



Master B-1901 (Garden of the Gods #14)

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Category: Horror

Description: With the death of Whitlock, a new home for horror is born...

Garden of the Gods

GOTG Registry

Name: Braddock Pierce

Master #: 1901

Occupation: CEO

Slave preference: Female Blank Slate

Recruiter #: The Main Master

Experience

Beginner

Intermediate

Experienced ?

Main Master Notes:

Braddock Pierce grew up as an elite. He had it all: riches, businesses, a prestige reputation. Getting into the Gardens was everything he'd always wanted. At least...that's what they keep telling him. But he's not who they think he is.

Or... is he?

Allison is the perfect blank slate. Her mission is her unstable Master. The violence she can take. What she isn't prepared for is the web of mystery woven around Braddock by his doctor. Nothing is as it seems. Is Braddock a ticking time bomb waiting to go off, or is Ally the real threat?

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W

Virgin slave. Wears a white robe during the auction.

B

Nonvirgin slave. Wears a blue robe during the auction.

D

Docile, drugged slave. Can be w or b. Heavily trained. Good for elderly or those with disabilities.

M

Male slave.

Crow

(fc: female crow, mc: male crow) Ruined, disfigured slave. Convicts fall into this category. Black robe during the auction. Usually the cheapest slave.

Blank slate

Mostly male slaves who have undergone forced indoctrination through various scientific methods. (Brainwashing, programming, training, etc.) Most remember their identity but have key parts of their past erased if it could pose a threat or alter their

role as a slave. They're programmed to be focused solely on their Mistress or Master. They are made to be obedient, loyal, and protective.

*Master numbers written out throughout the stories are capitalized. (Ex. Twelve-twelve.) Also, the word Master throughout is capitalized. (Ex. Master Twelve-twelve.)

*BC

Beta Couple (Ex. Mistress BC #)

*AC

Alpha Couple (Ex. Mistress AC#)

(Master numbers will stay the same. There will be no AC or BC attached to their title or number.)

*Slave numbers written out will not be capitalized. The word slave throughout will not be capitalized outside from the beginning of a sentence.

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MASTER B-1901

Garden of the Gods

Colorado Springs underground facility

What did you get when you mixed savior and Satan? Martyr and mayhem? A former combat veteran...with little grip on reality? Easy. When you were elite, you got hell...and heaven. Special privileges sure had their perks, but were they worth it when your duty was seen as a waste to those who saw you as nothing but a title?

My demons were many and most evolved from childhood. They had little to do with war. That only fed and made them grow, and not in a good or an elite way. I may not have been someone big in the world of Wexlers, Whitlocks, or Waltons, but as the only surviving Pierce, I'd suddenly become important. Too important to be murdered above ground. I went from nearly homeless to rotting in prison to rolling in the finest underground equivalent imaginable. And that's what this place was. The Gardens may have been dripping in luxury at every turn, but I was no more free or safe to leave this place than I was to leave my cell at Riker's Island. My paranoia kept me more prisoner than the Main Master, but even free of the memories that plagued me, I still wasn't sure how safe anyone would be. It kept me here, hidden away in my apartment. Hidden away from all the finery on my screen as I paced and watched the show play out on my giant flatscreen. Not that I was sure I'd go to the auction even if I could. I'd never been one to embrace the elite life. I sure as hell didn't think I was capable now.

"Masters and Mistresses, welcome to the third auction for the Garden of the Gods.

This is our first themed event together, and I'm happy to see you all had fun with it. Very creative." The Main Master pointed toward the cameras at someone sitting in the first few rows.

"For those who didn't make it to the first two auctions, I'm going to recap this as quickly as possible. Before you were permitted inside, you took classes to learn the rules. You underwent tests, and you've proven yourself worthy. Some of you are still in the Beta stage while others have moved up to become an Alpha. A lot of you have inquired why. I'll sum it up right here. There can be many different reasons why I've advanced a select few. Perhaps the auctions aren't new to them. Maybe they're more experienced and accepting of who they really are than others. What it boils down to is: they've put in the time, and I trust them to be our foundation. It is not an easy rank to obtain. For some, it may take years. Only when I'm satisfied by your progress will I move you to Alpha."

My eyes rolled. Alpha. Beta. I knew even though a B was attached to my title, I wasn't going anywhere. Despite that the Gardens thought it could fix me, my track record proved it was a lost cause. I'd never leave this place again. Not because I actually enjoyed my role here, but because it was impossible to erase a past that was burned into my very brain. I wasn't naïve about the blank slates. I'd seen them. Talked with them. Hell...I asked to be one of the soldiers being prepared for the outside world. I was denied by my shrink, and not a candidate for that level of training...or so she said. That told me one thing. I wasn't fixable; I was valuable. It had my lips twisting as I kept my stare stuck on the screen.

"Aside from the A and B attached to your name, there is a number. You are a number. Your outside status got you here, but that means nothing inside the Gardens. Your identity exists no more. Here, you have no power, nor will there be favoritism. This world is mine. If you follow the rules, you're wildest, darkest dreams can come true. If not..." He looked around the room, finally letting his shoulders shrug. "You're dead."

“For those joining us for the first time tonight.” The Main Master stopped . “And there are quite a new number of us: new members, old members I’m giving a chance. Previous Main Masters.” He paused as his head tilted and he glanced up to one of the higher, private balconies I knew rested above. “I don’t think I need to go much into how this place is not Whitlock ? i . The rules are different. The location is different.” Again, he glanced up. “I am not Bram Whitlock ? ii . You cannot buy yourself out of trouble. You cannot buy me. I will die in this place, and I will never let the Garden of the Gods be taken over or fall. If you can accept that, welcome home. Just know, there is no special treatment nor any favors. I am no one’s friend. We have rules, and every single one of you will follow them.”

A sigh left me as I continued watching.

“Now that we’re all clear, let’s recap bidding. First, we have the white, or w ? iii ’s. These are the virgins. We also have the b’s: or blue ? iv . Not virgins. There are the d ? v ’s. These slaves are docile, trained, and good for those who are looking for a long-term slave. Lastly, come the black, or as we call them, the crows ? vi . These are the convicts. The disfigured. The old. Repulsive.” He looped back around, making his way to the middle. “In this category, you’ll also find the breeders. These are through contract only and cannot be bid on unless you’ve already met with me. If you bid and you haven’t followed the rules, your bid will be revoked, and I will fine you ten thousand dollars. Breeders are special and are for only those I approve of.”

“For those looking for our programmable, ‘blank slate’ ? vii males and females, your auction is just through that door off to the right. These slaves are for those who want someone they can control. A bodyguard. A companion. A sex slave you can use or defile by any means possible that will not fight back. They have had a portion of their memories erased. They’re aware. They know who they are, but they only remember what we want them to. The best part is they obey every order. And I mean that. Every order.”

I had seen the males...but a female blank slate? Now that would be interesting. I didn't care much for the women I'd chosen to this point. Our conversations were awkward. The sex was forced on both parts. Wouldn't getting a blank slate make the process easier? There'd be no finding them beaten and broken, so damaged I couldn't even recognize them. Maybe I wouldn't even feel anything after killing them from one of my episodes. The blank slates were already practically gone anyway, weren't they? Gone like me?

“For those who are new, pay attention. I've said this before, and I'll continue to repeat it. What you buy is yours. You can do whatever you want with it. Fuck it. Kill it. Share it. Marry it. Love it. Eat it. Destroy it.” Hesitation . “I don't care so long as you follow the rules. Your business is your own. Keep it that way or you may come to regret it. I can't stress that enough.”

“If you look down the arm of the chair, you will see a button. That is how you will bid. Do not press that button unless you are sure you have the money. There is no lay-a-way plan or loans. If the slave is too much for you to afford, don't bid. At the Gardens, there are no such thing as accidents. If you bid, you will buy. If you don't have the money, I will take my payment from you from the outside world, and you can stay here with me and the slave you so desperately wanted. This life can be simple if you just follow the rules. They're easy. Complete acceptance into the Garden of the Gods is not. Honor your contract, abide by it, and Alpha status will be yours.”

Lights flashed, and the camera panned over, giving view to the entrances where the slaves were lined up in the back of the room. My heart was suddenly hammering away in my chest, and I wasn't even sure why. What I wanted, I wouldn't find on that screen. What I wanted...

My head turned to my counter as I took in the black binders the guards had delivered earlier that morning.

What I wanted was there . The perfect slave was inside those pages, and this time, I'd be safe to be myself. Whoever that person was.

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Dark hair. Light hair. Long. Short. Straight. Curly. I had no real preference on the woman I wanted. Beautiful. Unattractive. Any slave I chose was going to end up dead anyway. I knew this. Did I care? Perhaps I used to. One could only feel remorseful so much before the shock or denial of their curse completely faded. Where months ago I would have been swayed towards dark hair and curves, the appeal for anything specific wasn't here anymore.

It hadn't always been like this since I'd been at the Gardens. I'd been stupid and let myself get excited over my first slave. I'd even felt that twinge when I bought my second. Now...nope. I refused to get excited over a corpse. And that's exactly what this slave would be—mental illness or not. At least now, I wouldn't have to worry about there being much of a consciousness there. Not like I truly cared that much at all. It wasn't even their life I mourned over, but my loss of control. Of sex. Of...something or someone to fill the empty space between insanity.

My eyes scanned the pictures of the blank slate women, and I flipped the page, frowning. They were beautiful. I could have chosen any and would have been satisfied with my choice, but that wasn't necessarily going to work. I needed someone strong. Someone that could survive at least more than a few damn days. How was I going to assure that with a robot? The woman would take orders. I couldn't just tell her not to die and expect her to be living and breathing when I came out of my episode.

A groan left me. I could chain myself up if I wanted to. I'd done it before. Thing was...I found it only made it worse over time. That's why I had to keep with the treatment. My doctor assured if I continued to take the pills and come to therapy, I stood a chance. I could be normal, to an extent. I could live a real life on the outside

world again. Monitored, of course. Thing was...I wasn't sure if I wanted to.

"Maybe you?"

My lids narrowed as I held my finger between the pages and flipped to the next. Glancing over the women, I turned back. Curly, auburn hair was a few inches past her shoulders. She was beautiful and even smiling in the picture unlike so many others. My focus was on her lips, but only because I was wondering how they'd feel wrapped around my cock. Too real. If I wanted a normal slave, I'd buy one. I needed a blank slate. No emotion. Not unless I ordered it.

I gritted my teeth as I pushed the top half of my body from leaning down over the counter. The auction was still in full swing, and I took in the woman climbing the stage. She had tanned skin, and her hair was so light it practically looked white against the blue robe. My eyes darted back to the book. I reached over, closing my lids as I turned a big section of pages. I let my finger hover, bringing it straight down. Only when I connected with the page did I take in what I was pointing to.

Nothing.

I hadn't landed on a picture at all, but to the right of one. What I saw had my pulse suddenly thundering in my chest. Fate? Stupidity on my part?

Swallowing was almost impossible as I got closer. Straight, chestnut brown hair was level with the woman's defined jawline. She had round, pale blue eyes and a small, thin nose. Her lips were on the fuller side, almost too full, but for seconds I couldn't break my stare from them. I licked my own lips, pulling at the collar of my t-shirt as I took in her emotionless expression.

Blank slate. Yes. She appeared as that. I liked it. I couldn't hurt her. Not really. I could, but she wouldn't feel it like a normal slave would. At least...I didn't think so.

They were programmed. Programmed to obey. To take orders. If she felt pain, she wouldn't respond to it, which told me that it couldn't be registering.

But...fuck. The woman was beautiful. Too beautiful for another slave I didn't want to risk losing. I hadn't even decided on the woman yet, and already the thought of killing her put a bad taste in my mouth. But wasn't that nonsense? She was here to be bought. Someone would eventually buy her, and if that was the case, her fate would be no better with them than it would be with me. She'd die either way. And I didn't necessarily dislike killing. I felt as though in my past it even got me off. It was just that...the fucking silence. Being alone...I liked being alone but...not with the confusion. The guilt? No. Not really but...

A growl left me. Fuck it. Shouldn't I just take the win? Take her? Keep her for however long that happened to be?

I glanced back at the television. Back to the numbers rising on the screen that held the bids. I didn't let the prices sink in. I didn't care. Grabbing my phone, I hit the number provided with the binder, shifting on my feet as I began relaying the slave's information to the guard.

"Would you like to come down and see your slave before you start the bidding process, Master Nineteen-oh-one?"

My head shook. "No. Start it."

Another jump in my pulse.

"Done. She is up next on the queue. I will relay any matches to your bid when the time comes. You can increase the bid or pass."

"Understood."

I headed for the refrigerator, swinging it open as I reached in for a beer. Classical music began to play in my ear as I waited for the guard to return. Minutes passed. As they did, I paced, sucking down the cold liquid like it was air. I was just about done with my first beer when the guard's voice came through.

"The bid has just been placed." A few seconds. "Two bids. It's up to two-hundred-twenty-thousand."

I nodded, regardless that he couldn't see me.

"Increase."

I knew the bids went up ten thousand at a time for the first hundred thousand. I didn't need a play-by-play to know the higher it went, the larger the bid increased.

"You've been outbid. Once." He paused. "Twice. No, three times."

A growl left me. Fucking scavenger motherfuckers. I'd only been bid against once while ordering over the phone so far, but I'd heard stories in the lounging areas how some of these Masters couldn't resist a pretty face they hadn't found first. My choice was gorgeous, and it was all about the steal. I had a feeling that was the case here.

"Keep going. Don't stop until you have her. I don't care how fucking high the bid goes."

"Are you sure, Master?"

I took in her picture, feeling how a sensation almost like butterflies took over. My jaw tightened, and I turned, reaching in and grabbing another beer.

"Absolutely."

“I will return after it’s over, Master.”

The classical music came back on, and I opened the beer, taking a big drink. Three drinks in, and I was back to pacing. To eating the floor up in strides way too determined for someone about to kill their investment. I slowed, coming to a stop as I let my training sink in.

Calm. Deep breaths. Breathe in. Hold. One-two-three-four-five. Breathe out. Breathe in. Hold.

“Sir.”

My eyes opened. Your bid has been secured. We will get your slave programmed and bring her to you promptly.

“Thank you.”

I didn’t bother asking how much he’d spent. Hanging up, I glanced back to the picture. Back to the woman who now belonged to me. Where I hadn’t paid attention to the personal information next to the photo, I found myself picking up the binder as I glanced over it.

Slave #:f0091

Close to my own number.

Age: twenty-five

Hair: brown

Eyes: blue

Height: 5ft 7inches

My eyes flared. That tall? My imagination had her so much smaller. Not that I really cared but...I hadn't ever been with a taller woman before. Not because I chose shorter women, I just hadn't met the right one.

Skills: hyper-alert, impeccable attention to detail, problem solving, sufficient communication.

I stopped. Sufficient? What was this? Was she going for a job interview? I scanned back up, not seeing anything to indicate why in the hell they would have set it up like this. The men, I could understand. Most of the blank slate males were protectors for the Mistresses, but the women? That wasn't their purpose.

Knocking had me looking up, surprised. No way in hell they were already here. Were they?

More knocking sounded, and I swung open the barrier, my mouth parting in confusion.

"Doc."

A warm smile came to Mistress Two as she brushed back her red hair.

"Good evening, Master. Braddock," she said, gesturing towards me.

"Brad," I corrected. "I feel our introduction is a loop stuck on repeat."

"May I come inside?"

I hesitated, but widened the door, letting her through.

“I’m actually waiting for my new slave.”

“Oh, yes. I’m alerted when my favorite clients bid.” She headed for the middle of the room, turning to face me. “I was also notified your purchase was finalized. It’s why I’m here.”

“Oh.”

Silence played between us as her lids narrowed. I knew Melissa LaRoe from early in my youth. She’d been acquaintances with my mother, but I wouldn’t say they were ever close. My mother didn’t trust her, not that I really knew anyone who did. The stories of her were all over the place. Some spoke as if she created miracles. Others whispered that she was full of nightmares. I didn’t give much credit to either. I still wasn’t fixed.

“I know our appointment isn’t for a few more days, but it’s been almost two weeks since we’ve talked.”

My head drew back. “No, we talked the other day, remember? I was having a bad morning, and you saw me in the lounge area getting coffee. We talked then.”

The woman’s lids fluttered as her brow creased.

“I’m afraid I don’t remember that. What day?”

I thought over the date. “It was Tuesday. I told you about the dilemma I was having in finding a slave. I wasn’t sure if I should get another after...last time.”

More, she looked confused, but it was so brief, I wondered if I had caught it at all.

“Shame on me. I’ve had such a hectic schedule. Come, let’s sit on the sofa while we

wait for your slave. Tell me about our conversation. I'm afraid with all my clients, everything is beginning to blur together."

My jaw flexed, but I followed her to my sectional, taking a seat a few cushions away. Didn't she know it was dangerous to be in my domain, alone ?

I took a seat, taking another drink of my beer as I recalled the meeting.

"You were wearing a pale pink shirt and a black skirt. I told you about the episode I had, and you had me go over what I could remember of it."

"Episode? You had an episode, and you didn't call me? Tell me about it again."

Did she not fucking care about her patients? Was I so insignificant that she didn't even remember the hell I'd experienced when I told her about it? I wanted to explode. To groan. To kick her out and tell her we'd talk tomorrow after I got to spend the night with my slave. I didn't want her here. I didn't want to be talking about this right now. That was asking for trouble.

"I was back overseas."

Her hand came up, cutting me off before I could get out another word.

"Braddock—"

"Brad."

"Brad." She shifted on her cushion. "I want you to do me a favor. Close your eyes and count down from 10."

"What?" My head shook. "I'm not in a session right now, Doc."

“Master.” She leaned forward the smallest amount. My eyes connected with hers and a calming washed over me just like it did in our appointments. “Very good. We’re going to make you so much better.” Her voice was monotone yet soothing. Slightly slow. Beautiful. Hypnotic. “Count down for me. Let your body relax.”

“I don’t have time for this...I...ten. Nine.”

“Very good. Your anger is lifting. You’re feeling it leave you with every breath. Keep going.”

“Eight.”

“Yes. Your tongue is leaving the roof of your mouth. You can feel your jaw unclench.”

“Seven. Six.”

My body was getting tired as my actions became automatic at her orders.

“You feel safe. Happy.”

“Five. Four.”

“Listen very closely. You’ve never been overseas, Braddock.”

“ Three .”

“You never served in the military. You had your family duties, but they were under the supervision of your father. You’re a Pierce. You run your line. You have since your father’s death nearly four years ago.”

“Two.”

Had my tone rumbled and been harsh? No. I was calm. I was as light as a feather.

“You’re smart. Even though you won’t remember what I’m saying, you’re getting better every day. Forget all these episodes. Let go of the fears or memories that are holding you back. You’re elite. You know what that means.”

Did I? Did I know the significance of that?

“One.”

“Open your eyes, Brad. Look at me.”

Light flooded in as I took a deep breath and smiled. I met Melissa’s stare, but she didn’t look happy. I couldn’t tell what her emotion was.

“Better?”

“Yes.” I nodded, feeling my lips draw down as my smile faded. Wait. Did I feel better? Something was off. Different.

“Back to me.”

I brought my attention up to meet her gaze.

“I know these episodes are hard for you, but you must call me immediately if you have another.” She opened her purse, pulling out her phone. While she pushed at the screen, she peeked up, taking in glances at me. “I’ll give you one full day with your slave. I want to see you the day after tomorrow. You’ll be fine until then, but I would like the Main Master to hear your progress and see what he thinks.”

“The Main Master?”

She did smile then. “Of course. He’s a doctor like me, Braddock. You know that. I trained him. And he’s very good. Very, very good. You’re in safe hands.”

“I know Elec,” I ground out. “We grew up together. You know that. I just don’t know if I want to see him concerning this. What we talk about is private.”

“He’s the Main Master. He’s the one who invited you to the Gardens. Elec will help. You’ll see.”

“I thought you were helping me just fine. Am I missing something?”

My doctor stood, dazzling me with her smile. “What you’re missing is your slave.” Her head tilted. “You’re tired of hurting your slaves.”

“No.” My head quickly shook. “I feel like you don’t ever listen to me. We’ve gone over this before. I don’t mind hurting them. I like hurting them. What I’m tired of is killing them so soon. Especially when I can’t remember doing it. You said you were going to help me.”

“And I am. I just did . No more worries, Braddock. I’ll help you with everything .”

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Had I wanted a shell? A robot with no feeling or emotion?

As I stared up into the eyes of my new blank slate, I couldn't understand how she seemed so real. So...human? She was programmed to obey. To be what I needed. I knew that, but I hadn't expected her to be so damn good at it. If I didn't know better, I was fucking a woman who wanted me as much as I wanted her. Thing was, it wasn't like that at all. I was fucking a brainwashed body, and I had to remember that as I kept going back in to kiss her. She wasn't real. She wasn't even really alive at all.

I grabbed my slave's shoulder, keeping an arm at her lower back as I leaned her away from me. My mouth latched to her breast, and I sucked to her nipple. The whimper that left her was followed by her body jolting below me. Her pussy clutched to my cock and spasms had her eyes widening.

“Master?”

Innocent.

Once upon a time, my slave had been a good girl. One who'd only been fucked once. I didn't need her history to see that. It was obvious even though she wasn't a person anymore. The Garden's couldn't replace what her mind hadn't experienced. Being programmed was one thing, but the truth was still there. Both weaved, adding to the false authenticity. A fake truth. A beautiful lie.

“Shh.” A small laugh left me at how good her training was. I could almost believe the fear that had momentarily sparked in those light blue eyes. “Felt good, didn't it? It's just another thing you're going to obsess over. I want you to come on my cock every

time we fuck. I want you to scream from how good it feels.”

“I want my Master to feel good too.”

“Already there, but I think you know that. I’m going to fill you up so good with my cum.” The admission had me half moaning, half forcing the words through gritted teeth. “Spread your legs around me wider and ground your pussy against me. Take me deep.”

Real. Just. She seemed so damn alive. She was strong. She was trained. She was a goddess. But she was blank, and that meant she didn’t exist.

My slave obeyed. I fitted her arms around my neck and wrapped around her tightly as I moved her against me. Arms clung as I repeatedly gave her every inch.

“I’m going to hurt you now, slave. This you will take. Do you understand?”

Her head tilted back, and she met my eyes.

“As you wish, Master.”

I spun her back to the cushions of the sofa, keeping my cock in as I locked my hand around her throat. My slave’s eyes were heavy-lidded, but very much aware of my every move as I added pressure to her neck and drew back, slapping her cheek. The crack was loud, but nowhere near debilitating. Feeling the contact and force, my brain sputtered, but I couldn’t stop. I...needed this. I needed...

“Fuck.” I increased the thrusts, slapping her again. This time it was harder. The power had her face turning, and I kept my touch against her, rubbing over the reddening flesh as I brought her back to me. When I dipped my finger in her mouth, suction drew me in for the smallest moment.

“Does my Master like that?”

I moaned at her husky, breathless tone.

“Fuck yes.”

Crack!

My cock thickened as blood began to seep from the split on her lip. I didn't hesitate to swoop down and collect her essence. Just tasting the metallic tang was enough to have my own moan leaving me. Sweat was increasing as I tested the pressure of my fingers against her neck. A deep, vibrating moan came from my slave, and she turned, opening her mouth as I eased it past her busted lips again. At the swirl of her tongue, every muscle in my body tightened. I opened my mouth, gasping. Cum shot from me with such force, my vision wavered. Flashes I couldn't make out had me blinking hard as I kept jolting through the release. I knew I was beginning to talk but my mind glitched between here and...somewhere. It was dark. Then, light. My body jerked through what felt like hot zaps.

“Not tonight,” I whispered. “Not yet.”

“Master?”

My head shook, and I threw myself back. I was panting, wiping my hand down my face.

“Master?” My slave eased to stand. “Are you alright? Can I help you? Do you need assistance?”

My hand shot up. It was a warning for her to keep her distance, and she seemed to do that as I stayed put.

“I think I’m okay, but I can’t prolong this. I’m going to give you a word, slave. One you’re not to forget. If you ever feel I’m not myself, say Braddock. That’s my name. If I get angry at hearing it and attack you, you’re to fight to live. Do you understand? I will kill you, and I’m not ready for you to die yet.”

“Braddock.”

“Yes. But it’s more than that. That name for me is no different than a trigger to a gun. There may be times I attack you without warning. I will be out for blood. If you say my name, and I get angrier, you’re to protect yourself. You should be able to tell when I’m not myself.”

“Because you’ll want to hurt me.”

It wasn’t a question. I licked my lips, closing my eyes as I brought down the speed of my breaths.

“Kill you. I’m going to try to kill you. It’s going to happen at some point, and there’s nothing either of us can do about it. We have to wait it out. We?—”

I pressed my palm to the middle of my forehead as the blinding light returned. I twitched, groaning as I opened my eyes enough to see the direction of my room. I kept peeking, making it to my bed. The minutes drug out as I blinked the light away. It wasn’t but a minute or two that the smallest sound had me turning my head. My slave was sitting just inside my room, leaning against the wall, watching. Waiting.

“This is not how I wanted my night to go.”

Silence.

My slave stayed still and quiet, letting me vent as I tried to gauge what the hell was

happening. Why it was happening. There was so much I couldn't put my finger on. Events in my life that seemed like a big blur.

Was she analyzing me? Judging me? No, I didn't have to worry about that with ninety-one. She wasn't like the other slaves. She was waiting on an order. That was all. I didn't have to get mad. I didn't need to react.

Temper . Mine was unstable as I tried to calm the fluctuations of my racing mind. I was defensive, and I couldn't deny a part of me wanted to be angry or unsure of my slave. But that's how it got me. That's how he got me enough to take over. To kill them.

"Master, the woman here before, she was a doctor. You have an appointment with her. Would you like me to call for you?"

"No. This is normal. This isn't what I'd consider an episode. You'll learn the difference."

"Thank you for briefing me on your condition. After a few days, I will be better."

If she was alive in a few days. Although this was normal, I couldn't deny how these ocular episodes were happening more frequently.

"You'll understand it all soon enough. Shower time, slave, then, you'll eat. These are your orders for tonight. Tomorrow we will go over an actual schedule. You're not just going to be for my pleasure. You have quite the resume. We're going to see just how good you are at these skills."

My slave nodded, standing.

"What would my Master like me to wear?"

“You have clothes in the closet. Just find something.”

I lifted my arm, putting it over my eyes to block out the light. My head was starting to hurt, and I didn't want to talk. Luckily, I didn't have to as footsteps sounded against the wood.

Blank slate. Damn, they were so much easier. No questions. No nagging. Orders. This route was definitely the way to go in terms of slaves. At least for me.

Shuffling sounded and it wasn't long before the shower started. The sound went in and out as I dozed, watching as color bled in with darkness. Images appeared. A life. A dark outfit became apparent, but not one I recognized. I wore it. It was mine. Heat enflamed my body as I felt like I was dredging through slush to see more. Yelling sounded, but I couldn't make out the threats. Or were they pleas?

“Master? Master?”

My lids flew open, taking in dark hair and light blue eyes. It took me a minute to place her as I forced myself to sit.

“What is it, ninety-one?”

“You never told me where to sleep.”

I blinked through her words, confused.

“With me, of course.”

There was the slightest hesitation before she nodded. The headache was nearly nonexistent as I pushed from the bed. My slave was walking around to the other side as I headed for the closet. “I'm going to rinse off.” I slowed, stopping at the door as I

replayed her expression. Unease? Dislike? It wasn't positive. "You don't want to sleep with me."

I turned, watching her pause in lowering to the mattress.

"I'm sorry, Master?"

"I saw it on your face. You don't want to sleep in my bed. You can think. I mean...there's something up there aside from what you've learned."

"I'm not sure I understand. I'm grateful to sleep in your bed."

My head slowly went back and forth. Was I imagining it? I thought I caught something before, hadn't I?

"If I made you choose between sleeping on the sofa or in my bed, which would you choose?"

She lowered, pulling the blankets up. "Right here."

I could have argued. Maybe I wanted to after the dreams that never made sense. I didn't. I headed for the drawer to my dresser, grabbing out clothes. When I entered back into the room, my slave was already on her side, hugging to the pillow with her eyes closed. She didn't open them as I walked into the bathroom, and I didn't give her mindset another thought.

She wasn't a threat to me. She wasn't a trigger I needed to be worried about. Ninety-one was blank. Maybe so was I.

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Was someone screaming? Pleading? Yes, those piercing tones lanced into my very being. And I could feel myself searching them out, trying to decipher the mystery that came with them. Trying to dissect the different layers of emotion attached to the screams...or yells. Screaming? Rage? Begging?

“Breathe, Brad. It’s time to wake up. Wake up! Breathe!”

Whack!

Bright light blinded me as I sucked in as much oxygen as I could. Heat was pouring from my skin, and it had nothing to do with the throbbing of my cheek. Wetness covered every inch of me. My clothes were soaked. I gasped and coughed. Humming voices were buzzing just out of reach as my mind tried making sense of what I was seeing.

The Main Master was...arguing with my doctor? With Mistress Two? Both of them were looking at me, but their harsh expressions they were giving each other muddled my mind even more.

“I told you it was too far .”

“And you clearly saw I had it under control. You interrupted and tried to take over,” Elec roared. “We were getting somewhere. You ruined it by inserting yourself. Why would you do that? You know better, Melissa.”

“Master.”

A hand fitted against my cheek. I jumped at the touch, jerking my gaze to a stranger. To a woman...I knew? I felt I did.

“Master,” she said, lowly, again. “I’m here. Would you like me to get you water?”

Water...

I quickly nodded, watching her stand to walk across the room.

“Brad.” The Main Master kneeled as I fought to focus on his face. I knew him. In the very core of me, he was there. The woman...Melissa. I knew her too. But. I looked back at the beautiful woman, filling the water. She was still looking at me. And I knew her too. I did. She called me Master. Yes...Master. That was me now. I was...a Master. Her Master . My slave. That’s right. “Brad.”

Back and forth I went from pale blue eyes to sapphire ones. From my slave to the Main Master.

“Elec.” I cleared my throat. “Main Master.”

“Elec is fine. You don’t have to worry about titles right now. We’re friends. We’ve always been friends. Brad, how do you feel?”

Taking the water, I drank it down as if I couldn’t get enough. And suddenly I couldn’t. I didn’t stop until it was finished.

“I feel...tired.” My slave took the glass, heading back to refill it. “I can’t think very clearly.”

“It’s normal to feel that way after you’ve been under as deep as you were.”

I wiped the sweat from my face.

“Who was screaming? I heard...I think.” Pain had my hand shooting up to my head as I winced. “Someone keeps—Fuck.”

“That was you, Master.”

My lids cracked as I lowered my hand from my head and took the water.

“What do you mean?”

My slave seemed to catch herself, glancing at Elec. “You were the one screaming. It was you.”

“ Me? No, I’m hearing them in my head. That wasn’t me . ”

The slave didn’t speak as she once again looked to the Main Master. It had me moving my attention to him.

“Was I screaming?”

“I would say yelling. They weren’t screams. And we couldn’t make sense of what you were saying, so it’s hard to know.”

“I was yelling.” It wasn’t a question. My voice was monotone as I brought the cup to my lips trying to recall the reoccurring dream or memory that kept coming.

Yelling.

Yelling.

I was yelling? At whom? Why?

Nothing was clear as I finished off the water and pushed to stand. The tension between Elec and Melissa built at her walking closer, and I didn't want to have any part of it.

“Are we done? My head hurts. I'm ready to go back to my apartment.”

The Main Master went to speak but stopped himself as he threw a hard look at my doctor. At the gesture of his hand, Mistress Two straightened her shoulders.

“I want you back in a few days. We need to address some things discovered today. I'm pretty busy, but I'll call you when I have an exact time and date. It's imperative we get you in.”

I didn't wait. I reached over grabbing my slave's hand as I headed for the door. Just as I approached, I placed the glass on a small table, pushing through the door at a fast pace. My legs were wobbly, and pain kept stabbing into my brain. It felt like mush. Like someone had put it in a jar and shook the hell out of it.

“I don't know why I keep coming back to this shit.” I slowed at the elevator, stopping as I took in the button. At my long pause, my slave reached forward, pushing it for me. The fact that I hadn't thought to do that left me pulling at the collar of the gray T-shirt I wore.

“Master, I detect you're unwell. The session was hard on you. May I make a suggestion?”

Was I supposed to answer? I was suddenly too tired to speak. My arm lifted, and I flicked my hand, half lazily, half...unable to remember what to say.

“I believe you need rest. I would like for you to nap while I make you lunch. Something healthy and nutritious. Maybe if?—”

“Sandwich. I don’t do healthy.”

Dizziness had me reaching for the wall next to the elevator. My slave had her arm around me, leading me to the lounge area before I could get steady on my feet. How she managed to take on the majority of my weight was baffling but barely a thought as I fought the rotation of the room.

“You need assistance. I will get the Main Master.”

The room wavered, almost turning sideways as I went to tell her no. But it was already too late. She was running, and me...I was falling to the side on the loveseat she’d sat me on.

Colors blurred. The view before me faded. The screams edged in, and I could feel my breath catch in my throat.

“I’m going to tell you a story...It didn’t have to be this way.”

“I didn’t know. Please. I didn’t know!”

The collage of screams came back, deafening and overwhelming to my senses. I could feel my lids squeezing shut. My teeth were biting down against each other as I covered my ears to muffle them out.

“I didn’t know,” I ground out. “I didn’t know!”

“Brad.” Pressure gripped my shoulder, shaking and squeezing me. “Brad!”

“I didn’t know.”

“Brad, look at me.”

The room spun again as I was pulled up. I stared into the Main Master’s face, but I didn’t recognize the man who was staring at me in his own sense of horror. He was pale. He looked just as shaky as me.

“Talk to me. What happened?”

“I didn’t know.”

“Didn’t know? What didn’t you know?” He glanced between me and my slave, who wasn’t feet to the side of him. Even she appeared...off.

“Like I said when I ran into the office, he almost passed out. My Master is unwell.”

Elec pulled at his tie, turning to sink down into the sofa next to me. I was still off balance, but the room was coming in more clearly, as was my slave’s sudden stature. It had the fog dissipating enough to realize how quiet the room was. Quiet minus the click of heels that were beginning to approach.

“You look sicker than me.”

Elec glanced over, adjusting his tie as he turned more in my direction.

“I didn’t sleep last night. The hours are catching up with me. That’s all. Tell me about you. What didn’t you know, Braddock?”

I tensed at the name but was too exhausted to fight the anger that came with it.

“I don’t remember. I’m not even sure that was me saying that. The screams. They?—”

“What’s going on out here?”

“Side effect. Dizziness. That’s all. You can go back to your office now, Melissa.”

Elec’s voice was hard but shaky. The rage was there. The dislike was dripping with every word he spoke, but he wasn’t glaring at her anymore. He wasn’t looking at her at all.

“I see.” She scanned my face. “And you’re okay now?”

“Yes. I think I left the office too fast. It must have caught up with me.”

“Happens all the time. The Main Master is right. I have another appointment coming up. I’ll call you soon.”

“Alright.”

Elec didn’t look her way until the clicks of her heels were almost gone.

“Let me help you back to your apartment. I’m afraid you were under deeper than we expected. You’re probably going to feel a little off for the next few hours. It’ll pass with rest.”

I let him help me stand, and I followed him to the elevator.

“My slave advised the same. She’s going to make a nice lunch. I’m sure that’ll do the trick.”

He nodded, pressing the elevator's button.

“Main Master...what happened in there? I think I can recall my grandfather. Or...Pierce Hall. I think I was there?”

“You were.”

“Why? And why was I yelling? Who was screaming? You have to know something. What in the hell is happening to me? Who am I? I feel like I don't even know anymore. I'm so confused, and I think I'm getting worse by the day.”

The doors opened, and Elec hesitated before placing his arm on my shoulder and leading us in. When they shut, he let go and shifted, letting out a deep breath.

“Brad, how would you feel about me being your doctor from here on out?”

“You? But...” I stopped. “Is Mistress—Melissa...is she not helping me?”

For seconds he didn't speak. The doors opened, and again, his arm settled on my shoulder, guiding me to my hall. He didn't continue until I was unlocking the door and we were inside.

“Elec? What the hell is going on?”

There was no formality as he walked over and collapsed on my sofa. He leaned back, placing both of his palms over his face. A sound pushed through but ended just as fast. As if he were a completely different person, he sat up straight, squaring his shoulders as he looked at me.

“I can't tell you what's going on because I don't know. I'm just as confused as you. The man who I invited to the Gardens is gone. The boy I grew up with has

disappeared. I spent hours last night reading over your chart.” He continuously shook his head. “I must have gone over it countless times. You’re not schizophrenic. You have no history of trauma or anything close to a trigger that might have somehow...caused this. I can’t say much because truthfully, I had no idea this was even going on. It’s like you’re not even the same person. Do you hear what I’m saying?”

He gestured for the sofa, and I took a seat, leaving a cushion between us. My heart was racing. I felt sick. Anxiously violent. It was dancing along the blade that was digging into my heart, into my mind, at even talking about this.

“I hear what you’re saying, but I don’t understand it. Am I really so different? I don’t feel like I’ve changed at all. I’m still the same person I ever was.”

The shocked confusion he wore while shaking his head told me he was baffled at how I could even say that.

“Brad, I want to ask you questions, and you answer yes or no. There is no right or wrong answer, only insight for me as a doctor.”

“Okay.”

“Did you serve in the military?”

I paused. “Absolutely. I joined after college. You know this. Or maybe not. You were so heartbroken over Vivian. I...I didn’t say goodbye to you.”

He didn’t respond.

“When you got out, you said you were homeless.”

“I was. I lived on the streets for quite a while.”

“Your family is wealthy. Why didn’t you go home?”

My eyes turned from his, down to the floor. Swallowing hard, I felt my body nearly shutter.

“My father and I got into a fight before I left. He disowned me. He told me if I joined, I wasn’t allowed to ever come back. I got out and...I guess I was already sick at that point. I bounced around. I even held some jobs for a few months, but eventually it was too much.”

Emotion flickered behind Elec’s gaze only a moment before he nodded.

“You say you were sick. That’s what landed you in jail? What happened?”

Something between a groan and an aggravated sound left me.

“The episodes. They weren’t as often as they are now, but they happened. I’d blackout...people would be hurt. I killed a man. They didn’t believe or care that I didn’t remember. There was a video. They had everything they needed to lock me away. But then I was set free, and I came to the Gardens.”

“Amazing. You truly believe this.”

“Believe it? Elec, I lived it . It’s real... and I can prove it .”

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Seven days. Seven!

No episode. No headaches. It was as if confessing my truth to Elec had set it free. I felt like a new man. As if the smallest part of the real me still existed somewhere in the scrambled mess of what-ifs. But where there were questions...there was no sign of an answer. Only peace. Only happiness. Only Melissa trying her best to talk to me. This was the second day the Mistress had come, and she was getting more impatient each time.

“Brad, I know you’re in there. Open the door. That’s two appointments you’ve missed now. Two.”

I nodded at ninety-one. She was standing by the door, waiting for my command.

“Braddock, don’t make me get the guards. You’re clearly in violation of your Garden’s agreement. These appointments are mandatory. If you don’t open the door, you’ll leave me no choice.”

“My Master is not taking visitors today. He’ll continue his appointments with the Main Master from here on out. If you have any questions, I suggest you take it up with the Main Master.”

Silence.

“I’m afraid hearing this from a slave isn’t going to cut it. If Brad wants another doctor, he needs to tell me to my face.”

At my step forward, my slave's hand shot up.

“The Main Master told you not to face her.”

“What is she going to do? Hypnotize me right here at the door?”

“She may.”

My lips twisted as my head tilted.

“No one is that good. Besides, she won't have enough time.”

“And if she manages the impossible?”

I took in the worry behind light blue eyes.

“I have you. You won't let her hurt me, will you?”

“I won't let her hurt you.”

The seriousness had me slowing.

“Brad. Master Nineteen-oh-one . I'm asking nicely. Open this door.”

Melissa's voice sent my teeth grinding. My slave stepped out of the way, and I swung open the barrier with every ounce of hatred that continued to fester in my body. I met her narrowed, angry eyes head-on, not backing down as I let my own fury shine through. Her mouth opened but I cut her off.

“You're fired.”

As fast as I'd opened the door, I slammed it shut right in her face. The loud bang into the metal barrier had me looking back over my shoulder as I headed towards my sectional. With the automatic lock and no key card, it was impossible for her to get in.

“You can't fire me! Braddock. Braddock Amell , open this fucking door. You're going to hear me. You'll hear everything I have to say. Braddock Amell Pierce! ”

My body jolted to a stop, and I got so stiff, I had no doubts I was reaching my ultimate height as I stayed frozen in place. Thoughts were glitching, getting foggy and heavy as I blinked through the feeling.

“Wait-wait. Master?” My slave's voice grew more worrisome. “Master, are you okay? Master, cover your ears.”

“Braddock! You come over here right now an open the fucking door! Right now! ”

More pounding on metal. I could feel myself turning as I disappeared even more. The yanks on my arm did little to deter me from making it back to the door as the room faded and began to tunnel. I was swinging. Connecting. Swinging. And then I was reaching for the door. Opening it. Swinging at the pulls. Swinging.

Light.

Dark.

Light.

What was I doing again? Where was I going?

Tap.

Tap.

Tap.

Colors blurred, mixing and twisting with stringy wetness. With force . Screams engulfed my mind, drowning me in the deafening hollowness of violence. I could see a blur of a woman's body, fading into fancy suits and expensive jewelry. I could hear chants and laughter. It wasn't a new memory.

No....old. So old.

"You like a good history book. I want to tell you a story. Do you want to be a hero, Braddock Amell Pierce? I can make you anything I want. I can make you a God. I can make you the dirt I stomp under my heels. Let's start a little adventure, Braddock. Let's create it together."

Something hot burned into my skin eating through me like acid. More laughter. My skin was tearing. Sweet little whispers and moans were level with my ear. "Hit her! Kill her! Do it for me. Tell me her life is mine."

"It is. You know it is."

"Mmmm. I knew you wanted me. Do you like what you see, Braddock? You do, don't you. Tell me you do. Do as I say. Do everything I say. Watch me. Watch us."

More pain. Present? Old? All I knew was darkness as the light fought to get in. What it revealed gave me no comfort. It didn't make sense.

Coughing.

Coughing.

Screams.

Mine—hers.

Yelling.

“You’re coming back tomorrow. You want me as your doctor. Now, hit her again. Again! That’s right. Don’t stop until you finish it. When you’re done, you remember none of this. Nothing! See you first thing in the morning.”

If there was ever an inhuman sound, it left my face vibrating as it left me. And I knew it was me. I could feel my heart racing. Sound was beginning to register, even if I couldn’t quite decipher the magnitude of what I was hearing.

“Ma...ster.”

“Never.”

“Mmmm—ahhh!”

Stringy. Wet. Stringy.

It looped in my mind.

“Never. Never!”

“Mmmphhh.”

Sobs.

Moaning

Light flickered.

Red.

Black.

Red.

Wet.

“Never. Never! Never.”

More sobs.

My head jerked hard as a twitch jolted my body. I went to lift my arm again realizing I barely could.

Stringy.

Wet.

I blinked hard, forcing colors to come in. Trying my best to understand what the fuck was happening.

Stringy.

My hand flexed, staring down at the dark wad of string in my hand. But it wasn't string, and it wasn't solely in my hand. It was stuck to me, trapped in the red wetness covering my palms. Back and forth I looked at my hand and what it'd been holding to. What my fingers had been buried in.

Black. Dark. Wet. Red.

“Mast...er”

The tunnel exploded open, blinding me with colors I couldn't even process. A body lying on its stomach came into view. A head. Hair, soaked in blood. A...face that wasn't even recognizable. But I knew it. I knew her as I spun my slave over.

“Oh, God. Oh, fuck. Fuck!”

“Master. Ma ? —”

“Shh. Oh shit. Don't move, slave. Don't.”

My head went back and forth, searching...searching...

It took seconds to realize what I was looking for as I surged to my feet and raced for my phone. Even as I dialed, my hands itched to continue. My mind screamed to kill. Kill. Kill!

“Good afternoon, Master. How may?—”

“I need a doctor. I need a fucking doctor right now! M-Main Master. Send for him. I need. I...I.”

The phone fell from my hands as I lowered, kneeling next to my slave's battered body. But she wasn't alone. The room was warping. I wasn't real. Or was I? I couldn't tell as I took in what I'd done. One entire side of her face was caved in. Her eyes were swollen shut and the amount of bruising under the blood turned my stomach sick.

Had I thought there was hope for her? Had I let myself attach to a woman who never stood a chance?

Inhuman. Yes. The yell that left me came from places I didn't recognize. Parts so deep and haunted with hidden truths that the tears had no choice but to escape. I was cursed. Doomed. There was no hope for me. No hope for her as I watched her fight death. She wouldn't win against it, just like she couldn't win against me. How could she. Even if she was trained...so was I.

And I'd killed her. My slave would soon be dead.

Dead.

Dead.

"Ninety-one, please wake up. Ninety-one. Slave. I'm sorry. Please ."

Another yell left me. More lights stole me away from her, and I was spinning again. Spinning but still talking. My body was falling into a black void that never seemed to end.

"I didn't know. Please. That wasn't me."

"Mas-ter."

"Please stay. It wasn't me."

"Master."

"It wasn't me."

Light took over my vision, and my head felt like it imploded. I reached for my face, not feeling my cheek where I pressed. A mass of voices jumbled together. More laughter. More screaming. I was outside my father's house, staring towards his car as he drove away. Melissa was waving towards him as she leaned forward to whisper in my ear.

“What adventure shall we go on today? We're going to have so much fun. Wave bye to Daddy, Braddock. He won't be back for a week which is perfect for us.”

“Master.”

“I didn't know.”

“Master.”

Bang!

Vertigo hit and I swayed. The pain was unreal. I almost felt like I was moving, but the spin was the only thing I knew. The spin and the pain. It kept going around and around. Slamming into me again. And again.

“Stand down! Master, look at me. Braddock!”

Only half a roar left me. I swung, not even realizing I was going through the motions. The impact that came had me stumbling backwards and bright colors flooding in. My hand pressed hard into my face, but the feeling barely registered. I lowered my arms as I stared at my palms. The light was killing my head. My eyes. It was killing me. Killing me.

“Master!”

Blood registered over my fingers. So much blood, and it hurt to move. To even think. I gagged, not able to make sense at the yells that kept coming.

“Look up. Look up! Look at me.”

I met light blue, not understanding what I was seeing. There was so much blood. So much red everywhere I looked.

“Master, that’s it. Do you see me? Master. Braddock?”

“Slave?”

A sob left me as I stumbled in her direction. I reached both hands to her face. She had a large knot on her cheek that was split open, and blood covered down her jaw and T-shirt. She even had the crimson color coming from her nose.

“Is this real? This isn’t real.”

“Braddock, are you back?”

My head repeatedly shook.

“You’re alive?”

“I’m fine. I can’t say that for you. I have to call the Main Master. We have to get you to the hospital.”

“What? No, I killed you. I-I. You’re dead .”

“I’m very much alive.”

“No.”

My head shook and my knees gave out. I hit the ground hard, nearly bringing my slave down with me.

“I didn’t kill you?”

“You tried.”

“Fuck.” I held in the sob, pulling her closer to me. “Slave, look at me. I’m not okay. What happened?”

Her mouth opened, only to close.

“I...I don’t know. I.” Her gaze searched mine. “I can’t remember anything after this morning. All I know was you were suddenly hitting me. I think I heard yelling but...you got me good, and I passed out for a little. When I woke up you were kicking me. You?—”

My hand fitted over her mouth, feeling, praying this wasn’t another hallucination or dream. But even those were already fading. I couldn’t think straight. I was starting to forget... everything . Just like a dream. Dream. Dream. Was I dreaming?

“We have to call and get you help. I hurt you.”

“You did?”

Only then did I really look down. I had my arms at her sides now, but my hands weren’t working right. One I could barely feel. And I knew she’d gotten my face. Excruciating throbbing covered one side.

“You broke my hands.”

“One for sure, but I may have broken more than that. I can’t remember. I’m sorry, Master. You told me to defend myself. I’m just relieved that I didn’t kill you. I...I feel different. I’m...sorry. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry.” I winced as I adjusted, cringing as the pain hit. “We better just call.”

“Right.”

My slave walked over grabbing the phone. I looked at my feet, for sure I’d had it before. But I hadn’t because that had never happened. But was this happening. Was any of this real?

As the room started to spin again...I wasn’t so sure.

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Hushed whispers drew me from the darkness. Every bone in my body ached. Even breathing sent pains shooting down my limbs. A sound left me, and I tried to move more on my side so that my back and legs would stop aching.

“About time he starts to wake up.”

Opening my eyes was almost impossible. Light and colors flooded in, but they were blurry. It took me repeatedly blinking to bring the room into focus. What I saw had me jolting to a sitting position and I regretted it instantly.

“Master, no .”

My slave rushed to my side, but all I saw was the dark bruising and laceration on her cheek. It was taped with butterfly bandages. One of her eyes was still swollen and purple, and the other had hints of underlining black. I didn’t have to ask. Just taking in the excessive damage, I knew it was from me.

“It happened. I hurt you.” Her shoulders shrugged, and the expression she wore had me scanning her face. It was full of...emotion. More than I’d ever seen on her, but still not quite normal. “How bad are you hurt?”

“Don’t worry about me. I’m fine. We need to worry about you right now.”

My lips parted, only just realizing it was me in the damn bed. I looked down at my bandaged hands, cursing as the pain became all too real.

“How bad was it?”

“Bad. But I did as you ordered. I...lived. I stopped you.”

“Did you break my hands, or did I do that hurting you?”

The Main Master stood, moving in closer to the bed, but my attention remained on my slave.”

“Both. You’re mostly just cut up and bruised, but I did snap the wrist on your dominant hand. I don’t think it did much good. It barely slowed you down.

“Why does one of my ankles hurt? Did you snap that too?”

“No. That was you. Probably from kicking me.” Her hand lifted. “Actually, I might have done that. I think when I hit you, you clipped the coffee table and fell over it. The apartment was a mess. I’ve already had it cleaned.”

A groan left me, and I dropped back to the mattress, covering my eyes from the light.

“Allison, why don’t you go sit down while I talk to your Master.”

My head lifted and I pushed the top of my body back up as I looked between them.

“Did you call her Allison? Is that her name?”

The Main Master sat on the edge of my bed. “It is. Did you not read her file? Allison, former police officer. She goes by Ally, but she likes both names. If you plan to keep her around for a while, it would do her good if you used them. With regular slaves it’s optional, but with blank slates, it helps the bonding process.”

“Bonding,” I repeated.

“They are companions, Brad. And we’ve gotten to the point where it’s safe to bond. Emotions are good for them to a degree. But like with anything, too much isn’t a good thing. We’ve got a handle on that part now. Bonding is safe so long as the right protocols are set into place, which they are. Sure, we can treat them as regular slaves, but their purpose is special. They are special. They need to know this. It helps with the protection part. It even makes them more lethal. Allison saved your life. Hell ...she saved mine too. We both owe her more than you know.” He looked down, letting out a long breath. “Things are crazy right now, so I’ll be pretty busy, but you’re in good hands.” He paused, taking back in my slave for the smallest moment. “Do you remember what happened during this episode?”

My gaze went to my slave...Ally. A thickness coated my thoughts, holding to them like tar. I could feel a frown come to my face as my head shook.

“I can’t think right now. I fucking ache everywhere.”

The Main Master laughed.

“I was hoping you would. You hurt my friend.” He winked at Allison. “For that I thought I’d make you suffer. I’m done. I’ll get them to give you something now.” He stood, his face losing all playfulness. “I’m going to have your doctor release you back to your apartment tonight. Try not to leave if you can help it. No phones. Don’t even answer the door unless it’s me.”

My brow drew in as memories tried to return.

“Melissa. That’s right.” The room rocked for the smallest moment. “Wait...did she call? Come by? I feel like...I almost...think.”

“It’s fine.” Elec shook his head. “Your mind needs to rest. Don’t even worry about it right now. We’ll touch down on that in a few days when you heal. I’ll call before I

swing by.” He turned to my slave. “Ally. There we go. Look in my eyes and hear me. Your Master needs you. You are to protect him. Help him with whatever he needs. If someone knocks, you are to look before you answer. If someone calls, you answer. You know who not to allow.” He paused. “You don’t have to worry about the Mistress. I’ve fixed you, but only you. I can’t work on your Master yet. He’s not ready. Never leave his side if you can help it. You know what to do. Now, soldier up. We’ll visit again soon.”

The slight smile on my slave’s face melted like wax. She became stoic again. Hard and more determined than ever. There was almost a sadness in seeing her change. Then again, I couldn’t have her being soft with me. She saw first-hand what I was capable of, and there was no room for mistakes on her part. There was a flame growing inside of me. I could feel it flare to life the more I was awake, and there was something left undone that I couldn’t quite put my finger on. I didn’t feel...settled. Or... finished ?

“Main Master?”

Elec paused just outside the door, turning back to my slave.

“Yes, Ally?”

“Be safe. I’m here if you need me.”

He smiled, glancing at me before nodding.

“Thank you. I know you mean that. I’ll see you soon.”

The door shut, and she turned, moving her chair next to the bed but angled to the entrance. I watched for minutes as she sat at attention, staring forward. She barely moved. I wasn’t even sure she was breathing. I reached forward, brushing my good

fingers through her hair. The act had her softening just a little, but it was the feel of the silky strands that made it hard to breathe. I couldn't understand the sensation that kept shooting through me, but I couldn't stop running my fingers through them either.

“Are you sure you're okay?”

At my question, her head turned just enough to show me her profile.

“I'm well.”

My finger hooked as I forced myself from her hair to trail down her battered cheek.

“You don't look well. Your face is bandaged, but did the doctor check you for injuries elsewhere?”

“Yes. No broken bones. Just bruises.”

Pressure eased into my touch as she almost seemed to nuzzle into me. Quickly, she righted herself, turning back to the door. Minutes passed as I watched her hold to the seriousness. Ally. Allison. My slave. I wasn't sure how I felt about her having a name. The Main Master seemed to think it was a good idea that we bonded, but didn't he see it was pointless? She lived this time. That didn't mean she would survive the next. And I would be stupid to think I wouldn't do this again. Already, my fingers itched to wrap around her neck. To put those bruises on her face consciously. Not out of anger but...something more. Lust? Fuck yes. But...more.

“Come lay up here with me, slave.”

“I detect arousal in your tone.”

My fingers pushed back through her hair, gripping tight as I angled her head back so

that I could see her face.

“I could have killed you. I want you close.”

Knocking followed by the door opening had my gaze cutting up. A nurse got a few steps in before she jerked to a stop. Her eyes lifted from Allison to me.

“I apologize. The Main Master mentioned you might need some pain reliever.”

“Took you long enough.”

I released my grip, not missing the anger in my tone. The nurse kept her head down, quickly making me a glass of water and sliding the pills in my palm. The moment I drank them down, she scattered from the room. The door was barely closing as I grabbed the back of Ally’s neck, pulling her from the chair.

“Master, your wrist .”

“Lay up here with me. Let me see you.”

Full lips pouted, and she pulled back, quickly walking around the bed.

“The door,” she pointed. “I have to be able to see who comes in.”

“You’re really taking this soldier part seriously. That’s what the Main Master said to you, didn’t he? He said, ‘soldier up’? Why would he say that? I get that he made you more alert, but it was more than that. Both of you are acting strange, and I don’t think it has anything to do with me. I can’t shake this feeling. There’s more. There’s...You’re both hiding something from me.”

With each word, the building inside grew. The blistering heat held pressure and

although the amount fluctuated, it was never truly gone.

“Slave? Allison.” Her eyes jumped to me. “What is going on?”

Slowly, she eased in the bed, positioning herself on her side.

“I am to protect you.”

“Protect me from myself?”

Her head shook at my sarcastic tone, but the look on her face was sobering. The anger, the slight aggravation, it all faded the longer I looked at her.

“What exactly happened during my episode? I...I can’t remember much. I try, but it’s like I’m walking through darkness. Just when I feel like I’m going to remember, it slips through the fog.” At her silence, I kept searching. Searching. Searching. As soon as I tried to explore who I should be protected from, my mind would start to shut down. The heaviness grew. It was more knocking that made me want to groan. “Come in.”

The doctor and a nurse approached, followed by two guards who positioned themselves at the far side of the room.

“Alright, Master. I was given the go to release you. Although there were no serious injuries, I still want you seen at our clinic in a few days. We’ll contact you soon with times and dates.” He reached over, grabbing my hand with the fractured wrist. As he did, Allison sat up on my side, watching his every move. “The break was clean. We’ll send you home with a medication to help with the pain. If there’s not anything else, you’re free to go.”

“With them?”

I pointed at the guards. The doctor's hands came up as to say he wasn't responsible for their presence. It was a blonde guard that stepped forward.

"Wait. I know you."

He smiled.

"We've met before. I'm Nineteen. I'm the High Leader."

"That's right. Am I royalty? Why the escort?"

The smile stayed in place but not because he thought I was funny.

"Precaution."

"Ah, I see. So I don't slip into an episode between here and my room. I get it. Very smart."

He shrugged. "We'll be just outside. I believe the Main Master had your clothes put over there. We'll be waiting."

"I nodded, trying not to let the embarrassment stir the beast inside. Is this what I was becoming? Too unstable to even leave my apartment unsupervised? What was next...a cell? Hell Row? Well, yeah, if I killed a Master or Mistress. That was a terrifying thought when I had no control over my actions. I'd go from one prison to another. Above ground to below.

The door shut and I turned to my slave.

"Ally."

Her eyes softened at the name.

“Yes, Master?”

“You won’t let me leave my apartment while I’m...like that, right?”

“No, Master. I would never let you put yourself or anyone else at risk. You’re safe with me... You’re safe now .”

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What was real? What was implanted? Was I even here right now, walking through some underground science lab, down a dim hall, into...this?

The room I was led inside had to have been the entire size of my first apartment. Cement walls led to cement floors, and there was a drain centered just below a nude, older male who was hanging from the ceiling and yelling into a black gag. With every thrash of his body, he swayed. Antiseptic lingered, making my nose crinkle as I headed forward.

“Can we bring him down and set him free?”

“No, Master. I’m sorry. He has to stay cuffed.”

The door shut behind me, but I barely heard as I approached the man. Not far away a file rested on a cart. On that cart was multiple weapons. More than I knew what to do with. I grabbed the manilla folder, opening it to see a colored photo. To the right and underneath it was the man’s information.

“Crow,” I breathed out, glancing over the typed stats. In truth, I didn’t need to know anything to kill him. I’d do that because I wanted to face death where I could remember. I wanted to bleed out my own aggression any way I could, even if it was through carnage. But I took my time, reading, and adding fuel to the fire that was immersed within.

Melissa. Melissa.

Even saying her name in my head made me feel disoriented. I felt nauseous. Sick.

Was it a side effect from a truth my brain refused to let me grasp completely? Was it a symptom of something more?

“Mmmph! Mmmmpph!”

I glanced up at the angry undertone, taking in his balding head on the top and the longer brown length on the sides. He sported a thicker mustache but there was a light growth on his cheeks indicating he’d been away from a razor for at least a day or two. Some random tattoos covered his skin. Nothing fancy. A few faded names. A cross. Something that looked like a logo I wasn’t familiar with. Although I saw it, I only saw her. I wanted her to hurt. To be destroyed.

“Mmph! Mph!”

“Murderer. Go figure. Me too.”

I licked my lips, grabbing a baton with my submissive hand, testing the weight as I placed his info down. I wasn’t even sure the folder had landed on top of the other weapons before I was spinning and connecting with the man’s side. The thud was just as solid as the pop I felt in my hand. It wasn’t good enough. I didn’t like my weakness, and I did feel weak with the lack of power I knew I was capable of. Physically. Mentally. Weak. I was so fucking weak. It was all because of the Mistress. Because of Melissa .

Whack!

Whack!

“Mmmmm-mmmmpph!”

The yell transitioned into fear and was broken up as he tried to catch his breath.

Whack!

Whack!

Aching vibrated through my hand. Even unbroken, the damage was still there from trying to kill Ally. The realization had me swinging so hard, I nearly dropped the baton at the pain that cramped in my palm.

The crow was thrashing and flopping, but his face was deepening red as he fought for air. With his feet bound, there wasn't much he could do to try to fight me off. He was doomed, and we both knew it as I turned, dropping the baton on the cart. As my eyes met the dark glass ahead, I knew my slave was watching. What did it make her feel to see me this way? Cold. Callous. Was she having flashbacks of me attacking her? Did she feel nothing? I wasn't so sure. She was different since we left the hospital. How much she had changed though, I had no idea, but even she could sense the difference.

Over and over, I flexed my fingers, curling them in as I winced. Opening it back up, I repeatedly made a fist. My lids squeezed shut, and I jerked at the sudden flicker of colors that broke through the darkness.

What it was...I wasn't sure. There was a scene. One I felt lived inside the foundational part of my brain. The dawning was like a breath of fresh air. I knew it even if I couldn't see what it was. Laughing. Screaming. It wasn't a party. No. More...intimate. An initiation? Yes... I knew the event took place, but that I couldn't remember one of the best, most gruesome nights of my life, made me angry. The location and what happened was there, but I couldn't 'see' it in my thoughts anymore. That wasn't normal. That wasn't okay.

My head shook, and I grabbed what looked like a double-sided forked hammer. When I turned to face the crow, he was sobbing and wiggling for his life. It did nothing to phase me. This wasn't personal. This wasn't even about him at all. Even if

I would have been of sound mind. Even if I didn't have the hate for Melissa, this man was nothing but a body—an outlet for oppression. If I wanted to gouge him full of thick holes or break him into a billion pieces, I'd do it. When had I ever been given a choice about anything? What was even real? I'd argued with Elec, and I'd started to convince the Main Master of 'my' truth, but what if it was for nothing? What if it was all a lie?

I didn't know what to believe.

Who the fuck was I?

I circled around, watching the man swing through his wild thrashing. His toes were so close to the ground but not close enough. Wrinkles appeared through the screams and grimaces, driving me on. My weak arm drew back, and I speared the forked claws into the man's right pec, putting my weight forward as I drug it down. Skin and muscle tore. Jagged pieces of flesh aligned the wound, hanging free and stopping close to his sternum. Blood quickly streamed free, and the red urged me on as I began stabbing and hooking the ends into him.

Knowing I was inflicting pain wasn't enough. This wasn't right.

To kill was to...embrace our truest desires. I'd heard that before. To kill was to...openly accept the polarities within.

A yell ripped its way free from my throat as memories flashed urging me to stab more.

To kill was...to be free. To unleash the forbidden. To hug it tightly and welcome it home.

To kill...was...

“This isn’t...right. No.”

Whispering, so erotic and tempting haunted the depths of my mind. Whispers. Screams. Mine? The feminine voice was familiar making me roar. The words weren’t clear, but they didn’t have to be for the way my body was starting to react. My stomach rolled, and I was blind as scenes blurred and moans joined the whispers.

My head shook as I spun, turning to the cart and taking down a saw. With how thick the chains were, there was no way I could cut through them. I didn’t plan to even try as I went right to sawing at his wrists.

Screams echoed from the walls, drowning my thoughts, allowing me a moment of peace as I put all my strength into breaking through bone. It wasn’t easy with the damage to my hand, but I had the crow swinging within seconds. A severed arm dropped free, and his toe managed to bear his weight before he swung around widely, trying to hit me as he began to go crazy.

My eyes flared, and a smile came. Adrenaline fed me as I moved in, wrapping my bicep around his head and crushing him into my chest. I began slicing back and forth on his other wrist. Chains clinked and pressure from the slave’s hit slammed against my back as the door swung open in the distance. I knew the guards had entered again. Nineteen’s eyes hadn’t left me, and they wouldn’t now.

Movement blurred, but they stayed back as me and the crow hit the ground in a tangle of limbs. The saw slid away at the force, but I was in heaven. Blood was spraying at me with every swing of his nubs, and I didn’t hold back. My fist connected with the man’s cheek as I put myself on top of him. The agony jolted me stiff, but not enough to make me stop.

Whack!

Whack!

Whack!

This was better. This was right.

Weight thrashed underneath, and he bucked, sending me pitching forward. It put me in perfect distance. I reached over, grabbing the saw, watching as his eyes went round in terror.

Instinct immediately hit a wall of restriction. Where my true self knew what it wanted, what came natural, all I could feel was the overpowering need to finish it. Finish it. Finish. Yes. With my fist. Hit. Pound. Rage. But that wasn't me. Not at all. Was it? No. I wanted to take him apart. I wanted to pull his jaw clean off and turn him inside out. Hit? I wanted to, just from the anger that came with the command of my mind.

“No!”

My palm flattened on the crow's forehead, but the weight from his forearm was trying to wedge through to break my hold. I dropped the saw, pounding my fist into his face even more. The more he fought, the harder I hit.

“No.”

Hit

“No.”

Hit.

“No!”

The man’s head rolled, and his eyes fought to stay open. I grabbed the saw, pushing my bandaged palm back against his forehead, adding my weight. Leveling the blade horizontal over his mouth, I pushed past his lips and teeth. The first push of my hand had the razor-sharp blade slicing through the skin of his cheeks like butter. Muscle opened up exposing meat. I sawed the opposite way, pushing against him even more as a mad laughter began to leave me.

This is what I had wanted out of the Gardens. This was who I really was. Even in the realm of real and make-believe, there was no sense of true self. Only an awareness. Not an association. The realization had the crazed laughter dying, replaced with the demonic howls I knew all too well. It was the Braddock in the window covered in blood, hitting against the glass so that he could break free. The Braddock who killed his tutor just to see what death was like. He was still here. Still inside of me.

Deep pants left me as I pulled back, looking at the mush along the edges of the blade. Blood splattered the man’s face, and the crow’s head was almost cut in half. His eyes were glassing over as blood pooled in the large opening of his mouth. He was choking, coughing and sending more crimson spraying out.

For the first time in as long as I could remember, I didn’t move. I didn’t disappear. I kept staring into eyes that were slowing and searching for a miracle. His life was fading, but I wasn’t this time. I soaked in the struggling breaths. I let every twitch and jerk of his body register below me. I vowed...I’d never lose this again. I’d never lose my true self. I was here to stay, no matter what I had to do to make it that way.

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Emotion. For my slave, it came and went. There were moments I thought she was more than a blank slate, and then there were times like this where days would go by and Allison was just as she'd been when I got her. Blank. Programmed. Routine. It was nice, and yet...sad. I liked her emotion some days. Other days I missed when she would reassure or have a real conversation with me. Sex...it happened, but only once since we'd returned from me destroying that crew. Even that was different. She was a robot again, fulfilling my every command without feeling them. I wasn't sure what I thought about that. Not that I could think too much. There was only one woman on my mind, and I wanted to decimate her. Melissa was all I thought about, and it was driving me crazy.

“And that's what you remember?”

My stare left Allison who was sitting on the far side of the room making another list. She did that a lot. List after list after list. And it was for all things. Groceries. Books. Towels. New Blankets. Maybe she needed something to do. Maybe even as a blank slate these walls were getting to her too.

“That's it, Elec. I wish I could remember more . Stories. She says...Braddock, what story shall I tell you today? Or Braddock, what adventure should we go on today? It's always the same, but she's different when I see her. Sometimes she's younger. Other times...older.”

“And you can't remember the actual stories?”

“No. Will you tell me more of what the hell happened when Melissa came into my apartment since my own slave won't. You said when I healed we could talk about it.

I've healed enough. Why can't I know? I know she wanted me to kill Allison."

The Main Master's lips tightened as he glanced in her direction.

"You remember that?"

"No, but I'm not stupid. I remember..." My hand flattened on my face as I closed my eyes. "I remember seeing Ally down, and I was hitting her. It's such a blur. Barely even there. I hear...voices, but they're not clear. I don't know if it's Melissa or not. I don't care. We all know it is. I want this taken care of, Elec. I want her to pay for what she's done to me."

Back and forth his head shook.

"Brad, I wish she could. I wish—" He stopped, leaning forward to rest his forearms against his lower thighs, close to his knees. "What we know and what we can prove are two different things. Mistress Two is guarded by the Uppers. She's favored. Whether that's because of her skills or just status in our circle, it doesn't matter. The truth is, I can't do anything without solid evidence, and even then, it might be for nothing. They may very well let her get away with it."

"Get away with it," I exploded. "Get away with fucking up my mind? I'm a Pierce! Am I not part of this circle? Is there favoritism amongst us now? What she's doing is beyond treason. She's fucking ruined me, Elec. Do you hear me! Ruined. I can barely function. I can't leave my goddamn apartment without fear she'll be there to set off another episode. What about me? What about my life? Am I worth nothing? How can our circle function if there's no accountability? It can't."

Silence. My slave shifted in my peripheral, drawing my attention as she began to talk.

"The rules don't seem to apply to her. You're not worth anything to Mistress Two, anyway. You're in the way." Allison glanced up from her list but quickly looked

down as she wrote. “If I recall, Main Master, she wanted you to continue Braddock’s line without him. That was the entire reason she brought you in to that appointment. She wanted you to assess him. She thought you’d find him insane, and then she could get rid of him like she always planned to. She told me herself she’d gotten what she wanted out of him: money, death, and fun. He was nothing but a game. She destroyed his mind, exactly like she wanted. She’s sick. Are her motives not clear? Am I the only one able to see the entire picture? Or maybe we’re all affected.”

Only then did her stare jump up to meet the Main Master’s.

“She got you too?” He didn’t answer my question. “Elec?”

“Like I said, without evidence she’s untouchable. With it...maybe still. I’m working on it.”

“And if I kill her?”

Mine and Elec’s gaze jumped up to Allison, but it was the Main Master who gave a sharp shake.

“You know better than that, slave. I could have you locked up or put down for even saying that. Why would you feel it was okay to murder a Mistress?”

Angry light blue eyes peered up under thick lashes.

“Because she deserves it. Because she admitted the truth to me and she’s getting away with it. You and my Master are my priority, and both of your lives are in danger. What did she tell you when she left that hospital room? Enemy. She threatened you. ”

“I should have never messed with your programming, Allison. You think too freely, and you should have returned to your normal status at my order.”

Tears welled in her eyes. “I don’t even know what you mean. You think you did this to me because I can think? Because I feel? I do feel! I’m angry! I haven’t been the same since she got in here. It wasn’t you. She did this to me, Main Master. To all of us . What would have happened had I not walked in on the two of you? How far would she have gone? More than a kiss? How far has she gone? What has she made you do that you can’t even remember? I bet you’re just as clueless as my Master.”

“ Slave .”

Her lips trembled at his vicious tone.

“She’s hurting everyone she can, and she’s getting away with it.”

“Mistress Two won’t be able to by the time I’m finished. I only have one chance to nail her ass to the wall, or it’s me who will pay . I said stay out of it, and you both will.”

“And if we don’t?”

The Main Master’s head whipped to me.

“You’re speaking of treason.”

“She committed it first. After what she’s done, what’s one more blackout? One more mental fucking break that ends this for good?”

“ Enough ,” Elec hissed.

He glanced around the room, balling his fists.

“There is a time and a place for everything. Now is neither. Stick to your schedule. Keep your head down. Do nothing .” His intense eyes went back and forth between

us. “Things are going to get worse before they get better. It’s a battle out there. Melissa is a war .”

One of my eyebrows rose. “If anyone knows about war, it’s me. We’ll buy our time, but I will not let this go. Melissa will pay.

“Trust me, I’m with you,” Elec said, lowering his voice, “but you have to let me take the lead in this, otherwise, you’re done, Brad. You’ll spend your days in Hell Row or dead, and I promise you, you don’t want that.”

“What I want is to stop—I want my fucking mind back. Is it all a lie? The military, prison, is it a fucking lie? I mean, I swear, it happened. Look at me .”

The Main Master’s shoulders dropped and drew in.

“I have to admit, I really began to believe it too. Brad.” He paused. “I don’t believe it was real. Until right before the Gardens opened, you were running your family’s businesses. You were on the boards. I talked with Georgie. She saw you last year in Chicago. You both went to lunch together. Once you came here, it would seem you really haven’t left.”

I pushed to my feet, feeling sick. Feeling panicked.

‘Wait. Just...wait. I have been here. If that’s my responsibility, who the fuck is running the companies?’

Silence.

“Elec, answer me. I know you know. ”

“Your board, for now, but I’ve been looking more into it and...you know a lot of the younger generations intern in our circle. They take different positions to learn

different aspects of the industry. It's nothing more than a week or two, here. An occasional weekend, there."

"Yeah, so? What are you saying?"

Fingers interlaced but quickly separated as the Main Master stood and began to pace.

"It would seem Jett has spent the last few months?—"

"Whoa! Stop. Her son? Jett LaRoe?"

His hand rose as I stood.

"Calm, Brad."

"She really is after what's mine. She—" My fingers fisted in my hair. "She wasn't lying. How is this okay, Elec! "

"It's bad, but Jett is the least of your concerns. He's in trouble. He won't be leaving the Gardens any time soon, if at all. Right now, we're putting together the pieces. We need evidence. We need?—"

" To take this up to who matters. The evidence is there. We take it to the Uppers. We go to them so we can lay out our case."

"I already told you; s he controls them . They may not even know, but her influence is unmistakable. Without refutable facts, she wins."

"Then death."

"That's treason," Elec roared. "In that case, we all fall." His tight grip locked on my shoulders as he stared me down, dropping his voice, but not losing the deep tone.

“You have to trust me. You’re not the only one who’s pissed. Braddock, she’s been doing this to me too. I’ve told no one the details. I will tell no one, but you are not alone. I didn’t get it as bad as you did?—”

“That you know of.”

Elec paused, his face hardening. “Yes, that I know of, but we are not alone in wanting to fix this. We have others, but we do this right. Melissa has made her rounds, and all her evil deeds are coming to light. Our cases aren’t the only ones. Let’s do this by the book. Promise me you’ll wait this out. You won’t regret it. You have my word. You know I keep my word. One way or another, I will give you your justice.”

“You promise?”

“I swear it,” Elec said, pulling me in. “And if you let me, I’ll spend however long it takes to erase what she did and insert the truth. I can do that, Brad. If you can trust me, I’ll make you better again. I’ll make you better than you ever were. It is within my abilities. All I need you to do is say yes. We can even start now. We can start tonight.”