, Rune wrapping a blanket around Calix’s shoulders. I hand him my phone.

“This person is willing to pay thirty mil to eliminate some girl before midnight.”

It’s the largest amount of money I’ve ever been offered for a contract.

“Did they say why?” Calix asks, looking over Rune’s shoulder.

“No.” And I don’t give two shades of shit about the money either. I’m more curious as to why someone is so desperate to get rid of this girl. I may be a killer, but I don’t target innocents. Like I said, cleanse the world of filth and all that.

Rune looks up at me and I take my phone back, pocketing it. “You going to take the contract?”

What I really want if I can’t come when I need to, is to either stab somebody or go bed

because I'm fucking tired. If I'm sleeping, I'm not stabbing. Win-win for society. But that contract keeps nagging at my brain.

"I'll look into it. That's a lot of money, which tells me that this person must be desperate not only to make one woman disappear, but he wants her made a spectacle of."

I don't usually abide by the alarm bells that start ringing in my head, but I have enough common sense to do some recon before I stab a random woman through the heart.

"Maybe she saw or heard something she wasn't supposed to," Rune ponders, absentmindedly stroking his own hard cock. I need to get the fuck out of here.

"You want any help?" Calix asks but I look at him, then glance down his body to the open blanket where his cock is still red and straining against the cage.

"No. But I think you do." His face flushes and he looks to Rune expectantly. "I'll see you two later," I throw over my shoulder as I pull on my shirt and head toward the door.

"Adris," Rune calls. I pause, keeping my back to them. "You good?"

"I'm not feeling extra stabbyright now if that's what you're asking," I answer. Not waiting for a rebuttal, I walk out the door and head to where my bike is parked in their circular driveway.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

I read over the emails again and again, checking to make sure I didn't miss any attachments or additional information, but there's nothing. I reject the deposit request but accept the contract. Only once a contract to kill is accepted do I receive the coordinates for the mark.

It's time to find out who Ois. I have half a mind to strangle her just for interrupting my orgasm and putting off my sleep schedule. If she's guilty? Well, I just may take my time with tearing her apart piece by piece before plunging an arrow right through her fucking heart.

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Goddamnit, I am having zero fun right now. The person who put the hit out on this girl is making everything entirely too easy for me and it's only serving to piss me off and coil me up tighter.

I tried to run a search on the way here for any women whose names start with O that fit her age within a hundred-mile radius, but it proved fruitless. Well. Fuck a duck.

The gate to the mansion was left slightly ajar, but I opted to park out of sight down the road and trek through the woods like the good little stalker slash serial killer I am. I didn't have time to clean off my gear so my mask and hoodie are still covered in spatters of Joe's blood.

I catch my reflection in the glass of the sliding back door of the mansion and tilt my head, grinning at the macabre sight of my outfit. I am what society would call a "neat freak" if they were to see my habits. Emphasis on the freak, I guess. I like to know

where my shit is at all times and I like it clean. Unless I'm killing. Make that shit messy, please.

But having a clean presence means less chance of leaving DNA or evidence of my presence behind. I also never really cared for leaving an impression on my targets, but I have to admit that the bloody look does add quite a bit of a sinister vibe.

It's hard to actually be sinister when the door is left unlocked.

With a heavy, annoyed sigh, I shove it open aggressively, almost wanting it to crash into a wall. I want to scare the woman into running and giving me the chase my body craves. But alas, it opens quietly. A mechanism in the track stops it from slamming and it slows until it mechanically latches itself open.

Fucking rich people spoiling my fun with their high tech.

Instructions were vague as fuck so I'm literally operating blind to find this girl. I make quick work of checking each room on the main level before reaching into my bag and grabbing a handful of zip ties from the front pocket as I trek up to the second floor. The urge to slaughter something only grows because this level is empty as well. Every single room is either barren or untouched without a single hint of a feminine touch.

Where the fuck are you?

I'm starting to suspect that I walked right into a trap when I spot a second staircase that leads up to a third and final floor. I swear to fuck, she better be up here or I'm going to burn this house to the ground and piss on the ashes. First two rooms are empty. I'm about to turn around in search of gasoline to light this bitch when I catch the faint, warm scent of coconut coming from one of the other two rooms ahead of me. Following my instincts, I check the door on the left. It's silent on its hinges as I

push it open. The room is cloaked in darkness but the heady scent damn near slaps me in the face.

Bingo.

3

I can barely make out her sleeping form on the other side of the room. She's got blackout curtains drawn, so I can't see shit. Feeling my way across the floor, I make it to the edge of the bed without a sound. I set my bag down and get to work. I don't give a fuck if she screams and I want to question her, so I forgo the tape and snatch her wrists from where they were tucked from under her face. The zip ties easily loop over her hands and I cinch them tight before forcing her arms above her head, securing them to the iron bars of her headboard. I expect her to scream, to cry, to fight, or even curse me. But the only thing I get from her is a soft gasp that almost sounds like a sigh of relief.

Weird, but whatever.

Not wanting to waste any time, I straddle her thighs and pull an arrow from the quiver strapped to my back. I hold the point flush to her chest, letting it press in hard enough to try and startle her. I know she's awake from the way her breaths saw in and out of her chest, but she doesn't fight me. She doesn't scream. It's nearly pitch-black in the room, but I can feel her eyes on me like a physical touch.

Taking her throat in my hand, I squeeze until I'm almost cutting off her airway, keeping her right on the edge of consciousness. Again, she doesn't resist or push back against my hold. She doesn't fight her restraints. I don't get a single damn reaction from her. Alrighty then. Bending down closer to her face, I hold myself inches away as I speak in a low tone.

“Do you know why I’m here?” I question, and she barely manages to nod her head once in my hold, but I feel it. Progress, I guess. I tilt my head in question, even though she can’t see me. “And what is it that you’ve done to earn this?” I press the tip a little harder against her skin until I feel it break, the coppery tang of her blood mixing with the coconut aroma that floods the room.

She says nothing. Doesn’t even react. Actually, no. Scratch that. She is reacting, but not the way I’m expecting. This girl doesn’t even fight to get away from the sharp sting of my arrow. No, the crazy bitch bucks up against my hold, like she’s trying to impale herself before I can get my answers.

I don’t fucking think so.

Pulling the arrow away, I toss it to the side and reach out, feeling blindly until I find a lamp and flip it on. Something isn’t right if she’s this eager to meet the wrong end of my arrow. I’m more than ready to watch as the light fades from her eyes, but only after I siphon the information I want out of her. Not before.

The room illuminates around me, and it’s not what I expect from a spoiled rich girl living in a mansion like this. Don’t get me wrong, it’s filled with expensive furniture, but the entire space looks sterile. White on white on fucking white. There’s absolutely no feminine touch to this room whatsoever.

Red flag number one.

Then I look down at the woman beneath me and?—

What in the actual fuck?

It’s...her.

Odessa Kuznetsov.



## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

As in... the lost Kuznetsov Bratva Princess.

A hard, painful thump resonates within the empty cavity in my chest at seeing her face beneath me for the first time in ten years.

The first thing I notice is that she's covered in bruises. She's got a black eye, possibly a broken nose with dried blood crusted around it, and a cut slicing through the left side of her lips. Her neck is already littered with purple bruises, as well as her chest and shoulders.

You know what, let's just say her entire body is one big fucking bruise, okay? Somebody hurt her, but this wasn't just a punishment. They wanted to deliver a message that wouldn't need repeating. Evidently it wasn't enough since I've been called here. The nightmares that once haunted her have come to life and to be frank, it's got me seeing red.

The second thing I notice is that she's fucking flawless beneath her injuries. She's got the features of a goddess. Deep tan skin and high cheekbones. I can tell that beneath all the blood, bruising, and swelling, lies a pert nose accompanied by a full set of lips, accentuated with a prominent cupid's bow. Her left arm is covered from her shoulder to just below her elbow with fine line leaves and vines, tiny little stars woven in between the loops and whorls of the foliage. Her ears are covered in mismatched gold hoops and studs. Bright, pastel peach-colored hair fans out on her pillow, framing her face and almost giving her an ethereal glow.

The acceptance in her eyes makes the vacant cavity in my chest do that odd thumping thing again, this time so hard that it blurs my vision, and suddenly I feel the last

threads of my control snap. A decade of time and space between us doesn't erase the fact that she fucking ran from me after I'd taken her heart and carved my name into it. In a blink, I don't care what the reason is, I need her dead. No person who makes me feel so out of control so fast can be allowed to live.

I like to think I'm a killer with some decorum and control.

You take that carefully constructed control away and I'm the fucking grim reaper on speed.

I snatch the arrow from her side and renew my efforts to end her as quickly as possible. Beneath the swelling and bruises, she has an innocence and a sweetness about her that has a foreign feeling coiling around my gut. I can't demand answers when it wasn't part of my contract. I won't. The curiosity has me fucking unnerved and I'm starting to feel twitchy.

"Any last words?" I ask, as I usually do with each of my marks, but this time I hope like fuck she stays silent so I can kill her that much quicker. I don't want to hear her voice. I don't want to fall deeper out of control.

Raising the arrow, I drag the tip down her cheek, pressing just hard enough to draw the smallest bead of blood. It bubbles up so beautifully that I feel an odd compulsion to rip my mask off and lick it from her face. I shove the unwarranted thought away, collect the droplet on the tip of the arrow, and move on. Fuck, it looks even better when I smear it down across her lips. The deep crimson color against her tanned skin is exquisite, the sight of it calming my heart rate. Taming the brutal monster that is me can only be sated with ichor drawn by my hand.

I think she's about to grant my wish and keep her full lips sealed, but then she relaxes down into the pillow, acceptance of her fate in her eyes, and the saddest smile I've ever seen in a human barely tugs at her lips. She closes her eyes, and the deep brown

of her irises vanishes behind her lids.

The next words out of her mouth are not what I expect to hear, and for some unknown reason... I don't want to hear them, either.

4

It's just me in the house tonight as Santino left rather hastily and I've decided that this is the night of my final chapter. I'm desperate to put an end to the pain. But just before I can muster up the strength to get out of bed, my plan is interrupted.

I'm so fine-tuned to when Santino sneaks into my room to fuck me or torture me in the middle of the night that I hear the exact moment someone crosses the threshold. Someone who isn't supposed to be here.

He's tall, lithe, with broad shoulders. An angel of death before me—I can feel his desire to claim my mortality rolling off his body in heavy waves. And I welcome it.

Before I can blink, he straddles my body, his strong thighs keeping my hips pinned in place while he restrains my hands tightly above my head. The zip ties bite painfully into my skin, but really, I think they're unnecessary because I'm willing to give my life freely.

I've barely taken a breath and already he's poised with some sort of weapon in his hands, ready to strike. I close my eyes, even though the room is dark, and wait for the inevitable blow. Except... it doesn't come.

His scent washes over me when he leans down to press the tip of whatever his weapon is to my skin. He smells like death and sin. The coppery scent of blood on him mixes with the faint scent of ash and bergamot. His entire being radiates with an aura like that of a cunning devil ready to drag me to hell. I don't care where I go in the

afterlife. Anywhere is better than here.

He asks me questions but I suddenly can't focus. God, his voice is unlike anything I've ever heard. I'm sick for even paying attention to something like that. He's all grit and gravel and smoke and venom. It sounds muffled, like he's speaking behind a mask. Alluring. Like an asp just before it strikes.

My thighs instinctively tighten, and it momentarily steals my focus from the ultimate goal here. Now seems like a really inappropriate time to be turned on by a man who intends to kill me, but when you've been trained to get off on pain, you tend to seek pleasure from all the darkest corners of the world.

My lack of answers only serves to piss him off. I can feel the annoyance and frustration thickening the air around us. He shuffles around me and suddenly I'm blinded by the illumination of my bedside light.

He freezes.

I freeze.

The world around us seems to pause as well.

It can't be him.

We study each other for a long moment. I try not to flinch under the scrutiny of his familiar eyes. They're such an icy gray, framed by dark lashes and strong, furrowed brows that I would recognize anywhere. There's a scar that runs horizontally across his cheek and another vertically down his forehead. His inky black hair falls over his brow beneath his hood and the lower half of his face has been covered by some sort of mask.

I don't need to see the rest of him to know that he's just as devastating. Beautiful, even.

But his beauty stops there. There's no emotion behind his gaze. His eyes harbor no sentiment as his dead stare roams over my face and down my chest, where I'm covered in various shades of bruises and cuts from Santino's most recent form of brutality. My entire life, I've done my best to be obedient, respectful, and even kind to those around me, regardless of their cruelty. I've kept myself as small as possible to avoid being on the wrong end of a man's wrath. But I've come to learn that the men of this world don't harbor such soft emotions. The only way to escape the fist is death.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

My grim reaper picks up an arrow from my side and holds the sharpened tip to my face, cutting my skin. His pupils dilate at the sight of my blood, and the silver is nearly swallowed by black when he uses the very same blade to smear the blood across my lips.

I should be terrified, but I'm... aroused, and that is what scares me. This man, this killer, has stolen my focus for a moment in time. The strange tension we've created pulls taut when he positions the arrow directly over my heart, before he leans close and murmurs, "Any last words?"

Hurry up? Don't threaten me with a good time? I think, done with this strange brand of foreplay. My irritation washes away when an odd sense of gratitude and relief at the fact that in a matter of seconds I'll be pain-free takes over. My body falls limp and I take a breath, melting into the mattress. I close my eyes and ignore the pain I feel when my lips tug into a small smile, the cut there splitting open again, and whisper, "Thank you."

I feel my killer's body lock up, his breath leaving him on a shudder like a huff of confusion or disbelief. I don't have time to dissect it as I ready myself for the final strike. The tip of the arrow remains pressed to my skin, but that's it.

"Thank you?" he parrots, his voice flat but no less lethal.

My lashes flutter and he comes into focus again. I nod. He's doing my job for me, so why not thank him?

"Why?" Another flat question. I'm not sure if he's genuinely curious or if it's just a

piece of the puzzle he's trying to fit together.

"Because I'm done," I whisper, my eyes welling with tears as the pain of the last decade throbs just beneath the surface of my skin.

My killer rolls his eyes. "Oh, stop with the fucking tears. Somebody out there put a hit out on you. They want you dead. Why the fuck would you thank me for killing you?"

So this wasn't random. Someone wanted me dead. But who? Santino? My father? The thought sends a tendril of sadness through my soul and I fight to keep the tears at bay.

"Why is it so important to you? Just get it over with and make it quick, please," I beg, my voice breaking, but he's right there, gripping my jaw and analyzing my every reaction to his touch.

"What's the matter, Wraith?" he drawls, his smoky voice almost a taunt. "What's got you so eager to die, huh? Why not fight to live?"

If he only knew.

"What's the point in living when your soul has been shattered beyond repair? When your heart has been squeezed until it's black and blue? Having any power and choice stripped from you until you're nothing more than an object without a voice." I try to speak with strength in my words, but of course, my body betrays me and I sound like nothing more than a timid little mouse.

I stare at him, watching his eyes and his brows for any trace of sympathy—not that I expect it—and my findings are as empty as his blank stare.

"Or," he counters, cocking his head to the side as if in thought, "you can take those

shards that you claim to be so broken and you can make a fucking weapon out of them.” His shoulders lift in a shrug like his words are no big deal. Like he isn’t a masked murderer offering me sage advice right before he snuffs out my light.

“I can’t live a life knowing I have no power or control over it,” I try to argue, but it’s weak at best.

I know he’s grinning like a psycho with the way his cheeks lift and his eyes crinkle in the corners. He leans down close to me again, his mask inches from my lips as he speaks.

“You talk of power and control as if they are the same thing. As if they will synonymously bring you this sense of peace. But don’t you know, Wraith,” goddamnit, I hate the way my pussy clenches when the pet name falls from his lips, “that giving up control has the ability to give you all the power you so desperately seek?”

This... stumps me. My brows knit in confusion. I can’t believe that I’m entertaining this conversation when I ask, “How?”

Another dark chuckle comes from behind my killer’s mask. “What, would you like a demonstration?”

“W-what?”

He glances around the room, then slowly nods, as if he’s come to some decision after having a one-sided conversation with himself. He surprises me, though, when he leans forward with a knife that he’s procured from somewhere, and with a flick of his wrist, my bound hands are free.

I’m yanked and pulled up until my chest comes flush with his. I want to ask him what



he's doing, but he removes himself from where he's straddling my lap and pulls me to stand. "Wait here. Don't fucking move," he emphasizes.

Ah, okay?

He bends to scoop up his bag from beside the bed, and I notice a variety of weapons that send a chill up my spine before he zips the bag shut. Before he sheaths the arrow, he grips my wrist, and a gasp escapes my lips before I can stop it when he uses the broad head of the arrow to slice open my palm. Blood instantly floods to the surface as he jerks my hand over the bed. He milks the cut until blood pools in my hand before he turns my wrist over and lets it spill haphazardly all over the stark white of the comforter. It's enough blood, yet not even close to enough at the same time.

He moves and maneuvers my hand all over the bed, truly making the space look like a morbid crime scene. It's hard to ignore the way each swipe I'm forced to make over the fabric feels like fire and needles racing across my skin. It's also hard to ignore the way my body reacts to his touch, but I manage to keep from clenching my thighs.

This man wants me dead. I'm a means to an end for him. I don't need to be standing here fantasizing about what particular brand of brutality he could wreak upon my body before giving me the ultimate pleasure.

My God, you're fucking broken, Odessa.

It's a result of what Santino has done to me. It's the only level of affection I remember. The only one I know. He trained my body to find the pleasure in his pain and no matter how much I fight it, my traitorous body always craves more. I wish it didn't.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

My killer drops my wrist and steps back, admiring his handiwork. His eyes legitimately twinkle at the sight of the blood that now coats every inch of my small bed. I wish so badly that the bleeding hadn't already stopped in my palm.

My world is flipped when he turns to me with a determined set to his brow and says, "Let's go."

Let's go? "Go where?" I eye him warily. "Y-you're not going to... kill me?" I hate the obvious disappointment that laces my question.

He stalks toward where I stand, stupefied in the middle of the room, until there's barely an inch of space between us. I'm forced to look up until my neck is craned to meet his gaze. I knew he was tall, but standing up against him really puts into perspective that either I am extremely short, or he's a Goliath. He lifts his hand and allows a finger to graze over the five crescent moon-shaped scars that rest over my heart. Goosebumps pebble up beneath his touch and I barely manage to suppress a full-body shiver.

Silver eyes slowly rise to mine. It's like something clicks when they lock on me again. "Who are you?" I ask before I can stop the question from escaping my mouth, knowing I never even learned his name all those years ago, but it has to be him.

"Don't you know?" He leans down until his mask brushes my lips. "I'm the Cupid Killer." The blood drains from my face at his admission, because I know I've heard that name before. He tenderly brushes a strand of my hair back behind my trembling shoulders before he grabs my throat in a vise grip, stealing my breath. "And I intend to collect."

My little Wraith stood in the middle of her room, shaking like a leaf, as I finished making her bed look like a true crime scene before gathering her and the rest of my shit. I'm not killing her. So why does she look like I kicked her damn puppy?

She's like a walking ghost. A shell of herself. As if she's truly got nothing left to live for. Odessa Kuznetsov was ready to die just moments ago, and it looks like that yearning for the afterlife has yet to go away. She's eyeballed the arrows strapped to my back no less than a dozen times since I yanked her out of that bed. I've got news for her. Too fucking bad.

I told her, warned her, years ago, that every beat of her heart was mine. She doesn't get to decide when it stops.

I do.

Odessa became the object of my every obsession, then ran from me right after I'd made it clear to her that she was—is—mine. Why did she run from me? We may have been teens, but I would've given her the fucking carved heart of whatever demons haunted her at night if only she'd asked.

I'm the way I am now because she made me this way. And now I'm fucked in the head and fucked because this is the first hit I've ever accepted and not carried through on it.

This is how I saw tonight going, and I'm quickly approaching my limit. I need to kill someone. Multiple someones would be nice, actually. I'm itching to sink my arrows into as many hearts as I can before my own gives out from the fucking whiplash I'm going through.

Fuck, I need to call Rune and Calix. Figure out what to do with the extra body that's currently hugging me on the back of my bike like her life depends on it. Considering I'm pushing a hundred on the highway... it does. She's bundled in my blood-stained jacket, because to my surprise, she had no clothes outside of a handful of t-shirts and some kind of housekeeping uniform that looked like it would fall apart if I so much as blinked at it. I didn't like the idea of anyone getting a view of her ass on the back of my bike, and my jacket does a bang up job covering her all the way down to her knees.

Her nose crinkled when she scented and probably felt the blood that soaked through the fabric. She tried taking it off, but one look had her huffing and zipping it up to her chin.

There's not much traffic in the middle of the night, but I bob and weave around the few cars that stand between me and my exit. Using the voice control feature inside my helmet, I call Rune.

Once again, he answers on the first ring. "You're on a roll tonight?—"

"There's a problem," I deadpan, interrupting him.

"Uh, oh." He's got the nerve to fucking tease. "What kind of problem?"

"I couldn't execute the contract."

"And?" I've turned contracts down before, after completing my own research when the person who wanted to hire me failed to provide the proper information.

I hesitate. Rune and Calix wouldn't hurt her, but the more people that know that she's alive endangers not only her, but whoever holds such knowledge. I weigh the options against the feel of Odessa clinging to me as I slow and exit the highway. Rune and

Calix are grown-ass men and can certainly handle any threat that comes theirway. Their body count isn't nearly as hefty or as messy as mine, but they're no less lethal.

Odessa's helmet digs into my spine between my shoulder blades—I swear she's doing that shit on purpose because I chose to keep her alive instead of giving her what she wanted— and her close proximity grates on my already frayed nerves, but I ignore it and answer. “And I have her.”

“Alive?” he asks.

“Yes, fucking alive, Rune. How the fuck could I carry a dead body across the back of my bike?”

Odessa stiffens behind me like she heard me, and maybe she did with the volume of my voice.

“You're creative. I'm sure you would've found a way.”

“Rune,” I warn.

“What do you need from us?” His tone changes when he hears the severity in mine.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

“Answers,” is all I say. I need to know the truth of what the fuck is going on.

“We’ll get them, A.” Rune pauses, quiet for a moment before he asks, “How are you?”

“On the edge,” I answer honestly. “It’s bad.”

“We’ve got you. However you need us,” I hear Calix say in the background. I know they do. That’s how they are. Especially Calix. Unlike me, all he does is feel.

“Be there in ten.” I hang up, pulling up to a red light.

I prop my bike between my legs and wait. Odessa shifts behind me, her thighs sliding down a fraction, fitting herself a little tighter against me. It’s hard enough to ignore her heat that’s wrapped around me, but with the way her body is gripping mine, it may as well be a siren in my ear tempting me to touch. To take.

I’m about to scold her when she does it again, but luckily the light turns green, so I tap her hands to hang on tight before I take off again. She doesn’t, so I jolt forward, intentionally scaring her and forcing her to actually cling to me. I’m sure every part of her just wants to let go and eat the pavement, but luckily her fight or flight response still leans toward the I want to live side of things.

This little Wraith has some bite, though, because when she grabs me, it’s right where my shirt has ridden up in the wind. She sinks her claws right into the skin there and digs hard enough into my abs to draw blood.

I bite back a groan of pleasure at the feel of her marking me, but my dick is now awake and thoroughly paying attention, hoping to feel more of her brand of pain. I can feel the sticky wetness of the blood cooling against my skin as I wind down the backroad, nearly to Rune's house that he shares with Calix.

The gate to their home comes into view as I pull up, and we wait for it to swing open. The moment it does, I'm through and winding my way up the long drive. The house is settled at the back of the property by the creek, out of sight.

When you work for the bratva as a hitman, you learn to appreciate the security and privacy of the woods.

Pulling up, I lower the kickstand and remove my helmet, but keep the cowl pulled up over my mouth and nose.

I saw the recognition in her eyes earlier, but I won't give her the satisfaction of confirming her suspicions so easily. Shean fromme. She will have to earn the answer to every question she has about me, who I am, and what I've become. What she made me.

I turn around to see her struggling with the strap beneath her chin. There's a frustrated set to her brow. It's almost entertaining, but then I remember the bruises and possible broken nose and how the helmet must be squeezing against the wounds.

"Come here," I command, crooking my fingers at her.

"I've got it," she snaps, her fingers still fumbling.

I roll my eyes and grab her by the chin of her helmet, yanking her toward me with a quick jerk of my wrist. She loses her balance and stumbles into me, her small, curvy body pressing into mine and her hands gripping at the belt loops by my hips. Her

breath leaves her in a whoosh and her big, dark eyes meet mine behind the lifted visor.

For a fractured moment, when I finally free the strap and remove her helmet, the look in her eyes sends me back in time. Like we're teenagers again and I've just snuck into her room to slay her demons, and she's looking at me like I'm both her salvation as well as her damnation.

Her body shifts against mine, and before I can process what she's doing, I hear the distinct *snick* of my knife before I'm met with white-hot pain in my side, just below my ribs. Looking down, I see blood blooming through the puncture wound in my shirt. It takes me off guard, but I turn impressed eyes to the woman before me. She stands on shaky legs with a trembling arm out to me, knife in hand, and wide, terrified eyes.

I narrow mine and fight the way a maniacal grin wants to tug at my lips. "A cut? Are you flirting with me, Wraith?"

Her mouth pops open in surprise, but it takes a second for any words to spill out. "I'm sorry, I—You... You were going to... so I—I thought I—" She gulps and takes in a few shaky breaths before squaring her shoulders and lifting her chin at me. Her false bravado is positively adorable. "I won't become another slave. Another victim. Not to you, or him, or any other man on this planet."

She turns the knife around, the blade poised just above her navel. I take a step toward her on instinct, but her shouted "No!" almost gives me pause. I'm not going to feed into her dramatics.

"I don't fucking think so." I lunge for her, grabbing her wrist and twisting just hard enough for a shocked yelp to escape her lips. She drops the knife. I catch it with ease in my free hand and yank her closer. I use the blade to brush a sweaty peach strand from her sticky forehead, reveling in the way she trembles against me. Bending down



into her personal space, I murmur through the mask, “What’s the matter? Is the Wraith that desperate to become a specter?” I drag the back of the knife down her face, over her neck, and down her chest until I pause directly over her heart—over the marks I made ten years ago. “Ty moy, malen'koye privedeniye.”

Her dark eyes flare in recognition for a splitsecond before terror becomes her. In a move I honestly wasn’t expecting, she grips my shoulders and sends her knee harshly into my lower abdomen. It doesn’t hurt, but it does startle me enough to release her. Before I can right myself, she takes off at a sprint, her peach hair slowly disappearing through the tree line on Rune and Calix’s property.

Thunder rumbles in the distance, and I stand to my full height, tipping my head up at the sky with my eyes closed, releasing a satisfied breath that warms the cowl covering my mouth. I can’t wipe the grin from my lips as I take the first step toward the forest before me. Odessa may have always been mine, but she sealed her fate when she chose to run from me a second time. When I catch her, I’ll show her just how close to death I can bring her. Only then will she finally know what it’s like to truly feel alive.

I love a good hunt, and I can’t wait to claim my prize.

6

I’m going to die tonight.

My bare feet pound the forest floor beneath me, and for the first time in what seems like a lifetime, I’m not so sure that’s what I want.

My life had been stolen from me so long ago that I thought I’d never be reunited with my family again. Reunited with him again. The boy whose name I never learned, but a face so devastating that I hoped I would never forget.

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

A twig snaps somewhere behind me and it takes all of my energy to keep from screaming. I'm absolutely terrified right now, but for all the wrong reasons.

I had my suspicions about my killer's familiarity with his dark hair and silver eyes, but the way he spoke to me in perfect Russian, repeating the words he'd said to me that night before my mother took me, I knew. It was him.

It felt as if my heart might burst from my chest right before it sank low in my gut, because he was no longer that boy from my childhood. He's a trained killer. A serial killer, based on what little I heard of him—the Cupid Killer—in passing while working for Santino. This is a whole different person. A man who wants me dead.

Does he, though?

The errant thought doesn't have time to rationalize itself before a dark chuckle seems to echo around me, bouncing off the trees, and the smoky sound sends a chill running up my spine. It stops me in my tracks and I whip around, checking for any signs that he's found me. I can't breathe through my busted nose, my ribs scream in protest with every breath, and the muscles in my legs burn with every step.

Lightning flashes and I swear I catch a flash of his silver eyes just ahead, but in the next flash and clap of thunder, he's gone.

I turn, about to take a step back to run when heat envelops my back and I hear his voice right at the shell of my ear.

“Do you feel alive yet, Wraith, or is it still death that you crave?”

I yelp at his startling proximity. Where did he come from? Scratch that thought—I don't care. I don't even turn around to look at him before I take off at a sprint. My feet carry me all of twenty feet before the world spins before me and I'm suddenly on my back. The tree canopy far above me does little to stop the trickle of rain that quickly turns into a steady downpour.

I fight against my killer's hold, but the struggle is futile when he pins my hands above my head with one hand and produces one of his arrows from seemingly nowhere with the other.

“Valiant effort, Odessa, but it looks like I caught you this time.” This time?

Using my heels, I bend my knees and dig them into the ground to shove, hoping to expel myself from beneath his grip. It's a useless effort, because he only adjusts his grip and moves with me. Unfortunately the torn t-shirt I fell asleep in shifts and pulls further down my shoulder, exposing my left breast. I'd ditched his bloody jacket the moment I broke the tree line because the metallic smell was making me nauseous. It could've been my own bloody nose I was smelling, but still, the damn thing was too baggy and I didn't want to risk it getting caught on a wayward branch while trying to escape his clutches.

My killer's eyes immediately home in on my newly exposed flesh, and if I thought his eyes had darkened before, they're obsidian now. My nipples tighten. Be it his focused gaze or the rain pebbling against my heated, battered skin, the way it makes me feel is wrong.

Because it is wrong, right? So wrong of me that I like the way he's affected by me. It gives me a false sense of power and a foreign feeling in my core that can't be named. He doesn't touch me apart from his hold, but he cocks his head in a predatory way and uses the tip of the arrow to trace the shape of my exposed breast. There's a dangerous glint in his eyes as he watches me closely while pressing the blade to my skin and

pulling down until it breaks.

Blood bubbles up and around the wound until it cascades down my breast and pools at my sternum. A whimper escapes my lips before I can stop it, and my core clenches against my will at the fiery pain that radiates from my chest before it morphs and travels down to settle at the apex of my thighs. The sounds I make aren't those of pain, though, which he absolutely notices, if the way his chest heaves at the sight is any indication.

Imoan.

Shame washes over me with the way my body is reacting and I close my eyes, turning away from the situation, wishing I could just vanish into the ether, but my killer doesn't let me. He releases my hands and grips my jaw as he makes two more cuts in close proximity to the first. He wants me to watch him mark me. Pushing down on my jaw, he angles my head enough for me to see that he's carved a perfect A into my skin, directly in the center of the scars over my heart.

"Perhaps this time, you won't forget who this belongs to," he says, brushing his thumb over the tender flesh. I grit my teeth, biting back some cross between a groan and a moan. "While I do enjoy chasing you, I won't let you run from me a third time, Wraith. You'll have no choice but to stay and see exactly what your actions have turned me into."

There's that phrase again.

Then it hits me like a freight train. He thinks Icho seto run from him the first time. Leaving him was the last thing I wanted to do, not when his soul whispered to mine night after night, giving me no choice but to surrender to its siren call.

My chest is throbbing with pain and I don't know whether to be appalled that he's

marked me again, or relieved that he's instead chosen to claim me for a second time in my life.

My time with him felt so brief—just years compared to the decade that has separated us—but it was so impactful that I felt as if I'd lost my soul when my mother ripped me from Father's home. Not just a piece of it, either. The whole damned thing. Because something tells me that this man doesn't do anything in halves.

When my eyes make their way to his face again, he's got this sort of deranged satisfaction etched in his eyes as he admires his handiwork. His dark hair hangs heavy with rain, droplets falling almost in a steady stream and coating my skin, smearing and diluting the blood that seeps from my newest wound.

It takes a moment for my brain to register that my hands are free, and I use them.

"I didn't make you into anything," I grit, clasp my hands together to make one large fist I swing them down, landing a blow to his shoulder to shove him off of me.

It does... abso-fucking-lutely nothing but cause my exposed breast to bounce. He doesn't even acknowledge my attack, save for the way he grins behind his mask and cocks his head, like a predator observing the intimidation tactics of its prey before it strikes. He's a creature with carnal desires and the way he tracks my exposed skin is proof enough. I use this moment of distraction to lift my knee and strike directly between his legs, but he stops me by wedging his own damp leg up between my thighs, and settles there like it's no problem with his dark jeans pressed directly against my clit. "You became a fucking psycho murderer all on your own?"

His grip on my neck tightens, cutting off both my air and my words. "See, that's where you're wrong," he says casually, leaning down into my space again. My hands grip his wrist to pull him off of me, but he overpowers me easily. "You leaving without so much as a word with something that belongs to me? Letting us believe that

you were as dead as your mother? Yeah, that can make a man lose his fucking mind.”

I try to shake my head because I didn't choose to leave him, but I'm struggling to even see straight with the way he's cutting off my oxygen and blood flow.

“You also ruined my orgasm earlier tonight,” he straightens, his grip on my neck loosening just enough to make me cough before inhaling a shaky breath as he climbs swiftly to straddle my chest. “Right now I either need to fuck something or kill something. So, take out my cock, Wraith.”

The blood drains from my face at the same time the rest of my body flushes and my pussy pulses at his command.

## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

So fucking wrong, Odessa. How is he any different than Santino?

I stare up at the man above me, contemplating if I want to disobey him enough for him to give me the latter of the two options instead. All I've wanted was to be freed from his plane of existence, to end the eternal suffering and pain I've endured. But this man, this killer, owns the piece of me I'd thought I lost and now I'm not so sure that it's the end I crave. He may hate me now, but I'll take his ire over being alone in the afterlife.

"Now, Odessa." His order is firm, and goddamnit, I hate the way that I love the sound of my name on his lips. Fuck him for that.

7

"Now, Odessa," I all but bark at her over the rain.

I like her name, but I think I like Wraith better. It suits her.

Her fingers shake as they fumble with the belt of my jeans. It takes her two tries before she finally gets the job done. Lightning cracks the sky around us as I watch her patiently, because I've got all the time in the world to show this girl just exactly what she's done to me by running away. The effects of ten years ago, I mean. I'm hard as a fucking rock right now and that'll send the wrong message but eh, I work with what I've got.

I don't offer her any help when she struggles with the zipper, too, but she finally bests that part of my jeans as well.

Just the thought of her touching my dick has this thrill of excitement zapping down my spine. It's such a foreign feeling when it comes to my cock and my pleasure that I'm not sure if I want to stab her to stop it or let this ride out.

The moment her delicate hand wraps around me, my body shudders in favor of her touch.

Definitely ride this out.

Lightning flashes again and I catch the way her eyes widen. I'm assuming not only at my size, but at the magic cross piercing that decorates the head.

"Oh God," she gasps and it's got me grinning like a madman behind my cowl.

I mean, I am a madman, according to the media, so maybe I'm just grinning?

"Close, but no." My grip on her throat tightens and I invade her space again, trapping her hand on my dick between us until I'm just inches from her face. I use my free hand to hook a finger into my mask and tug it down, finally fully revealing myself to her for the first time in a decade. "The name you'll be calling out when it comes to my cock and your body, is Adris."

Her body freezes beneath me and her chest rises and falls rapidly with every breath that saws in and out of her lungs. I cock my head to the side, not giving her time to conjure up any form of a response and lean in closer, allowing my lips to brush over hers when I speak. "You tried to take my breath with that knee to my gut earlier. Little did you know that I haven't taken a proper breath in ten fucking years, Wraith." I squeeze her neck tighter and a soft whimper is released from the confines of her lips. "Now it's my turn to take yours."

Panic flares in her eyes as she shakes her head in my grip, her skull sinking a little



deeper into the earth. I don't know why she's in such a tizzy over digging herself deeper. It's where she longs to be, after all. I let up on her neck when I see her lips moving, like she's trying to speak. "I don't—I'm?—"

"I'm going to fuck this throat before I take this pussy," I growl into her neck, and squeeze her throat just to further drive my point home that I am the one with the control here. "Then maybe you'll understand just exactly what you've done to me."

"Adris—"

"Open." I don't want her excuses. The time for her words and her reasoning is not wanted. Right now, I just need her fucking submission. I need her pain. Her pleasure. Such a thing had never mattered to me before, but this little ghost beneath me has me craving...more.

"Please."

"You'll be begging soon enough, baby. Open." The command falls from my lips at the same time lightning flashes around us and the sky opens up, turning the steady rain into a torrential downpour. I emphasize the demand by shifting my grip to her jaw with one hand while the other grips my cock. Anticipation rushes through me faster than any spike of adrenaline that comes with taking someone's life when I tap the tip against her, smearing a bead of precum over her bottom lip.

Her dark eyes glare up at me, but she's not fooling anyone with the way her blatant desire overpowers her desire to fight. Bummer. I rather enjoy her spark. She bares her flawless teeth at me as she grits out, her lips brushing against my cockhead with an adorable, "Fuck. You."

It's a valiant effort, really, but it only serves to make me smile like the maniac they say I am. "That's the goal, yes." My fingers press into her cheeks, forcing her lips to

part. Fear flashes in her eyes as they stare at my dick. I roll my eyes, huffing, “You can tap my leg three times if it becomes too much, or you feel like you’re going to lose your grip on life.”

I can tell she doesn’t believe me. Smart girl.

The moment her tongue darts out, I waste no time plunging my cock as deep as her throat allows. “There’s a chance your cues could get lost in the storm, though, but at least I’ll know when you’re straddling the line of life and death, my pretty little Wraith.”

I’m so pent up that there’s nothing graceful about the way in which I begin to fuck her face. She relaxes her jaw to take more of me, and I can tell she’s using her tongue by the way it swirls along the underside of my cock. There’s a part of me that simply doesn’t like that she knows what to do when it comes to sucking cock, so it looks like I’ll be digging even deeper into her past, into who it is that put this hit out on her, finding any person who touched her before me, and adding more names to my kill count. Before I cut their dicks off first, of course.

She shimmies beneath me. I look behind me and notice her thighs rubbing together. A dark, sinister chuckle rattles up from my chest from her little cue that she’s turned the fuck on—as much as I’m sure she’d deny it.

I up the pace, my cock throbbing within her mouth, hissing when her teeth scrape along my shaft. Jokes on her, though. I’m into that shit.

“Fuck, you are flirting with me, Wraith,” I grit out. I’m close, and I’m not about to lose this orgasm by pulling out, but her mouth isn’t where I want to come.

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

Reaching behind me, I trail my hand up her smooth, rain-slicked thigh, feeling her goosebumps rise in the wake of my touch until I reach her panties at the apex of her thighs. She tries to tighten them, trying to shut me out, but a quick slap to her inner thigh has her yelping around my length and her knees dropping out to the sides.

Slipping my hand beneath the elastic band, I find her entrance and... she's fucking soaked, but not from the rain. She whimpers around my cock and bucks up into my touch and the sound sends a vibration through my dick that has me groaning out loud. I want so badly to claim her wet cunt with my fingers, but I'm on a mission here, and I don't have time to play with her like I want. Gathering the evidence of her arousal on my fingers, I bring them to my lips and lock eyes with her as I pop the digit into my mouth.

Even in the dark, I can see her pupils dilate while watching me suck her off of my fingers. That tells me all I need to know. I was planning on claiming her regardless, but now I know that some part of her wants me, even if it's buried deep beneath her fight.

I'm a moment away from coming down her throat and she hasn't taken a proper breath for a while. She's essentially minutes away from suffocating on my cock. I pull myself from her mouth, and she sputters then coughs. Stealing her next breath, I squeeze her throat and lean in close as I roughly slide down her body until I've made myself at home between her thighs again, the ridge of my cock resting over her wet pussy.

Her nails dig into my wrist hard enough to draw blood as she fights for air. Leaning in, I can't help but bite at her lip, pulling just hard enough to reopen the wound there.

The tang of her blood hits my tongue and it's almost as sweet as tasting her arousal.

"Tell me, Wraith, does it make you feel alive knowing only I hold the power to bring you to your death?"

Her lashes flutter and her breathing kicks up at my words and I'm not sure if it's at the promise of being able to kill her or not. I need to be buried inside of her but she needs to understand that while she has no control over the situation, she can have power. That she's not some waif to be battered around. The Odessa I knew wasn't a death-chaser, but there's a side of her that seems to have laid dormant. Now it's time to wake her the fuck up and teach her to know when and how to take that power back.

She's going to need it to survive in our world.

Using my grip on her neck and my hand on her hip, I roll, flipping our positions until Odessa is hovering above me, her body trembling from a combination of adrenaline, fear, arousal, and the rain and wind pelting her skin. My cock stands firm, poised at the entrance of her pussy, her panties the only barrier between us.

At least, they were. A satisfying rip tears through the air when I release her hip and hook a finger into the hem, tugging hard enough to tear a hole directly in the center.

Now there's nothing blocking her from me.

She tries to push off of me, but I don't let go of her neck. I use my grip on her to keep her anchored to me. Her long, pastel hair creates a dripping wet curtain around us and it's as if it narrows our world down into two focal points: me and her.

"Let go of me, Adris."

The sound of my name rolling off of her tongue is enough to send me into a feral

frenzy that I barely manage to shove down. Instead, I cock my head against the cold, wet earth, giving her a lazy, lopsided grin. “Mm, no. I don’t think I will.”

“Let me g?—”

“No, you let go, Odessa,” I snap. She freezes above me. “Just fucking. Let. Go.”

At my words, it’s as if time stops. The rain, the thunder, the wind, her heartbeat... everything. Everything, save for the shared breaths between us. Beads of water cling to her tanned, bruised skin and I want nothing more than to lean up to lick them off of her. To ensure I devour every part of her being.

Her dark eyes meet mine and she just stares with a furious passion.

I stare back.

The air seems to crackle and charge around us. Lightning strikes somewhere nearby and the flash of light is brighter than daylight. The thunder that follows is deafening. Odessa looks fucking glorious above me. All anger and fury and arousal thrumming throughout her veins, and it’s as if it’s lighting her up from the inside out.

She looks so alive. So. Fucking. Mine.

My lungs seize and I fight the way my eyes want to roll to the back of my head when she reaches between us and grips my cock in her cold, wet hand, lining me up before sinking her warm, wet pussy down onto me until I’m fully sheathed inside of her. Her lashes flutter at the same time her pouty lips part in a soft “Oh.”

“Fuuuuuck,” I hiss through clenched teeth. She feels like fucking nirvana.

She whimpers as she adjusts to my length that’s now buried so fucking deep inside her,

but it quickly turns into a moan when I shift my hips, rocking into her just once.

Her hands plant themselves on my chest, clenching and unclenching around the fabric of my soaked shirt. I'm about to tell her to fucking move before I take over and fuck her like a beast when her hips begin to undulate, fucking me at her own leisurely pace.

My hands move to grip her hips tight enough to bruise before circling them down to the globes of her ass. I squeeze each cheek as I support her weight, helping her to bounce on my cock.

All the way out.

All the way in.

She takes over, shifting between bouncing and grinding, each of her moans louder and headier than the last. Her legs begin to shake, and I can feel the way her entire body tenses up around me. Her hands seek purchase and it seems my shirt isn't enough for her, because in a fucking flash, she rips my shirt open with a snarl that has my balls drawing up tight and my cock throbbing.

Her nails dig into my flesh, but not nearly enough to cause pain.

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

“If your aim is to hurt me, I’m afraid you’re failing,” I taunt her, leaning up to lick the line of water at her jaw. She bears her teeth at me while she continues to gyrate, bringing us both closer to the edge of oblivion. I grip her wrists and press them deeper into my chest until the skin breaks. “If you’re going to mark me, make it count, Wraith.”

“Fuck you, monster,” she growls, her dark eyes locked onto where she’s starting to draw blood. Her next words are nothing more than a broken whisper full of pain. “I fucking hate you.”

I’ve never been one to dwell on emotions, but something inside of me snaps at her words. Before she can blink, I’m shoving to stand, keeping my cock firmly seated inside of her as I back her against a tree, knocking the wind from her lungs. I slam up into her and she screams out into the forest, but I slap a hand over her mouth and set a punishing pace.

“Every line you draw, I will fucking obliterate it like the monster you’ve made of me. Your emotions have no place here. Not now.” I thrust hard and she cries out around my hand. “The only thing I want you to feel is my cock as it claims your pussy. The only sound I want to hear coming from your lips is the name of the man who melts your pain and pleasure into one.”

She whimpers as her pussy clenches so tightly around me that I practically see stars. Her hands tangle in my wet hair and she pulls hard. Hard enough that she forces my head to tilt back and I have no choice but to face the downpour head-on. Her teeth meet my neck and she bites down, pulling a groan from my throat. She’s fucking vicious when she allows herself to be, and I revel in it.

I can tell she's close. She's panting and shaking, the walls of her pussy spasming around my cock with every harsh thrust.

I pull against her grip on my hair and look into her dark eyes. "You want to come?"

She just stares at me, her chin set in defiance.

Despite my own impending orgasm, I stop, causing her to grunt in frustration. She tries to grind against me, seeking friction, but I pin her harder to the tree, her back scraping against the harsh bark. "You want to come? All you have to do is say it."

I can tell she wants to argue, but she wants to come more. I pull out and thrust back in, my piercings rubbing all the right spots apparently, because she releases one of the most pornographic moans I've ever heard. Butting my forehead against hers, I urge her on, nipping her lower lip. Thrust. "Come on, Odessa." Thrust. "Say it." Thrust.

Rain pours around us and the wind whips at our skin, chilling us to the core. Our breaths mix and just before I feel her clench around me again, her lips part.

"Adris—" is all I allow before my lips slam into hers and I claim every last piece of her that she may have kept hidden from me. Her wide eyes meet mine, a strange emotion taking over her features just before she explodes around me and I immediately follow, the sound of her orgasm swallowed down with every harsh kiss that claims her lips. My cock continues to pump its release deep within her walls as she spirals into oblivion within my arms.

I stand there, holding her, each of us catching our breath as the downpour pounds the ground around us, our breaths intertwining.

In a shocking moment of tenderness, Odessa cups my jaw in her delicate fingers, her dark eyes shining with unshed tears even in the dark of night. Her bottom lip quivers



as her next words come out in a rough whisper. “I never wanted to leave, Adris.” Her eyes close and her head falls forward until it rests in the crook of my neck. “I didn’t want to leave you.”

It’s the last thing she says before her entire body goes limp, completely drained of energy and adrenaline. Like she didn’t just knock my entire psychotic little world off its axis.

Slowly, I make my way out of the woods towards Rune’s home, my cock still seated within Odessa’s now drenched pussy. Thanks to the powers that be, she only unzipped my jeans, or I’d be walking back with them firmly around my ankles. I’m not about to unsheath myself from her. Not when she feels this fucking good. I pull the soaking wet shirt further down to cover as much of Odessa’s ass as I can, to give her some decorum of modesty as I walk her unconscious body to a stranger’s home. My cock is already hard and ready to fucking go again, but I push the feeling down when I see Calix waiting patiently on the covered porch. I don’t miss the raging hard-on behind his sweats, and I have no doubts that he and Rune either saw everything from their cameras or heard her cries, even over the rain. He sees her sleeping form and wastes no time in grabbing one of the towels in his arms and draping it over her body, and the other around my shoulders.

I say nothing as he ushers me inside, her words echoing on repeat inside my head.

I didn’t want to leave.

I didn’t want to leave.

I didn’t want to leave you...

I need some fucking answers and I need them now.

Odessa Kuznetsov belongs to me. Her life. Her death. Her every fucking breath has been mine. I'll take great joy in ending every single motherfucker who kept her from me all these years.

8

You know what I like about Rune and Calix? The fact that they see some fucked up shit with me and they question absolutely nothing. So when I waltz into their home, drenched and covered in blood, mud, and cum? Rune just rolls his eyes and directs me to their guest bath to get cleaned up. Calix offers to help wash her after helping me out of my jeans and ripped tee, but then he sees where Odessa and I are still connected and his face breaks out in a fierce blush before he hurries from the room, adjusting his dick on the way out.

Usually, sharing isn't an issue, as he and Rune let me take my turn on each of them, but the thought of him touching Odessa in this state has me wanting to break every one of his fingers off and jam them down his throat one by one.

Stepping into the shower, I sigh when the hot water rushes over my back, washing away the mud that caked up when I rolled us around. The two of us are a fucking mess. One look in the mirror showed that we were fucking covered in bruises, blood, and mud. My release leaks from around my cock, right where it found its little happy place seated deep inside of her.

Careful not to soak her face, I tip my head back and let the water rinse my hair. It needs to be washed, but with what hands? Mine are a little busy at the moment. By the time I've finished, I know I need to get her cleaned up as well. Dropping down to sit on the showerbench, I adjust her knees on either side of my thighs and grip the tattered t-shirt, pulling it down her shoulders until it hits the ground with a wetplop.

She remains asleep as the rainfall showerhead rinses her back, cleansing the dirt that

clings to the scrapes up and down from where I just fucked her against the tree.

I didn't want to leave you...

Then where the fuck did she go? Why did she leave? I'd always thought it too ironic that the day after I'd made my mark on her, she was gone. My mother always worried about me because she said I could never process emotions normally, so when I lost my shit, lost my sanity, I believed her. I turned into nothing more than a fucking unfeeling machine, hellbent on bathing the entire continent in blood until I found her again.

## Page 14

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

I take inventory of her injuries, carefully calculating what I caused versus what existed prior to my chasing her through the woods. It's obvious that someone was hurting her, but why?

I need some fucking answers like, yesterday. This whole night is not going how I had expected it to, and though I just came harder than I ever have in my life, my skin is crawling with the need to burst again. Killing or fucking, I don't care.

Odessa starts to rouse in my lap, and a soft whimper passes her lips as she wiggles, waking my half-hard cock once again. My growing length inside of her makes her gasp, her dainty hands gripping my shoulders hard as her head raises until her forehead is pressed against mine. Her hips rock gently, the motion slick and sensual from my cum lubing my cock, making it easier for her to ride me. I sit perfectly still, letting her control the narrative.

She keeps the slow and steady rhythm, the tenderness in each thrust driving me past the point of insanity but I clench my jaw, holding myself back from claiming her roughly like I'm so fucking desperate to.

"Adris." Her soft moan is followed swiftly by a growl that radiates from deep within my chest at the sound of my name falling softly from her lips.

Her orgasm comes softly and quickly, tipping me right over the edge with her. I wait as she rides out the last waves, her breaths slowly steadying. It takes a moment, but she finally pulls back, and her eyes meet mine. So many warring emotions battle for dominance on her face.

I ignore them all, not wanting to dive deep into that pit right now. “Let’s get you cleaned up, Wraith,” I say, tapping her thigh, encouraging her to lift up and off of me. She complies, albeit reluctantly, and whimpers at the loss when my cock unsheathes itself from her pussy.

I look down, and I could laugh at how thoroughly used my cock looks right now. Poor guy looks like he’s gasping for air after being so blissfully suffocated by Odessa’s tight pussy. Sex had always been a means to an end for me, but what just happened out in the woods... What happened just now? It was anything but.

I move to stand and notice how my cum has begun to leak, running down her tanned thighs. She tries hurriedly to wash it off, but I’m having none of that. I’d waste no time in shoving it right back inside of her if it weren’t already mixing with the dirt, sticks, and leaves that cling to her skin. She looks at me over her shoulder and quickly covers herself as if I wasn’t just buried balls deep inside of her mere moments ago.

Rolling my eyes, I crowd her personal space when she faces away from me in an attempt to regain some level of modesty. I want nothing more than to manhandle her into listening to me, but logic tells me that it would not be well-received if I want her to submit to me right now. She shifts before me, suddenly guarded, and looks around the oversized area like she’s slipped back into being that meek little death-seeking mouse all over again. Sealing my front to her back, I wrap my arms around her to grip her wrists and pull them away to uncover her breasts. She seems unsure of where to put them, so I lift them until they’re laced behind my neck.

I walk us forward until we’re both under the spray and silently rinse the entire night away. I’ve already permanently marked her again so I’ll let the cum wash away... this time.

Odessa remains silent while I lather her in the spare body wash that I keep here after

particularly bloody jobs. My cock throbs against her lower back when my scent mixes with hers. Such minuscule things never had any merit with me before, but my little Wraith is changing fucking everything in the course of one night and it's threatening to upheave my carefully constructed chaos.

Rinsing her body free of the soap, she leans into me and tips her head back, resting her head against my chest with a contented sigh. She winces when I reach the A that I carved right over her heart and her dark eyes open to meet mine.

I didn't want to leave you, Adris...

I have to get answers and I can't get them while naked in the shower. I mean, I could, but all I can think about is her slick body pressed against mine, so inevitably, I would fuck her again and wouldn't stop until she passed out from exhaustion. Again.

Shutting off the water, I wrap her in a towel before drying myself. I notice two sets of clothes sitting on the bathroom sink that weren't there the first time Calix left, so either he or Rune brought them back at some point. I ignore the errant thought of Calix ogling her because I really don't want to kill one of the only two people I trust.

Group play is one thing if I am the one leading it. Going behind my back to covet what belongs to me is grounds for a fucking stabbing.

Before Odessa can get dressed, I look her over, checking each of her injuries. In the light of the bathroom, I can tell that none of them are self-inflicted. Rage burns hot through me when I see just how bad her bruising is around her neck. Now that her face is clean, I can tell that her nose is not broken, but is busted up pretty bad. I offer her a salve for the cuts on her face and chest, but she flinches away from me.

I don't fucking think so, Wraith.

“Don’t fucking do that,” I snap, grabbing her chin and lifting her face until her eyes fall upon mine again. I don’t wait for her to recoil again before I apply the salve to the cut on her nose and lips.

Grabbing her hips, I lift her until she’s propped up on my sink and I quickly step between her knees before she can snap them shut. If looks could kill, I’d be dead with the way she’s glaring daggers at my forehead. Luckily, she’s quiet, and I’m able to clean and bandage her palm where I’d cut her earlier tonight. It’s deep and will definitely scar, but I don’t think she needs stitches. I’m wrapping the last of the gauze around her hand and wrist when she finally speaks.

“Why?” she whispers, her breaths mixing with my own at my close proximity.

“Elaborate,” I rumble as I add the fasteners to the gauze to keep it in place.

“Why do all this? You were going to kill me an hour ago. That doesn’t make you any better than them.”

I straighten and turn to my clothing pile before throwing my own clothes on. “Plans change. If I wanted you dead, you’d be dead, Wraith. I don’t play with my food before I eat it,” I say, turning toward her pile of clothes, but stop and think. A crazed grin stretches over my lips. “Okay, maybe I do, but not for this long. I also don’t let targets ride on the back of my bike and I certainly don’t fuck them in the woods until they come all over my cock, either.”

She blushes fiercely and lifts her hands when I motion for her to do so. I pull the plain black t-shirt over her head before she says in a voice so soft I barely register it, “That can’t happen again.”

I scoff. “You mean the way it happened again when you rode me again in the shower just minutes ago?”

Her blush deepens.

I tap the scar on her chest and she hisses in pain. “What did I tell you that night?”

“Adris—”



“What. Did. I. Tell. You.”

She tries to look away, but I grip her neck and use my thumb beneath her jaw to hold her in place. “That it belongs to you.”

“Thatwhatbelongs to me?”

“My heart. Everything. All of me.”

I nod. “And then you left me,” I spit, dropping my hand. I leave the bathroom with her following hesitantly behind me as I make my way through the house until I get to the guest room Rune set up for me.

I know what she said earlier, but I’m goading her to repeat herself. She stands in the doorway of the room before quietly closing the door behind her. That’s... brave. What she knows of me is that I’m a fucking killer who will take whatever the fuck I see fit from her, uncaring of the necessary steps to get there. And yet, she just shut herself in here with me.

She’s quiet for several moments before she repeats her words from earlier. “I-I didn’t want to leave you, Adris.”

“You say that, yet you did it anyway.”

Facts, Adris. Get the fucking facts and quit fucking pussyfooting around them with immature banter.

I sit on the edge of the bed with a heavy sigh and beckon her toward me. Reluctantly, she listens and stops just shy of my reach. I allow it. For now.

“What happened, Wraith?”

“It was my mother,” she supplies, but I already knew this. Mikhail Kuznetsov was furious and beside himself for years after Odessa and her mother disappeared. Odessa was the bastard child but the sole heir to the Kuznetsov bratva. He’s been searching for her for all these years, but it’s something else that plagues the Pakhan besides his secret daughter’s disappearance.

“Why did she take you and run?”

“Why is the fucking sky blue, Adris? That world is dangerous and my mother was tired of living in fear. She loved Papa, but she loved me enough to leave him and try and give me a shot at a normal life.”

“Doesn’t look like she did much better.” I gesture to her bruises and her eyes instantly well with those pesky-ass tears.

“That’s because we never made it,” she snaps at me, her chin quivering. “Mama was killed before we even made it an hour outside of city limits. An enemy of Papa ran us off the road, then shot my mother point-blank.”

That is new. According to my father, they turned the city upside down looking for them and had never mentioned anything of the sort. As if the evidence of her mother’s death—of her and Odessa’s entire existence—had been scrubbed. Wherever she’s been over the last decade, it wasn’t paradise, that’s for fucking sure.

I look at the woman before me, needing more answers from her before I go completely off the rails and start another killing spree. “And what about you? What

happened to you after she was killed?”

She swallows thickly, shifting her stance from foot to foot. Tears free-fall down her cheeks in heavy rivulets as she whispers, “I was taken from the wreckage and sold.”

The icy blood that already ran through my veins freezes. My body goes rigid and all I see is red. My voice is low and controlled, though I feel anything but. “Sold? By who? To whom?”

My jaw ticks as I wait for her to answer. Little does she know she’s feeding me my next kill. Knowing I’m this close to sinking my arrows into another mark has me nearly salivating with feral excitement.

She takes a hesitant step forward, her brows drawn down. “What are you going to do to him when I tell you?”

I tilt my head at her. When. Not if... I grab her by the hem of her shirt and give a firm tug, effectively yanking her closer. I catch her body as she stumbles over her own feet and settle her to stand between my spread thighs. Her golden skin breaks out in goosebumps when I trail each of my hands up the backs of her thighs.

“You really want to know what I’ll do to the man who bought you? To the people who sold you?” I give her a wicked grin, looking up at her from beneath my lashes before placing a hot kiss to the space between her breasts, over her shirt.

Her lips roll between her teeth for a contemplative moment, then she nods.

I lean up and bite her left nipple through her shirt, tugging lightly. She gasps and her hands fly to my hair. “You want me to tell you what I’ll do to the man who dared to touch you?” Another nod, and her fingers tug at my strands when I move to tease her other breast. “To hurt what fucking belongs to me?”

“Yes.” Her instant confirmation is nothing more than a breathy gasp.

My grin is so fucking wide that it has skipped manic, and morphs straight into deranged when I grab her hips and flip us around, and toss her onto the bed with a bounce. I’m on her before she can brush her wild, pastel hair from her eyes.

I do it for her. Of course, not because I’m a gentleman, but because I want her to see the full extent of her monster that will forever fucking haunt her, slaying all other demons and monsters who even think about breathing the same air as her.

I pin her hands above her head before licking a slow line up the column of her neck. “When I find him, I think I might tie him up with some rusty barbed wire. Let him hang just far enough off the ground that he can’t find any relief.”

## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

Scraping my teeth along her jaw, she bucks up beneath me, her hips seeking friction but I shift down her body and settle my weight there so she can't move. "Then I'm going to cut off every single finger that he has ever laid upon you, knuckle by knuckle."

My tongue laves over my initial on her chest and she yelps. "Oh,fuck."

Her hands find their way back to my hair as I shift even further down her body. I nip at each of her hip bones before placing a languid kiss just over the mound of her pussy. She's bare beneath the shirt, since I didn't offer her the bottoms that Calix had left. It's easyaccess and I fucking need her bared to me at all times because I will tear apart any barrier that threatens to keep me from her.

"And while he's screaming from having stumps for hands, I'll take my time carving his fucking doorstep of a dick from his body. I'll make him watch as I douse it in gasoline and set it on fire."

Her eyes widen in shock before rolling to the back of her head when I drag my tongue up the length of her pussy before sucking her swollen, needy clit into my mouth. She's already sensitive to the touch with how red and thoroughly used her flesh is from fucking her so roughly in the woods.

I hear Calix whimper from somewhere outside the door, no doubt being the nosy, horny little shit that he is.

Turning my head, I bite down on her inner thigh. Odessa makes this seductive mewling sound that goes straight to my cock. "But just to make sure he doesn't pass

out on me, I'll inject him with adrenaline and make him watch me with wide eyes as I drive one of my arrows right through the center of his pounding heart." Another slow, languid lick up her drenched pussy has her knees quivering and squeezing around my skull. "Then I'll fuck you in his blood as a reminder of who the fuck owns you, body and soul."

I look up to see that her dark eyes are obsidian with how blown out her pupils have become. She's panting and her brows are drawn together. Her voice shakes as her words are forced out on a whisper. "There's something seriously wrong with?—"

"Me?" I supply, but she swallows, shaking her head.

"Me," she counters. I lower my head, keeping my lips barely a whisper away from her pussy while I await the rest of her statement. I can practically see the insanity lurking behind her eyes. It seems to be that my Wraith also has a sick, depraved little monster just like mine. All caged up and gnawing at its bars, and I'm going to fucking set her free. Her next words bind her to me in ways she'll never escape from, because she's just fed my hungry beast exactly what he wanted to know. "Because his name is Santino Ferrero, and I want to watch you tear him apart, piece by piece."

It's the last words to pass her lips before I dive in again, rewarding her for her compliance. Meanwhile, I'm becoming more and more addicted to not only her taste, but the sound of my name on her lips while making her come repeatedly on my tongue, fingers, or cock. Only, the satiation that I feel in taking control of her body does nothing to quell the urge to wreak havoc on the world around me. It's quite the opposite, I fear. Every time life sparks in her eyes by fighting against me for control, the way the yearning for death evaporates with my every touch? It's also a reminder that there's a group of motherfuckers out there who took her from me and bled the will to live from her soul. And that has me more than ready to drown the world in a sea of sinew and blood.

Ididn't mean to make Odessa pass out from too many orgasms... again. I mean, I did, but not so soon. I've got shit to do and she's got answers to help me get it done. Ah well, c'est la vie and all that.

I leave her to rest in my bed and bandage my own cut from when she'd sliced me earlier. After, I find Rune and Calix waiting for me at the island in the kitchen. Calix is pouting and nursing a small tumbler of vodka where he's perched on the corner of the island. Rune stands between his legs, a stern look on his face.

I lift a single brow at the two of them. "Do I need to come back?"

Rune shakes his head. "Cal is just pissed that I wouldn't let him come again after he heard your collateral damage mewling through the door."

"Don't call her that or I'll cut your fucking tongue out and feed it to your dog," I grit.

"We don't have a d?—"

"Woof." Calix barks and Rune looks like he can't decide if he wants to bend Calix over his knee, or put his mouth to use in other ways. Probably both.

"Oh, my fucking God. Fine," Rune groans, completely unfazed by the threat and instead turns to Cal and places an open mouthed kiss to his throat, just over a nasty scar that trails across the front. "You should know that this fucking mutt is also pouting because he thinks she's losing our dynamic now that you've found someone else, someone new to fill that void."

My eyes trail to Calix, whose innocent face is now as bright red as his ass gets when I've taken my hand to it several times. My cock twitches at the idea of punishing him

again for eavesdropping on Odessa's orgasm, but then again, I had her quite literally screaming my name so I can't fault him for hearing and listening in.

Rune and Calix had always known that my interactions with them were merely transactional. A means to an end. But seeing the hurt and jealousy in Calix's eyes tells me that at some point in time, it started to mean more to him.

Rune is the center of his universe, but clearly he's thrown me into the mix there, somewhere, too.

I need to explain this whole shitshow of a situation and find the answers I need before addressing anyone's fucking hurt feelings.

"The woman in that room is Odessa Kuznetsov."

Rune's eyes widen to saucers and he blanches when he hears her full name. "Oh, shit."

Oh, shit is right. For many, many reasons.

Calix chews on his lip, his eyes volleying back and forth as if he's sifting through all the information he keeps stored in his brain for moments like this. "You're sure?"

I nod.

Rune rakes a hand through his pale, messy strands before turning his blue eyes onto me. "Well, what the fuck happened, Adris? She had a hit put out on her. And I thought she was from Chicago? How the fuck did she wind up in Washington? Truth be told, I thought she was dead, because nobody can outrun the bratva."



*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

Yeah, no kidding. The boys know some of Odessa's story based on what I told them in the past when I was first sent to the west coast by Mikhail, but even I didn't have all the details back then. They thought I was off the rails nuts and certifiably insane with how often I would leave a string of bodies in my wake. They weren't wrong. The first time they invited me to play with them was the first time the urge to kill had been dulled fractionally enough to at least explain my compunction to cause a heart to stop beating.

Odessa was in possession of the threads that held my humanity together and when she left, they snapped one by one with every mile she ran away from me.

I divulge the new information to the two of them, explaining how her mother had been killed and how she was sold to Santino Ferrero for what purposes, I don't know, but regardless of what they were, he was a dead man the moment he had half a thought to purchase her.

"Ferrero? The head of the Italian mafia here in Washington?" Rune asks, moving down the hall and turns into his office where all of his computer equipment is set up. Rune is a fucking tech genius and his skill is highly sought after in the underground world.

"It seems so. Why?"

"He's a piece of shit," Calix mumbles under his breath. I roll my eyes, crossing my arms over my chest. Rune sits behind his computer monitors, but makes room for Cal when he moves to sit in his lap.

“Welcome to our world, Calix. We’re all pieces of shit here.”

Now it’s his turn to roll his eyes while Rune types away on his keyboard. “No, I mean he’s an actual piece of shit. Santino Ferrero let his position of power go straight to his head. From what I heard, he’s in the red after gambling all of his money away on bad business dealings. He’s also in deep shit with several outfits that were once allies to the Ferrero family after three of his drug trafficking rings were busted and his storage warehouses were set on fire.”

He pauses, sifting through his mental cache of information again. That’s the special thing about Calix. He has an eidetic memory, which is both as much an asset as it is a liability. All it takes is hearing or witnessing one conversation or event, and it becomes permanently ingrained in his memory, right down to the finest details. It’s quite the spectacle to watch, because it’s like he becomes a completely different person when he starts to recall information.

“He was also arranged to marry Nadya Papov, daughter to the head of the Papov bratva, by his thirtieth birthday. It was done so in an effort to strengthen the alliance between the mafia and the bratva of the west coast, particularly the Pacific northwest. But I heard through Volkov that Pakhan Papov called it off suddenly, earlier this week. This is Santino’s second engagement, but I don’t know who she was or what happened to the first woman promised to him,” he says, a look of frustration creasing his brows as if he’s upset that he doesn’t have more information. His dark eyes snap up. “Wait,” he says, looking at me from behind the monitors, “you were on his property today. How the hell did you not know any of this?”

“Because if you recall, the contract gave me no information about the kill other than a first initial and the money he was willing to pay. The hit was an anonymous request. The whole situation was fucked and nothing made sense. There was no staff onsite, no security either. Every alarm had been disabled prior to my arrival. Santino suddenly wanted Odessa dead after he had her under his thumb for a fucking decade.”

I grind my molars so hard at the thought that I swear I hear one of them crack.

“The question is, why?” Calix ponders, his eyes moving to whatever Rune is doing on his computer.

“No, the question is, where the fuck did he go? I don’t give two shades of shit about the ‘why’ of it all. He’s a dead man regardless of what his reasoning is. He took what belongs to me but he sealed his visit from the fucking Cupid Killer the moment I found out exactly who he wanted dead.”

Calix’s doe-eyed mocha gaze meets mine and his shoulders sag in defeat, “She really means that m?—”

“Shut the fuck up, Cal,” Rune snaps, slapping a hand over Calix’s mouth, but I’m already moving across the room and lifting Calix by his jaw off of Rune’s lap, backing him into the wall. I crowd his space and force my knee between his legs. He’s already hard against my thigh because Cal lives for rough play.

Rune watches silently from his chair, knowing to not interfere. I cock my head to the side, watching his pupils blow with arousal. “What’s wrong, malenkyi diable? Use your words.”

His breaths come heavily and I loosen my grip on his jaw so he can speak clearly. “I don’t—” He swallows, his eyes darting to Rune. Rune nods back at him in my peripheral. “I don’t like the idea of losing you to someone else.”

I narrow my eyes. “Who says you have to?”

“I—Well,” he stutters. “I don’t—I?—”

“Calix,” I croon, pressing my knee harder into him until he groans. “Lines were

drawn in societal norms by jealous men, and tell me where the fuck any of us fit into society?”

“We don’t,” he breathes, his eyes volleying between mine.

“We don’t,” I confirm.

I don’t like the idea of anyone but me coming anywhere near my Wraith but perhaps I could attempt to extend the same trust to Calix and Rune with Odessa as they’ve given to me with each of them. What’s the worst that could happen? I stab them both and take her far away from here? Simple solutions.

Just when I think Calix is about to implode from the friction of my thigh against his dick, I back up a few steps and turn my attention to Rune. “We need to find this cocksucker first so I can make him dead before I can even think about fucking. I’m about to lose my fucking cool and start stabbing, Rune.” It’s like he’s not even paying attention. He’s actually got his eyes glued to the monitor. “What are you doing?”

“I put some feelers out on the dark web. Offering payment in exchange for information that can lead us directly to Santino.”

“You don’t need that,” a soft voice calls from the doorway. All three of us turn at the same time to see Odessa standing there in nothing but a black tee, her pastel locks falling in messy waves down to her navel. Her dark eyes flit over each of us before landing on me.

She crosses the room and stops in front of where I stand. Her cheeks are flushed a bright crimson as she watches Calix panting like the dirty dog he is somewhere behind me. She probably witnessed the whole exchange. I don’t bother with offering an explanation, though. Instead, I lift my hand to grab one of her wild, wavy strands of hair to rub between my fingers and my eye fucking twitches when she flinches

away from me. The bruising on her face is just one of the infinitely many clear indicators that it's not just me, but because it's a habit she's formed from her past. I can see the apology and fear written in her eyes, but I don't want her cowardess. I want to devour that fear and leave nothing but the crumbs of unapologetic chaos in its wake.

She steps closer to me when she notices the two extra sets of eyes on her. Rune is watching her with a disinterested expression and Calix can't decide if he's jealous or turned on at the sight of her. They each have a bad history with women, so I'm sure there'll be an adjustment period for the four of us.

I gesture to the man now scowling at Calix. "This delightful ray of sunshine is Rune."

He flips me off before softening his hardened expression and nodding at Odessa.

## Page 18

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

“And this,” I swing my arm out in over dramatic fanfare, “is Calix.”

Oh, what the fuck? I bite back the growl building in my chest because when I look over my shoulder, I see that Calix is blushing fiercely all because my little Wraith offers him the faintest of smiles.

Fuck, no.

Nope.

Not doing this shit.

Calix has Rune, and I have them, and Odessa has me, and it’s a big fucking clusterfuck and I’m not doing this right now. Fuck, man.

Outside of some drama that had gone down prior to my arrival, I don’t think Calix has had relations with a woman before, but I can read his every thought about Odessa as clear as day on his face. I’m about to break his dick off for making his thoughts so loud about her.

“Adris—” Rune snaps. I look at him. “I don’t know of you’re aware of this, but you’re actually fucking growling, man. Calm the fuck down.”

“I am not,” I snap, but he’s right. I totally was.

Rune sighs and turns his attention toward Odessa. “What did you mean I won’t have to?” He hedges and she shifts nervously on her feet. It’s a tic that grates on my frayed

nerves, so I pull her to a chair and into my lap as I sit down.

She swallows, sinking her body back into mine. “I think I know where he goes when he needs to hide out.”

“And where would that be, Wraith?”

She turns to me, biting her lower lip for a moment before she speaks. “He only spoke Italian around me, but there were certain words he would say that sounded close enough to English that I understood. Just before he...” Her voice cracks and she tries to retreat into herself but I give her a squeeze in warning. In an instant, her spine straightens and her eyes snap up to mine. “Before he left tonight, I heard the word *rifugio* a few times when he was speaking with his underboss over the phone. I’m assuming the word means something similar to ‘refuge,’ or maybe a safehouse?”

I nod in confirmation and she continues. “I think he’s in Italy somewhere. *Isola di Lipari*. That’s the name he had repeated, at least. He left a few hours before you arrived. He could still be in the States, but... I don’t know.”

Rune starts tapping away on his keyboard, his lips set in a firm line while he works on narrowing it down to a more precise location, I’m sure.

“He left you alone for hours? Why the fuck didn’t you just leave?” I snap at her, but she gives me a look that screams *you know why*.

“Ah, right. My little death-seeker had planned on meeting her maker tonight. Too fucking bad I spoiled your plan, isn’t it?”

I’ve no sooner finished my sentence when Odessa disappears from my lap and a loud *SLAP* reverberates around the room, my head snapping to the side after connecting with her palm.

A deafening silence laced with malice fills the room. The taste of blood fills my mouth as I slowly turn my head back to the woman who finally worked up the nerve to defend herself. Too bad I don't tolerate that shit. Amidst the fury burning in her eyes, the color drains from her face and a look of horror crosses her features when I slowly rise from the chair. She looks like she wants to bolt, and as much as I want to throttle her for raising her hand against me, I won't. That's not my ultimate goal here.

Odessa is forcing me to feel things I don't think I'm fully capable of feeling in any normal capacity. While it may make me want to stab her for making me feel out of control, I don't want to cause her more pain and suffering. It's obvious that Santino was hurting her, and to what extent, I don't know. Yet.

I don't want her to crave death. I want her to become addicted to my darkness and chaos, and to learn that I can breathe life into her by taking those very breaths away.

She remains rooted to the spot when I move until I'm standing chest to chest with her. I've got more than a foot of height on her so she really has to crane her neck to meet my eyes. One hand tangles in her strands at the back of her head while the other slowly slides up her neck until I'm gripping her throat. I don't squeeze, though.

Bending down until my lips ghost over hers, I murmur quietly, "Don't ever fucking raise your hand against me again, Wraith."

I'm pleasantly surprised when she doesn't cower, but instead meets me with her own ire. "Says the man who has done nothing but manhandle me from the moment he stepped into my room."

Rune says something, but I'm not listening. I continue to stare at the woman before me, my face just a fucking whisper away from hers.

"Need I remind you of how hard you come, or how loud you scream my name when



you're subjected to my manhandling?"

"Adris—" She tries to admonish, but my name turns into a yip and a moan when I lower my lips to the junction where her neck meets her shoulder and bite down hard.

Her hands fly to my hair and she grips the strands. I chuckle darkly against her skin before straightening again, forcing her to release me.

"I found him." Rune repeats, gaining my attention.

I turn, noting that Calix is watching the two of us closely, and he's trying so hard to mask all of the emotions that are currently running rampant across his face. His hands are folded in front of him, covering up the raging hard-on currently straining his sweats.

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

I look to Rune. “Do you have an exact location?”

He nods. “Close enough,” he says, grabbing his laptop and pushing to stand. He moves to Calix and grips him by the back of his neck. He visibly relaxes in his partner’s hold. “I’ll get a more pinpointed location shortly. I assume I’ll need to contact the airfield?”

“Your assumption would be correct,” I confirm. I grab Odessa by the wrist and pull her behind me as I make my way from the room. I call over my shoulder, knowing Rune needs to get Calix under control before either of them can be around Odessa again. “Do what you need to do to be ready to leave in fifteen.”

Odessa trails behind me until I unceremoniously yank her into the room behind me. I pull her into my arms and her legs immediately wrap around my hips. Slamming her back against the wood of the door, my mouth ravages her skin wherever I can reach her. Her fucking fire earlier has me more turned on than I’ve ever felt and I need to feel her. Now.

I’ve never felt so out of control. My hands shake with the adrenaline pumping through my veins while I hastily pull the waistband of my sweats down just far enough for my cock to spring free. I’m on the verge of losing complete control. I need release. I have too many fucking needs and I have to purge the overwhelming rush of it all before I hurt her. The need to kill Santino. The need to fuck Odessa. The need to get back to my carefully constructed chaos. All of it. None of it. Fuck. Me.

“Adris, what—” But her words break off on a sultry moan when I sink into her wet heat in one go, burying myself deep inside. It’s not enough. I want to burrow myself

beneath her skin and make a home there. I want to carve my name so deep into her soul that she'll never be rid of me.

My little Wraith clings to me for dear life, her nails digging hard enough into my skin that she draws blood while I wreak havoc on her tight pussy. I pound into her relentlessly, growling my growing frustrations into her skin. Her moans and mewls only spur me on. I find the spot on her neck where I bit her just minutes ago and run my tongue along the indented flesh. Her whole body shivers in my hold. I can feel her tightening around me, her body coiling up, ready to burst with her impending orgasm.

"Let go and come for me, Wraith." I say, curling my hips into her. I don't let up, fucking her hard against the door. My own orgasm slithers down my spine the moment her body convulses and she comes, my name a broken prayer on her lips. What sends me over the edge, though, is when her own lips seal around my neck, in the same spot I had marked her, and she returns the favor, biting me.

She's fucking meant for me.

I spill every part of me, every bit of the monster she made of me, into her. I let her feel the beast I've become as my cock releases every drop of cum deep within her walls, further marking Odessa Kuznetsov as mine.

Panting, I lift my head and I'm immediately met with her dark eyes. Something shifts within me and it feels like a gunshot straight through my gut. Her eyes remain locked onto me but I can't look at her right now. She's making me fucking feel and like a petulant child, I. Don't. Like. It.

I can tell she wants to say something, but I can't hear her words right now. My cock slips from her as I lower her back to the floor. She shifts on her feet and it draws my eyes to where my cum is currently dripping down her tanned thighs. She opens her mouth to protest, but I quickly slap my palm over her lips when I trail my fingers up

her leg, swiftly catching every last drop and thrusting it back inside her. She moans behind my hand and her round, dark eyes shine with an emotion I'd rather stay far, far away from. So I turn away from her, making my way to the closet across the room. Pulling out a black button down shirt, I toss it at her along with a pair of black socks. She's never wearing that trash for a uniform again but she's got no other clothes here. At least the shirt will cover every bit of her utterly distracting skin.

We both dress in silence but still, I refuse to look at her.

I feel her soft touch on my upper arm. "You'll take me with you?"

I turn, a smirk pulling at my lips when I feel that my head is level enough to look her in the eye. "Baby, you couldn't get away from me from now on, even if you fucking tried."

I expected any emotion to cross her face that isn't the one she's wearing now. She looks... relieved.

"I also want to be there when you... kill Santino."

Wrapping an arm around her waist, I pull her into me. "I'll give you the fucking dagger to drive right into his heart yourself."

Something shifts in her gaze, that little monster I caught lurking just beneath the surface peeks out when a sinister smile tugs at her busted lips. "Promise?"

Oh, fuck. I can't get turned on again.

Down, boy.

I make an Xshape over the A on her heart before doing the same to my own. "Cross

my cold, dead heart, Wraith.”

10

I’ve only ever flown once in my life, and the majority of the trip was spent under sedation because apparently I was too combative for the crew to handle. A needle in my upper arm pushed something into my system that had me knocked out until the wheels touched down here in Washington. That’s where I’ve been held captive for the last ten years, I’ve learned.

I opted to sit alone in the back of this tiny plane and luckily, Adris allowed it. He had done nothing but manhandle me, use me, and confuse the fuck out of me from the moment he waltzed into my room on Santino’s estate. I’ve never felt so many conflicting emotions in my entire life and I’m beyond overwhelmed. For so long, all I felt was pain, sadness, and grief. My days were spent mourning the loss of my mother, my family, my life, and my freedom... my innocence. Santino Ferrero stole everything from me.

Tonight, I was going to take my life back by taking it away because I saw no other way out from the endless cycle of misery I was constantly exposed to.

Then Adris came barreling back into my life, ready to end my very existence himself. Of all the times I had dreamed, yearned for the boy who had claimed my heart as his own, the last thing I expected was to be at the wrong end of his arrow. But something changed. Shifted. Somewhere between being chased through the woods and being fucked against his bedroom door, he decided to keep me around.

He’s been watching me like a hawk, knowing I was ready to die at any given moment. I’d say he was worried, but I don’t think Adris knows such an emotion. I don’t think he feels much of anything at all. Except for when he’s buried deep inside of me. It’s like he becomes a man possessed and his eyes light up with the heat of a

thousand infernos with every thrust of his hips. The dead, unfeeling expression disappears, replaced by anger, fury, and lust.

I know I should be fighting against his every move. Fighting for freedom, not trading one cage for another. But the twisted truth is, I don't want to. Tonight, Adris has breathed more life into me than I've felt in ten years. He may have taken my choices away, but he was right. He didn't take my power. Earlier tonight in the woods, he had given me the power to take control.

There was no choice in that moment.

There was only Adris.

It's always been Adris.

From the first time he appeared in my bedroom and every night after, it's been him. I wanted to claim Adris as my own in the same way he had laid claim to my soul. Words were never exchanged, but his silence spoke louder and clearer than any teenage conversation ever could. Every night he would take a piece of me with him when he would leave, but he gave, too.

Not of himself, but little tokens, reassurances that he wasn't just a dream. That he was really there with me.

The conversation hearts.

Adris always left two on the pillow where he would lay some nights, watching over me. I have no idea where he got them from but the messages were always the same.

MINE.

ALWAYS.

I understand my mother wanting to live a life of freedom, of wanting to give me a future that wasn't already premeditated. To be used as a bargaining chip in the bratva world. I didn't want to leave him. For the first time in my life, I had wanted to fight my mother just to stay, my future be damned.

But my leaving caused something to snap in Adris. He believed I'd willingly run, and it fucked with his mind more than I ever could've imagined. I had heard whispers of the Cupid Killer throughout the years. The trail of bodies left in his wake would probably be plentiful enough to stretch across the span of the continent and back. I had never learned much about the killer, other than the fact that he seemed to target the scum of the earth, who often worked under men like Santino.

The first few hours of the flight, I was able to piece together why they call Adris the Cupid Killer. The first clue being the fact that he works with those fucking terrifying broadhead arrows. The second came from the lifetime supply of conversation hearts stashed in the spare closet of Calix and Rune's home. I discovered them when I went snooping through the room in search of anything that could clue me in as to where exactly I was. For ten years I've been lost, knowing I was somewhere in the Pacific Northwest, but didn't know exactly where. I was looking for a piece of mail, a letter, a fucking postcard... anything. I'd found a large cardboard box, thinking I had hit the jackpot, but instead I found the candy boxes.

My heart stutters over the fact that he chose those hearts in particular as his calling card. Like he wanted me to know he was out there, scouring the continent in search of me. At least that's what my delusional ass is choosing to believe.

My eyes drift on their own accord to the two men sitting across from Adris at the front of the plane. Rune, the stoic, white-haired man with ice-blue eyes is fully immersed in his laptop. Meanwhile, Calix—the deceptively sweet-faced man with dark eyes and dark curly hair sits next to Rune, seemingly having a one-sided conversation with Adris. He'd told me about their relationship, but what has me more curious is the dynamic that Adris has with the two of them.

When I found the group of men in the office, Adris had Calix pinned to the wall by his throat with his knee wedged between his legs. There wasn't even enough room to fit a wisp of air between the two of them.



Unfettered jealousy ripped through me at their close proximity, but I felt I had no merit and no leg to stand on when it came to my claim on Adris. He's not the kind of man who can be owned.

It doesn't stop me from wanting it, though, does it?

It was impossible to miss the arousal and lust permeating the air in that moment, the feeling practically radiating off of Calix in heavy, stifling waves. According to Adris, the adoptive brothers are also together, together, but he mentioned nothing of being in some sort of...group relationship with them.

Being a slave for most of my adolescence, I grew up not knowing much of relationships, other than marriage was to be between man and woman, and women were to be subservient to their men. One night outside the walls of that wretched place has changed my entire perspective.

It's clear to see that Rune loves Calix and Calix loves Rune. But it's also obvious that Calix feels something for Adris, too. Adris doesn't feel much in any capacity beyond obsession, but he clearly has a history with these two men.

So where does that leave me?

My heart stutters at the thought and I turn to face the window—away from the men at the front of the plane—and close my eyes, curling in on myself. Unshed tears sting the backs of my eyes when my thoughts drift to the way I had been treated by Santino. For years, I've been nothing more than an object to be abused, used, and discarded. I can't help but feel that it's no doubt how Adris will see me eventually, too.

A finger swipes at a rogue tear that had escaped and rolled down my cheek, and the unexpected touch makes me jolt in my seat. My head whips to the side to see Adris

occupying the vacant seat next to me as he sucks his finger into his mouth, devouring my tearlike a delicacy.

His expression is blank as he watches me, his eyes boring into mine for a pregnant pause. He cocks his head to the side like a curious, demonic puppy when he homes in on the tears gathered in my eyes. His own eyes narrow before he leans in closer and his tongue darts out and he licks the next tear directly from my cheek when it falls.

“Why?” His bored tone makes it sound more like a statement than a question.

I don’t answer him fast enough, because his hand darts out like he’s going to grab me, but I swat his wrist away, having had enough of being jerked around tonight.

His nostrils flare but he doesn’t react otherwise. It’s the closest thing to a reaction that I’m going to get, I guess.

“Why the tears?” he tries again, but it’s still just as flat as the first time he asked, and if my face wasn’t so sore from all the bruising and my split lip, I’d laugh.

Instead I release a heavy breath, allowing my head to slump back against the headrest and close my eyes. “It’s been a fucking day, Adris,” I murmur, shifting in my seat to alleviate the pain in my sore muscles. “I’m so far beyond my mental and physical limits and we’re not even done yet, apparently.”

“No rest for the mentally deranged, or however the saying goes,” he quips. I snort.

“He’ll be dead in less than twelve hours, you know,” he says after a few minutes of silence between us. I crack open one eye and look at him.

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:35 am*

“Good,” is the only response I can conjure up.

“Then why the ugly fucking tears, Wraith?” I can tell his patience is at its end, so I relent, giving him my full attention.

“When will it end, Adris?”

He stares at me like I’m speaking an unknown language. “You’re going to have to elaborate for me.”

“Anything. Everything. I don’t know.” I huff, running a hand through my tangled hair. “I’m just so tired. Ten years of captivity under Santino’s thumb was bad enough, but half of that was spent being his brava ragazzasex doll.”

No sooner have the words left my mouth does Adris vacate his seat and crowd my personal space. My back presses into the window. The expression on his face looks almost painful as rage contorts his features.

11

I beg her finest motherfucking pardon? His brava fucking ragazza sex doll? My eye twitches and our breaths mingle as I invade the space around her. Odessa Kuznetsov is nobody’s fucking anything but mine. I knew by the way she took my cock that she had some form of a sexual experience in her life, but she was abused and assaulted for five years? Five? Fucking? Years?

The bruising on her body pisses me off even more, because Ferrero thoroughly broke

her. He stole her from me and stole all that she was, all that she was meant to be at my side, from me. He cost me my fucking family. My sanity. He took what wasn't his to take and Odessa was ready to die because of him.

“Did he...” My fingers brush over the fingerprints on her neck with a tenderness I certainly do not feel. I physically shake my head of my errant thoughts and ask again. “When he did this to you,” I brush my thumb over the scab on her lower lip, “did he?—”

“No,” she answers quickly, her eyes never wavering from mine when she speaks. Her delicate hands cup my cheeks and it's as if her touch quells the fire burning through my veins. My stomach twists uncomfortably at the sudden change but I ignore it, redirecting my focus on her face as she explains, “With Santino, the pain always overpowered the pl?—”

“Don't you fucking dare say pleasure,” I hiss, but she has the nerve to put a finger over my lips to silence me.

“But that's what it was, unfortunately. It's not something I wanted, nor did I ask for. In fact, I fought him every chance I got in the beginning, but I soon learned that he was less violent if I was less combative.” Her dark eyes pin me to the spot and I can't look away. I welcome the feeling of her nails digging into the skin of my jaw as she continues. “He took me and broke me and turned me into this...monster who craved the pain. I wanted to fight him so that he would hurt me. Because feeling the pain on the outside was better than the pain I felt in here,” she says, tapping my chest. “When I felt like the world had finally forgotten about me, I gave up. I started to hope that he'd finally take it too far. To put an end to the shame and disgust I felt when my body would react against my will to his touch. I hated—hate him, but I hate me more.”

She tries to curl back into herself at her admission, but I'll be having none of that.

Gripping her hips, I pull her into my lap until her small, lithe body is straddling my thighs. I revel in the fact that she comes willingly. A quick hiss bursts from my lips when her knee brushes the spot on my side where she stabbed me earlier, and the zap of pain hardens my dick because like her, I crave and get off on it. The only difference is that mine came with the experience of willingly testing my limits. Her choice was stolen from her.

I cup her ass and scoot her closer to me until we're nose to nose. "I'm not going to promise you a life of sunshine and rainbows and peace on earth. What I can promise you, though, is to bathe the world in the blood of whoever dares to try taking your power from you."

"But you took?—"

"Control," I interject, leaning in to nip at her neck before whispering against the shell of her ear, "because you've always had power over me."

Her body tenses over my words, and I can tell by her silence that she doesn't believe me. That's fine. It doesn't change the truth that's plagued me for years.

I look up through my lashes over her shoulder to find Calix and Rune watching me with rapt attention. I ponder how well Odessa would respond to the four of us together, but I file it away for later because now isn't the time and I don't trust myself not to hurt anyone who comes near her that isn't me.

I shift Odessa in my lap until she's sideways, but of course she fights me and my "manhandling," as she so lovingly labeled it.

"Adris, I can sit on my own."

"Shhh-ut the fuck up and just rest, little Wraith." I lay my head back against the

headrest, watching as Calix lays his head in Rune's lap so he can rub his fingers through his curly hair. I smirk. "Murdering a man is no walk in the park, and you're going to need your energy. Otherwise the arrow can get stuck in the squishy, fleshy part of the?—"

"Ew, Adris, okay. Stop talking," she snaps while simultaneously settling into my chest. Just before her breathing evens out, her last words force a silent, yet equally unhinged chuckle to barrel through my chest. "Fucking psychopath."

No lies detected there.

"I'm your psychopath, baby. And now there's nowhere you could go that could keep me from finding you. Even if it's right into a goddamned grave."

A whole-ass eternity later, we touched down in Italy and had to pay an old fisherman to discreetly drop us off on the far side of the island where Santino was spotted docking the previous night. It took a few hours to trek through the island to get just beyond the perimeter of Ferrero's property. We couldn't risk a vehicle being seen or heard. It fucking sucked, but we survived.

Once we were about a mile out, Rune had done a thorough scan for security and hacked their entire system to get a headcount on security detail which is... not a lot of men. Santino has an entire horde of enemies six miles long and he's only got barely more than two dozen men stationed outside of his hideaway? Dumbfuck thinks he's so untouchable. But hey, his loss, our win.

Hours later, I'm feeling ragey and ready to fucking drive my arrows not just through some hearts, but I'm about to start cracking skulls open at the sight of Odessa after having to look at every mark on her body in all shades of daylight. Her bruising is so much worse, but the determined set of her jaw makes the marring spots look like fucking war paint. It's hot. Like, I've been trekking through the fucking forest with a

semi rubbing against my zipper for hours, hot.

She's still wearing my black button down top with the sleeves rolled up and one of my belts cinched around her waist. Her tan legs are still bare, save for the scrunched-up socks and combat boots that were waiting for her when we deboarded the plane.

Courtesy of Calix "Tenderheart" Sterling.

Fucker.

I wasn't about to let my little Wraithtraipse through the woods with no protection for her dainty feet, but he fucking beat me to it. Made my eye twitch when he blushed while handing them to her.

I couldn't see reason beyond my jealousy and need to claim her all over again, so I pressed her up against the railing on the front deck of the boat and made her come all over my fingers while I swallowed her every moan.

It's nearly time to move in and expunge the life force from the shit stain that is Santino Ferrero, and I'm practically vibrating with anticipation. Killing people is what I do. It's my norm. Last night was enough to throw me so off-balance that I'm shocked as fuck I don't have a trail of bodies haunting me.

Calix followed Rune to find higher ground about fifteen minutes ago to scope out a spot to set up his sniper rifle. Rune isn't just a master hacker and technology genius, but he's one of the best marksmen in the Volkov bratva. If there's anyone I trust implicitly to take out the appetizers before I get to the main course, it's Rune Volkov.

Odessa and I remain where we are, hunkered down and hidden within the heavy brush, waiting for the "all clear" from the boys. I'm trying to give her a little lesson in how to shoot a gun, handle a knife, and the best angle to stab a man with my arrows, but I can tell she's distracted. Anxious. I'd originally thought that cutting her non-dominant hand was a stroke of luck, but she barely has the strength to pull back the slide and hammer on the pistol with her right hand, so we're flying by the seat of our fucking pants when I get it ready for her. Before she can fire off a rogue shot, I switch



the safety on so she doesn't accidentally shoot me or herself. "Keep the fucking safety on until you're ready to shoot, Wraith."

She simply nods and inhales a shaky breath. The arrows are self-explanatory but I drove the point home that she's not to use them unless she's up close and personal with an incapacitated or de-weaponized victim. She's entirely too small to be charging in like a raging bull with nothing but an arrow.

So we're moving on to knives. I keep a grip over her hand as I show her the basic workings of the OTF knife I gave her. She's right-handed, so it's a bit awkward to maneuver with her left, but the mechanics should be simple enough.

"This one's easy," I tell her. "Just press this mechanism here and—" The knife emerges from the front of the blade in the blink of an eye with a snick. "To retract it..." I demonstrate and she nods.

I let go of her hand and watch her practice a few times before she tucks several of them into the belt around her waist.

She starts to pace as she pulls the gun out and just stares at it in her hand. My dead heart stutters when I think she's going to turn the fucking thing on herself, but I force my muscles to relax when I see that she's only familiarizing herself with her weapon. I feel an odd mix of uncertainty and pride because she's not only taken all the instructions without missing a beat, but not even twenty-four hours ago, she was ready to die.

"You good?" I ask, feeling like that's the right question to ask here. Her eyes snap to mine and understanding softens her gaze.

"I'm..." She takes a deep breath. "I'm okay."

Good. I can't be on babysitter duty to keep her from turning any one of the weapons on herself. If she even thinks about trying, I'll bend her over my fucking knee for daring to challenge who it is that owns her heart, body, and soul.

Gunfire sounds off in the distance and she starts to pace, her face growing pale in the fading light of day. It's almost nightfall and based on the slowing increments between shots, I'd say Rune should be done any minute now.

I approach Odessa and press my front to her back, halting the ditch she's pacing into the earth. I wrap my arms around her and hold her against me, just feeling the heat of her body intertwine with mine. I'm not afraid of this fucker, and I'm honestly not thrilled about the prospect of bringing Odessa into the fucking thick of it, but I will not deny her revenge.

My earpiece crackles before Rune's voice sounds, causing Odessa to jump. "Exterior all clear. There are some men scrambling inside, but Calix and I haven't seen anyone exit the premises. I took down as many as I could through the windows, but I'd bet my left nut that the rest are hunkering down with Ferrero."

"Don't say that," Calix whines in our ears. "I like your left nut as much as I like the right one. Especially when?—"

"Calix—"Rune and I hiss at the same time.

"What, we all like balls here, don't we?"

"I'll have your ass for that," Rune grumbles. I watch the backs of my little Wraith's sears turn fire red, clueing me in to the flush taking over her at what she's hearing.

"You promise?" Calix chuckles. I swear under my breath.

Grabbing Odessa's chin, I tip her head back until she's staring at me upside down. My stern expression is unrelenting and has her swallowing nervously.

"You are to stay behind me at all times. I can't protect you if you let your emotions get the better of you and go charging ahead of me full steam. You let me take out whatever fuckers are in there until we find Ferrero. His kill is yours, but you have to let me take him down first. We work together. Do you understand, Wraith?"

Her eyes bore into me with a sense of understanding before she nods in my grip. "I'll stay behind you," she promises. "But what if you get hurt?"

She's worried about me?

Why the fuck does that make a strange heat spread throughout my body?

I shove it away and allow an unhinged grin to pull at my lips and bend down until my lips brush hers.

"You worried about me, little Wraith?"

"Yes." Her whispered answer is immediate.

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

Nipping at her lower lip before straightening, I pick up my quiver and sling it over my back. I check my handgun before tucking it away in the holster beneath my arm. I pull my mask and my riding cowl from my bag and hand the cowl to her. I pull mine over my mouth and nose and look at her once she's covered. I can't focus on just how good she looks. She's a fucking distraction and we can't have that.

I turn back to her and snort, grabbing her hand and lacing her fingers through my back belt loop. "It'd take a lot more than Santino fucking Ferrero to kill the Cupid Killer, baby."

The closer we get, the more my heart pounds at the thrill of finally getting to kill somebody. I stop us just shy of the clearing and keep hidden behind several large trees as I press my earpiece.

"Perimeter clear?"

"Affirmative. North entrance clear."

"South side clear."

Their confirmation is all I need. I know they're still stationed just outside the estate and can cover us, if needed.

Guiding her through a weak, broken portion of the fencing, we make our way to the house hidden away in the hill of the island. Bodies litter the ground, most of them dead with near perfect bullseye bullet wounds between their eyes, and others some shots to the center of their chests. Odessa releases my belt loop and before I can snap

at her, she switches her grip and grabs the fabric of my shirt in a tight death grip.

“Jesus Christ,” she whispers behind me.

“He’s got nothing to do with this shit,” I murmur behind my mask.

My earpiece crackles before Calix’s voice cuts in.

“Some movement on the main level but I can’t get a shot. There can’t be more than a handful of guards inside.”

“Fucking amateurs.”

I huff. “We’re almost there. Stay vigilant.”

“Always, A.”

We reach the front door, of which the handle has been conveniently blown off.

Thank you, Rune.

“You ready, Wraith?” I ask, not really caring whether she’s ready or not. Santino Ferrero will die and he’ll die tonight. “Where will you stay?”

“Behind you.”

“Good girl.”

She fucking shudders. I file that away for later. After tonight, I’ll have a fucking lifetime of pushing Odessa to her limits and discovering all the ways that I can make her scream my name.

Clapping my hands once, I rub my palms together and let the chaos flood through my veins, injecting a hefty dose of pure adrenaline into my body. I break out into a grin.

“It’s a good day to kill a mafia don. Shall we, Wraith?”

12

The moment Adris kicks open the front door, bullets fly at us. As much as I want to help, the last thing I want to do is jeopardize Adris while he eliminates person after person who fires at us. I’m not a violent person and despite Adris’ mini lesson on how to handle a weapon, I still don’t entirely know what to do with them. Especially the gun tucked into the belt at my back.

A bullet whizzes by my head so close that the whistling sound brushes by my ear and I yelp, tucking myself in as close to Adris’ back as I can without hindering his ability to fight.

A string of Italian curses and shuffling footsteps pounds closer. My heart beats in sync with every step. Fear has a chokehold on me and my knuckles turn white where I grip Adris’ shirt.

His manic laughter fills the space when he plucks two knives from his thigh straps, grips them by the blade, and flings them across the room. I peek under his arm and see the moment it lands between the eyes of a man holding a gun not even twenty feet away, and he immediately slumps to the floor. Dead. The second dagger hits another man, slicing through his Adam’s apple directly in the center of his throat. He gurgles and stupidly pulls the knife out, and it fuckingsprays. Everywhere.

I gag, but Adris’ laughter turns into a full blown cackle when it hits his mask. Some lands on my forehead, but I don’t have time to wipe it away because we’re moving again.

No rest for the deranged, indeed.

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

More of Santino's guards are shouting, spewing commands in Italian, but Adris doesn't rise to the bait. Suddenly, a burly man with a protruding gut charges Adris like a vicious bear, but the psycho killer before me is quicker. He makes no effort to grab for a weapon but instead uses his weight and swings his arm out, fucking clotheslining the man. He hits the ground with a shudder and wheezes at his lack of oxygen after having the breath knocked from his lungs.

I drop when Adris drops, trying to keep myself small and look away when Adris' fist flies so fast and hard that it knocks the guard out in one hit. But he doesn't stop. The muscles in his back flex with three swift punches before he reaches behind his head and grabs an arrow, driving it right into the heart of the man beneath him. He leaves him there as he stands again, briefly checking on me over his shoulder, nodding to himself before making our way to the stairs.

The tiny device in my ear crackles.

"More movement on the second floor. Last room on the south corner. I don't have a body count. It could be Ferrero but I can't be sure. Eyes open," Rune warns.

Walking by one of the dead security guards, Adris reaches down and pulls one of his blades from between the guard's eyes. I have to bite back a gag and the heavy wave of nausea that washes over me when it makes a sickening squelching sound and more blood spurts out, staining Adris' and my boots.

Wiping the blood and brain matter off on the guard's uniform, he tuts. "I fucking hate when that happens. I just had these fuckers cleaned."



“I have no words,” I whisper more to myself than anything, because how can he be so unaffected by the absolute carnage that surrounds us?

We ascend the staircase and unease has the hairs on the back of my neck rising. It’s entirely too quiet and that scares me. Santino is a coward, and I trust that Adris is crafty enough to bring him down, but a small part of me is terrified that I’ll leave here a prisoner to his cruelty again.

“Adris—” I whisper, tugging at his shirt, but I’m cut off with a curtshh.

He turns his head but doesn’t look at me. Still, I see the command when he presses his finger to his lips, then presses the side of it to his ear, telling me to listen. I do my best to quieten my shaky, staccato breaths and strain my ears.

Then his voice registers.

I’ve heard his agitated, hushed shouts too many times to count and the familiarity of his voice causes unwanted dread to slither down my spine.

I pull at the material on Adris’ shirt hard enough to get him to look back at me, his silver eyes meeting mine.

“It’s him.” I pull the cowl down to mouth the words.

He raises a single eyebrow as if to ask, “You sure?” since I can’t see his mouth. I nod in confirmation.

My cowl is pulled back up over my mouth and nose, and I’m momentarily stunned when he grips my face and presses the mouth of his mask to mine as if in a kiss. I don’t have time to process what he just did because he’s got me reattached to his belt loop as we silently creep our way to the end of the hall.

The hushed whispers become more distinct and it hits me that there's more than one voice coming from within the last room. My heart is pounding so hard in my chest, I'm afraid even Adris can hear each thump.

"This whole thing is a fucking shitshow and it's entirely on you, Santino," one voice whisper-shouts behind the closed door.

"Me? I wouldn't even be a fucking target right now if you hadn't sold me false information about the girl!" Santino hisses.

"Oh, you're still a target because you don't know how to conduct business, Ferrero." The other voice tuts. "She was a liability and a threat to my taking over the Kuznetsov bratva. Mikhail is about to give up his decade-long search for her and hand over the title, but do you think that's going to happen when he finds out that his fucking daughter is still alive?"

The blood drains from my face, and Adris turns to look at me with an oddly perplexed expression marring his brow. Dawning seems to hit us both at the same time. Somebody betrayed my father in an attempt to take over as Pakhan.

The car crash wasn't just a random, targeted attack.

My mother's death.

My kidnapping.

It was all a part of some grand plan.

But who is working with Santino?

"You were supposed to fucking dispose of her, you goddamned?—"

Clearly Adris has heard enough, because he raises his boot and kicks in the door so hard that the hinges split and crack, his gun raised. Before Santino can even react, his shoulder explodes in a spray of red as a bullet pierces his skin and he grips the ruined flesh, an ear-grating shriek pushing past his lips.

“Motherfucker!” he curses, reaching behind his back, but before he can grasp a weapon, Adris fires off another shot, blowing a hole straight through the center of his hand. He rushes Santino, only to kick him square in the chest.

Santino goes down hard, hitting his head along the way, rendering himself unconscious.

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

I realize too late that I had let go of Adris when a slow, ominous clap reverberates around the room. My hair is grabbed a second later, my entire body screaming in pain when I'm jerked against a hard chest. A scream starts to burst free from my lungs, but is quickly halted when the cool barrel of a gun is pressed to my temple.

A deep, menacing voice vibrates me to my core and dread settles in my stomach when he speaks.

"Talk about a grand entrance. You really know how to put on quite the show," he mocks, his tone dripping with malice. "Have I taught you nothing of stealth and silence, son?"

Oh, no.

My watery, horrified gaze finds Adris standing over the body of Santino, his silver eyes darkened and homed in on the man caging me.

Adris removes his mask, and a carefree smirk tugs at his lips as he tilts his head to the side, looking unperturbed by the fact that his father is a fucking traitor.

"You know damn well that subtlety isn't my style, Father."

His father.

My father's second in command.

Boris Knox.

“Ah, yes.” His grip tightens on my hair and he presses the muzzle of the gun harder into my temple, causing me to gasp in pain. “How could we forget the mark of the infamous Cupid Killer?”

Adris begins to twirl one of his arrows between his fingers in a move so casual that it has unease flooding my veins. Instead of falling victim to the goading, he begins to circle us like a predator before striking his prey.

“I have to admit, I’m proud of you.”

“For...”

“For the simple fact that you’ve never once not followed through on a kill contract. I’d banked on you taking this one.” Santino groans beneath Adris, but I keep my eyes pinned on the man before me, trying to hold myself together for him. “I knew the lack of information would be gnawing at your brain.”

Something dangerous shifts in Adris’ eyes and he stops twirling the arrow, his body becoming rigid.

“You’re the one who sent the contract to kill Odessa?”

“I did,” he confirms, not an ounce of guilt in his tone.

“Why?” Adris’ question barks out and it sounds more like a command for an answer.

“Because she’s the final piece of the puzzle I need to take over as the next Pakhan in the Kuznetsov Bratva.”

“What is going on? You two okay?” Calix’s voice chimes quietly in my ear but I don’t dare react. I don’t think his father has noticed the earpiece, and I can’t risk

drawing attention to it when it could help us get out of this situation.

“So why involve this fuckface in the grand plan?” Adris asks, pointing his arrow at my unconscious abuser.

“It was just business.” He shrugs, tightening his grip on my hair. I bite back the sting of tears. “He kills the girl, I take over after convincing Mikhail to retire, and Ferrero gets a share of the trades for doing his part.”

In a flash, I’m whipped around until I’m facing an older, more wicked version of Adris, but with dark blond hair. I don’t remember much of him, but there’s no mistaking who he is.

Boris grips my throat right over the bruises already marring my skin and squeezes until I can’t breathe. “So imagine my surprise when I find out that he didn’t keep his end of the bargain. That the daughter, the sole heir to the Kuznetsov bratva, was still alive.”

He leans in so close that I can smell the bourbon on his breath as he chuckles in my face. “Santino knew that he had fucked up the whole plan. And he knew that I knew because he had beat you black and blue, left you for dead, and split town—escaping to his little hideaway island before I could get my fucking hands on him.” He looks down over my shoulder, assumingly at Santino’s unconscious form. “Little did he know that I had already formulated a new plan to make his little departure work to my advantage.”

His eyes rake over my body from bottom to top with a predatory hunger that has nausea swirling heavily in my gut. A malevolent smile takes over his twisted features before he leans in, the stubble of his cheek scratching against mine.

“Get the fuck away—”Click.The newly familiar sound of a hammer being pulled

back sounds close to my ear and Adris' argument dies on his lips.

Boris' eyes never once stray from my face when he croons, "See, I'd planned on killing you myself once I discovered the truth, since apparently the only person I can count on to follow through on a plan here is me." His eyes flit to Adris and back. "Until you." His grin broadens and I recoil. "And now that I've had a good look at you, I have a much, much better idea."

Goosebumps prickle along my skin at his words and a sense of impending doom settles like a lead weight in my chest. He licks the shell of my ear and my body threatens to revolt against his sickening touch. Adris undoubtedly sees what his father has just done, judging by the growl that rattles through his chest. Footsteps pound the ground right as I'm whipped back around and his father's arm bands around my neck. My hands fly up to grip his forearm in an attempt to loosen his hold, but this time the gun is trained on Adris, and my heart stops.

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

He stands stock still, completely unmoving, his expression dead and unreadable. Almost as if he's bored and this entire exchange isn't the manifestation of my worst nightmares.

Boris chuckles and the sound injects pure horror and dread directly into my veins. My trembling causes him to tighten his grip on me and I whimper, my eyes stinging with the onslaught of unshed tears. Adris' eyes flicker to me for a fraction of a second before they lock on his father again. "Obviously the plan went to shit when Ferrero decided to keep you as his little pet instead of putting a bullet between your pretty eyes, but your being alive actually works better to my advantage."

"You're talking in circles," Adris points out, crossing his arms. "Care to get to the point?" My eyes track the move, because his seemingly disinterested posture would seem natural for his current persona, but I notice the way his middle finger repeatedly taps against the dagger strapped to his bicep. It's a gesture that would suggest that his patience is wearing thin—which it just may be—but he's speaking tomewithout words.

You're not defenseless, Wraith.

I can practically hear his silent message echoing in my mind as if he said it aloud.

I swallow thickly and jerk against his father's hold, knowing I won't get anywhere, but I wanted to have a reason to remove my hands from his arm without drawing suspicion. I'm not a trained killer, and I'm terrified I'll fuck something up, but I have to try something. I'm the furthest thing from being a heroine but I've never felt more fear than I have at seeing a gun trained on the man who owns me; body, heart, and



soul.

Are these affections between me and the unhinged man before me toxic? Yes. But what other kind of love do I have to compare it to?

“My point, son, is that in your vigilante quest for revenge, you delivered her to me on a silver fucking platter.” He sniffs, adjusting his grip on his gun and I let my hands slip slower until they rest atop the OTF knives tucked into the belt around my waist. “I’m assuming you’ve fucked her already, no?”

Adris doesn’t react to his father baiting him, but my breath hitches and my body stiffens against my will, immediately giving him the answer he needs. He chuckles again.

“You’re just like me, then.”

“In your dreams, you fucking cunt.” Adris scoffs, tapping two fingers now. “Both of us know that when it comes to who the better man is, you don’t have a godsdamned leg to stand on.” His eyes dart to me when he says “leg” and I understand what he wants me to do.

“You’re a cocky fucker. Ever since you decided to finally open that mouth of yours and talk.” His father tuts. “But let me clue you in since you seem to be missing the point.”

He shifts the gun until the barrel is pressed to my temple again and my hands freeze on the knives, my breaths pushing past my lips in short staccato bursts. “She’s soiled goods now. Mikhail will never be able to marry her off to any man, knowing she won’t bleed for her husband that first time he fucks her on their wedding night. But lucky for you, Odessa,” he croons against my ear, “I’m nothing if not a man of honor, and after mourning the loss of my darling wife for so long, I offer to marry you. Then

I'll secure my place as Pakhan and you'll go back to being what Santino and my son have bred you for. My little fuck doll?—"

"Like fuck," I grit, taking advantage of his head being so close to mine and rearing back, I head butt him so hard my skull starts to throb as Adris' father howls in pain. In that same moment, I pop each knife from my belt, flipping them around in my palm so they're facing down. While he's distracted with holding his face, I swing both arms down, my thumbs deploying the button that releases the blade just before they each sink into each of his thighs.

A deafening roar fills the room but I barely register the sound over the pounding in my skull and blood whooshing in my ears.

Adris is quick to move, grabbing me and giving me a rapid once-over before shoving me behind him. Santino is still unconscious on the floor behind us, and his father is now on his knees before us, groaning over the blades currently lodged in the thick flesh of his thighs, blood rapidly seeping through the fabric of his black slacks.

A sinister laugh bubbles up from the confines of Adris' chest and the macabre sound does nothing to quell the pounding of my tired heart.

He shakes his head, looking at his father, who is still struggling on the ground.

"Bested by a Wraith," he taunts, plucking a dagger from the strap around his upper arm. His arm whips out, the knife soaring it at his father, who ducks, but it still lodges deep in his shoulder. He throws another and it hits his father's abdomen.

Boris wavers, swaying on his knees before coughing up blood and landing on his ass, a dazed look glazing over his eyes.

A tattooed hand wraps around my wrist, and suddenly I'm being pulled from the

room faster than my feet can keep up with.

“We’re close!”

“Get to the closest exit point!”

Calix and Rune’s commands and panicked voices invade our ears and Adris presses his hand against his device. “Northern exit. Get Odessa out of here.”

His command is borderline manic as we rush down the stairs.

“Adris, your signal is weak. Repeat. Where the fuck are you?”Rune barks, but Adris isn’t listening to him.

I trip over a dead body and lose my grip on his hand, landing hard in a puddle of blood; pain radiates through my knees and palms.

“Adris!” I shout, panicked, trying to get his attention and turn my wild eyes to him, but he’s already lifting me in his arms and sprinting for the busted door we entered through.

Holding me closer to his chest, I can feel his heart beating wildly as we grow closer.

“Almost there, baby, hang on.”

## Page 27

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

We reach the entrance and it feels as if I may faint with the adrenaline pumping through my veins, hope flooding my chest because our freedom is just on the other side of this threshold. Adris sets me back on my own two feet, and he's gripping my shoulders, his unhinged, wild eyes boring into me, urging me to turn me around and run out the door and into safety.

I'm about to follow his silent command, but a deafening pop reverberates off the walls. Adris and I both flinch at the same moment that something wet explodes across my hands and face.

It's sticky.

Warm.

Crimson.

Oh, God.

Blood.

Adris stares at me and for the first time, I can see the raw, genuine fear swallowing him whole as blood begins to bloom in the center of his chest before he collapses against me.

I go down with him, unable to hold his weight, and I'm screaming. I'm screaming, and crying, and begging as I press my hands to his chest, trying and failing to staunch the bleeding.

“No, no, no, no, nonononono!” I press harder, ignoring the distant sound of staggering footsteps. “Adris!”

His breathing is erratic, coming in random puffs and spurts from his bloody mouth and nose. “Fuck! Hold on! Please,” I beg, gathering the material of his shirt and holding it against the bullet wound that won’t. Stop. Bleeding.

He’s... Hhe’s dying.

Bleeding out before me and I’m fucking helpless to stop it.

I can barely see through my tears and an all-consuming pain shreds its way through my heart as Adris grows pale beneath me, beads of sweat dotting his brow, his dark hair plastered to his face.

This can’t be how we end. I’ve only just gotten him back.

His eyes start to roll back, and it has me leaning in close, screaming his name mere inches from his face. “You have to stay with me! You wouldn’t let me run, so neither can you, Adris Knox.”

The words barely register through the agony that has a chokehold on me. His body falls unnaturally still and his chest rises so painfully slow in an attempt to take another breath.

No.

No, no, no.

Another scream rips from my throat, tearing apart my vocal cords with the same intensity in which my heart is shredding in two.

On a hiccup, my eyes fall to the last arrow left from his quiver that had fallen from his back and without thought I reach for it.

I won't live without him.

I can't.

Turning the arrow around, I take aim just over the A carved within the scarring over the very heart that Adris stole so long ago. But before I can strike, a hand darts out, gripping my wrist hard enough for the bone to crack.

It's Adris' broken last words, gritted through bloody teeth that will forever haunt me down to my marrow.

"Don't. You. Fucking. Dare." His eyes can't even focus on me, but I feel the intensity of his words nonetheless.

"Adris, don't," I beg, knowing that despite fighting him tooth and nail, I'd do anything he asked of me. "Please."

"Fight, Wraith."

"For what?" I ask him, but I'm not even sure he hears the words until a moment later when he sucks in a garbled, rattling breath.

"For life." He coughs and more blood leaks from his mouth. "Pomni, tvoe serdtse prinadlezhit mne."

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

Remember, your heart is mine.

His form disappears behind my watery vision and through my uncontrollable sobs, I kiss his cold, unmoving lips just as his body falls completely slack.

I'm ripped away from him suddenly as I become airborne for a moment, but before I can fight to get back to Adris, the muzzle of a gun crashes down against my temple and my vision swims, the world around me being swallowed into oblivion. I reach for him despite the growing distance between us. I think I'm crying out his name, but the words sound so hazy and muffled that I can't be sure. Everything moves in a blur as I'm thrown haphazardly into the backseat of a vehicle before peeling out and speeding down a hill.

The device in my ear crackles one last time as I'm taken further and further away.

“We're here! Adris? Oh, fuck! Odessa, where?—”

**BOOM!**

An explosion shakes the earth beneath the car, a fiery mushroom cloud rising from the place where Santino's hideaway once stood.

I want to scream but my own body is shutting down. A final tear rolls down my cheek before giving in. The last thing I see in my mind's eye before surrendering to the darkness is Adris' pale, lifeless body as I'm carried away from where I left my heart.

And now they're all gone.

Rune. Calix.

Adris.

It's all because of me. The death-seeking wraith.

13

ONE WEEK LATER

Have you ever heard the sound a heart makes just before it stops beating?

Well, I have, and it's my least favorite sound in the world.

We buried three empty caskets today.

The Kuznetsov and Volkov bratvas, and many others gathered to pay their respects to the best assassins "they ever had the honor of training."

I stood there, numbly staring at the caskets and trying to mask the deep ache of the chasm in my chest where my heart once beat. But the cavernous space was just as empty as the three boxes laid out before me.

Ivory for Calix Sterling.

Gunmetal gray for Rune Volkov.

Pitch-black for Adris Knox.

Emptycaskets, because there was nothing left of their bodies to bury after the explosion that ensured his father's plan to backstab my own father ran smoothly.



My life had taken a total three-sixty in a matter of days. I was never even able to savor the taste of freedom, and now I'm back to being caged. I haven't spoken in a week, not since that first day, when I was reunited with Papa.

At first, he was in complete disbelief, then relief mixed with sorrow before he pulled me into his arms and hugged me like he would never get another chance. Little did I know, that would actually be the case.

I took the chance on telling my Papa everything that Adris' father had done, how long he'd been working with Santino and planned to overthrow him, how he killed his own son to further his own plans.

And for a moment... one small, fleeting moment, it looked as if Papa believed me, that he would take my side and have Boris punished or killed or anything that would've taken him away from me and my family and the looming threat he had imposed behind my father's back. But that moment vanished when he told me he would "get to the bottom of the matter" and I was escorted to a room. Not the room that I used to share with my mother, though. This room was larger by comparison, but it was barren, save for a single bed and an empty dresser.

Hope was such a temporary emotion that I had clung to too tightly, though. Because Boris Knox is a master manipulator, convincing my father that I was simply speaking fallacies due to malnutrition and delirium after a decade of unsavory servitude to Ferrero.

His belief in Boris' concocted story had multiplied the ache I felt when my father believed him so easily.

"You're not well," Papa said, suddenly looking down at me as if I were nothing more than a patient in a mental institution after begging him to believe me. "Just give me time, little one. We'll fix this."

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

Despite crying after him, pleading for him to just hear me, to believe what I was saying, he walked out the door, locking it behind him. I was left alone for several days. Papa stopped coming in to check on me after the first few days had passed and I would not relent on trying to convince him that Boris was a traitor. Each time, it was as if some of the light in his eyes left him when he walked out the door. Meals were still brought, but I felt there was no use in nourishing a failing body. I spent my days alone. Nights were filled with reliving the nightmare of watching Adris die over and over again. Or dreams where I tried to commit the sound of his voice and memorize the feel of his touch.

You've always had the power over me, Wraith.

My week in isolation passed in an agonizing blur of tears and mourning the man who stole me away in the middle of the night and reclaimed my heart as his all over again. My isolation from the world had shown me that there is no world where I exist and Adris does not.

His last command is one I intend to break. He doesn't get to barrel back into my life, only to leave it just as quickly, and have the audacity to ask me to live the rest of my life without him. I just have to bide my time.

Today is the first day I've been let out of my room.

The service for Adris, Calix, and Rune was about as impersonal as you could get, but you can believe that his father put on a perfect show. I sat between my father, his robot of a wife, and Boris. He'd pretended to console me when rogue tears fell, but his bruising grip was anything but. To everyone in attendance, he'd shown our world

how deeply he mourned the loss of his only son, who died while eliminating the manipulative enemy that was Santino Ferrero.

It took everything in me to not react.

I couldn't stay while they lowered the caskets into the ground. They weren't in there anyway.

When we arrived back at my father's estate, I expected to be ushered back into my cell—because that's what it truly was—but instead I was escorted into Papa's office. A place I was never allowed before.

“Odessa,” my father calls, standing at the liquor bar set up in the corner of the room. He turns to me, his eyes still haunted when they land on me. “Come. Sit.”

He gestures to an ornate wingback chair. I'm hesitant to move from my spot in the doorway because everything about this screams ulterior motive.

After ten years, Mikhail Kuznetsov hardly looks like himself anymore. As if the loss of both me and my mother really took a toll on his health as well as his appearance.

Reluctantly, I slowly inch my way across the room and take a seat in the chair. Papa swirls the ice around in his tumbler while he sits in the matching chair across from me.

I fidget, growing more uncomfortable by the second because he just sits there, looking at me. I don't know what to say to him, because for years I'd hoped he would find me, showing just how much I meant to him, even as his bastard child. And while he did search for me, I'd fallen victim to the man in which he had entrusted as his confidant. His second in command. The man who intends to overthrow my father.

He clears his throat and says in a low tone laced with sadness and regret, “I can’t believe you’re really here. I knew, I knew that you were out there.”

Maybe if I pull the sympathy card, he’ll believe me. “I’ve missed you so, so much Papa.” It’s true. I knew my father loved me as much as a Pakhan could. But if Adris could find me, even by happenstance, why couldn’t he?

His eyes flick to mine at my words, but something dark flashes for all of a moment before he blinks and his expression completely shifts. My brow furrows at the sudden change, but before I can analyze it, there’s a knock on the door.

“Enter,” my father commands.

All of the blood drains from my face when Boris walks through, his posture poised, looking nothing like a man mourning his son.

The closer he draws, the more he kicks my fight or flight response into high gear, and I seriously contemplate running.

“You wanted to see me, Mikhail?” If he were any other man, he’d be dead for addressing my father in such a casual way.

“Yes, please have a seat.” Papa directs him to the chair right next to me and my skin crawls with unease. He turns to me with soft, apologetic eyes. I know what’s coming and yet it still hits me like a severe punch to the gut.

“Odessa,” he begins. It feels like the start of a clock ticking down to my doom. “Today has been a very rough day for all of us.” He says this as if he has even the slightest idea of the pain I’ve been living through today. His eyes shift to Boris. “I am deeply saddened at the loss of your son. Please accept my deepest condolences.”

Boris nods as if he actually gives a shit, and I fight the urge to roll my eyes.

“It also goes to show that you never know when an enemy will strike, and I cannot risk anyone else in the family.” He sucks in a shaky breath, raking a hand through his slicked back curls and brings his eyes back to me. “I will not lose another—lose you, again.”

“Sir?” Boris asks, as if he’s completely clueless as to what’s going on.

My father has the good sense to look remorseful. “I propose a marriage to further protect you, my little one.”

“No,” I whisper, but Boris places his hand on my knee and squeezes so tight that I know it will leave another bruise.

“I’m sorry, Odessa. I know I just got you back, but I fear this must be done. I know that Boris will protect you with his life, as he has protected me.”

Not if I have anything to say about it.

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

“You can’t,” I blurt before I can stop the words from tumbling past my trembling lips.

“Odessa—”

“Please, Papa,” I cry, clutching the fabric of my black dress so tight that my nails threaten to puncture the fabric. “Don’t do this. I cannot marry this man.”

Boris squeezes my leg again and it makes me wince in pain. My father tracks the reaction from my leg to Boris’ arm. I expect him to rage. To yell. To do any-fucking-thing to defend his daughter... but he just sits there, swirling the ice around in his tumbler with an ankle thrown so casually over his knee.

Something cracks within me with finality. His lack of compassion or empathy speaks so much louder than his words ever could.

He heaves a heavy sigh, leaning forward with his hands clasping the glass between his palms and his elbows resting on his knees. Right now he doesn’t look like my father. The man I grew up with nothing but love and respect for. This is Mikhail Kuznetsov—brutal Pakhan to the Kuznetsov bratva of Chicago.

His dark eyes, so like mine, are cold and empty when he looks at me. The next words to pass his lips practically sound like a sneer.

“The wedding is set for three weeks from now. I’ve made all the arrangements. For your own health, I think it best if you remained in your room to rest until then. Perhaps it will help with all the bruising.”

“Papa,” I rasp, shaking my head, causing a lone tear to roll down my cheek.

“Boris, may I have a word alone with my daughter?”

“Of course, sir.” The man bows his head in faux respect, casting a chilling glance my way before exiting the room.

My father stands and crosses the room to fill his glass again.

“You will marry Boris.” He takes a sip. “For years and years I yearned for having my daughter back. Not knowing who or what had taken you from me, it practically killed me Odessa.”

“So imagine my surprise when I found out that you had eventually whored yourself out to not only the very man who kidnapped you, but the very same man who murdered your mother. There is no world where I could marry you off for protection or business. There is no boss or underboss who would willingly take you for a wife after what you’ve done. Fortunately for you, Boris is the only one willing to overlook such a situation.”

And there it is. The final piece of me to wither away until I’m nothing more than a living hollow shell. Alive, yet no longer willing to live.

Not even for him.

I am nothing.

A true wraith.

Still, I can’t help but try and defend myself even though my words will fall on deaf ears.

“You think I willingly gave myself to that man?” I ask, pushing to stand and face my father. “The vile creature who murdered my mother? Stole me from my family? From—” I stop myself from confessing about my connection to Adris. “Boris is the one who orchestrated the whole thing! I don’t know why you won’t believe me! What could I possibly have to lose, Papa? Boris is a traitor, a backstabbing piece of trash who shot and killed his own son! He has this detailed, elaborate plan to overthrow you the first chance he gets—”

Slap.

My face whips to the side and instantly, my face burns. Tears sting my eyes but I don’t dare let them fall. I refuse to touch the mark when I look back to the man who is nothing more to me than the very same kind of monster who stole me away.

“I have had enough of these fucking delusions, Odessa. Boris has shown me nothing but undying loyalty for longer than you’ve been alive. Your lies will not persuade me to change my mind. You’re of no use to me if you can’t bring about an alliance, so this is my only other option to protect you.”

I can’t help the scoff that falls from my lips as I take a step back. “Yeah? Well, if he’s so fucking great, you marry him. God knows you love keeping secret affairs around here.”

I can see the blow coming before he even raises a hand, but before my father can hit me again or choke me to death for my insolence, Boris barges back in.

“Mikhail—” he barks, striding across the room and coming to a stop next to me. “It’s been a long day and we’re all hurt and mourning. Let me take my fiancée to her room.”

Fiancée. I don’t fucking think so.



I internally shudder at his words, but my father merely nods after staring at me with such cold eyes that I can feel the chill of them deep in my bones.

“See to it that she’s properly secured.”

“Of course,” he says, bowing his head.

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

He tries to wrap his arm around my waist, but I rush ahead of him. I don't want any part of him near me. Unfortunately I'm not fast enough because the next thing I know, I'm being roughly thrown over his shoulder and carried away.

"Nice try in there," Boris mocks, his hands squeezing my thighs too hard. "But your father is well aware that you are psychologically unwell, and every word that may come from your mouth is nothing but some psychobabble bullshit."

I'm tossed down onto my bed after fighting him the whole way, clawing at him and hitting him wherever I could reach. When he kneels over my body and gets too close for me to back away, I renew my efforts. While he's busy trying to restrain my legs, my hands get ahold of his face and I dig my nails in. He lets out a groan but before he can stop me, I jab my thumb into his eye socket and push.

His eye fucking pops with a sickening squish and the matter oozes out and runs down my wrist.

He howls so loud that guards come flooding into the room, their guns trained on me.

My small victory is short-lived when Boris hits me so hard I feel something crack in my cheek and I almost lose consciousness.

He looks like he's ready to kill me, and God I hope he does sooner than later.

But instead he works to quickly bind my wrists and fucking shackles my ankle to a chain that's bolted into the ground. All the while his empty eye socket drips blood everywhere.

He finally pushes to stand and I'm too delirious and dazed to try and make out his hazy form where he lingers over my body.

The guards ask him if he's alright and it's almost funny to me. Almost.

A quiet laugh bubbles up and escapes the confines of my chest when Adris' words come back to me. "Bested by a wraith."

I repeat the words before blackness creeps into my vision. I think I hear something along the lines of, "Crazy bitch," and "See you in three weeks," before I'm swallowed whole by the endless oblivion.

14

THREE WEEKS LATER

It's my death day.

Father calls it my wedding, but let's not kid ourselves.

I'd rather die than tie myself to a monster like Boris. So that's what I intend to do.

My stepmother—of all people—finished applying the last touches of my makeup and now she's uselessly fluffing the train of my wedding dress. I'm sure Father sent her because he knows she doesn't have a soft bone in her body for me and would make sure my ass makes it down the aisle come hell or high water.

I feel nothing as I look at myself in the mirror. Dark, hollow eyes stare back at me. My fading peach curls have been artfully contained in an elegant bun that hurts my fucking scalp and my makeup is unfortunately flawless. The dress... This fucking dress is tragically beautiful for such an ominous day.

It's a fitting lace gown with long sleeves and a backless detail. The neckline was purposefully designed to cover the mark over my heart. Unfortunately it's a perfect fit, despite refusing to eat a full meal for three weeks.

I couldn't.

Not when I had been reduced to nothing more than an empty vessel, doomed to roam the confines of this gilded prison until my dying breath. Not when my heart ached and my soul cried for the man who was larger than this life could've ever allowed, and terrified even death himself.

Adris, who lived without fear, because a man at the top of the food chain never had to look down.

I searched for him in my dreams, but was greeted by only nightmares that foretold of my impending doom that is marrying his fucking father.

Adris was certainly no saint—nothing short of a fucking nightmare, actually—but he was my nightmare and I would have sold every last shred of my shattered soul to have eternity with him instead.

My stepmother looks at her diamond-encrusted watch and glances at me. "It's time, Odessa."

She ushers me to the door, and we're greeted by a security guard standing just beyond the threshold. My head remains bowed in grief of what I'm about to endure, but I note that he's wearing a formal suit as opposed to the typical security uniform. A bouquet is thrust into my vision and it surprises me.

"For the bride."

There's a gritty rasp to his tone, but something painfully familiar about the sound. I push the notion away and just stand there, blankly staring at the bouquet, wondering if it's some kind of cosmic joke.

All the flowers are dried and dead.

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

One would think they're a bad omen, but in truth, they're eerily beautiful.

"For Christ's sake, Odessa," the woman beside me snaps and hisses as she snatches it from his hand and shoves it into my chest, some of the dried baby's breath fluttering to the floor around me.

Bitch.

Without a word, the guard turns to leave. Before he disappears from my line of sight, I swear that I catch the faded cut of silvery-white hair peeking from beneath an eight-point newsboy hat that's pulled down to cover his downcast eyes.

My heart beats in a slow, sorrowful rhythm as I'm led to the beginning of my end.

"Where is your father?" my stepmother grits through her teeth as we approach the rear foyer of my father's estate, but I don't answer. I don't know where he is and I don't care, either.

Just as we reach the double doors, she looks around again. "Wait here," she hisses before scurrying off in search of him. I shift from foot to foot, debating trying to make a run for it, but a crunching sound beneath my feet gives me pause.

The air in my lungs completely seizes when I look down. I bend as much as my dress will allow and pick up the tiny object I just crushed. A shocked gasp is forced up and out of my lungs as I stare at the two perfect halves of a candy heart and the four letters split evenly into two.

M-I-N-E.

The candy remnants fall from my now trembling hand and my eyes refocus on my bouquet. My dead bouquet. My heart rate kicks up when I spot a small, rolled piece of paper tucked artfully into one of the dried rose buds.

With shaking fingers, I pluck the parchment from its hiding spot and unroll it.

A bouquet so befitting for one betrothed. Breathtaking, even as she walks amongst us as a living apparition.

See you soon. -X

What?

My initial thought is that this is all just a cruel joke, a heartbreaking point to finally drive home that Adris is never coming back.

It's been several minutes and my stepmother still hasn't returned, and my father is nowhere in sight. I can't find it in me to care because I can't stop reading this note over and over, scanning the words for any sign that this is more than just Boris' vicious cruelty.

Suddenly, a new birth of curiosity and fear has me reaching for the door handle. The moment both doors before me swing open, my jaw drops in shock and horror at the scene laid out before me.

The bodies of every security guard litter the ground, and the once-white decorations, right down to the flowers, have all been smeared and splattered in the deepest crimson of blood. It's a fucking massacre. But it's what awaits me at the end of the aisle that urges my feet to move. Four concealed figures stand, waiting behind a

bloodstained veil that blows gently in the breeze.

My heart pounds at a renewed, rapid pace when I take that first step over the threshold and into the aisle created within my father's garden.

Unsteady steps carry me closer, because my legs threaten to buckle beneath me with every inch that closes in between me and whoever awaits me at the end of the aisle. My ankle is still swollen and sore from the shackle that kept me anchored to the floor for three weeks, and walking in the grass does not make my shaky stride any stronger.

The breeze kicks up and the veil concealing the men at the altar flutters in the wind, the blood splattered material parting down the center, and that's when I see it.

My heart stops entirely before kick-starting again.

Two hauntingly beautiful, impossibly bright silver eyes lock onto mine and hold me captive. The sheer covering settles back in place and I stand frozen, utterly rooted to the spot, because this must be a dream. There's no other way to explain what I think I just saw.

I force my body to take a step. Then another. Another. Step after step, I move forward until all that separates me from the answers I seek is the bloody veil between us. As if nature were a sentient being, a soft breeze pushes the delicate material open, allowing it to part. With downcast eyes, I step through.

I squeeze my eyes shut, sending out a silent prayer to any greaterpower that may be listening that I'm not going crazy. Footsteps shuffle against the grass, and when I peek through my lashes, I see a pair of dress shoes before me, completely covered in blood.



“Shit, guess I’ll have to have these cleaned, too.”

At the sound of his voice, my head whips up and an involuntary cry bursts from me. I cover my mouth with my hand to try and contain the sobs from within.

It’s him.

It’s really him.

Adris.

He's alive. Here.

"How?" I whisper, looking at the beautifully scarred man before me. He looks exactly the same, save for a few new cuts along the left side of his face.

"Oh, my little wraith." He tuts, but his deep, smoky voice alone threatens to cause the dam to break. His hands—warm and very much alive—cup my face as he tugs until we're standing toe to toe, chest to chest. "You should know by now that there is no force on this plane of existence or any other that could keep me from you."

Before my brain can even form a response, another familiar voice pipes up.

"Not even a fucking bullet to the chest." I look around Adris' shoulder, and my lips part in shock to find Rune and Calix standing next to a very terrified looking priest. Calix, like Adris, has a few healing cuts on his face, but looks otherwise uninjured. Rune is wearing not only an expensive looking suit, but on top of his head rests... an eight-point newsboy hat.

His eyes lift to mine, and it's then that I notice the bright pink burn scars on the right side of his face. Scars I hadn't noticed earlier, because he was the one who delivered my bouquet to me. Rune simply winks and wraps an arm around Calix's waist, placing a delicate kiss to the scar on the side of Cal's neck.

I look back to Adris, still unbelieving that this is real. That all three of them somehow miraculously survived.

With trembling fingers, I lift my hand and place it just over the place on his chest

where his heart should be, and let the tears free-fall when I feel the beautiful, chaoticthump, thump, thump.

In true Adris fashion, he leans down and licks a stray tear from my cheek. My entire body shivers beneath his touch. That familiar slow, maddening grin takes over his entire face when he leans back and looks down at what is most certainly my expression of disbelief.

An awkward sputtering cough sounds from behind us, and Adris turns his head to the priest who looks like he's about to either piss himself or pass away. Which is fair, considering we're in the presence of the three ghosts whom he helped to bury three weeks ago.

"Shall we, Father?" Adris asks, and while I know he's addressing the priest, my mind gets flashbacks of when he was addressing Boris on Santino's estate.

"Father?" I echo before I can stop the word from leaving my mouth.

Adris' eyes find mine again and he barks a laugh. "Oh, no, baby. He's taken care of." He says, nodding toward the seating that created the center aisle. It's then that I notice two bodies propped up in chairs on either side. He pulls back one of the sheer curtains and the sight before me pulls a shriek from my lungs. Both of our fathers look as if they're sitting and observing this miraculous rising from the dead, but then I notice the arrows protruding from each of their chests.

Adris' cheek presses against mine from over my shoulder when he bends down to speak. "Though I seem to remember that mine had two eyes the last time I saw him. You don't happen to know what happened to the other one, do you, Wraith?"

"I took it," I whisper back, remembering that day when I'd rallied to fight for myself one last time. "I was sick of his fucking manhandling."

“That’s my girl,” Adris croons before he growls—actuallygrowls—in my ear, but I can’t help the laugh that bubbles up.

“Adris, he hasnoeyes now.”

It’s truly macabre. My eyes drift over to my father, who’s been set up next to my very dead stepmother in the same position as Boris.

So that’s where she went.

His hands are folded in his lap and his neck is rigid, looking like he’s patiently waiting for his own daughter’s wedding to start. Well, he would if he had any eyes either. I fight the urge to gag when bile rises up in my throat. I notice that there are those fucking signature candy hearts stuffed between their lids, propping them open so that their hollow sockets can bear witness to whatever the fuck is happening here.

Both of their mouths hang wide open in a permanent scream, as if that’s exactly how time froze them when they each took their final breaths.

“What the fuck,” I whisper, wondering very briefly why I’m not more horrified at the way my own father was brutally murdered by the man behind me.

“They chose to be blind to your pain in life. They can live without their eyes in death.” Adris states simply as he places a tender kiss to the top of my head. “Call it an early wedding present.”

I spin around to face him so fast that I trip on my heels, but he’s quick to catch me and pull me into him, keeping me steady. “Wedding present?” I ask, my brows drawn together, completely bewildered by his words. My heart begins to pound within my chest.

“We’re here, we’re dressed up.” He gestures to Rune, Calix, and the priest. “And we’ve got witnesses and a holy man, so why not?”

“You want to marry me?” My eyes search his, wondering where the hell his sanity has gone, but then I realize the joke’s on me because he’s never been sane. “You don’t even know anything about me, Adris. You could spend a week with me and decide that I’m not what you actually want. That maybe you spent a decade chasing the literal ghost of who I used to be.” I suck in a breath, fighting the emotion currently clogging my throat. “I’m so utterly broken, and I don’t think that the damage done is something that could ever be fixed.”

Adris sighs, but it doesn’t sound agitated. His gaze never breaks from mine when he holds his hand out. Rune reaches into his coat pocket and drops something into his palm.

Picking up my left hand, he speaks.

“Marriage between two people is just another one of those ancient societal norms that are a public way of proverbially pissing on what’s yours to mark your territory. But you’re just as crazy as I am if you think that I’m not about to tie you to me in every fucking way that I possibly can, Wraith.”

He gingerly slides a ring onto my finger, and I’m stunned when I lower my eyes to glance at it. I have no idea where the hell he got the ring from, but it’s a breathtaking marquis diamond set in yellow gold, surrounded by a crown of smaller, round diamonds. What leaves me speechless, though, is the solitaire blood diamond that rests at the bottom point of the main diamond. Because it’s been cut into the shape of a heart.

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

The world narrows until all I see is the unhinged man before me. The man who stole me back. The man who chased me through the woods and showed me how to take power by surrendering my control to him. The one who killed for me and died for me. The very man who probably looked the grim reaper in the eye and laughed like a maniac for having the audacity to think he had any right to claim his life before he was damn well good and ready.

“You’ve always been mine, Odessa. You say you’re broken?” He draws me back in and I lift my head. His bright, silver eyes hold me captive. “Then give me the most jagged edges of your soul and I’ll show you the most depraved pieces of mine. I’ll fit them together so tightly that you’ll never again be capable of telling where I begin and you end.”

The distinct *snick* of a blade makes me jump, but then Adris is turning my hand over and before I can say a word, he drags the blade across the scar on my palm—the same palm he cut weeks ago—and I hiss at the sting of my skin reopening. But then every part of my being is set on fire when he leans down and drags the thick pad of his tongue directly over the gash he recreated with expert precision. I must be seriously fucked in the head, because the sight of my blood on his lips has my breaths kicking up in my chest and my thighs tightening within the confines of this dress.

“I already know the most important and most intimate parts about you. All the rest, I’ll learn along the way. You’ve got all of me, and all of my cold heart and blackened soul. I’ll slay any motherfucker who dares to threaten the heart that beats within the confines of your chest because it belongs to me. I’ll do it all with a shit-eating grin on my face, too, because you. Are. Mine. Always.” He leans in close, his bloody lips brushing against mine when he whispers, “This is my solemn vow to you, Odessa.”

He eliminates the microscopic distance between us and his lips claim mine in a brutal kiss. I don't hesitate. I kiss him back with a sense of urgency I've never felt before. I cup his face with my bloody hand and hold him to me as I claim his lips, his heart, his soul. Taking and claiming every part of Adris, everything that he is, and making it mine.

"Um," the priest sputters next to us, but Adris doesn't dare to break the kiss. I'm held captive by his lips and surrender to his need to claim me all over again. "Th—that's not how this wor?—"

His words are cut off when Adris' arm swings out to the side and the priest's body slumps to the ground in a heap, blood spraying down my dress as he goes.

Adris finally releases me when Calix pretends to gag and Rune groans.

"What the fuck, Adris?" Rune barks out, his eyes glued to the priest that is currently bleeding out at our feet.

Adris just chuckles and shrugs. "He interrupted me." He sniffs, tucking the knife back into his pocket. "We didn't need him anyway."

I look at him, shaking my head. "Was that really necessary?" I ask, but his flat, unamused expression tells me that the priest interrupting had set him off more severely than I'd thought.

"This is like, so fucking sweet. Poetic, really, but we gotta get this show on the road before anyone else shows up," Calix quips, adjusting his length behind his slacks and fanning his cheeks that are fully flushed and red.

Rune nods in agreement. "They're gonna know exactly who was here, A. We've gotta go and regroup before we're fucking cornered."

“Right,” Adris agrees. A squeak pops from my lips when he picks me up and carries me back down the aisle, whistling some macabre yet jovial tune I don’t recognize, casually stepping over the dead bodies that litter the path to the doors of the house. He expertly weaves through the mansion, but before he walks out the front door, he stops and sets me down.

“What—” The question dies on my lips when he produces his knife again, and with a flick of the switch, he’s cutting through my dress like butter. I watch as Adris’ eyes dilate when the lacy material slips from my shoulders and flutters to the ground. I can tell he wants to pounce, but another rumbling growl rips from his chest before he whips off his suit jacket long enough to remove his black button down. My eyes home in on the angrily healing bullet wound that must have just barely missed his heart, and I feel the pain of that day all over again.

I shove the unwanted feeling away because we need to get the hell out of here.

A minute later, I’m back to being dressed in his shirts and I’m quickly learning that there’s no other way I want to dress around him. It’s justus.

I work with him as he loads me up onto the back of his bike that’s parked just outside of my father’s property line. He’d taken a lighter to my dress, effectively catching it on fire, which then caught the rest of the house on fire as well. Smoke billows from the windows while Adris adjusts the chin strap of my helmet before swinging his leg over and mounting his bike.

Forty minutes later, I feel like I can finally take a breath. We’re all safely boarded on the same plane that had taken us to Italy to find Santino. Part of me wants to ask what’s become of him, butthe question disappears from my mind when Adris throws me over his shoulder and takes me to the room at the back of the plane.

“Don’t reopen your fucking wound, Adris!” Calix calls from his seat next to Rune,



but Adris turns, his demeanor shifting suddenly.

“Mind your fucking tongue, malenkyi diable.”

Calix visibly shudders as his cheeks pinken and it piques my growing curiosity of exactly what Adris’ relationship is or was with these two men.

He’s on me before my body can even bounce from being tossed on the mattress. He wastes no time in ripping the shirt from my body before he devours my pussy with his lips, teeth, and tongue, forcing orgasm after orgasm until I’m a boneless pile beneath him.

He crawls up my body, his pierced cock notching itself at my entrance. No time is wasted when he pushes his way in until he’s buried deep within me, all the way to the hilt.

We both release this sound that can only be described as a contented sigh when we’re finally connected this way again. I cup his face, trying to cling to these last moments of tenderness before he inevitably sets his beast loose to wreak havoc on my body.

“I need you, Adris,” I moan against his lips when he thrusts against me. “I’ve—Oh, fuck—I missed you.”

His silver eyes darken as he thrusts in again and again, pressing his forehead against mine.

“Never again will I be deprived of this. Of you, Wraith. It’s been too long since I’ve had a taste of you.”

“Yes,” I moan and he groans, pulling out and thrusting back in, his pierced cock hitting a spot inside me that has me seeing stars and whimpering his name over and

over.

That psycho smile that I've come to crave spreads across his face before he dips his head and his teeth clamp down on my shoulder. I cry out as a blissful ecstasy washes over me at the sensation. "And I need to take a fucking bite, Mrs. Knox."

### EpiLogue

#### PART ONE

Another day, another body.

I'm standing next to my bike, wiping the dried blood and sinew from my exposed skin with a damp rag. I can't stop the nostalgia that washes over me when I think about the way Steve and... What did the other guy call himself? Ritz? Like the cracker, I guess. Anywho, they screamed so pretty for me as I drove my arrow right through their hearts after fucking with their minds a little first.

Okay, so they've been dead for like, fifteen minutes tops, but it was a juicy kill and one I won't soon forget.

I'd received a kill contract for them by some Scottish mob boss in Northern California, so I decided to make a little minihoneymoonout of it. You know, since I totally fucking married Odessa two weeks ago. Granted, said honeymoon was planned for all the wrong reasons because I refuse to be parted from her and need to keep her close to me. It's an unhealthy obsession, really. But myWraithalso deserves to spend some time in the sun and not have to worry about tomorrow for once.

These men were being held prisoner in a new warehouse for sexually assaulting someone close to these Scots, and apparently one of the victim's partners went batshit crazy and wanted them to die a very graphic death.

Since that's my specialty, I was all in. It's my self-appointed task to rid this planet of

the scum that dwells within it, I was all too happy to oblige.

I send off proof of death to the contact and payment follows through a moment later. Job done.

I scowl at the bloodstained rag like it offended me, because I really don't feel any better. I'm on edge and my hands are itching to find more victims to make an example of. I can't see straight. Not when I've been away from my wife for this long. My brain is running on two modes.

Fuck or fight.

While I'd fucked my little wife goodbye this morning before heading out for this job, it wasn't enough.

Rune and Calix agreed to come down and keep an eye on her while I took out the trash. Since it's been quiet from all three of them, I'm assuming they're all just fine and haven't killed each other yet.

That's a lie. There's no assuming. I watched them. So I know she's fine, because I kept a live stream from the security cameras inside the house on and in my ears the whole time I was working.

I mount my bike and take off, breaking so many laws and speed limits as I make my way back to Odessa. Thank fuck there's no traffic, but even if there was, I'd be slashing tires and throats all the same just to get back to her.

She mostly stayed in our bedroom the whole time, reading, watching the ocean from our private balcony, or doing fucking yoga that only pissed me off because I wasn't there to watch her bend into those positions. Or fuck her when she wasn't all twisted up like a pretty little pretzel.

Occasionally, she'd venture beyond our room for a snack or a meal, which Calix was thrilled to prepare for her. He and Rune have never been better—Cal's words, not mine—but I can see a shift in his demeanor when he's around Odessa.

He'd never shown interest in women before, and he's only ever had eyes for Rune, but he's different with Odessa. Rune takes care of him, but he gets to take care of her when I'm not there. Rune isn't blind to it, either.

I'm still not thrilled about the idea of playing with the three of them together, but it doesn't make my eye as twitchy as it used to. I don't have that strong urge to stab the only two men I trust... that much. So, you know, progress.

"Oh, fuck." The breathy words take me by surprise, because Odessa has been so quiet all damned day. But that... That sounded like a fucking moan. Which shouldn't be possible considering I'm here and she's there and Rune and Calix are... Oh, shit.

Logically, I know they would never betray my trust in them, but with the way my own father tried to kill me and with the way she's just moaned in my ear, any-fucking-thing is possible.

Nobody, not a goddamned soul, gets to paint her pleasure to draw those sounds out of her sinful mouth unless it's me.

I make it back to the beachside manor in record time and skid to a stop in the garage next to the armored SUV that Rune had driven down. I'm about to remove my helmet when I hear another soft moan drift through the speakers. It confirms that what I'm hearing is the live camera footage.

So I hadn't imagined it earlier.

She'd been so quiet up until this point, save for asking Rune or Calix questions

throughout the day and into the evening.

My blood pressure rises instantly when another soft moan graces my ears.

What the fuck?—

My helmet is off and I'm practically kicking in the door, hunting down the source of her pleasure, ready to fucking maim.

Okay, so maybe the murderous thoughts are still there because I swear to fucking all that is unholy, if Calix is touching her without my goddamned permission, I'm going to?—

I hear the faint sound of someone yelling what I think could be my name, but it's unclear through the blood fucking roaring through my veins and whooshing through my ears.

## Page 36

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

I take the stairs three at a time, knife in hand, and when I reach my door, I throw my boot into it so hard that the wood splinters and it bounces off the wall. The sheets are rumpled but Odessa's fresh peach curls are nowhere to be seen against the black satin.

The bathroom light is on and I'm like a fucking insect, drawn to it immediately. Before I can kick that door in, too, a hand clamps down over my shoulder and pulls to spin me around, but I won't be kept from what's mine. My knife meets Rune's throat and he just stares at me, unaffected by the blade currently pricking his skin just enough for a bead of blood to roll down his neck.

He simply cocks a brow. "You done?"

"Am I done?" I mock with a scoff. "I haven't even fucking begun. The second I open that door, Calix is going to fucking feel the pain of—"

"Adris?" The topic of conversation's voice sounds out from somewhere behind me.

Behind me.

As in, not in the bathroom.

As if perfectly timed, Odessa chooses that exact moment to fucking release the most mind-melting moan from just beyond the door.

Well, what the fuck is happening if she's in there alone and these two are?—

“Get the fuck out,” I snap, removing the blade when I realize just what my little Wraith is up to.

Rune just scoffs, shaking his head. “You’re welcome, you fucking moody prick.”

“Wait, why were you—” Calix’s eyes widen when Rune approaches where he stands at the threshold of my room. His dark eyes light up like a kid in a candy store and his cheeks flush to a dark, rosy shade, looking from Rune to me. “Oh, oh. You thought that I was... That she and I were... Wait.” A shit-eating grin spreads across his freckled face. “You’ve thought about it, too, haven’t you?”

I narrow my eyes at him. “Too?”

“Goodbye, Adris,” Rune mutters as he grabs Calix by the dick—literally—and leads him away before I can question why he’s thinking about Odessa. “Everything is ready for you, FYI. We’ll resurface sometime tomorrow to help with cleanup. Sort your shit out in the meantime, yeah?”

I strong arm the broken door until it’s closed, and pause. I know what he’s talking about, but his last words are almost an echo of what I told him that first night I brought Odessa back. But that’s a problem for future Adris to figure out.

My wraith moans again and just like that, I’m singular in thought again. Knowing she’s behind this door alone has me turning the handle quietly so I can spy on what she’s actually doing.

I peer through the crack and though I can’t see much, the sight before me is pretty fucking telling. She’s in the clawfoot tub in the center of the room with her pastel curls tied up in a messy knot while her head rests just off the edge. She’s wearing my noise-cancelling headphones that she’s taken a liking to while listening to any kind of music from Bach to Dark Sins.



That explains why she's completely unperturbed by my kicking the door in.

One of her legs, an even deeper tan now that she's spent time outside, is propped up against the side of the tub and the detachable shower head is nowhere to be seen.

My dick was already hard from the first time I heard her moan in my ear, but it's fucking steel now just watching as her brows draw together and her full lips part on a soft "Oh."

Her eyes are closed when I quietly slink into the room with her, ready to show her exactly who owns her pleasure, but I'm given pause when her body begins to coil and undulate beneath her own ministrations.

"Adris," she cries, her eyes still closed. "Oh, fuck... I need you."

Well, if she insists.

The second I approach the tub, I lean over her until I'm inches away with one hand braced on the ledge next to her head while the other dips into the hot water. I watch her for a moment, her body undulating beneath the pulse of the spray. I watch as the muscles of her abdomen begin to tighten and I know she's about to come.

Before she can finish, I'm gripping her throat and her eyes fly open in panic before settling on me, headphones falling off the back of her head and clattering onto the floor, then her smile fucking morphs into something downright sinister.

"Took you long enough," she fucking teases, flashing her perfect teeth at me.

"I had no idea you missed me this much, Wraith." I groan against her lips, my hand in the water dipping lower until the tips of my fingers barely brush against her clit and she jerks against me. "What's the matter, baby? Did I leave my little wife unsatisfied

when I left you passed out from fucking you six ways to Sunday this morning?”

Her eyes roll back when I run the length of my middle finger along the length of her pussy. I can feel her wetness even while fully submerged in this bath.

“You know, I think it’s you that’s turned me into a monster,” she moans when I dip the tip of my finger inside of her and quickly pull out, “because I need to feel you all the time now.”

Her words rush past her lips so fast that it sounds like one continuous word. And fuck me, they do something to me.

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

“Hmm,” I hum, straightening where I’m perched on the side of the tub and removing my hands from her completely. “And you thought you’d just... take care of your needy cunt all on your own?”

She sits up suddenly, and my eyes are drawn to the water that cascades down and over her breasts in sweet little rivulets. “I-I didn’t know when you were going to be home, and?—”

“Who owns your pleasure, Odessa?” I ask, gripping her jaw and tilting her face up until her dark eyes meet mine.

“You,” she answers immediately, the word nothing more than a heady breath on her tongue.

“Right,” I supply, pushing to stand and backing up a few steps. “Come here.”

Her lips part in surprise and her chest heaves with heavy breaths. She’s either nervous or scared. I’ll take either. She’s a fucking vision when I can wring either emotion from her.

“Adris—”

“Odessa,” I snap, loosening my belt to unbutton my black jeans.

She understands the connotation beneath the command, quickly standing and stepping out of the tub, her wet, mouthwatering body on full display for me. Her dark eyes turn obsidian with the lust consuming her as she waits rather impatiently for the

next task. I stopped her orgasm, so now she's constantly shifting, rubbing her thighs together and seeking any form of friction.

Grabbing a towel from the shelf next to me, I unfold it once and lay it at her feet. "Kneel."

This time she doesn't fight me on the command. Odessa instantly drops to her knees before me and for a moment, my brain graces me with an image of her kneeling for Cal or Rune. It's got me clenching my jaw. Fisting her hair at the base of her skull, completely undoing her messy updo, I ask, "Who owns this body?"

Her brow furrows but she's quick to answer.

"You, Adris."

Fuck, yeah, I do.

"And this?" I question, tracing a finger over the scars I left on her chest.

Her lashes flutter. "You. Always you."

There's not been a day where my heart doesn't do this painful thump when she confesses like this, but the masochist in me has come to crave that feeling, too.

"Good girl." I grin down at her and she shivers in my grip.

Releasing her, I stand to my full height and her palms slowly slide up the front of my legs until they rest against my thighs. She sits there patiently, waiting as I slowly unzip my jeans. I watch her fingers curl into the fabric of my pants and she starts to slowly tug, her eyes homed in on my hard cock that she's revealing at a painstakingly slow pace.

The moment my cock springs free, her delicate hand is there, wrapping itself around my thick length, giving it a few pumps.

Fuuuuuck,there really is nothing more erotic than seeing my blood diamond on her finger while she jacks me off.

Precum already coats the tip of my cock, the proof of my obsession with her glinting off of my piercing in an offering.

“You missed me?” I question, wrapping my hand around hers to squeeze harder around my length as she strokes me from root to tip.

“Yes,” she answers quickly, her breaths coming quick, her bare breasts rising and falling with every inhale as she squirms beneath me.

I cant my hips forward just enough to draw closer to her full, pouty mouth and tap the head of my cock against her bottom lip before smearing the precum there, painting her in my arousal like the perfect, pretty little canvas that she is for me.

A wicked grin pulls at my lips when her tongue darts out, catching the tip of my cock as she sweeps across her bottom lip, tasting me.

“Then show me, Wraith.”

My hand releases hers and sinks into her hair at the same moment her lips wrap around my cock and she sucks. My eyes threaten to roll back when she allows her teeth to scrape lightly along the bottom side of my shaft before tugging at my piercing. She licks and teases me, dragging her tongue back and forth from base to tip, fully coating me before taking me back into her mouth.

I love when I can force Odessa to submit to me, butmotherfucker,I fucking love the

way she willingly takes my pleasure into her own hands. Literally.

I watch her work my cock, eyeing her over my shirt that's now tugged up and held tight between my teeth so I don't miss a fucking thing. Her lips sink deeper and deeper until I feel my cock hit the back of her throat and she coughs and gags around me. But she doesn't let up. I keep a tight grip on her hair and help her out when I feel her working her throat around me. She wants to go deeper. She hums around my cock and I recognize the sound for exactly what it is.

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

She needs her breath taken away.

In the weeks since I found her again, I've come to realize that while Odessa is fully here with me, wanting to live forme, it hasn't stopped her from craving riding the edge of life and death. It's something that's been ingrained into her very essence, and instead of letting her feel ashamed for the way she craves it, I've found a way to help her satiate that side of her.

Breath play during sex has quickly become her vice when she gets that desire to feel adrift. It forces her into a state of bliss and if it brings her happiness while I also get to bury myself inside of her one way or another, I'll always oblige.

Gripping each side of her jaw gently with both hands, I lock onto her deep mocha eyes, making sure she's actually seeing and hearing me.

"Deep breath," I command, and she obeys, sucking in a sharp inhale through her nose. I swipe at the tears now rolling down her cheeks from choking on my cock and quickly suck them from each digit before cupping her face again. "That's a good littlewife," I croon, incapable of wiping the sadistic grin from my face, "because that's the last one you'll get until I'm ready to release you."

I surge forward, pressing my cock so deep into her throat that I feel the moment it fully suppresses her tongue and takes her breath away. I don't let up when I take over, fucking into her mouth at a punishing pace, remembering that she'd tried to take her own pleasure into her own hands, without me. With Rune and Calix under the same roof, hearing her moans.

I watch her closely as I fuck her face, tears falling uncontrollably and saliva running down her chin and coating her perky tits. Her face is reddening and I know she's struggling for air by the way her nails are biting into my thighs hard enough to draw blood. She hums around me, and I groan at the vibration as it shoots pleasure directly down my spine and settles deep in my balls.

I hiss the moment I feel her break the skin on my thighs. My cock pulses inside of her mouth at the shot of pain that mixes with pleasure, threatening to make me spill all that I am inside of her.

While I quite enjoy using her like this, I've developed a new addiction, and oftentimes I find that I don't want to come down her throat. Not all the time, at least. I fucking love watching every drop of my seed leak from her swollen, sated pussy, only to fuck it right back inside of her. The feral beast within me roars with the knowledge that she'll be walking around with a part of me still very much buried inside of her.

Especially for the little surprise I have for her later.

I thrust deep into her mouth again, her tongue twitching against the bottom of my cock in hunger, and I watch and wait, biting my fucking cheek to stave off the desire to come down her throat from the messy, erotic sight of her body trembling beneath me.

Just before she starts to turn a deeper shade of red and her muscles start to relax, I release myself from the confines of her throat and pull all the way out. She coughs and sputters before inhaling a deep breath, and her head hangs down for a moment but I won't let her relax.

I bend down and lift her up from under her arms until she's standing on wobbly legs. I leave her there for only a moment while I ditch my bloody jeans and shirt.



“No time to rest, wife,” I say, bending down to her level to place a tender kiss to her lips before biting the lower one hard enough to make her wince. “I’m not done with you yet.”

I pull her into the closet and dress her in my favorite outfit. One of my black button downs and no panties beneath. I can tell she’s fucking frustrated because neither of us has come yet, but that’ll be remedied shortly.

“Adris,” she snips when I grab her by the wrist and quickly escort us through the halls until we reach a room on the far side of the house, the door a thick steel. The only way in is through a code and fingerprint scanner. “What the hell is this? It’s not exactly how I imagined welcoming you home,” she mutters under her breath. It has me turning back to her with a smug look that I’m sure she’d love to just slap right off of my face.

“So you imagined how you’d welcome me home, Wraith?”

Her cheeks turn an adorable shade of crimson and she chews on the inside of her cheek, looking suddenly shy. “Maybe,” she mutters. I can’t help but chuckle.

“Mm,” I hum, bending down to nip at her lip when she turns to glare at me again. “Hold onto whatever that warm welcome was. You can do whatever the fuck you had planned after I show you your surprise.”

“Surprise?” Her brows furrow when she sees my grin morph from something playful to full-blown evil. “Your surprises can induce fucking heart attacks, Adris.”

“I think you’ll like this one. Turn around for me, and bend over against the door,” I murmur, and instantly, she obeys.

“How so?” she asks over her shoulder, watching as I produce a toy from my pocket. I

pull it from the packaging and press it to her entrance. She jumps at the touch of the cool silicone.

“Adris, what?—”

Her argument dies in her lips when I swat her ass hard enough to make her yelp. “Stay still.”

She’s so fucking wet for me already, so I’m able to slide the internal vibrator into her with zero resistance. She whimpers when it settles into place, and I make sure that the stimulator on the outside is pressed firmly against her clit.

“What is that?” Her question is breathy when she looks at me over her shoulder, dark eyes full of curiosity.

I give her my sadistic grin, ignoring her question and gesturing to the door when the red light on the panel turns green and a heavy lock clicks. “You’ll see. Shall we?”

## PART TWO

What the fuck?

I ignore the object he just placed inside of my pussy and turn to my psychotichusband, who’s just grinning like a kid in a candy store. He looks so fucking proud right now and I’m just gobsmacked.

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

Turning back, I stare into the sickly, sunken eyes of none other than Santino-fucking-Ferrero. Who, by the way, looks a lot worse for wear. He's significantly thinner and his skin has taken on a grayish pallor as opposed to the olive tones I had no choice but to look at every day for ten years.

The first emotion I feel tearing through me is an unfettered rage that boils beneath my skin and rushes through my veins at the fact that Adris had the nerve to bring himhere.

But then I take in the fact that he's heavily chained to a chair. They seem a bit excessive, noting just how frail he looks sitting there, staring at me like he's seeing a ghost.

I guess he is, though.

Adris presses his chest to my back and wraps his arms around me before bending down to speak over my shoulder.

"Surprise!" he whisper-shouts. The sudden sound of his voice causes Santino to snap out of whatever stupor he was in and starts to fight and pull against his restraints, albeit weakly.

"What the fuck?" His eyes widen when they finally focus on me. "You're supposed to be dead."

I look at Adris who barks out a laugh that makes Santino jump. "He doesn't remember much around the time his fucking house exploded." He shrugs, walking

around me and up to a table that's covered in a black cloth with... Yeah, that's a fucking giant, shiny red bow. Whatever is under the table is legitimately wrapped up like a gift.

I point at the red monstrosity, ignoring Santino's sputtering. "What's that?"

He looks back and forth between me and the table a few times, his brows raised, "Oh, this? Another little honeymoon gift for you, Wraith."

"Honeymoon?" Santino slurs, looking at Adris. "You were supposed to kill her, and you married her instead? She's a fucking soiled cum dum?—"

SLAP.

His head jerks to the side and my hand stings from how hard I hit him. Shaking it out, I look to Adris, who looks like he's ready to pry Santino's head from his shoulders with his bare hands. I walk up to him until my chest brushes his abs and look up at him. He's not looking at me, though. I can feel him physically vibrating from anger.

Reaching beneath his shirt, I run my nails up his stomach, digging them in hard enough to make him hiss, and his attention snaps back to me.

I quirk a brow when he just stares at me. "You were about to show me my honeymoon gift?"

His posture relaxes and he smirks at me. "Right." He snaps his fingers, and gestures for me to follow him the two steps it takes to get to the table. With all the finesse in his body, he pulls the cloth from the table, revealing... tools.

Like... murder tools.

All laid out in perfect rows are dozens of different knives, hammers, chains, saws, and there are even fucking forks and spoons laid here, but also... candy hearts. I want to laugh at those, but instantly, I recognize those mortifying broad-tipped arrows laying inches from my hand.

Adris sees me eyeing them and he picks one up, rolling it between us fingers as he rounds the table and closes the distance between us. He holds it out to me in offering and I take it.

“I promised that I’d let you be the one to drive the arrow directly through his heart?—”

“Wait—” Santino tries to butt in.

“His kill is yours, Wraith,” Adris says, hopping up on the table and swinging his feet. He gestures to a struggling Santino. “Have some fun.” He winks. “He’s completely detained. No part of him will be able to get to you.”

My fingers begin to tremble around the arrow when I look away from Adris and back to Santino. The man who was supposed to kill me a decade ago, but took me to keep as a pet instead. He overworked me as a child, then used and abused me as an adult. Degraded and debased me, reduced me to nothing more than a subservient vessel, trained to crave his punishing hands and utterly hate myself for it every day.

My anger turns to fury the longer I look at the pathetic man in front of me.

“Hold this.” I turn back to the table and slap the arrow against Adris’ chest.

“Yes, ma’am,” he growls, dragging his tongue across the straight of the arrow where my hand held it. It’s doing things to me with how feral he looks right now., “Fuck him up, baby girl.”

My face flushes at the nickname and my eyes flick to his, the silver in them practically glowing with excitement when I pick up a small rubber mallet.

Santino spots the new weapon in my hand and actually has the balls to scoff at me when I hesitate just long enough to gather myself.

“Odessa.” He tuts, albeit weakly. “You can’t even do it, can you? All these years, and it seems you’ve still lost your fight.” His eyes light up in victory as he drags my traumas back to the surface, the mallet feeling even heavier in my hand. “When exactly did that happen, hm?”

“Shut up,” I grit through clenched teeth, shifting on my feet. Adris watches closely in my peripheral vision but makes no move to aid me.

“Was it the first time I bent you over?—”

CRACK!

His words are cut off on a wail so loud I swear it rattles my brain. But that’s the sound I’d hoped for when I raised the hammer over my head and threw all my body weight into swinging it down as hard as I could, dead center on his right hand.

Blood splatters where the bones have popped through the skin, and instantly his hand is mangled. The same hand that touched me the moment I turned eighteen.

I think I sort of fall into a blackout daze after that. I don’t come back into my own mind until Adris’ whooping and hollering startles me, and I realize I’m covered in blood and the mallet is on the floor, lying in a puddle of mixed bodily fluids.

Santino is sobbing from one side of his mouth because the other side is bruised and bloody. There are teeth littering his lap and his face, hands, and knees are busted all to hell.

What the fuck? Did I do this?

Adris cackles when I fight a gag, and I glare at him as he sits there like a fucking child, happily swinging his feet to-and-fucking-fro, while one hand squeezes around his hardening cock and the other pops those fucking candy hearts in his mouth.

I roll my eyes, squaring my shoulders and leveling my eyes back on Santino, a smirk tugging at my lips when I see the tears gathering in his one good eye that hasn’t

swollen shut yet, sputtering with blood and drool falling from his lips with every silent plea.

My smirk disappears completely and my knees threaten to buckle beneath me when a sudden buzzing sensation starts vibrating from within my pussy and I yelp in surprise.

Adris' back meets my front as he keeps me from collapsing at the sudden burst of pleasure that whips up my spine and back down again.

His lips brush the shell of my ear as he wraps one hand around my throat and the other around my lower belly. "You should know better than to roll your eyes at me, little Wraith."

I can hardly focus on Santino as he pitifully wails and curses me to hell and back with practically no teeth.

"W-what did you put inside of me?" My question is nothing more than a rasp.

"A vibrator," he chuckles against my ear and I shiver, biting back a moan when it causes my walls to clamp around this... toy. "Or rather, a pleasure-bringing placeholder for my cock, if you will."

"But... w-why?"

"Because," a sharp nip at my shoulder makes me yelp, forcing Santino's bleary-eyed attention back to me, "you need to remember that your pleasure is always mine. That you can find pleasure within pain. And that there is always pleasure to be found," he presses my OTF knife into my palm and wraps his hand around mine, forcing me to press the button that unsheathes the blade, "when you're the one inflicting the pain."

His silver eyes darken when he turns them onto Santino. "Isn't that right,



motherfucker?”

The pure venom he’s injected into his words is a clear indicator that the question was purely rhetorical. Adris rounds me until his chest is pressed to mine, and he cups my bloody face in his large palms. His silver eyes look so alive that it borders on jubilant as he takes me in.

His thumb swipes across my cheek, smearing the blood and his tongue darts out, swiping across his bottom lip as he growls, “You’re a fucking vision in red, wife.”

I shiver at his term of endearment. Two weeks married to this man and already it feels like a lifetime, yet never enough either.

I’m about to combust when the vibrating stops suddenly. I don’t even have time to whine because Adris is claiming my mouth with his own. It’s oddly slow and incredibly sensual. Taking his time to taste me as if Santino isn’t blubbering and wailing and pleading for his life three feet away. Cursing our existence through the new gaps in his remaining teeth.

When he pulls away, he presses one of his arrows into my hand.

“His soul is yours for the reaping, Wraith.”

I remain in Adris’ grip when I turn my head to look at Santino. My body starts to vibrate with the onset of an adrenaline spike and I take a step towards him.

“For so fucking long I’ve waited for this exact moment,” I say, pleasantly surprised by the strength in my voice. “You took everything from me. My mother, my life, my fucking innocence. You even managed to turn my own father against me in the end.”

The tips of my bare toes meet his and I stand before him, arrow in hand. Using the

blade of the broad tip, I slice through the top button of his shirt like butter and he flinches.

Good.

“You hurt me.”

Pop. Another button.

“Abused me.”

Pop.

“Broke me.”

Pop. Pop. Pop.

“You put on one hell of an act, parading yourself as a made man. One to be respected. To be feared.” Adris scoffs at my words and I feel his heat at my back again, and his hands begin to explore, working their way up my thighs and hips.

“But everyone knows exactly what you are, Ferrero. Wanna guess what that is?” I prod, tapping the arrow against my temple, feeling empowered as Adris’ touch shifts to my ass, then lower, until he’s gripping the toy he’d placed inside of me.

Santino just glares at me, looking like he wants to murder me, but says nothing.

Adris clicks a button that turns on the vibrator and it zaps to life again. I involuntarily release this sound that’s some cross between a moan and a gasp when he begins to pump it in and out of me. Mybody lurches forward with the rush of pleasure that floods my body, but Adris is there to keep me from collapsing against Santino’s body.

A sharp crack sounds through the air when he slaps my ass with a dark chuckle on his lips.

“Don’t leave me in suspense, baby. Tell me.” He thrusts the toy into me, hitting that magic spot that has me gasping and wanting to scream his name all at once, “What is the true nature behind the great Santino Ferrero?” he mocks as he peppers my neck with nips and kisses before lavishing every mark with his sinful tongue.

I moan, then look down into Santino’s one open eye.

“You’re a fucking lying, cheating, traitorous, manipulative piece of shit rapist and coward.”

I’m seconds away from coming again when Adris rips the toy away from my body again. I’m about to turn around and fucking throttle him, but he beats me to it when he grips my hips in a bruising hold at the same time his long, pierced cock thrusts all the way inside of me in one go.

This time my body is thrown forward, and I have to catch myself on Santino’s bound wrists. My arms are completely outstretched, so he can’t even so much as head butt me if he wanted to.

I can hardly focus on the task at hand when Adris is hitting my g-spot with fucking expert precision.

“Mmm,” Adris hums as he sets a punishing pace, fucking me hard enough that my muscles strain to keep my elbows from bucking. “Sorry, baby, I just can’t resist my fucking queen when she rises to power.”

I cry out when he reaches around me and presses his two middle fingers to my clit, rubbing in circles with such a perfect amount of pressure that my pussy spasms around his cock, pulling a hiss from his lips.

A sudden orgasm shoots through my core, spreading to my limbs down to the tips of

my fingers and back again, my wholebody shuddering at the onslaught of pleasure as I feel every bit of my slick arousal coating Adris' cock.

Of course, this only spurs him on, because one orgasm is never enough for my psychotic husband.

Santino's face bunches, disgust wreaking havoc on his busted features, and he spits at me, blood spraying across my face.

"You really are a fucking whore, Odessa. Look at you," he grits with a lisp. My second orgasm is halted when Adris goes deathly still behind me, his cock still buried six feet deep inside of me. "You disgust me."

I laugh. I can't help it. Adris bites back a moan when the sudden sound causes my walls to clamp around his girth.

I grip the arrow, not bothering to wipe my face of his vile blood. He blinks, and my grin falls away, revealing a lethal expression.

"Yeah?" I huff, suppressing the moan that really, really wants to slip free. Raising the arrow, still seated around Adris and his monster dick, I bare my teeth. "Likewise, motherfucker."

I don't hesitate.

I shove forward with all of my body weight, Adris' cock slipping free the moment the arrow pierces Santino's skin. He shrieks, blood and spit flying, and his body jerks mercilessly, trying to prevent the inevitable.

"Never again will I cower to a lowlife piece of shit like you, Ferrero."

Adris moans behind me and I peek over my shoulder to see him palming his cock, stroking it while biting his lip, the piercing at the tip completely drenched in my arousal. He looks completely entranced. I'm not sure if it's from brutally fucking me while I kill a man, or if it's my words.

Probably both, to be honest.

He's a freak like that.

## Page 42

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

But he's my freak.

"Any last words?" The familiar question barely makes it past my lips when I feel Adris' fingers press into me, like he truly can't help himself.

Santino attempts to level me with a glare, but his weakened state has it falling flat. His lip curls up in a snarl. "They'll all come for you, and I can't wait to watch you burn in hell."

His words tug at the back of my mind, but I ignore it for now. I give him my most unhinged smile. "Ladies first."

I surge forward again, forcing the arrow deeper into Santino's chest, but Adris was right, the fucker is stuck on something, so I'm stuck here with a half-dead pile of shit before me because I can't fucking kill him properly.

"Need some help, Wraith?" Adris asks, coming up behind me and wrapping his hand around mine while his other hand is busy stroking my pussy lazily.

"Please," I beg, though I can't be sure if it's for him to make me come again or to help me kill Santino already.

"Push, baby," he murmurs, like what we're doing is something sweet and intimate.

At the same time, we shove the arrow and something fuckingsquelches, making me gag. Santino's body quakes for mere seconds before he stills, his head falling at an odd angle.

Adris is quick to pull me upright and away from Santino Ferrero's body.

"I—We did it." I huff a laugh, chock-full of disbelief. "He's dead."

"You did it, Odessa," Adris croons behind me, his hands running over the blood splattered on my body. "You were fucking magnificent. A reaper in her own right."

Before he can say another word, I turn, raking my arms down the solid metal table, shoving all of the tools to the floor with a deafening clatter. I grab Adris by the fabric of his shirt and shove him until he stumbles back against the table, and push some more until he's forced to lay back.

I grab my OTF knife from the floor and quickly climb on top of my killer until I'm straddling his waist. My aching clit rubs against the hard underside of his cock when I rock back and forth, coating his form length with my wetness.

Adris eyes the knife when I click open the release. His eyes flash in warning and intrigue. "Odessa?—"

"Don't," I hiss, but it turns into this embarrassing mewling sound when I grip his length and sink down onto him, inch by agonizing inch until I'm fully seated to the hilt.

Uncaring of my warning and my knife now poised at his throat, he reaches up and pulls on the shirt so hard that buttons fly everywhere, my breasts bouncing free from the force of it.

He grips my neck at my jaw and pulls until we're nose to nose, always ever his silent display of who's really in charge.

"I've told you before, wife." He smirks when my breath hitches at the combination of



his hips bucking up into me, and his hands guiding me, encouraging me to keep up the pace. “If you’re going to hurt me,” he presses the blade lower until it begins to cut through the fabric, “make it count.”

I cut through the rest of his shirt until it falls to his sides, exposing his lean, chiseled body, his scattered ink proudly on display for me.

“Don’t worry, Adris,” I moan at the sight of him and up my pace, grinding my hips back and forth until his cock is hitting me so deep that it hurts. I don’t dare slow down, though, because his piercing is pressing into that sweet spot within me. “I plan to.”

My eyes lock on the bullet wound in his chest, right over a tattoo of an anatomical heart that he got shortly after saving me... again.

I grip his face at his jaw, squeezing his cheeks like he’s done to me so many times and lean in close until my lips brush his. His expression is unreadable, but I revel in the feel of this throat bobbing beneath my hold. His cock throbs inside of me as I slowly roll my hips against him again.

“I want to hurt you,” I grit, squeezing harder. “I want to deliver unto you the pain that I felt when you held that arrow over my heart. Knowing in the back of my mind that the man I dreamt of rescuing me everyday was the very same man who wanted to kill me. And in that moment, I wanted to die.” I hiccup, caught off guard by the emotion clogging my throat.

Aris’ head tilts like a curious predator, observing me but not saying anything. Letting me get everything out that I’ve kept bottled up.

I pull back and press down on the blade in my hand, breaking the skin over Adris’ tattoo. He hisses a string of curses through his teeth and his cock grows impossibly

harder inside of me while I continue rocking back or forth on top of him.

I laugh, and it sounds a little manic as I curve the cut into the shape of an O. “You had your chance to kill me when I wanted nothing more than just that. But in taking me from him, by taking my body, my soul, breaking and making and molding me until I fit perfectly with you, you’re stuck with me now, Adris Knox.”

I make another slice, loving the way his eyes dilate until his pupils swallow up the silver with the pain and pleasure that I’m causing. “You’ve given me no choice but to dig myself deep beneath your skin, and now I am just as much a part of you as you are of me.”

I finish the K with a mewling moan when he reaches between us and starts to rub my clit, completely unfazed by the blood pooling in his chest and neck and groans when my pussy clenches around his length.

“You. Are. Mine. Just as I am yours.” I lean down and drag my tongue over the fresh wound over his heart, much like he did on our very unorthodox and highly sacrilegious wedding day. I look at him from beneath my lashes and repeat his words from that day back to him. “This is my solemn vow to you, Adris.”

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

“Always,” he growls, pulling me up to devour my bloody lips.

It’s in this moment that he and I truly become one, wholly. Uncaring of the corpse of my abuser behind me, I ride Adris, fucking him and hurdling us both closer and closer to the sweet oblivion that we both crave. We’re a fucking mess and it only serves to heat me from the inside out, pleasure coiling deeply in my core, only for the dam to break a second later when Adris pinches my clit between his fingers that are trapped between us.

“Adris, oh my God—” I come with a cry, my body shaking with my release, so much so that Adris takes over, still roughly fucking up into me from below. His eyes roll back when he reaches his tipping point and he comes with a low, feral growl.

Even as our breathing evens out in the aftermath of what we’ve just done, he looks every bit of the monster that he is right now. “You are mine, Odessa,” he rumbles before pressing an alarmingly gentle kiss to my lips. “Mine to ruin. Mine to possess. Mine to absolutely shatter and reshape and mold as I please. My obsession with you knows no fucking bounds. Your life is mine and I intend to see you live it fully, Wraith.”

“Don’t you know by now,” I whisper against his skin right next to my handiwork on his chest, “there is no life for me without you in it.”

He sits up then, his eyes locked on something behind me, and his expression morphs into some cross between a morbid curiosity and something I can’t quite identify.

He leans in, sweeping my hair to some side before biting down on my shoulder,

causing me to whimper and spasm around his half-hard cock that's still seated deep inside of me.

“I have a feeling this is only the beginning for all of us, Wraith.”

Just as he drags his tongue up the side of my neck, drawing out a shiver from me, a soft whimper sounds from across the room and Adris chuckles against my skin.

Peeking over my shoulder, that's when I notice we're really not alone. And I don't mean Santino's dead body.

Calix stands shirtless in the doorway, palming his hard cock through his gray sweats—completely unapologetic in his blatant ogling. But his eyes aren't on Adris... They're on me.

### PART THREE

A soft squeak bursts past Odessa's lips when my hands drift down her soft curves and I lift her, cupping the bottom of her ass and holding her against my lower abdomen. Her hands instantly loop around my neck and she nestles into the crook of my neck, peppering the skin there with nips and kisses and licks that only serve to rile me up as I carry her from the torture chamber, through the house, and into the bedroom. I bypass the bed, feeling the need to claim her body a little differently today.

Calix had hightailed it from the room when I shot him a look that even I couldn't explain. I've never minded his voyeuristic tendencies before, but I wasn't in the right mindset for him to look at her. Not after she murdered Santino like an avenging goddess and fucking claimed me as her own so ceremoniously that I was about to bust a nut from her vows alone.

It's clear that Calix wants Odessa. He developed this instant, silent attachment to her

and I can't quite properly process that little nugget of information.

Knowing that the victim of the two men I killed today had multiple partners was fucking with my head. I'm well-versed in the world of living however the fuck you see fit and committing to whoever you feel drawn to, but the thought of Odessa being with someone who isn't me? I was ready to drive my bike off a cliff when my brain had the fucking audacity to consider that she could find what she feels for me in someone like Calix. Rune, I don't know if he would ever touch a woman, but Cal couldn't be more obvious with who and what he wants, even without saying the words.

He wants her just as much as he still wants me. All in the same way he's committed himself to Rune.

Could I tolerate it, though?

Someone else touching her?

My wife.

No time like the present to put it to the test... c'est la fucking vie... from a distance to start, of course.

I think it'd be frowned upon to kill the only two men that I trust.

Keeping her wrapped tightly around me, I open the floor-to-ceiling sliding glass door and step out onto the balcony, the warm, late evening air warming Odessa's cooled, damp skin as she shivers against me. Her hips try to undulate, seeking friction, but her body locks up the moment we hear a long, drawn out, masculine moan.

On the shared balcony that connects my room to Rune's, the man himself lays

sprawled out on the round outdoor lounge that could easily fit four men. Calix moans again, his hard cock bobbing up, slapping his abs repeatedly as he bounces on Rune's cock. His eyes are closed, head dropped back as he grips Calix's hips and meets him thrust for thrust.

Curiosity gets the better of my little wraith because she lifts her head just enough to peek from under my chin and her breath catches in her throat, her hands shifting to grip the hair at the nape of my neck tightly when her eyes settle on the scene playing out before us.

We stand there silently for a moment, watching as Rune's hands rove over Calix's bare chest before settling one hand at the base of his throat and the other traveling down, nails scraping down his abs until his fingers wrap firmly around Calix's cock. He pulls until Cal is lowered, his back flush to Rune's front before propping up his heels on the cushion, renewing his efforts to bury himself deep inside of Calix's ass.

"Oh, fuck yes," Calix whimpers, his movements stuttering when Rune starts to stroke him from base to tip, his thumb swirling over the head and spreading his precum over his shaft.

Odessa writhes against me and I can feel our combined arousal soaking my abs just as much as I can feel her heart pounding so hard like it's about to beat right out of her chest.

Rune sinks his teeth into Calix's neck, pulling a loud, haughty moan from deep within his chest.

"You feel so fucking good wrapped around my cock like this, brother," Rune growls into his ear, his fingers alternating between stroking the scar across Cal's throat and squeezing.

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

I back up until my legs silently hit the oversized chair behind me and in one swift move, I flip Odessa so she's facing the two men who are so lost in each other that they haven't even noticed us yet.

I soundlessly lower myself onto the cushion, while simultaneously holding my cock steady as Odessa lowers herself onto me. I steel myself and take a deep fucking breath, knowing my relationship between Rune and Calix is about to be put to the test when my little wraith whimpers the moment she's fully seated on my cock.

The moans and whimpers immediately halt, and two sets of eyes are instantly drawn to us. Odessa is shaking above me, most likely in a heavy mix of fear and adrenaline as well as probably needing me to move.

I lock eyes with Rune first, watching for any sign that he may not be okay with any kind of group play with the woman before me, and while I don't see arousal there at watching her as she nervously writhes on my lap, silently begging for more, I don't find any anger or disgust either.

Though I do sense a bit of jealousy when his nostrils flare and his eyes trail down to where my cock is buried inside of my wife's pussy.

His eyes snap back to mine, and I simply raise a brow, to which he answers with a simple nod.

Gripping Odessa's hips, I encourage her to lift up, sliding me almost all the way out of her before releasing her and letting her hips drop down again.

“Adris—”Odessa tries to warn, but I cut her off, thrusting up into her and turning her protest into a moan instead.

While speaking my next words into her ear, I find Cal’s dark eyes and hold his gaze, giving both of them the command. “Go ahead, fucking ride that cock for me.”

I pulse inside of Odessa when not only do they both whimper at the same fucking time, they both listen. We’re mere feet apart and I’m doing my fucking best to watch all of them closely, but with the way my girl’s tight walls are gripping me like she wants to choke my cock to death, it’s really, really difficult.

“Wraith?” I mutter under my breath and into her neck, unable to form more words when she rolls her hips against me.

“Yes,” she whispers as her head drops back, and I can’t tell if it’s an answer to my question or if she’s waiting for me to finish, but she’s completely in her element, so I let her ride it out. Literally.

But Calix starts to whine, and the sound not only travels through me and my dick, but it must shoot through Odessa as well because her skin is suddenly pebbled with goosebumps and her pussy pulses around my length as she rides me into oblivion.

“P-please,” Calix begs, but I can’t be certain who he’s asking permission from, because he’s got one hand reached back with a death grip on his hair but his eyes are darting rapidly between me and Odessa.

“What do you need?” I ask before trailing my tongue up the side of Odessa’s neck before biting down on her shoulder, pulling a sultry moan from her lips. She’s taken to having this miniature audience shockingly well. Seeing her comfort level and my lack of wanting to murder my only friends where they sit knocks something loose in my chest and it’d be staggering if I wasn’t already sitting down.



“More,” Calix whispers and reaches for his cock when Rune releases it, but his own hand is slapped away.

“You don’t get to come yet, mybeautiful menace,” Rune growls against Cal’s cheek, shifting his grip to his chestnut curls on top of his head.

“You want more?” Odessa stiffens for a moment against me at my question but I give her hip a squeeze. I want to push her limits, but I’d never force her to play with more than just me. This is just another test for me as much as it is for her.

Calix nods fervently in Rune’s grip, and it dawns on Rune who the maestro is right now.

I look to Rune. “Get him on his hands and knees.”

He shudders at the command, but does exactly as I say, without even pulling out of Calix’s ass.

“Closer,” I all but bark, my cock ready to fucking explode from being seated deep inside of Odessa for so long without fucking her hard like I so desperately need to.

Three hard thrusts from Rune, and it has Calix crying out as he scoots forward from the sheer force of power. His face is now mere inches from my cock, from Odessa’s pussy.

“Oh, my G—Adris!” Odessa cries when I reach around her and pinch her clit between my fingers, rubbing with enough pressure that it has her head dropping back against my shoulder. She fucking falls apart in my arms, her pussy spasming hard around my cock with the sudden orgasm that’s rushing through her.

She’s still mine.

It's an odd and unbidden reassurance, but it certainly does the job to quell the beast just below the surface that's more than ready to lash out and draw blood.

Calix moans and inches closer but stops, refusing to touch without my permission, without her permission. Because his eyes are so dead set on her while Rune pounds into him from behind while my little wraith comes down from her high. I can feel the warmth of each breath as he moans and whimpers and pants through every thrust against his ass. I'm sure Odessa feels it, too, because she attempts to lift her head but it's like her entire body has turned to jelly.

Needing to gauge her reaction, I slowly help her to lift her head and grip the back of her neck to hold her in place when her sights move lower and lower until her hazy gaze settles on Calix.

Their eyes meet, and it's like something locks into place within Calix's brain, and he moans.

"Please," he begs, his cheeks flushed bright crimson even in the dark of night. "I need a fucking taste, please."

*Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:36 am*

Rune curses under his breath but there's no malice behind it. He looks curious and aroused as hell as he ups his pace, tightening his grip on Cal's curls.

But my answer is instant. "You want a taste?"

"Fucking please," he grits through his teeth, moaning out loud, inches from Odessa's pussy. "You two smell so fucking divine together. Please let me taste you." Another moan, and his eyes find mine, desperation blatant. "I'll be the best boy for you, for all of you," he begs as his eyes shift to Odessa.

His words send me over the edge along with my wife, who fucking shatters again over his words. My brain short circuits as I come deep inside of her, and I bite down on her shoulder hard enough to nearly break the skin. She cries out, a third mini orgasm slamming into her hard and fast.

Rune comes with a grunt, his forehead falling to rest against Calix's back. When his movements slow, he lazily reaches around and starts to stroke Calix, who is painfully rock hard. His cock is thick and angry, desperate for its release.

"You want to taste?" I question and Odessa's breath hitches when my cock slips free of her perfect pussy, my entire length coated in our combined release. I reach around her and grip my length, pointing it at Calix in an offering.

"Taste us, then," I growl, tapping the tip of my piercing against his lips. "Don't waste a fucking drop."

Calix wastes no time in wrapping his lips around the head of my cock and sucks,

swirling his tongue around the tip before licking up all sides. Like a true good boy, he does as I ask, cleaning all of our cum from my shaft, even as it leaks from Odessa and onto me.

And what does she do? She fucking pants and moans. I had no idea how she would react to anyone touching me, but she's certainly not mad at this. She's fucking aroused. And that alone is enough to force something to settle within my feral brain.

When my cock is clean of our cum, I grip Calix by the jaw. "Such a good boy, little devil."

He and Odessa both shudder over my words. I then look to Rune, who looks just as oddly content as me.

"Go get cleaned up, then meet us back in the office," I murmur, "It seems we have a lot to discuss."

"Seems so," Rune responds, pulling from Calix with a groan.

He pulls Calix from the balcony, who has this fucking awestruck look on his face that makes my eye twitch.

Odessa turns herself around in my lap when they're gone, her fingers stroking over her handiwork on my chest. "That was... something, Adris."

She's flustered, I can see the blush taking over her as well. "You're mine, through and through, Odessa. And I am certainly yours."

I look into her dark eyes and see the question lingering there that she wants to ask, but doesn't dare to. After staring at her blankly long enough, she sighs.

"Where do we go now, though? After all of...that, I mean."

I give her my best psycho smile.

“Like I said, Wraith.” I nip her bottom lip as I sink her back down into my cock again so slowly that it has us each groaning. My cock that’s still slick with Calix’s spit.

“This is only just the beginning.”

To Be Continued...