



Pretty Deadly

Author: *KyAnn Waters*

Category: Suspense Thriller

Description: He'd keep me or he'd kill me. Either way, he wasn't going to let me go.

Eric Spade

Lust and a beautiful woman can make a man weak. Pretty deadly. She makes me question my purpose. She's in bed with my enemy. To take down a king, sometimes you have to sacrifice his queen.

Nalini Bryan

Fear is my constant companion. I've been held hostage by the Kyng of the cartel until a stranger takes me, stealing me from my nightmare. I thought he had come to rescue me. I was wrong.

This is dark romance with morally gray characters. Contains violence, drug use, and graphic language. Some readers may find content disturbing.

Total Pages (Source): 7

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Spade

Drip. Drip. Drip.

A small dose of scopolamine slipped through the plastic IV tubing and into the man's median cubital vein. I had Madden Kyng's general anchored to my examination table. His arms stretched out horizontally from his supine body. Wide straps at his forehead, shoulders, hips, and feet kept him immobile.

"I'm going to need some information," I said, picking up a syringe.

"I don't know shit," he mumbled. The scopolamine had him in a twilight sleep. Drool trickled from his mouth, and blood stained his swollen lips.

The guy had to be close to two hundred and fifty pounds of mean-as-fuck muscle. Too bad he held his junk with two hands when he took a leak. He hadn't had time to grab his gun before I'd given him a shot of benzodiazepines into the axillary vein of his shoulder. By the time he'd zipped up, he'd forgotten his fucking name.

Like the spider tattoo covering his neck, he was deadly with his poison. They called him Laf, short for lethal as fuck. Not today.

He had left the bar easy enough with a promise of sweet teenage pussy tied up in my van. When I hit him with the second shot, he realized he was the one about to be fucked. He turned like a muscled mutant ready to smash. He threw me against the side of the van and pinned me by my neck. The second shot worked, but I had to haul his ass into the van.

I rolled my shoulder. It still fucking hurt.

Laf twitched on the table, continuing to grumble about my death.

“Focus. I haven’t asked you a question yet.” I brought another serum to the catheter port. “I want to know more about Madden Kyng.”

As the toxin slipped through his veins, every muscle in his body seized. Tendons in his neck stretched and strained as he clenched down hard on his jaw.

“Hurts, doesn’t it? That’s just a taste.” A full dose would have him biting off his tongue.

As the flare of pain eased, he breathed out a ragged exhale. I sat on the chair at my desk. “If you don’t want another dose, answer my questions. I want to know the one thing Kyng can’t live without.”

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Spade

I wasn't just a killer. There were men wielded power like a weapon. They sharpened their knives of intimidation, yet hid behind the false security of walls, guards, and guns.

I wasn't one of those men. I worked alone, camouflaged in the shadows.

Real power came from patience. Like a spider spinning an intricate web, I only needed to wait for my prey to vibrate one of the gossamer filaments. To make one misstep. Once I had him, I intended to make him suffer the same fate as his victims, to watch life slowly fade from his black, soulless eyes.

Madden Kyng. He was known as the cartel Kyng. He peddled his poison on the streets while wearing Brioni like Bond. The man reeked of hypocrisy while reigning over his empire. His day of reckoning had come.

I'd become an artist, torture my medium. Kyng would be my masterpiece. He'd die a slow, agonizing death. I'd perfected my craft and refined my pharmaceuticals. In small doses, scopolamine could make my targets groggy, but I wanted their bodies stiff with the incapacitating effects, and I wanted their minds paralyzed with fear.

My first kill had gone unnoticed by law enforcement. Another drug dealer dead in the street, caught in the crossfire of a dangerous profession. Another followed. Both were members of Kyng's cartel.

A smug smile curled my lips. Not even Kyng realized he had an enemy at the door.

Then I killed Laf, the one considered his top general. As long as the medical examiner continued to rule the deaths as drug overdoses, I'd continue to send them to hell.

Sitting in the corner of Inferno, Kyng's playpen of iniquity, I flicked open the lid of my lighter and rolled the wheel, striking the flint. Flames licked the wick. I breathed in the scent, snapped the lid closed, and then flipped it open again.

People crowded onto the dance floor of the upscale downtown nightclub. Chrome, glass, and exclusivity. Music droned out the chatter of voices. Women wore leather. Their skin glistened as they pulsed and gyrated on the dance floor. I didn't come to dance. I was here for a specific purpose.

In the corner, roped off in a private area, Kyng surrounded himself with guards. Massive men scanned the crowd, protecting their boss. I lifted my cola to my lips, letting my gaze linger over the rim. The man smiled and laughed, arrogant in his position.

No one was untouchable. Every man had a weakness. Madden Kyng's stood to his left. Nalini Bryan. My prey was stunningly beautiful but deceptively deadly.

Heat slipped under my skin with the hunt. A cascade of dark hair draped over her bare shoulders. Long lashes framed sultry brown eyes rimmed with black. Red slicked across her luscious lips. Leather pants rode low on her hips. The flawless flesh of her full tits played peek-a-boo through a red, lace-up corset. A diamond jewel winked from her bellybutton of her exposed midriff.

She was petite. I could span her waist with my hands or crush her throat with one fist. Movements were fluid as she swiveled her hips to the music. The song changed to something popular with a faster beat. The crowd cheered. One of the other girls tugged her hand and pulled her toward the dance floor.

Kyng grabbed her, wrapped his fingers around her wrist, and yanked her onto his lap. His palm covered the tit cresting out of her corset, and his mouth slammed onto hers. He kissed her, groped her, then shoved her off his lap and smacked her ass.

Nalini stumbled to catch her balance as she wiped smudged lipstick from her face. Kyng bent over the table and snorted another line up his nose.

As Nalini and the blonde moved onto the dance floor, Kyng nodded at one of his men to follow them. In the crowd, I was just another guy dancing, looking to get laid.

I had the ability to blend in when I needed camouflaged but also to intimidate when the situation required it. To quote the movies, I had a particular set of skills that made me dangerous to men like Kyng. I could find anyone. Some might call me a killer. They'd be right. I killed. But I didn't see it as murder.

I balanced the scales of justice.

True justice was an eye for an eye. Kyng was a drug dealer. His victims died with his poison in their veins. He didn't know it yet, but he would know soon. I was his endgame, and he'd meet the same fate.

Planning my next moves, I waited for an opportunity for checkmate. To kill the king, I'd take his queen. The one thing he couldn't live without.

I slipped my lighter into my pocket. Staying near the edge of the dance floor, I worked my way closer to the women. Bodies with sweat-slicked skin bumped into me. The pungent odor blended with the cloying scent of perfumes. Lights flashed, and the bass of the music matched the steady rhythm of my pulse.

I wasn't immune to the spike of adrenaline or the coil of tension knotting in my gut. I'd hunted, cloaked in the shadows. The fucker understood the game too well. Moves

and countermoves.

It wasn't enough to kill him. I wanted him to suffer.

For weeks, while watching Kyng, I'd watched her . She'd become an obsession as much as Madden. I wanted them both.

Nalini lifted her arms, dancing to the heavy beat of the music. The dance floor was packed. The bodyguard stood against the wall, a few feet from her. As the song continued, I shifted with the crowd.

"Come with me." The blonde grabbed Nalini's hand. As they danced, her friend leaned into her. "I need another hit."

"I'm good." Nalini shimmied her hips.

"I need to pee," the friend screamed at the bodyguard.

The bodyguard was torn between following the blonde or coming back for Nalini. He glanced to Kyng, who nodded in the direction of the blonde. The guard stepped away from the wall and split the crowd. As he followed the friend, I closed the space between me and Nalini. Heat radiated off her body, releasing the scent of her perfume. It saturated the air with her pheromones.

As she swayed to the music, I rested a hand on her hip.

My touch chilled her flesh. She shivered and pressed closer, still moving to the music.

"Dance with me, beautiful," I said.

With a slow roll, she turned toward me. Her wild gaze shifted to the people dancing around us. We were in the center of the dance floor, crushed together by gyrating bodies. Lights cut through the darkened room, and strobes created a disorienting pulse.

I'd planned for contingencies. Once I had her isolated, I had options for extraction. Preferably, she'd come quietly. However, I wasn't optimistic. She was Kyng's, and his guards gave her a sense of security. They couldn't protect her from me.

She brushed a strand of hair from her face with her fingers. A tendril clung to her lip. I grazed my finger across her bottom lip, catching the soft, damp hair, and pulling it from her mouth. Her breath was moist and warm against my skin.

Time seemed to slow as she stared into my face and nodded.

With a few steps, I steered us deeper into the swarm of bodies.

Mesmerized by the music, she closed her eyes and swayed her body seductively. Using those around us, I shifted closer. My fingertips slipped onto the bare skin of her midriff.

Touching her was like touching electricity, sending a scorch of current surging through me. The room was too hot, my cock was too interested, and the fucking target in front of me was too provoking.

Perspiration trickled along my spine. She wobbled toward me, so small and tempting. With my hands on her hips, she tilted her face to mine. Those beautiful brown eyes were blown. She was high as fuck.

I felt the anesthetizing patch in my pocket. Since I didn't have a charming personality, I'd have to coerce her out of the club another way.

She stilled, and the music seemed to fade. Soft breaths floated past the rim of her plump lips. Her delicate pink tongue touched the bow, then slicked along the glossy fullness to disappear back into her mouth.

After weeks of watching her, I wanted to give chase with a kiss, to taste her, even knowing the bastard watching had just had his brutal mouth on her. I glanced over my shoulder. Kyng stood, his drink clutched in one hand and the other balled into a fist.

One of his guards made his way around the edge of the dance floor. I continued to shift us into the throng of bodies.

“You shouldn’t stand so close to me,” she said.

My hand slid onto her hip. “I enjoy doing things I shouldn’t.”

Standing this close to her, my body reacted. My chest tightened, and my balls grew heavy as my cock kicked into a full mast behind the fly of my black jeans. I wasn’t supposed to play with my prey or to think about her smooth skin flush against mine, or of taking her for pleasure instead of punishment.

I leaned closer, running my nose along her neck and breathing in her scent.

“You must like getting into trouble.” Her voice trembled with my nearness.

I raked my gaze along her body. “Are you trouble?”

Remember my face, Kyng, because I’m about to take something you can’t live without...just as you did to me.

Her flesh shimmered, and her heartbeat fluttered in the column of her neck. I placed my fingertips on the faint bruises collaring her throat. My thumb pressed against her

pulse as she swallowed.

Her focus drifted over my shoulder. Her hand rested on my chest as she stumbled back with a step. Her fingers curled into my T-shirt. “I’m sorry.”

“What have you done to be sorry about?” With her hands on me, my abdominals clenched, and an unwanted flare of heat sent a rush of blood into my cock. She was toxic. And my dick didn’t get to change the focus of my objectives. I gripped her, tugging her closer.

“You like to live dangerously.” Her gaze darted from me to Kyng’s VIP section again. “But I don’t,” she whispered.

“Wait.” With my hand still on her hip, I spun her away from Kyng. My body blocked his view of her.

She stilled. “You’re going to get me in trouble. Please, let me go.”

A warm slip of power slithered over me as she begged me to release her.

When another bodyguard approached, I let her go. She rushed to them, then cast a last glance over her shoulder. A tentative smile tilted her lips. I cocked a brow and smiled at her.

Don’t worry, Nalini. The pieces are just shifting on the board.

As the guard ushered her back to the VIP section, I locked gazes with Kyng. A predatory gleam darkened his eyes. He lifted his drink to his lips. He pointed to me as he spoke with one of his guards.

I made my way back over to my table. Kyng’s muscle approached.

“Is there a problem?” I asked.

“Mr. Kyng would like you to leave.” He crossed his arms over his chest.

My gaze shifted from the guy in front of me to the blonde leading an unsteady Nalini to the rear of the club. I leaned back in my chair. “I don’t know Mr. Kyng, and I don’t know you.”

“This is Mr. Kyng’s club, and your presence here is irritating him.”

I smiled. “Yeah, I get that a lot. Tell him I apologize. I’ll go after my friend returns. He’s in the restroom.”

“Get your friend and go now.”

“Sure.” I stood and walked toward the rear of the club. “Are you going to follow me into the john?”

“You going to take a piss?”

I glanced over my shoulder. “Do you want to hold my dick for me?”

The guy grumbled. “Get your friend and get out.”

I pushed open the door, took two steps into the bathroom, spun, and sliced the blade of my forearm against the man’s throat.

Doubling over, he grabbed his neck and tried to take a breath. With a hard thrust, I rammed my thigh into his chin. Air swooshed from his lungs. His jaw cracked, his upper body jolted back, and blood poured from his mouth. He dropped onto the bathroom floor. Disoriented and in shock, his arms flopped to the side, and his nearly

severed tongue dangled between his lips.

I stood on his hand as I bent down and slipped a clear patch from my back pocket. I stared into his eyes. “You’re not so pretty anymore.”

He groaned, trying to twist away from me. His suit coat gaped, revealing a gun tucked against his ribs.

“I’ll take this.” I curled my fingers around the grip of the gun, pulled it from the harness, checked the safety, and slid it into the back of my jeans.

A low moan rolled from his chest. He couldn’t speak with his tongue flopping against his swollen lips.

“I can make you feel good,” I whispered. “Is that what you say to women before you lead them to your boss?” I tugged the snap on his trousers, lowered the zipper and parted the fly. After peeling the protective film from the clear patch, I placed it over the veins running beneath the skin of his lower abdomen. “Welcome to my party.”

The toxin would bleed through his skin. As he sweated the nanofibers would dissolve, leaving no trace of the method of delivery, just another dead drug pusher.

I stepped over the man as he gurgled on a mouthful of blood. I slipped out of the men’s restroom. A line formed along the hall for the lady’s room. As the king’s queen, she wouldn’t wait in line.

Making sure I wasn’t followed, I wandered to the far end of the corridor. Cameras captured every corner of the club. I had moments to make my move. A digital keypad locked on the last door on the right. I stood next to it. Opposite me, the emergency exit sign marked the door on the left.

Muted music drifted from the belly of the club. I steadied my breathing. My pulse slowed. Calmness washed through me. I became one with my surroundings. Breathe. Listen. The spider anticipating the vibration on his web.

Finally, someone entered the men's room. A guy screamed for help. I banged on the door and waited for my prey.

Nalini

Tracers followed flares of light. A tattoo of blinding white flashes sounded in my ears. Colors weren't supposed to make a sound or have a taste, but the euphoric kaleidoscope breathed with life. Blues warmed my flesh. Reds pulsed in my core. I swallowed the sweetness in my mouth, an aphrodisiac of sin.

I didn't know what Madden had given me tonight. I didn't care. If I was high enough, I could forget how fucked up my life had become. I was never high enough.

Whatever he'd given me made me ache, a physical need for touch.

My skin burned with a blistering intensity from the euphoria. Energy pulsed through my body. I ran my hands over my hardened nipples and thought of the man on the dance floor. The man with the penetrating gaze.

For the first time in...forever...I hadn't been repulsed. I hadn't wanted to be high. I'd wanted to disappear into the warmth of his body. For a moment, I imagined he was there to rescue me.

Because the brush of his fingertips hadn't made me shiver with fear but tremble with a wild recklessness. With his body pressed against mine, I'd forgotten the risks. I'd forgotten everything when I'd stared into his brown eyes, so brown they were nearly black with black lashes.

Dark hair had wisped across his forehead and feathered against his brows. Whiskers shadowed his angular jaw. Those lips had promised more than words. His warm breath had teased my skin, sending a dangerous burn of need through my veins. I imagined the feel of his mustache on my skin...between my thighs. Oh god, my core fluttered with an ache.

He was big, built, and intimidating. I couldn't push the thoughts of the stranger out of my head. Obsessions were dangerous. My life was toxic. Three years ago, I'd been a different girl. There was nothing left of her. Madden had seen to that.

I rubbed the itch on my arm. Maybe if I had another hit, this time would be enough to take away the high because I lived in a nightmare, each night bleeding into the next. My only escape would be to never wake up.

Only Madden wouldn't let me go. Not even death could win against Madden Kyng.

Ayla slumped on the settee in the corner of the room, and her head lolled to the side. I couldn't watch her willingly shoot poison into her veins. I hated myself and what I'd become. I hated that there was nothing left of who I used to be. If I could be free, I'd suffer the withdrawal, pay my penance with pain, but the choice wasn't mine. Not anymore.

Ayla pushed her supply bag toward me.

I leaned against the door. My heart raced, and my hands trembled. "I'm good."

At least I wasn't feeling anything bad. Right now, I wasn't feeling anything but aroused. My limbs were heavy. I was high, but on what, I had no idea. And I didn't trust Ayla. I didn't trust anyone, especially myself.

It didn't matter. Madden violated my mind the way he violated my body. I'd learned

to live with the highs in order to survive the lows.

“What did he give me?” I asked. My skin flushed. A lethal elixir of sexual heat slipped through me. I pushed my hair from my face.

Ayla wiped a bit of drool from her mouth. “It’s Dominic’s birthday, Nalini. Kyng wants you to celebrate with him.”

Madden’s gift would be a night of hell for me, twisting and writhing beneath Madden’s enforcer in a delirium of pain. Dominic didn’t care about pleasures except his own, and those always came at the price of agony.

“I’ll give you just enough to get through tonight,” she said. “Tomorrow, I’ll take care of you.”

The offer was tempting, to drift away in a cloud of ecstasy. But I knew bliss would never come, only the crash. I never asked for the hit. Never wanted it. But with Madden, I wasn’t allowed to say no. Ayla never said no to the high either. Rather, she gloried in it, relishing the temptation of the Kyngdom.

Someone pounded on the door.

“Just a minute.” Although she seemed to move in slow motion, Ayla shifted to put away her syringes and supplies.

I twisted the lock.

“Wait,” Ayla said, but it was too late.

The door ripped from my fingers as the man from the dance floor pushed into the private office. I stumbled back a step. He’d been tall and imposing in the crowd, but

in the club's office, he overwhelmed the space, sucking the oxygen from the room with his heated gaze and imposing form.

"You," I stammered. The rabbiting of my heart had nothing to do with the toxins rushing through my system or the fear I had of my tormentor.

He'd followed me. Even after Madden's goons had threatened him, he'd come to find me.

Ayla crumbled to the floor and staggered to her feet. "I think I know you." She stood and braced a hand on the wall to stabilize herself. "I've seen you before, at the bar with Laf."

A sinking feeling ripped through my gut. Another one of Madden's men? I tried to back away from him, but his hand snaked around my arm.

"Who are you?" Ayla stumbled to me, grabbed onto my arm, and tried to put distance between me and the stranger. "Don't touch her."

The man pulled a gun. He definitely was not one of Madden's men. Madden would never allow anyone to threaten Ayla, his sister—stepsister. The one he trusted above all, even his lieutenants. Ayla had betrayed her own mother to protect Madden.

But I couldn't hate her. I should. Even though she served her stepbrother, bound herself to one of his generals, she'd also been my only friend as long as I didn't break any of Madden's rules.

"This isn't about you," the man said. "I'm here for Nalini."

I jerked my gaze from Ayla to the gun. He knew my name. "Do I know you?"

“Not yet.”

His voice seeped into me, a dark guttural promise of depravity. I didn't need to be sober to know my night of hell was just beginning.

Maybe I should have let Ayla dose me again. I didn't want to feel. Yet, my body vibrated with awareness of this man. Strong fingers still gripped my arm.

There was a quiet strength to him. Muscles rippled beneath his fitted T-shirt, the kind of potency that came from absolute power. His grip tightened, and my body responded.

I wasn't supposed to feel. Emotions made me weak, and Madden would only exploit my weaknesses. I needed to be numb. I needed another hit.

“What do you want?” I asked him. The raspy quality of my voice revealed I wasn't sure what I wanted his answer to be. There was a dangerous edge to him that made me want to be on the receiving end of his attention. But I was scared of what that would mean to me. I belonged to Madden.

“You.”

His simple reply terrified me. I understood what it meant to be wanted by a dangerous man. Fear clawed into my throat. I was Madden's prisoner. His pet. Too broken to fight. Too addicted to run. After three years, I no longer cared what he did to me.

He'd already destroyed me, corrupted my thoughts, and blackened my soul. I was a toy he shared just to watch me break.

The stranger's body pressed into mine. “We're leaving. Now.”

I stilled at the darkly spoken command. Oh my god. He wasn't just a guy at the bar.

Ayla swept her hair from her eyes. "Who the fuck do you think you are?"

A slow smile curled the corner of his mouth. Why did he look even more sinister? An icy tendril of fear sliced into my chest.

A dark shadow fell across his face, a harbinger of the hurt he'd bring me. Because this wasn't a man I could turn away from or someone I could pretend wasn't there as I drifted into the delusion of my high. I'd been taken once before and shackled in a prison I couldn't escape.

"Trust me. You don't want me coming back." He curled his hand around the back of my neck. "Sit there and shut the fuck up," he said to Ayla. "Or I'll put a bullet in your head."

He dragged me toward the door. "What do you want with me?" Did it matter?

"He'll never make it past the guards," Ayla said.

I swallowed and licked my lips. "She's right. You don't know me, but you don't want to do this."

"I know everything about you."

"Then you know Kyng will come after you."

"I'm counting on it."

"He'll kill you." And then he'd punish me. "I can't leave."

I'd tried when I'd run once before. His fingers gripped my wrist, reminding me of the punishment I'd received for betraying Madden. The bindings had left my wrists and ankles scarred, but the damage inside had taken months to heal.

I'd also learned how deeply I'd been ensnared by the Kyngdom. Even if I had escaped, Madden had the power to destroy me. I'd stopped fighting after that, accepting that I'd never be free, not from Madden, not from my prison, or the poisons lacing my blood.

Bruising strength gripped me. Heat from his hand burned into me. His touch was another addictive drug. Intense and toxic. My nipples tightened painfully as the heat seeped lower, pooling low in my belly.

"Walk now, or I'll drag you out."

I tried to focus on his face. Flares of light surged through me, and the sweet taste of arousal bloomed on my tongue. I could have the night of torment Madden had planned for me, or I could succumb to my eventual demise and hope this stranger ended my life quickly.

"I'll go," I said.

Once away from Madden, maybe I would finally find an escape from my prison. I rubbed the itch in my arm again. Unless it was already too late for me.

Ayla cut in front of him to block the door.

"Get out of my way or don't." Danger swirled in his darkened eyes. A muscle ticked in his jaw as his fingers closed around my throat. "Either way, I'm taking Kyng's queen."

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Spade

I kept one hand on Nalini's neck and the other on the gun in my hand. A thrill zinged through me that she trembled beneath my fingers. Fear was a powerful motivator.

A crowd had gathered in the corridor. Guards blocked anyone from venturing past the bathroom doorway. I wouldn't escape unnoticed. Good. I wanted witnesses, wanted Kyng to know he'd lost her on his watch. Not even his guards would be able to stop me. Another guard blocked the emergency exit.

"Who the fuck are you?" the guard asked, gripping his gun.

Nalini sucked in a sharp inhale. I tightened my hold on her, tugging her closer. She pressed along my side, fitting her small frame against my hard edges.

Unsteady, she gripped my shirt. Her fingers tightened in the fabric, almost as if she leaned into me for protection. Did she not recognize I was the villain in this scenario? If not now, she would. Her nightmare was just beginning.

"Let the girl go."

"Kyng took something of mine." I held his gaze, daring him to challenge me, and stepped in front of Nalini. "I'm taking something of his."

The office door lurched open. Ayla stumbled forward, gripping the jamb to stay upright. "He's taking Nalini."

In the confusion, I lifted my gun, aimed, and pulled the trigger. The bang ruptured the heavy music and drone of voices. Red misted in the air as the bullet ripped through the guard. He grunted, gasped, and dropped to his knees. His gun clattered to the floor. Blood oozed from between his fingers as he clutched his chest.

Screams reverberated through the hall. People scrambled. Some ran back into the club. More charged toward the emergency exit.

Ayla shrieked, retreated into the office, and slammed the door closed.

“Go.” I shoved open the emergency exit. Alarms instantly pierced the air, adding to the chaos. “Don’t make a sound,” I said, propelling her through the doorway.

A flood of people followed, swallowing us into the crowd. Stopping at my black utility van, I slid open the side door. “Get in.”

“If you took me to get to Kyng, it won’t work. I’m nothing to him.”

“You’re nothing to me .” With a shove, she tumbled into the vehicle. Braced on her hands, she crawled until she was completely inside. I climbed in behind her and slammed the door closed.

She scrambled away from me. “Where are you taking me?”

I ignored her question, worked quickly, and asked my own. “What are you on?” I grabbed my bag, shifted the syringe I’d planned to use on her out of the way, and chose a single dose of naloxone instead. She was high on something. If he had her on an opioid, naloxone would counter the effects.

“No, please.” She tried to back away from me. Perhaps she finally realized Kyng wasn’t going to be able to save her.

People screamed outside the van. I focused my attention on the girl, drowning out distractions. I had moments to get her stable and get the fuck out of the area.

“Calm down. It’s naloxone.” Since I didn’t know how an anesthetizing patch would react with whatever was in her system, I’d have to restrain her another way. “Heroin, Ketamine, Rohypnol, MDMA?”

Her eyes tried to focus. “What?”

“Fuck, smack, Special K, roofies, molly?” I popped the orange cap on the naloxone and stabbed it into her thigh.

“I don’t know, but I’m hot, and—” She licked her lips.

“And what?” I snapped.

“I need to be touched.” She slid her legs together, her hips rolling. She rubbed her hands on her thighs, inching closer to the heat of her pussy.

“It’s a shit situation because I don’t give a fuck what you need. You have something that I want.” I grabbed a length of rope and closed the space between us. “Clasp your hands together.”

“I won’t try to get away.” Her wild eyes widened, and her lower lip trembled. “Please don’t tie me up.” Panic laced her words. “Please,” she begged and twisted her arms to hide her hands behind her back. She brought her knees to her chest, curling herself over her thighs. Her fear was palpable.

“Give me your hands,” I demanded.

When she lifted her head, tears shimmered in her eyes. She slowly moved her arms in

front of her. Her chest rose and fell with shallow breaths. I gripped her wrists. Tears slid onto her cheek, and her eyes closed. Her lips moved, but no sound came from her mouth.

I inhaled deeply, flaring my nostrils. The woman vibrated with fear. I twisted the rope around her small wrists. What the fuck? Red lines cut a crisscross pattern on her tender flesh. The scars were rough, and the skin abraded. I loosened the rope and ran my thumb over another set of raised bumps. These were self-inflicted.

She whimpered, and her heartbeat raced beneath her skin, the rampant pulses mimicking the fluttering of her chest.

She was soft, pretty, and deadly. Whatever coursed through her veins had her riding the rails of arousal. With a few twists of the rope, I had her hands bound.

Had I been able to sedate her, I wouldn't have had to restrain her, wouldn't have had to touch her. Because touching her felt too fucking good. My fingertips slid over her soft skin as I wrapped my hands around her bare biceps and positioned her against the wall of the van.

"I won't fight." Her back arched, and her nipples poked against the fabric of her corset. A low moan rolled from her chest.

That moan settled in my balls. Heat surged into my hardening cock. Her lips parted with a breathy exhale. I inhaled her exhale, taking in her truth. She was turned on and terrified. I had the queen on her knees.

"We're going for a little ride. Make a sound and I'll duct tape your mouth."

"You don't have to do this." Her voice trembled.

“Are you afraid?” I spoke low, letting my words seep into her psyche.

She swallowed and touched her tongue to her upper lip. “Yes.”

“Kyng’s guards couldn’t protect you.”

Bent at the elbows, she clutched her bound arms in front of her. “You’re under the impression I hold value to him?”

“You should be more concerned with the value you hold for me.” I tugged the rope to ensure the knots were tight. I picked up a black pillowcase. Her wide eyes blinked. I covered her head. “Don’t fight me. He can’t save you.” I lowered my voice. “He’ll never find you.”

From behind the black fabric, she released a shuddering exhale. “Promise?”

I paused, listening to her rapid breaths.

“Because if he does, he’ll kill us both.”

“I can promise someone is going to be dead.” And his name was Madden Kyng.

I reluctantly backed away from her because I ached to feed the beast inside me, the one that wanted a taste of her. Scent wasn’t enough. I slammed the door on my thoughts and climbed behind the wheel. I hadn’t been caught because I was smart.

For some reason, that pissed me the fuck off. This woman made me reckless.

Police lights cut through the night. Another nightclub, another shooting. Panicked people filled the parking lot and street. Tonight hadn’t gone exactly like I’d planned, but I had the queen in the van. Another one of Kyng’s pawns was dead, and the guy

in the bathroom should be joining his friend in the morgue.

I slowly drove between vehicles to the rear of the lot, rolled over the curb, and drove away from the pandemonium. My gaze shifted between the driver's side mirror and the mirror angled to watch my captive.

Her head bowed, and her dark hair tumbled around her shoulders. The black cover over her head shifted with her ragged breaths. She rubbed her hands between her legs, either to loosen the rope or to get herself off. Either way, the muscles in her arms strained.

"Stop."

Her head snapped up. In less than five minutes, she'd rubbed her wrists raw. "I don't like to be tied up." She twisted and turned her wrists, shredding her skin against the rough fibers.

I wanted her contained, not injured. "If I wanted to hurt you, I would. Until I do, calm the fuck down."

"I can't calm down." Her movements became violent. Blood stained the ropes.

"Fuck." I pulled to the side of the road, threw the van into park, and launched over the seat. I jerked the hood off her head and then grabbed her hands. "I'm not going to kill you."

Sweat beaded on her upper lip. Goosebumps peppered her flesh as she twitched and shivered. "Then why did you take me?"

"Insurance to get what I want." My jaw clenched. "I don't plan to kill you, but I will. I'll untie your wrists. If you move from this spot, I'll send you back to Kyng in a

body bag.”

Once the ropes were off her wrists, she rubbed her arms. Her gaze darted to the handle on the side door.

“Don’t try it. It only opens from the outside.” I climbed back into the driver’s seat. She fidgeted behind me.

“Where are we going?”

“Does it matter?”

She loosened the ties on her corset and wiped the sheen on her breasts with her fingertips. “It depends on how long you plan to keep me.”

I shook my head. “I’m not keeping you.” She was just a piece in the game. Once played, I wouldn’t have any use for her. I imagined Madden discovering her gone and his anger at his men for allowing her to be taken. How many would pay the price?

All of them, I hoped.

As I navigated through the city, the headlights cut through the night surrounding the vehicle. I wanted her isolated, under my control, and I needed her to fear me more than she feared Madden Kyng.

“Talk to me. Tell me something,” she said. She’d gone from light perspiration to sweat dampening her hair and trickling along her temple. Makeup smeared down her face. “What’s your name?”

I’d warned her not to speak, but her voice, soft with trepidation, slipped under my skin.

“The next time I stop the vehicle, I’ll gag your mouth.”

Nalini

My body burned. Even the air scorched my flesh. The only relief came from embracing the pain.

“Something’s wrong with me,” I whispered. “I’m not coming down.” My high was still climbing. Endorphins fired through my brain. The beautiful taste of colors had become an unquenchable thirst. Blinding lights burned my eyes. Closing them sent a piercing symphony of pain into my brain.

Breathing tightened my chest, catching fire, searing lower, and boiling to a fevering pitch.

The stranger gripped the steering wheel. Those strong hands could ease the ache. I imagined his fingers stripping me, caressing my breasts—no, he wouldn’t caress me. He’d tear me apart.

My core clenched with the need of turbulent, angry thrusts. My breath came in ragged gasps. I kept my eyes on the tight stretch of his T-shirt as I lifted my heavy breasts and pinched my nipples. The memory of his scent, the dangerous tone of his voice, and the way he’d stood protectively in front of me sent a shiver of electric current into my clit.

Unlike Madden’s brutal touch, I imagined the stranger’s firm grip holding me hostage for pleasure, not for pain. Popping the button on my pants, I spread the wings of the leather to make room for my hand.

Quivers rippled low in my abdomen with the first touch of my fingertip through the drenched folds of my pussy. A low moan crawled up my throat.

The stranger's jaw tightened, and his Adam's apple bobbed on a hard swallow.

Heat rushed through me, but I couldn't stop. The need to come was stronger than my will to fight the effects of whatever Madden had injected into my veins. Stronger than any fear I had of my captor.

"The naloxone didn't help." Tears filled my eyes, intensifying the kaleidoscope of colors swimming in my vision.

I rubbed my clit. A wave of tension built, drowning me in darkening waters of a drug fueled need.

The van came to a screeching halt. The driver's door slammed, and a moment later, the side door slid open. The rumble of the automatic door echoed in the large open bay.

"Get out."

His harshly spoken command sent a corkscrew of panic curling in my belly, but I couldn't stop. I cried out as my climax rushed over me. Every nerve exploded in a volcano of pleasure. My heart hammered against my ribs. I lost focus as my eyes rolled and my body quaked with wave after wave.

A tide of fear surged through me. The orgasm didn't ebb but continued to rage. I screamed, punishing my clit with rapid strokes.

"Fuck." The stranger vaulted into the van, ripped my fingers from my pants, and lifted me into his arms.

I gasped, winding my arms around his neck. I was on fire yet craved the warmth of his body. I buried my face in his neck, drinking in the scent of his skin, and crushing

my face into the soft hair of his beard. My fingers slid over the hard hills of his broad shoulders.

A desperate need held me in its clutches. With a soft flick of my tongue, I tasted salty sweat from his neck.

“Don’t.” A low rumble vibrated from his body and seeped into mine. “What the fuck are you on?” His hold on me tightened, pressing my breast into the solid wall of muscle carving his chest.

I didn’t know. I was crawling out of my skin to get under his. He juggled me in his arms. I kept my eyes closed, breathing him in, desperate to relieve the fire snapping through my veins. Everywhere he touched sizzled with awareness.

Holding me in his arms, he entered the building and kicked the door closed. I clung to him as he strode down a stark corridor. He placed his hand on another door, and the sound of a lock sliding open followed.

The stench of antiseptic wafted over me. I tightened my arms around his neck, holding him as tremors wracked my body. The back of my thighs brushed against a cold, metal table, and his hold on me loosened.

His hand curled around my neck. I waited for the pressure, the delirious, mind-numbing euphoria of being choked, but his palm stilled on my throat. “Your pulse is racing. Sweats. Heightened sexual responses. Dilated pupils. Are you feeling anxiety?”

“I feel like I’m coming apart. I can taste how badly I need more.” I covered his hand with mine, forcing him to squeeze. His grip tightened. “I need you.”

“All you need is your next fix.”

“No. I never wanted this.” I’d been blinded. A girl who hadn’t had much growing up at least had dreams. Those dreams became nightmares the day I met Madden Kyng.

“You’re Kyng’s queen.”

“No, I’m not. He considers me his property.” I traced his hand to his wrist, following the clean cuts of tendon and sinew in his forearms. His biceps flexed, and I pulsed between my legs. I moaned as my body begged for more.

“Does it hurt?” The rough touch of his fingers had me on the brink of orgasm.

“Yes.” My gaze met his as I raked my nails down his chest. My fingertips caught the snap of his jeans. “Please—”

Those dark eyes focused on me. “Please, what?”

My gaze tracked lower. Quivers rippled my abdominals. Outlined behind his jeans, his cock was thick, long, and hard. “Kill me or make me come.”

“Don’t tempt me.”

Did he want to hurt me as much as I needed to feel the bite of his fingers on my hips, the thrust of his cock, and the edge of his teeth scoring my flesh?

“I’ll give you whatever you want. Just make it stop.” Tears slipped onto my cheeks.

The hand at my neck held me immobile, and his other slid into the front of my pants. One touch had me shattering. An unholy cry erupted from my chest as his fingertip parted my slick folds, grazed across my swollen clit, and pushed into my soaked opening.

He growled and aggressively plunged a second finger deep into my core.

I clawed the corset from my chest, parting the lace and fabric and exposing my breasts. With a hard tug, he wrenched me to the edge of the exam table and stepped between my thighs.

“Is this how you hold onto a king? Does your cunt keep him on his knees?” The stranger twisted his fingers. His palm ground against my clit. Another gush of fluids drenched his hand.

“Don’t talk about him.” He’d taken me to hurt Madden, but he didn’t know Kyng the way I did. Madden wouldn’t be hurt, but I would be if he ever found me.

“Protecting him even while you’re begging to ride my fingers?”

I gripped his wrist, my nails cutting half-moons into his flesh as I rolled my hips against his hand. “I’m not protecting him.”

Another climax tore through me. Pain warred with pleasure. I clenched hard against his fingers, but my overstimulated clit screamed in agony. I bit my lip until I tasted the coppery tang of blood. And still, there was no reprieve from the coil of lust knotting low in my belly.

When I’d asked him to kill me or make me come, I wished he would have killed me.

Spade

After her third orgasm, I’d stripped Nalini out of her leather pants and panties. Her tattered corset lay on the floor. Naked, her thighs were spread, and I had three fingers crammed into her swollen core as I wrung another orgasm from her. Only her release had nothing to do with me. Whatever fed her habit had her creaming on my fingers.

I'd stalked her for weeks. I considered it pursuing with purpose. Three weeks of watching her sip lattes with her blonde friend before climbing into the back of Kyng's limo. Men surrounding her, using her. I understood the fascination.

She was beautiful. Her body was made for sex. I'd wanted to see her suffer, but with every whimper from her lips, with every breathy exhale, I was the one in turmoil. I pressed my lips to her temple as she tumbled, locked in the throes of continuous climaxes.

I couldn't watch her writhe in pain. Maybe because the last woman I'd had my hands on had been tempted by the same addicting affliction. Ella had gotten in bed with a beast, not me, but the allure of Madden Kyng and his promise of a chemical pleasure.

She'd been clean for two years. Then her pale eyes had changed, going from a beautiful, blue summer sky to the dead, lifeless eyes of a junkie needing nothing but her next fix.

We had dreams. Or maybe they were just my wishful fantasies. Maybe if I'd kept her with me. Maybe if I hadn't given her the ultimatum. But I'd grown tired of the lies. I'd made her choose, let her go, and now, she was dead. I shook the mental image, the one that clawed into my thoughts every fucking minute of the day.

I hadn't been enough for her, but Madden Kyng had been too much.

I couldn't save Ella. I wrestled with what I knew of Nalini Bryan. Kill me or make me come. I didn't want to see her dead.

Fuck me. Her pussy gripped tighter to my fingers.

She screamed as violent convulsions ripped through her. "Please, I need more. Fuck me."

I rested my forehead against hers. “I can’t. Hold on. Breathe through it.” I eased my fingers in and out of her tender flesh.

Her head tipped forward, resting on my chest, and her legs trembled as she braced against my hips. She whimpered as tears streamed from her eyes. Her open mouth slid along my neck, licking, biting, and sucking.

My cock throbbed. I wanted inside her, but this wasn’t a mutual attraction. She was out of her fucking mind on whatever poison she’d taken.

Yet, I had to touch her. She shivered beneath my palm as I trekked my hand along the ladder of her ribs. Hardened nipples centered on soft, luscious breasts. She filled my hand. The nipple prodded my palm.

Wrecked and exhausted, she breathed deeply. Her body softened against me. Juices from her multiple orgasms pooled beneath her, soaked her folds, and trickled down her thighs. Her limp arms held onto my shoulders, but she didn’t have the strength to fight the power of the drugs weaponizing her body.

Her eyes slid closed, and she slumped against me. I eased my fingers out of her trembling body and shifted her onto the exam table.

“Nalini?”

Sweat beaded on her brow and on the cupid’s bow of her lip. I combed damp tendrils of hair from her face. Even unconscious, she leaned into my touch.

With one hand, I ran my fingers along the delicate features of her face. With the other, I rubbed my fingers against my lips, breathing deeply of her scent. My gut clenched as I slipped my fingers into my mouth and tasted the sweet tang of her essence. She’d spread her thighs for a king, but she’d rode my hand searching for

salvation.

My shoulders were tight with tension. She was at war with her body, and I fought against my intentions. Who was this woman?

I'd watched her, seethed with my hatred, and yet, somehow, revenge against her tasted bitter on my tongue when I wanted more of her dark and musky sweetness.

I still wanted Madden dead, but what if I wanted to keep the queen?

Careful of her head, I positioned her on the exam table. Once I had her strapped down at the shoulders, hips, and feet, I extended the left armrest and restrained her at the biceps and wrist. With my fingertip, I traced the blue veins beneath her translucent skin.

I crossed to my supply cabinet and loaded a medical procedure tray with a tourniquet, needle, tubes, and gloves. When I returned to Nalini, I softly stroked her hair. Blood marred her mouth where she'd sunk her teeth into her bottom lip.

Locked in her restlessness, she writhed on the table. The scent of her arousal had me biting the inside of my cheek. The heat of her flesh seeped into my fingertips as I tightened the tourniquet, ran my thumb over her blood-swollen vein, and slid the needle into her arm.

Dark red blood filled the first tube. I slipped the tourniquet from her arm as the second tube filled. I expected to see more track marks in her arms. She was a junkie. I could kill her now, pull the tube, leave her vein open, and watch her bleed out onto the floor. A sleeping beauty, so perfect in death. So fucked up in life.

Her eyelids fluttered open, brows furrowed, and her lips trembled. She shifted on the table, but the straps held her immobile.

“No,” she said on a whimper. “No.”

Her eyes closed again. I wasn't sure if she was speaking to me or whatever nightmare played out in her mind. I pulled the needle from her arm and pressed my thumb against the vein. Because I needed her immobile, I couldn't release the restraints, so I applied pressure until the blood coagulated.

My lab was specific to my needs. A micro core laboratory with a hematology analyzer. A centrifugation process separated the fluids, and an automated aliquoting dispersed the fluids to different wells for analysis. High-performance liquid chromatography would tell me exactly what substances were in her system.

While the machines completed the analytic procedure, I dampened a cloth at the sink, then crossed to Nalini and gently ran the cloth over the feminine slope of her shoulders, followed the softness of her neck to her round breasts with rose nipples. She was a petite woman with trim thighs and a flat, toned stomach.

I spread her legs. Instant anger roiled in my chest. She was marked, and I'd seen the image before, tattooed on a dead man's neck. Nalini had a fucking spider scarring her inner thigh. Not tattooed but burned. Her words came back to haunt me. Branded as Madden's property. She carried the mark of the cartel.

Not anymore.

She moaned in her sexual fog as I tenderly washed between her legs, holding the cool cloth to her pussy. More scars crisscrossed her body. What the fuck had she been into? While I had her on my table, I did a full examination.

My computer buzzed and chirped. I crossed the room and sat in the chair and analyzed the composition of her blood. She was a toxic stew of chemicals.

Madden had her enslaved with drugs, just as he'd done with Ella. I would've locked Ella away if I thought I could've saved her. She'd chosen. Fuck, she probably did drugs with Nalini and Ayla. The last time I'd seen Ella's body, she hadn't been branded, but that hadn't changed her loyalty to Kyng.

I was a chemist with a medical degree and enough rage to burn down the fucking world. If Nalini wanted to be chained to a monster, she could be a slave to me.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 3:41 am

Nalini

I was dreaming—dreaming of breath, laced with the whisper of mint warming my face. I recalled the subtle hint of citrus blended with the slightly spicy and masculine scent of a man. In my dream, I remembered strong hands sliding against my hips, and the hard cuts of a chiseled chest cradling my body. I floated, unable to resist the sweet surrender.

This had to be the end. My eyelids were too heavy to open. I sighed and surrendered to the blackness blinding me. It didn't matter. No one would miss me. Not really. Madden would only be pissed that he wasn't the one who killed me.

“Rest.” A distant gravelly voice slipped under my skin like a dark and forbidden promise.

I didn't hurt anymore. Cool sheets caressed my naked flesh. A shuddering exhale rippled through me. My mind drifted. Time passed, hours, minutes, or maybe eternity.

But my heart stopped racing, and the gnawing pain in my belly softened with the stiffness of my muscles and joints.

Normally, the crash would hit me hard. I relished the pain. Penance for a fucked up life. I became conscious of my surroundings. My eyes burned as I pried them open.

Lethargy weighed heavy in my limbs. I was alone on a bed in a darkened room. Like shattered glass, memories filtered into my mind. I had pieces, but nothing was clear.

Madden had given me too much. I'd begged for death.

No, I'd begged the stranger to fuck me. I slipped my fingers between my thighs, touched my tender flesh, and sucked in a sharp breath.

"Do you want to come?" The voice from my dreams filled the silence. "Or do you need to come?"

The lamp in the corner snapped on. I ripped my hand from between my legs, jerked upright to sitting, and shielded myself with the blanket. Tension stretched between us as we stared at each other. Confusion clouded my mind, and my instincts were to flee. But fear slipped hot and toxic through my blood.

My gaze darted around the room, then lasered onto the man across from me. Oh god, the guy from the club. No, maybe not, or maybe it was. My memories were foggy. At least, he had the build and the voice of the man at the club.

The same brooding aura that had saturated the air in the club and made me want for more than a dance banked just below the surface of this man. He radiated with a tightly controlled energy, a force of intimidation that I'd witnessed against both Madden and Ayla. He had lips that didn't smile but promised wickedness.

I'd danced with a man with eyes so dark they were nearly black. This man's ice blue glare sent a shiver over my flesh. "Who are you?"

He leaned forward in the chair and rested his elbows on his knees. "Right now, I'm your doctor."

"This doesn't look like a hospital."

"Good. You're not prone to hallucinations. You're in my home."

“And in your bed?”

“You weren’t complaining about that last night.” He stood from the chair and crossed to the bed. “You shouldn’t be feeling any effects from the drugs in your system.”

As he sat next to me, I leaned away from him, but there was nowhere for me to go. “I wasn’t... I wasn’t masturbating.”

A torrid rush warmed my chest, crawled up my neck, and heated my face. Last night, I’d been insatiable. I would have sold my soul to end the torrent of need, but my soul was as worthless as my life had become.

“You were hitting highs that your body couldn’t process. You’ve been using long enough to know how fucking reckless polydrug use is.”

He was right. I’d been so high. But I also wasn’t crashing. I needed the withdrawal, wanted the pain, because the only way I felt good was if I was high. “Did you give me something?”

I wasn’t going to play the victim. I’d made choices that made my life worthless. It had been my choice to fall for the intoxicating lifestyle of Madden Kyng. Only I hadn’t understood the dark games he played until it was too late.

The doctor lifted my wrist and gently held his fingers to my pulse. Tingles chased over the hairs on my arms. His hands were warm with long, sculpted fingers. “I gave you a blocker. It’s flushing the drugs out of your system.”

“You injected me?” I tried to swallow the scratchiness in my dry throat.

He offered me a bottle of water. “You wouldn’t tell me what you were on.”

I drank several mouthfuls. “I didn’t know.” Madden said I’d have a good time. But it wouldn’t have mattered. Submitting to him was safer than defying him. Was this stranger any safer? “Why am I here?”

He stood. “We’ll get to that.”

My stomach rumbled with a gnawing ache. I couldn’t remember the last time I’d eaten. Once at the club, I’d only wanted physical touch. My gaze snapped to the doctor as I remembered the way he’d taken me, the feel of his hands on me, and the way he’d made me come.

I’d been out of my head. In the last three years, Madden had used me in ways that made nightmares look like daydreams. I was a slave to his whims. A sex slave. I fucked him, fucked his friends, and I existed at his mercy, but last night was unlike anything I’d experienced before. With the fragments I had now and knowing Madden would’ve continued to pump me full of drugs, I wouldn’t have remembered any of it.

I stared into the stranger’s eyes. I remembered enough to know he’d touched me, but I’d begged for more. I was mortified. This was my hell. But what kind of twisted menace was he? I was here because he took me. And he’d killed Madden’s guard.

He’d saved me.

“I thought your eyes were brown. And you shaved.”

“The club is under video surveillance.” He ran his hand along the sharp angle of his now smooth jaw.

“Today you’re my doctor, but what were you last night? You said you came to the club to take me.” He had to have planned it for a while if he’d grown a beard, worn colored contact lenses, and knew just how to get me out of the club.

“Get dressed.” He handed me a T-shirt and a pair of basketball shorts with a tie at the waistband.

The disguise was good. I barely recognized him. But Madden had resources. They could track the van. “Madden won’t involve the police.” Even if he did, they’d be cops that worked for him. Madden had men on the inside. Men who could manufacture evidence...and men who made evidence disappear. “He’ll find you.”

“I’m not hiding. I’ve killed his soldiers, I’ve killed his general, and I’ve taken his queen.”

“I’m not his queen, and can I have some privacy?” I was naked beneath the sheet.

“No.” His gaze locked with mine. “You serve a purpose, Nalini. You’re going to give me what I want.” He tugged on the sheet, exposing my breasts. His gaze slipped over my flesh and set off tiny explosions of heat. “You’re not my guest.” He leaned into me. “And I’m not your friend.”

Fear flared in my gut and crawled into my chest to tear at my rampantly beating heart.

“I didn’t bring you here to fuck you, but I am keeping you until you’re no longer useful to me.”

He stared at me as if he owned me. And he did. My memory held the imprint of his hand gripping my hip as his other hand collared my throat. Strong, possessive and wringing orgasms from me one after another. Yet, I was his prisoner.

An invisible thread of need tightened between my hardened nipples and tender clit. An answering spike of terror washed over me. He’d killed to take me.

He slid his hands into the front pockets of his jeans as he watched me dress.

My hands trembled as I pulled the T-shirt over my head. I slid my legs out of the bed, keeping my lap covered with the sheet, and tugged on the shorts. My bare feet touched the plush gray carpeting, but tremors radiated up my legs. I stumbled, catching myself from falling with a hand to the mattress.

His arm snaked around my waist, bracing me against his side. I clutched the soft fabric of his shirt.

A tidal wave of nausea washed over me. “I’m going to throw up.”

The doctor scooped me into his arms and carried me to the en suite bathroom.

As soon as my toes touched the cool tile, I dropped to my knees at the toilet. Tears filled my eyes as my stomach cramped, and I wretched.

“You need another injection,” he said and gathered my hair, holding it away from my face as I gripped the toilet seat with my hands.

Once I’d emptied my stomach, I sat back on my heels. The doctor stroked my head as my hair slipped through his fingers. The moment of kindness was both comforting and disconcerting. Kindness always came with consequences.

I shook my head and wiped spit from my bottom lip. “No more injections.”

He squatted next to me and handed me a small towel. “It’ll block the withdrawal symptoms.”

I wiped my hands and mouth. “I’m used to the withdrawals.” I dropped onto my ass and pulled my knees to my chest. “I don’t have a choice.”

The doctor sat across from me. “You’re a junkie. You can’t be surprised your dealer wants favors in return for his product.”

I didn’t respond. I never asked for drugs, never wanted Madden to touch me, never gave him permission to invade my body or to let anyone else. None of that mattered. I was owned by the cartel.

“Thank you,” I said. “For last night. I don’t know what Madden had planned for me, but you saved me.”

He rested his forearms on his knees with his wrists bent and his hands hanging limp. “I’m not here to save you. I’m going to use you to kill Kyng.”

I lowered my knees. “You can’t.”

“He’ll be happy to learn you care so much.” He chuckled as he stood. “That is, if I let him find you.”

My jaw tightened as I tried to stand. “Maybe I don’t want to be found.”

He closed the space between us, and his breath was warm on my face. “The choice is no longer yours.”

“The choice has never been mine.” I couldn’t escape Madden. I’d made a mistake. At the time, I’d thought Madden was my protection. Instead, he was my destruction. “I don’t know why you think I’m important to Madden because I’m not.”

“I’ve watched you for weeks. You’re at his side, you pimp his product and suck his dick.”

“You’ve watched me?” I hated the idea of him seeing me with Madden.

“Every. Fucking. Day.” His voice was whisper soft. “You learn about a person, what they like or don’t like. I know you like strawberries on your salad and that you pick off the croutons and save them to eat last.”

The rough timbre of his voice pooled warmth in my belly. I should be scared of his intentions. But I was drawn to him in the club in ways that had nothing to do with being high because I was sober now, and inside, I was sinking into the darkness of his tone.

“You learn their triggers, and how to make them snap.” He breathed me in. “I know the scent of your perfume that you spritz between your legs...for him.” His nostrils flared. “And after last night, I know the sweet scent of your arousal.”

I lifted my gaze to his. “I’m sorry.”

He towered over me. Heat from his body radiated into me. Even the air around him was soaked with his citrus scent.

“You’ll need to be more specific. Your list of transgressions is as long as mine, but I’m not apologizing for my sins. I’m not looking for absolution. Just retribution.”

“I haven’t done anything to you,” I whispered, fearing even my words could set him off. He’d stalked me.

His gaze narrowed on me. “Then don’t apologize.”

Both a scorching lust and icy hate swirled in his eyes. Maybe he was feeling as conflicted as I was. I should be afraid, but his possessiveness had a darker craving building within me.

“I’m not responsible for Madden Kyng. I know what I am. And what I’m not. I’m not

his queen. I'm just another toy he'll play with until he tires of me or until I'm broken." I was already broken. Just the deepest cracks didn't show.

He touched my face briefly, then let his hand fall away. "Are you breakable?"

A shiver skittered over my flesh. My soul was black, and my body was fueled by poison. "I don't know."

"Maybe not by Madden, but maybe you'll break for me."

Spade

I'd made us a simple dinner of chicken soup and crackers. The can of Sprite would settle her stomach, and the sugar would help with the withdrawals. Her hand trembled as she lifted the spoon to her lips.

In the weeks I'd been lurking in her shadow, I'd fantasized about her, imagined it was my fingers wrapped around her neck as Madden held her against a wall, pushing his other hand beneath her skirt, touching her.

Always submissive in his embrace, always ready to spread her legs, always high.

Now she was here, and I still wanted my hands on her. I should want to choke her, fill her veins full of poison and punish her, but her haunting brown eyes pleaded with a part of me I'd thought died with Ella.

Her words conflicted with what I'd witnessed of her lifestyle with Kyng. But I'd been fooled before. I'd believed Ella. She'd lied, hiding her addiction until I couldn't pretend anymore.

"Are you going to tell me your name?" she asked between sips of her soup.

I'd contemplated the possibilities. I was a killer, and I didn't plan to stop. As long as dealers preyed on the vulnerable, I was going to hunt predators. The more she learned about me, the more of a liability she'd become. "You're better off not knowing."

"Because you're going to kill Madden?"

I set my spoon to the side of my soup. "I am."

She kept her gaze on her soup and nodded. "How?"

"Morbid curiosity or fear for your lover?"

She dragged her spoon through her soup. "Will he suffer?"

"I'm going to fill him so full of chemicals he'll be radioactive in the ground for a hundred fucking years."

She nibbled on a cracker. "I don't want to upset you, but you won't be able to get to him. Ayla saw you with Laf. She'll tell Madden. He knows someone is taking out his lieutenants and distributors."

"I let her live for a reason, and I left another dead reminder in his bathroom."

"There isn't a place where he's vulnerable. He's too protected, and his guards are loyal. You wouldn't get close enough, and you won't be able to tamper with his supply. Chain of custody is through his family."

I wiped my mouth on a napkin and took a sip of my water. "I need bait."

Her gaze lifted. "Then you should've taken Ayla. They've been fucking since they were teenagers, probably before that. She is the only one he truly trusts, and she

worships him. She recruits for him.”

“She was always with his general.” And I’d interrogated him. He’d never given me Nalini’s name, but he’d let me know his weakness. That was the moment I decided to take his queen. “Did Laf know she was keeping her brother company in bed?”

“Maybe. If he did, he wouldn’t have said anything or done anything about it. He wouldn’t challenge Madden. And Madden would’ve slit his throat if he’d said anything about Ayla.”

“Fuck.”

“She was only with Laf to make sure he never betrayed Madden. The soldiers fear her more than they fear Kyng.” She tucked her hair behind her ear. “I learned early on not to piss her off.”

“Are you telling me this to get revenge on her because she has the man you want?”

She pushed her soup away and folded her hands in her lap. “I do want Madden...dead.” Her gaze met mine. “I want to help you kill him.”

I chuckled and scooted away from the table.

“You need me for bait.” She stood but held onto the edge of the table.

“Yes, but you need to rest for a couple of days.” While Madden simmered with the knowledge that I had his toy.

For whatever reason, Nalini was convinced she wasn’t important to Madden. I knew better. I’d seen the possessive way he looked at her. The way he’d kept her close. But her revelations about Ayla also seemed plausible.

At the club, the guards had been more concerned with Ayla's safety than Nalini's. I hadn't expected it to be easy to isolate her, but she'd been left on the dance floor while the guard had stayed close to the blonde.

"You need to rest."

"I'm good." Nalini closed her eyes and took several deep breaths. Sweat glistened on her skin, and her lips trembled.

"No, you're not. You're crashing again." Before she passed out, I approached and wrapped my arm around her waist. "Will you let me give you another dose of the blocker?" Before, she'd been unconscious, so I hadn't given her a choice. But even if she'd protested, I wouldn't have asked for her permission. Just as she hadn't given consent for the blood draw.

She gripped my arm and shook her head.

"Why? It'll stop the pain."

"If you're giving me the choice, I'd rather suffer with the withdrawals." Her soulful eyes shimmered with unshed tears. "People make mistakes. Everything comes with a price, and mine cost me everything."

She stepped away from me, determined to stand on her own.

"I'm not going to drug you." I gently banded my fingers around her tender wrists and kept her next to me. "The injection is therapeutic. You don't have to suffer." Christ, what was I doing? I didn't need to negotiate with her. I'd taken her by force. There was no reason for her to believe anything I said to her. "You can trust me."

"I don't have to trust you. You can't kill me. I'm already dead."

Nalini

The man led me out of the kitchen. His house wasn't much of a home. There weren't any family photos or comfortable couches nestled into corners with colorful throw pillows.

The kitchen was white, brushed stainless steel and sterile. A painting of a violent ocean crashing against a lighthouse hung on the wall of a corridor leading to a steel door. He placed his hand on the digital pad. Recognizing his biometrics, the lock slid open.

"Spade," he finally said as he pulled open the door.

"I don't know what that means," I said as I crossed in front of him and entered his medical room. There was an examination table, medical supplies, computers, and machines. I snapped my gaze over my shoulder. "You really are a doctor?"

He followed me in and closed the door behind him. "My name is Eric Spade. And yes, among several others, I do have a medical degree." He pointed to the exam table.

"I don't want the injection," I said. "I hate needles."

"Sit down before you fall down." He opened cabinets and gathered supplies on a small metal tray. I'd been in this room last night. I'd been out of my mind, scared of my own body, but I remembered his touch, his scent. My tummy tumbled, sending heat lower as I recalled the way he'd crammed his fingers into me, staving off my torment.

The room swirled. Blackness encroached from my peripheral vision. I tried to suck in a breath.

“Breathe.” Suddenly, his hand was on my neck, feeling my pulse race beneath his fingertips. I lifted my face to his, and those fingers curved around my nape, and his thumb pressed against my rabbiting pulse.

A silent war waged within me. Arousal and withdrawal. Both had me riding the edge of pain. Cramps knotted in my stomach. I doubled over trying to relieve the ache. A low moan ripped from my chest. I embraced the pain even as tears filled my eyes.

“Fuck, you’re stubborn.”

I inhaled fear. “What if I can’t fight this?”

“Trust me.” He caught a tear from my cheek with his thumb.

Giving in wouldn’t mean giving up. This man offered me something I hadn’t felt in a long time. So long I barely recognized the emotion for what it was. A chance for reciprocity. A chance to take down a brutal Kyng.

For the beat of my heart, I waited. Then I decided to trust him. I was worthless high, and he was going to need my help. “I’ll trust you and hope you’ll trust me.”

Eric moved quickly and wiped my shoulder with an alcohol pad. “I’m going to put this into your deltoid muscle.” He uncapped a syringe with his teeth and pierced the skin. “It’ll help increase your dopamine production. It’s not a cure.”

I inhaled a deep breath as the pain of withdrawal softened into a dull ache and then melted into simmering warmth.

“You should rest,” he said as he disposed of the needle.

I took his hand as I slid off the exam table. I wasn’t supposed to feel a surge of heat

up my arms. My heart wasn't supposed to stutter then race as his eyes focused on my lips, then slid down my throat, to stare at my tight and achy nipples pressed against the soft cotton of his T-shirt.

Nothing about the way I was feeling was healthy. I shouldn't feel safe with a professed killer who took me at gunpoint for the purpose of using me for his crimes. Yet, something sparked between us on the dance floor that had nothing to do with his vendetta against Madden.

His touch still felt like an electrical storm of need, lighting me up with memories of last night.

Even high, the thought of another man's hands on my body roiled like acid. Yet, I burned for this man. I was no longer high, still my body reacted to him. It didn't make sense, and I didn't want it to.

I wanted to feel something besides revulsion. I wanted to feel clean. I wanted to be clean again, both inside and out. "Can I take a shower?"

Eric led me back to the bedroom and into the bathroom.

"I'll leave the door open in case you need me."

Tension thickened the air between us. A lump rose in my throat. I didn't care that everything about this was wrong. Tomorrow might never come. My life hadn't been my own for three years. This moment was mine.

The choice was mine.

I fingered the hem of his T-shirt. His gaze darkened as I lifted the soft fabric over my head. My arm dropped to my side, and the T-shirt fluttered to the floor.

“Nalini.” My name was a whispered promise of something dark and dangerous.

Madden was a monster. But Eric wasn't a hero. He'd keep me or he'd kill me. Either way, he wasn't going to let me go. He was a killer, and I was a witness.

“I need you.” Before I could take a breath, he was on me. His lips crashed against mine, his tongue speared into my mouth, conquering, claiming, devouring. He kissed me as if he sucked my soul from my body.

He gripped my skull, angling my head to plunder my mouth, tasting me with strokes of his tongue. A whimper crawled up my throat and out of my mouth as he gently bit my lip. I wanted more.

I rested my hands on his hips, then slowly trekked higher, dipping my fingers under his shirt and raking my nails along his taut abdominals. He was hard edges, a body sculpted with valleys and ridges of muscles.

He hissed as he broke the kiss and reached between us. With a tug to the drawstring, the basketball shorts slipped past my hips and pooled on the floor. His gaze followed his fingers as his knuckles traced the ridge of my collarbone, dipped into the hollow of my throat, feathered lower to the swell of my breast, and grazed across my nipple.

I sucked in a sharp breath and gripped the edge of the vanity as Eric lifted me onto the counter. He kissed me, glided his mouth along my neck, and sank his teeth into the flesh where my shoulder met my neck.

Last night, I'd been drawn to him. Now, I was on fire in ways I didn't want to understand. My thighs spread, and he stepped between them. The solid swell of his cock nestled against me. I arched, wanting to feel more of him.

“Are you high?” he asked. “Fuck. Maybe I am.” His lips were on mine again. I kissed

him back with the same fierce intensity. I wrapped my legs around his hips, my arms around his neck, and clawed at his shoulders. I couldn't get close enough.

My breasts crushed against his chest. "I'm not high," I promised. I wasn't Madden's, but I wasn't innocent either. I was an addict, and I'd lived in a haze. "I need this."

I needed to choose. If my life was over, I wanted my last thoughts to be of this man and the way he made me feel. For this moment, I was just a woman, not a toy, not property.

Eric shifted, putting a few inches between us, and ripped his shirt over his head. His touch gentled as he traced my trembling lower lip with his thumb. "There's no out for you."

"I know." I flicked my tongue against his skin. "And there's no saving you. I think you're just as fucked up as I am."

"Maybe more." He caressed my face, then ran his fingers along my throat. "You're trading one prison for another."

I swallowed against the pressure. This wasn't a prison. Eric Spade offered sanctuary. I rested my hand over his heart. Then I took his hand from my throat and dragged his palm to my heart. "I felt nothing but numb until you touched me at the club. I want to feel more."

He lifted me from the vanity. "Once I'm inside you, you'll feel me for fucking days."

My legs locked around his waist, and his hands molded to my ass. I ground my tender pussy against the heat and hardness of his cock through the denim of his jeans.

"I fuck you, you're mine." The rough edge of his voice reverberated against my skin.

“You aren’t going to let me go anyway.”

He carried me to the bed, climbed onto the mattress, and hovered over me. His fingers were like manacles on my wrists as he pinned me to the bed, bent his head, and sucked my nipple into his mouth.

“Oh my god.” I sank my teeth into my lower lip. The warmth and wetness of his mouth had my pussy weeping for more. Feral growls rolled from his chest and sent lust coiling through me, surging out to my extremities.

He released my wrists and leveraged onto outstretched arms. “There’s no god here. Nothing redeemable. Nothing worth saving.”

I fumbled with the zipper on his jeans, wedging open the fly, and pushing them over his hips. Not waiting for him to undress, I curled my fingers around his cock and poised him at the entrance to my body. “We’ll burn together.”

With a hard thrust, he speared into me. Deeper, drilling into me until his groin ground against my pubic bone. He soaked his dick in my juices.

I gasped a breath as he stretched me, filled me, and branded me with his possession.

“Fuck, you feel so good squeezing my dick.” Rearing back, he then plunged in again. Heat slipped beneath my skin, and the thin thread I held onto began to fray. I relished the weight of him. My fingers curved onto the hard flex of his buttocks, and my thighs rose higher on his flanks.

“Ah, fuck.” He cursed as he stared into my eyes. His mouth pulled into a taut line, and his jaw clenched as he fucked me into the mattress. Every thrust forced the breath from my lungs. My stomach clenched, and the black hole that had been my heart cracked and snapped in a painful revelation that I’d never been this wrought with

pleasure.

A stranger. A killer.

I held tight and let go. A cry ripped from my throat as I twisted and writhed. Violent tremors rolled through me, clamping hard to Eric's cock as he continued to fuck me through my orgasm.

"Fucking hell." He ripped from my body, threw his head back, and fisted his cock. Ropes of cum splashed my abdomen, my breasts, and trickled along his fingers. He was savagely beautiful. Full of vengeance and hate.

As he gasped for breath, he sat back on his haunches. The moment stretched between us. He'd more than fucked me, he'd funneled those dangerous desires into me. He'd twisted into something dark and possessive. He wanted what I wanted.

Silence filled the room as he tugged up his jeans, tucked his dick away, and stretched out next to me.

Muscles in my body melted into the bed. I turned to him. "I know how we can kill Madden."

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 3:41 am

Spade

I'd avoided the scrutiny of others because I was a meticulous planner. Dead bodies could stack up in the morgue as long as I avoided the complication of intimate connections. No close friends. No social outings with colleagues. I blended in. An average-looking guy who was a respected member of the community.

Taking out Madden's underlings hadn't been difficult. Their arrogance was their weakness. I'd found mine.

A beautiful junkie with haunting eyes and a darkness that matched my own.

I trailed my fingers over the soft contour of her thin arm. She curled onto her side. My cum still streaked her flesh. I palmed her ass, tugged her flush against me, and plundered her mouth with a filthy kiss.

I wanted to taste betrayal. Trusting was dangerous. But she arched into me, weakening my resolve. For months, I'd looked for an opportunity to get to Madden. Outside of gunning him down in a public display of violence, he was untouchable.

Governments couldn't take down a cartel. But perhaps this petite woman with a scorching need for penance held the key to unlock my need for retribution.

"You won't get to Madden," she said against my lips. "But I can."

I leaned up on my elbow. "You want to kill Madden?" I asked. "Why?"

“I don’t care about your reasons,” she said. “I have reasons of my own for wanting him dead.”

“You’re not a killer. All I need from you is a way in.”

“It won’t be that simple. I can give you the code to the gate, but the property is under surveillance. You don’t just need a way in, but you’ll also need a distraction.” She lifted her hand to my face. “Whether I’m there or not, I’m helping you. That makes me an accomplice.”

“I took you by force. You’re just another one of my victims.”

“Eric, I need to be there.”

“I’m trying to find a way to be the good guy here.” I didn’t want to involve her in murder, but that didn’t mean I’d let her go either.

“You are the good guy. The only good guy I’ve met in a long time.” She dropped her hand and lowered her gaze. “I met Ayla about three years ago. We’d been hanging out for a few weeks. I was a typical struggling college student, living off ramen and mac and cheese.”

I remembered those days from medical school, living on coffee, five-dollar pizzas, and sex. Everything changed when Ella needed something more to keep up with her classes. Neither of us slept much. Then she had her first overdose...

Nalini’s voice broke through my memory.

“Ayla always had money, but she never worked. She had a great apartment.”

With her fingertip, she traced the trail of hair bisecting my abdominals. The slightest

touch had my heart at a gallop. My instincts were to hold her closer, but I didn't want to disrupt her from her story.

"She promised it was a simple exchange. Spring break in Cancun with thousands of other American college students. She paid for our trip. All-inclusive. We drank on the beach, and then just before we left, we picked up several packages and mixed them in with our souvenirs. She'd made the drop before. We were cute, young, and above suspicion."

Her voice lowered.

"I didn't know she smuggled for Madden Kyng. I guess I didn't look as innocent as she thought. We were detained. I was scared. Ayla said Madden would take care of me. The way she said it, I didn't know if she meant take care of me and the drug charges or if take care of me meant something more drastic and fatal. I didn't really have a choice. Prison or Madden? Either way, I was in trouble."

"You could've been locked up for decades."

A slight shrug lifted her shoulder. "I was so stupid." A tear slipped onto her cheek. "I had no idea Madden was leader of a cartel. I should have let him kill me. Most days I know I'd be better off dead."

"Fuck." I wrapped my hand around the nape of her neck and pulled her into me. Nothing about her fit with what I'd believed about her. If everything she told me was true, she was another victim.

"I want him dead. I want him to see my eyes while your drugs twist painfully inside him." Her fingers curled into a fist against my chest. "I want to watch him die."

"You don't want that on your conscience."

She propped up, leaned over me, and rested her chin on my chest. “You don’t get to decide for me. My conscience will be clear.”

I couldn’t deny her the opportunity to face her tormentor. But her body was abused and tired from the drugs. “You need a couple of days.”

She lunged up. “No. I can’t do it anymore,” she said and pushed her hair from her face. “I don’t even know what he’s injected into me. Most of the time I’m so out of it, I barely remember what he’s done to me.” She lowered her head. “You didn’t wear a condom.”

“I ran a full scope on your bloodwork. He pumped you full of shit. Methamphetamine, MDMA, Rohypnol, but also a dozen other chemicals. Trace amounts of opioids. Weed.” I lifted her chin. “You don’t have any STD’s or other diseases, but there’s no test for birth control.”

She averted her gaze. “You don’t need to pull out next time. I can’t get pregnant. Not anymore.”

A heaviness settled over her, and she visibly swallowed. Watching the torment cross her eyes, I could taste the bitterness of her pain. “I’m sorry,” I softly said.

“Yeah, me, too.” She wiped a tear from her cheek. “So, doctor, did you perform any other procedures on me?”

“I gave you an immune booster with the first injection.”

“The injections? How long do they last?”

“Nalini, I can take care of the withdrawals, but the only way to slay your addiction is to deal with the cause.”

“You don’t know me. Maybe you don’t believe me. I know I have addictions, but I fight them every day. Madden doesn’t give me a choice. If you want him, we only have one chance.” She scooted off the bed. “To get to him, we have to go now.”

Her vehemence convinced me to listen.

My plan was to draw him out. But if she was right, Madden might not fall for the bait.

“I’m listening.” I laced my fingers with hers and led her into the bathroom for a shower. She could tell me her plan as I washed my cum from her body.

Once the water heated, Nalini stepped beneath the hot spray. She moaned and tipped her face. We were strangers, but perhaps fate had put us on a collision course, destined to meet at this moment to slay both of our dragons.

“You wanted to know how long the injection will last? The first dose lasted a few hours. The second dose may last longer since the formula is building up in your system.”

She wiped water from her face and stared into my eyes. “The only way you can even get close to him would be going to his home.”

I’d followed him for months. The man was a snake. I was a predator, stalking my prey in the open, yet I couldn’t get close enough to strike.

“We need to get into the estate, but the perimeter is heavily guarded and under surveillance.” She tasted droplets of water from her lips. “Madden is too suspicious.” She subconsciously rubbed her wrists. “There’s only one reason I’d return to him.” Her mouth softened into a small smile. “I’m an addict, and he’s my source.”

Nalini

Back in Spade's examination room, I dressed in my dirty clothes from the club. After he gave me another injection, I stood at the counter as he described the drugs. "I don't want you touching the clear nanofiber patches. If the fentanyl gets onto your skin, you will absorb it. The patch dissolves. When the body arrives at the morgue, the medical examiner isn't going to discover anything but another dead drug user. There's no trace of the patch."

"There are usually two guards at the gate."

"Nalini, everyone involved dies. No witnesses. Are you sure about this?"

"No. Yes. Maybe?"

He smiled at my answer and handed me several patches. "These are anesthetizing patches. They'll work quickly to incapacitate but won't result in death."

How was I supposed to put a patch on the guards without their knowing? I stared at the small strips.

"You don't have to do this," he said.

I slipped the patches into the front pocket of my pants. "I'll figure it out." I drew in a deep inhale and slowly exhaled my fear. "Show me how to use the fentanyl patches."

He shook his head. "I'm not going to let anything happen to you." With a palm around my neck, he pulled me closer. "Do you feel it?"

My chest was tight, my tummy tumbled, and I wondered how he could be a stranger. He was a twisting kaleidoscope of color better than any drug I'd ever taken. I wasn't

supposed to crave him. I didn't need another addiction. Yet, I couldn't resist the pull he'd had on me from that first moment. I didn't understand it. I didn't care. He felt good. Maybe this feeling would only last a moment, but I wanted him. I wanted to feel safe in his arms. Even if only while he touched me. "I feel you."

His breath warmed my lips, and then his mouth was on mine. A soft whimper slipped from my lips, and his tongue slid against mine. His hand fisted in my hair, angling my head where he needed me to devour my mouth in a hot, wet tangle of tongue and teeth. He sucked my lip, gently biting then licking his way back into my mouth.

I pressed closer, lost in the intoxication. "More." I rocked against the hard ridge of his cock pressing into my abdomen. "In case anything happens, I want to remember this."

"You're going to have a thousand more tomorrows."

"Just promise me we can have one more." I wanted a night without the specter of Madden haunting me.

Eric ran his fingers through my hair, rubbing the strands between his thumb and fingers. "You're so beautiful."

Only to someone who was as broken as I was. I hated what I'd become. When he looked at me with those blue eyes, I didn't feel like Madden's whore or a dope sick junkie. Maybe we could be broken together.

When Madden took his last breath, would I feel like a killer? "Do their deaths haunt you?"

"No. They got what they deserved and so will Madden Kyng." He released me and took a step back. "You shouldn't be in this fight, Nalini. I don't want Madden's blood

on your hands.”

“I’m not scared. My blood is already on his hands.” My body bore the bruises of his power. My veins bled from his poison, and my choice had been bent to his will. I had a mental list of justifications for killing him. “It’s my turn.”

Eric gathered supplies into a duffel bag.

“Should we wait until nightfall?” I asked and followed him from the examination room and out to the garage.

He paused at the biometric reader and placed his palm on the pad. Once the system recognized him, he pressed a series of buttons on the touch screen. “Place your hand on the pad.”

I flattened my palm and fingers on the pad. Red lights surrounded my hand and heat radiated into my skin. The system turned green.

Eric released a heavy breath. “Ready?”

He pulled open the side door of the nondescript, unmarked van, placed his bag inside, and slid it closed. “People are less observant during the day.” Then he popped open the passenger door. “You’re up front this time.”

I smiled and climbed into the seat. Once he was behind the wheel, the automatic door opened. He turned to me. “You’re the only other person with access to the house. Once inside, you’ll be safe.”

I already felt safe with him.

Eric started the van and pulled out of the garage. He drove down a long, steep

driveway. “There are sensors around the property to alert the security system if any vehicle or person breaches the perimeter. The garage will open for the van, but no other vehicle.” He shifted between watching the road and glancing at me.

I focused on the landmarks and street signs to keep my mind from spiraling into the what ifs.

“Nalini, are you listening to me?”

I snapped my gaze to Eric.

“We’ll leave the van a few houses down. The property is on the market, and it’s vacant. For the last month, I’ve used it to surveil Madden’s comings and goings.” His jaw clenched as he checked his side mirror, changed lanes, then glanced over again. “If something happens, get to the van. Get the fuck out.”

My brows pinched. “And leave you there?”

“Baby, I can’t watch you hurt.” He grazed his thumb over my cheek. “This—us—we weren’t supposed to happen. One fucking touch and you crawled under my skin.”

“One touch and you made me feel.” I lowered my head, not wanting to see disgust in his eyes. “I stopped fighting Madden on the drugs. I wanted to be numb.”

A few moments of silence stretched between us. Finally, I turned to him.

“He didn’t break you. I’m going to kill him, Nalini. You’re going to watch him break, watch him beg for his life, then watch it drain from his eyes. Your nightmare will be over.”

But would a new one take its place? I wanted Madden dead, but he wasn’t the only

one I wanted dead.

Nervous energy buzzed through me as Eric backed into the circular driveway of the vacant mansion and parked just out of view of the street. He popped open the sun visor, tucked the keys against the mirror, and closed it again.

He climbed out of the driver's seat, and I followed him into the back of the van. He squatted next to the open duffel with his forearms resting on his thighs. "You don't have to do this. It's my fight."

"Then why did you kidnap me?" I cocked a brow. "You need me, right?"

He stared into my eyes. "I need you."

His words warmed me because I could feel the heat in them. He wasn't just talking about this moment. I needed him, too. "This isn't your fight. It's our fight."

I still didn't know his reasons for wanting Madden dead. I didn't care. My reasons were enough.

"You need to give me time to take care of the guards at the gate. I'll cause a distraction to give you time to get to the house." A nervous smile found my lips. "But don't wait too long."

"I'm right behind you." He ran his fingers through my hair, gripped me tight, and pulled me into a kiss that made my toes curl and sent a riot of butterflies free inside me. "I'm like your shadow, Nalini. Even in the dark, I'm there. You just can't see me."

Tears flooded into my eyes. "Okay."

I took a fortifying breath and described the mansion. “Madden’s office is on the second floor. He’s usually at his desk during the day. A guard is always stationed outside the door.” I smiled at him. “I’m going to be throwing patches on bodies like stickers on fruit in the grocery store.”

A soft smile curled his lips as he snapped a satchel of syringes and patches over his shoulder and across his chest and stuffed a gun into the waistband of his jeans. He pulled a pair of leather gloves from the duffel and handed them to me.

I shook my head. “The guards will know something is wrong. Nothing suspicious.” I slipped off my shoes and ran my fingers through my hair, tangling the strands. The fresh injuries on my wrists would also give credibility to my story of escaping my captor.

“We’re going to be seen on the security cameras,” Eric said. “We keep them disoriented by being unpredictable. I just need inside. Once I’m in, you’ll be the distraction. In the moment it takes for someone to realize I shouldn’t be there, I’ll already have them injected.”

“What if we get caught?”

“Then the guards will take us to Kyng. Either way, he dies today. I’ll get a patch on him if it’s with my last breath.” Eric slid open the side door.

I glanced across the manicured lawns, fences, and trees. “I can do this.” Just saying the words had my stomach in knots. I was afraid to be alone with Madden.

Rocks bit into my bare feet as I crossed the property. I fisted my hands at my side to calm the trembles vibrating through me. I could do this. I imagined the scene like a movie in my mind. With each step closer to the guard station, more adrenaline fired through my veins. Breaths came fast and shallow.

I slid my hand into my pocket and carefully pulled out one of the anesthetizing patches. My heart raced so hard I had no idea how much time had passed. One of the guards noticed my approach. I crossed my arms over my chest and embraced the shivers breaking along my flesh. Because I'd gone through withdrawals enough times, I easily faked my cravings.

"Call Kyng," one guard said to the other as he rushed out of the small bulletproof glass and brick building. "She's back."

As he reached me, I collapsed into his arms. "I hurt," I whispered as I snuggled against his chest.

The guard scooped me into his arms. Feigning withdrawals from one of Madden's sex inducing drugs, I draped a limp arm over his shoulder and curled my palm around his neck. The patch made contact with his skin as he carried me into the building.

"What is that?" He shrugged to remove my hand from his neck, but with me in his arms, he couldn't pull the patch from his skin.

"I need a little something," I said. "Just to take the edge off." I opened my mouth over his neck, licking and sucking his skin.

"She's on Kyng's shit," he said as he lowered me, but I kept my arms around his neck, holding the patch to his flesh.

"Fuck," he slumped into a chair, his eyes rolled back, and his head lolled to the side.

A spark of pleasure twitched within me. How did it feel to be the one with no choice?

"Are you okay?" the other guard asked. Not me, but the slumping guard.

No, he wasn't okay. He was incapacitated. A powerful single-mindedness took root. Retaliation. I could do whatever I wanted to him. I could use his body the way mine had been abused, inject him with drugs, or get my doctor to use a scalpel to carve him into pieces.

However, I had one more task.

The other guard leaned over him and tapped his cheek. He fell out of the chair and crumbled to the floor. "What the fuck did you do to him?"

I carefully pulled another patch from my pocket. "I had to touch him." I pressed close to the second guard. "I need you, too..." I slipped my hand under his shirt. "I need you to sleep." I slapped my hand to his back, sticking the patch to his flesh between his shoulder blades.

"Bitch," he roared, spinning around, and throwing me against the wall.

Oomph. My left side crashed against the metal shelving unit, tearing a gash along my biceps. A jarring force reverberated through me. Pain exploded in my body as my bare skin raked against the metal. Red gushed from the torn flesh. I covered the wound with my palm. Blood slicked my skin and seeped between my fingers.

The guard ripped off his shirt to remove the patch, but his massive muscles kept him from reaching behind to his back. His gaze locked with mine. Veins in his thick neck swelled, and his brows cut an angry furrow into his forehead. Saliva dripped from his mouth as he crossed the room.

"Get it off." Spittle flew from his mouth.

"Go to sleep," I screamed as I scampered backward on my ass, toward the corner of the room.

“Fucking, bitch.” He gripped my hair, dragging me up to my knees.

I clawed at his arms and clutched the top of my head. Pain seared across my scalp as he yanked hard on my hair. Fear blazed through me. I had to do this. I let go with one hand, grabbed another patch from my pocket, and peeled off the backing. Shit. No. No. It stuck to my hand.

Oh god, I was going to get dosed. I ripped it off, reached over my head, and grabbed the guard’s wrist. I could only hope the medicine side was stuck to him and not me. Blood flowed down my arm and soaked into the fabric of my corset.

With my arm going numb, I continued to squeeze his wrist, and then finally, after what felt like a fucking lifetime of nightmares, monsters, and comedowns, he loosened his hold, stumbled back two steps, slammed against the door, and crashed to the ground.

Panicked, I scrambled over his body and ran toward the house. The plan was already going to shit. I was supposed to be inside when I created the distraction.

I landed with a thud against the door. Blood rubbed onto the elaborate white and gold finish.

Seconds later, a guard swung the door open. “Fuck, get her in the house,” he said to his partner. Madden always had his guards working in pairs.

“Nalini? What the fuck happened to her?” He wrapped an arm around my waist. Blood from the gash had slowed to a trickle but had smeared across my chest. Everywhere I touched left a stripe of blood, including his arm, where I pressed a drugging strip to his forearm.

“I need Madden.” I braced my hand on the wall, leaving a bloody handprint, a

crimson trail, and a collection of unconscious men for Eric to follow.

Spade

Less than two minutes in and regret had me by the balls. This was a mistake. I could feel it. Generally, I trusted my instincts, but they'd been shit since I'd become obsessed with Nalini.

And I was obsessed. I'd just let her walk through the gates of the Kyngdom. I couldn't let her take this risk. When I'd decided to take his queen, I hadn't known how soft her skin would feel beneath my fingertips or the way her eyes would plead with me to make her come.

I didn't know the way she'd affect me. I'd watched her with Kyng, hated that sick bastard could have something so beautiful. But then I was a monster, and I wanted her, too.

The woman was nothing like what I'd expected. After living under the control of a king, she should fear him. She hadn't cowered but donned armor, trusting me to inject her with my serum after Madden had spent three years pumping her full of poison and pawning her off as his whore.

Once tangled with him, she hadn't needed to go to prison. His fucking cartel had enslaved her.

And now I wanted her. I strode down the sidewalk as if I owned the fucking block.

When I'd taken her, I hadn't realized our roles would reverse. I'd wanted her for information, but she needed me. I'd shown her a way to fight back. I'd cleared her mind, at least temporarily. She had the opportunity, but did she have the strength to fight him?

My skin prickled with the bite of Laf's gun wedged in the waistband of my jeans. I wanted her to have her revenge, but no way should she be walking into Madden's fortress of horror alone. Hopefully, she was thinking clearly with the blockers, because she was in this with me. And once she had her revenge, I wasn't going to let her go.

The door to the guard shack was wedged open. One of the guards sprawled out on the ground, halfway out the door. The other was just inside.

I took in the scene all at once. Two men down. My girl was gone, but there was blood on the wall and on the floor.

She was hurt, or she'd taken justice into her own hands. "This is too easy for you," I said to the unconscious men as I grabbed a syringe, turned over his arm, and slipped the needle into his vein. They weren't dead yet, but they would be. I injected the second man and crushed the syringes under my boot.

Without waiting for their last breaths, I rushed out of the building. I needed to get to Nalini.

No way did we keep this from becoming a crime scene. With my gloved hand, I pulled the gun. Drops of blood led the way to the house.

Gravel crunched beneath my boots as I rushed to the front door. Tension slipped along my spine. My hearing tuned to the commotion on the other side of the entrance. I slowed my breathing, listening as footfalls rushed past.

"What the fuck happened to Vic?" someone yelled on the other side.

I pulled a syringe from my bag and flattened myself against the wall. The door swung open. As the guard turned, I stabbed the needle into his neck and pressed the plunger.

The toxin immediately paralyzed the vocal cords. No whisper, no gasp, just wild eyes, filling with fear as the drug spread down his throat, numbing, making it impossible to swallow.

He stumbled toward me, but I stepped back as he fell to his knees. His hands wrapped around his throat as he fought for air.

“Four minutes,” I said to him. That was how long the brain could survive without oxygen. “Make peace with your god.”

I held the gun as I entered the house. Blood splatter peppered the marble foyer. A perfect handprint marred the wall leading up to the second floor. She’d told me she’d have their blood on her hands, but nausea roiled in my gut because the blood had to be hers.

“Drop the gun.”

The voice sounded behind me. A gun pressed against the back of my head. I’d been ninety seconds behind her. Time had run out...at least for me.

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Nalini

I was petrified with fear. I was out of patches, and Eric was out of time. I'd caused a distraction. Maybe not the one I'd planned, but I had the interest of the guards focused on the blood all over the foyer. I slunk up the stairs and waited.

Eric should have been here by now. My heart beat in my chest, my head, and pounded in my ears. I slammed my fingers through my hair as my body trembled on an overload of adrenaline.

“Nalini!”

I spun at the shriek from the other side of the hall. Ayla rushed to me, wrapped her thin arms around my shoulders, and squeezed me.

She kissed me, holding me close as her hands weirdly roamed over my body, as if she were searching me. Paranoia slipped along my spine. What if I'd worn gloves or brought a weapon?

Ayla noticed everything. She'd sense my fear. I released a trembling breath and rubbed my arms, mimicking the icy chills of withdrawal.

“We were so scared we'd never see you again. Hurry. Come with me. Madden is desperate to see you. You can't imagine what it did to him to know you were gone. I mean, you left with that asshole. But I explained to Madden you were protecting me.” She gasped as she grasped my arm. “Oh my god. Did he hurt you?”

Shivers broke over my flesh. “I had to escape.”

Ayla held my hand. My feet seemed to follow even while my head screamed to run. I darted my gaze over my shoulder. Eric said he wouldn’t let anything happen to me. But I was never safe with Madden, and Ayla was dragging me toward him. Perhaps if I had more patches, I could’ve drugged him like the guards, like he’d done to me.

“What did he do to you?” Ayla asked. “How did you get away?”

“I ran. I...I, ah, got sick. I’m hurting,” I whispered. “I didn’t want to come back, but I didn’t know where else to go.”

If I acted as if I wanted to be here, she’d know something was off. I never wanted to be here but couldn’t escape either.

She paused at the door to Madden’s office. I leaned against the wall, leaving a smear of blood.

“Madden will take care of you. He always does.” She pushed the door open and ushered me inside.

I stumbled into the room. Madden stood at the window with his back to me.

“I found her,” Ayla said to Madden. “She’s dope sick. You need to give her something.”

“I’m okay.” I only needed the ruse to get past the guards. Now that I was in Madden’s lair, I needed to be smart, not high.

She wrapped her arm around me and led me to a chair. “You should sit down. You’re shaking. You must have been scared.”

“Are you still afraid, Nalini?” Madden’s cold tone sank into my bones. There was no way he could know about Eric, but maybe I hadn’t been quick enough. Maybe he knew I’d drugged the guards.

“You’re safe now.” Ayla stood next to Madden but kept her gaze on me. “The guards captured an intruder. They have him detained. I think it might be the guy from the club. The guy who killed Laf. At least, I think it is. I only saw him on the security footage, and I was high at the club, but I remember the way he walked. He must have followed you here.”

Oh please, no. This wasn’t part of the plan. But maybe it didn’t matter. Eric understood we’d be seen on the security cameras. A violent shudder ripped through me, and a spike of fear pierced my resolve. They had Eric.

If I pleaded with Madden, I’d convince him I wanted to be here, not that he would let me go, and I’d only be playing into his twisted sickness.

He was going to hurt Eric.

Madden’s shoulders stiffened as he spoke to Ayla. “Now that Nalini is safely here, have one of the guards bring the intruder to me.” He slid his hands into the front pockets of his trousers. “I need a moment alone with Nalini.”

She squeezed my hand. “If it’s him, I’m sure Madden will let you watch him squirm as he dies.”

A hard knot of terror lodged in my throat, fighting to escape as a moan of regret. I should have saved a patch for Madden. I should have fought back a long time ago. Then like now, war with Madden was impossible. He always won.

Once the door clicked closed, the shroud of silence fell between us like a suffocating

cloud of toxicity. I couldn't draw a breath. My chest tightened, and my belly soured.

Each step Madden made toward me rippled the air with a wave of hostility. He came around the back of my chair. His deadly hand landed on my shoulder, skated higher to my neck, and curved around my throat. He'd choked me often, but this time, there was no sexual intention behind my torture. He squeezed, his strong fingers like a vise, killing me with his bare hands.

I froze, unwilling to fight the inevitable. He'd been killing me slowly. I'd rather be dead than watch him torture Eric. And he would be brutal. Madden relished the painful wails of his adversaries begging for mercy. Power made him high, higher than any of the drugs he pushed through his drug empire.

His grip lessened as he leaned over me. Warm breath, tainted with the scent of cigarettes, caressed my flesh. The spice of his cologne surrounded me, reminding me that even his presence was enough to hold me hostage with impending dread.

"Vinny is dead. Rico is dead. Laf is dead. Tomas is dead." His voice became sharper and more dangerous with each name. "Yet, you're here. Did you betray me, Nalini, after everything I've done for you?"

I couldn't speak. My tongue thickened in my mouth.

"Did you use the only weapon you have against men? Did you fuck him? He must be weak to be brought to his knees by a tight, wet cunt. Did he promise to save you from your pathetic fucking life? You bring him into my home, to threaten my family, to what? Kill me?"

I white-knuckle gripped the arms of the chair. Tears burned in my eyes, but I couldn't find my voice to speak. My hands trembled. Fear arrested my breath. Eric was right. I wasn't ready for this.

“I’ve been inside you, bitch. Your cunt won’t save you.” He straightened, turned, and walked to his cabinet. A cabinet of horrors that promised a slippery slide into hell.

Sweat soaked my flesh. My gut clenched, my mouth salivated, and my veins sang with the memory of what was to come. Goosebumps crawled over my arms, tickling my veins. Or maybe the bumps were more like ants under my skin, creating an itch only a chemical high could scratch. Heat radiated through my limbs, but my mind was shattering. I ached, even my teeth hurt. “Oh, god.”

“Once I’m done with you, there won’t be anything left for your savior.”

Maybe I was stupidly hoping Eric would save me. I didn’t want to be me anymore. The girl I’d been before Madden, before drugs, no longer existed. But I could be someone else, someone who had no past.

The crush of rocks sent flares of anticipation into my blood. I hated that I could taste what he wanted to give me. The high, the euphoria of forgetting who I was...forgetting what I’d become.

But I didn’t want to forget Eric. He needed my help. Madden was going to send me back into the darkness when I’d barely glimpsed the possibility of light with a stranger. Maybe the blocker would help mask the effects, but I didn’t want to take the chance.

I cast a quick glance over my shoulder. Madden focused on melting the drug. I could run, but nothing had changed. Madden still had my freedom in his hands, and now, he didn’t just have me. He had Eric.

I didn’t have a weapon. There was no way to escape, and Ayla would return with Eric. I needed something, anything, to keep him from getting me high. Not that it was sharp like a knife, or deadly like a gun, but there was a pencil resting on top of his

desk.

Madden only did his books with a pencil. Laundering his drug money through legitimate business meant adjusting numbers. What if I stabbed him and the pencil broke? I would be dead two minutes from now after he snapped my neck. The only way would be to hit him somewhere vulnerable. I could jam it into his eye or his ear. He wouldn't be dead, but I'd be able to run.

I needed to wait until Eric was in the room. I couldn't abandon him to the same misery he tried to break me free from. I just needed a little good luck for once in my life. Maybe this could be twice in my life because Eric taking me from the club was the first good thing that had happened to me. Maybe ever.

Holy shit. Madden focused on loading the syringe. If I moved, he'd see me. I slid forward on the chair.

Madden shifted his gaze from me to the melted drug. "I should make you suffer, but I want you to enjoy your captor's demise." He tapped the syringe with his fingernail. "I admit, this situation had me unnerved. I didn't understand why he'd come after you, not if he wanted to get to me."

I stood and faced Madden with his desk behind me. I took a step back, grabbed the pencil, and flattened it beneath my palm on my thigh. "Whatever you gave me at the club was too strong. I don't remember much after he took me. I wasn't with him long enough to know what he wanted."

He paused, his gaze narrowed, and a muscle clenched in his jaw. "Sit down."

I carefully angled my body and sank into the chair, tucking the pencil under my thigh. He approached with the syringe in his hand.

“Don’t do this,” I whispered.

“You should be thanking me. I’m granting you leniency.”

I was motionless as he turned over my arm. Blood rushed to the surface, swelling in my veins. “I don’t want it.”

“I don’t give a fuck what you want. If he’s here for you, he’s going to see you’re nothing but a junkie looking for her next high. If he’s here thinking he can get to me through you, then he’s higher than you’re about to be.” He traced my vein. “I’ll deal with your betrayal after I’ve made your friend regret his interference in my business.”

The needle promised a moment of sweet relief and another lifetime of darkness. This time, I’d be stronger than my addiction.

My gaze lifted to Madden’s. “Don’t talk of betrayal when you betrayed me first.” Tears filled my eyes. “You’ve stolen everything from me.” My sanity, my morals, my integrity...a future with a man who would love me and want a family.

“Stolen? Don’t forget how this started. You cost me three hundred thousand in product when you fucked up. You owed me.” He leaned in closer, the needle in his hand as he followed my vein with his thumb. “You still owe me.”

An instinct to fight overwhelmed me. I lifted my thigh and curled my fingers around the pencil. I didn’t know what would happen once he hit a vein. Would the blocker keep me from getting high, or would I once again fall into the nothingness?

I didn’t want to be dead anymore. I’d had a moment with Eric. A blip in an otherwise fucked up life. He had his own demons to fight, and I was just a stranger.

Regrets still wormed through my belly, but it wasn’t just Eric. I couldn’t deny there

was a spark. I wanted the heat of his body against mine, the lick of fire across my skin, but I only had this moment left.

I couldn't wait for Eric to kill Madden, to watch him suffer from a toxic chemical death. My grip tightened on the pencil.

The prick of my skin sent a flash of fear through me. The needle slid into my vein. Madden pulled back on the plunger. A swirl of blood mixed with the clear liquid inside the syringe. For a surreal moment, I could see my future.

"No," I whispered.

Every muscle in my body clenched, my mind focused on Madden's long, strong fingers. Time slowed. My breath gusted past the rim of my lips. As if I was watching in slow motion, his thumb shifted to the plunger.

"No." My voice echoed in the room as I wrenched my arm back. Madden jerked. The needle ripped from my vein and dropped from his fingers.

Gripping the pencil, I spun, swinging my arm as hard as I could, jabbing the pencil into Madden's neck. I felt resistance for the beat of my heart, then the pencil pierced the skin and slid into Madden's throat. I yanked back hard. Blood squirted from the hole.

Madden gripped his neck and fell back on his ass. I collapsed to the carpet next to him and jammed the bloody pencil into the hollow of his neck. It cracked and snapped. He flung his arm. Pain exploded in my head as I tumbled to my side.

He rose to his feet, blood squirting from his neck with each beat of his heart. I must have hit an artery. His eyes widened as he stared at me, his bloody fingers trying to grasp the broken pencil still protruding from the base of his neck.

Light glinted off the syringe beneath the chair I'd been sitting in. I scrambled over and clutched it in my hand. This would be the last time.

"I hate you," I screamed at him. I hated myself.

Madden dropped to his knees. Air hissed from the hole in his throat. Blood gurgled and bubbled, drenching the pristine white shirt hugging his muscular torso. I crawled across the carpet with the syringe in my hand.

Madden's gaze met mine.

"You didn't just kill me. You killed any chance I have for a normal life. I know I'll go to prison for this." Until tears slipped onto my cheeks, I hadn't realized I was crying. "I'll finally sleep at night knowing you won't come to my bed because you'll be dead. Ayla will rot in prison with me. Your empire is gone." I stabbed the needle into his arm, pressed the plunger, and injected his poison into his body.

The door flung open. I darted my gaze to the intruder.

Ayla screamed when she saw Madden on the floor, covered in blood. I leaned over him, my blood-stained hands braced against his chest as I stared into his eyes and the last whistles of breath eked out of the hole in his neck.

Eric positioned behind Ayla. He had one hand on her shoulder, the other held a syringe to her neck, the needle already imbedded deep in her throat. He kicked the door closed.

"Oh god, Eric." I crawled away from Madden, pulled myself to standing, and stumbled toward them. The high of adrenaline morphed into a fluid wave of relief.

His gaze softened as he glanced from me to Madden.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered. “I messed up.”

A slow smile curled his lips. “You did great, baby. He’s dead.”

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” Fat tears rolled down Ayla’s face. “How could you? After everything he’s done for you. You fucking bitch.”

Eric propelled her farther into the room. “He was going to die today regardless. You should thank her. I would’ve made him suffer.”

I glared at Ayla. “After everything he’s done to me, he deserved to die. You should be with him. You’re just as twisted as he is. How could you help him? You know he raped me. You kept me high because you knew he was going to give me to his dealers.”

“You fucking bitch! You killed him!”

“Yes, and when he drowned in his own blood, he knew I was the one who killed him.” I turned to Eric. “You need to go. When the police come, they’re going to arrest me.”

“I hate you,” Ayla said to me.

“I don’t care.” My monster was dead.

“I loved him.” Ayla nearly crumpled to the ground, but Eric held her steady. “I can’t live without him.” Before Eric could react to stop her, she thrust her arm high, grabbed his wrist, and forced the chemical into her throat.

“Jesus fucking Christ.” He jerked the needle from her neck.

Ayla dropped to the ground, crawled across the floor, and climbed onto Madden. She kissed him, smearing her hands through the thickening blood. “I love you,” she cried.

“What was in the syringe?”

Eric stared at Ayla as she curled against Madden. Blood colored her cheeks as she rested her head on his motionless chest. Her mouth opened, but she clutched her throat. Her wild eyes turned to me.

“She’ll be dead in minutes.”

“She looks like she’s in pain.”

Ayla’s hands curled into fists. Drool leaked from the corners of her mouth as she tried to breathe.

“She is.” His voice was cold and final.

I wanted to care, but I couldn’t see past my anger. Eric wrapped his strong arms around my shoulders and pulled me into his solid chest. Muscles flexed beneath my cheek. His hand slipped under the fall of my hair and his fingertips slid along the nape of my neck.

I sagged against him and lifted my face to his. Those ice-blue eyes stared into mine. Then he pressed his soft lips against my forehead. His kiss feathered across my flesh. Warmth bloomed in my core. This was a man that fairytales were made of. A man who slayed dragons and rescued the princess.

But I was the poison apple. I gripped his shirt, the scent of his cologne seeping into me. Tears filled my eyes as I convinced my heart to let go of the dream that I could have someone like Eric care about me. “You need to go.”

“Not yet.” His knuckles grazed along my cheek. “Everyone isn’t dead.”

“It’s too late. The police will know Madden was murdered.” My tummy tumbled when I thought of the trail of evidence I’d left. “And I made a mess of the guards at the gate.” An incredulous laugh bubbled out of my throat. “I’m not very good at killing.”

“You killed Kyng with a pencil. I think that puts you on a level with assassins from the movies.”

I ran my hands across his cabled abdominals and over his sculpted chest, feeling the hard beat of his heart beneath my palms. Taking a step back pained my heart, but I wouldn’t bring him down with me. “You can’t cover this up.”

“Don’t worry. This is a drug crime.”

I stared at the blood on my hands. Red rimmed my fingernails and soaked into my pores. “Police are going to investigate. My fingerprints are throughout the house.” I’d even left bloody handprints on the walls. “My DNA is all over Madden.”

He gently raked his fingers through the hair at my temple. “They’ll have hundreds of prints and DNA. Unless you’re in the system, they won’t know who you are. Just never get your ancestry charted. That’s how they found the Golden State Killer.”

I stared at Ayla. Because of her, I didn’t need a DNA ancestry database. “I have a warrant out for my arrest. Madden had it buried, but he made sure I understood that he controlled my freedom. With him gone, there won’t be a way to protect me from facing the drug charges against me.”

Eric was quiet. I lifted my gaze to his.

“Trust me, Nalini. I can keep you safe.”

Spade

Nalini trembled against me.

“So fucking brave.” I spoke against her hair as she fit perfectly against me with her arms around my waist and her head tucked under my chin. I slid my hand along the ladder of her spine, pressing her closer, crushing her tits against my chest, feeling her hard nipples like diamonds.

Her grip eased, and her hands drifted onto my hips. “I killed him.”

“You did, baby.”

“I’m not his whore anymore.”

In the club, her eyes had been vacant and lifeless, blown with drugs. Now, when she stared at me, those same eyes darkened with a heat that simmered the same in me. A chaotic madness. “You never were.”

Long lashes lowered, and when she lifted them again, her eyes glistened with a shimmer of moisture.

“You’ve done enough,” I said to her. “I can finish.” I rubbed a smudge of blood from her cheek. “We don’t have much time. But we can’t be on the street covered in blood. Wash off and change into something casual.”

“Jeans and a T-shirt or sweats and a tank?”

“Yeah. Either one. This is it. When we walk away, you’re leaving Nalini here. Take

nothing from your room. Not your purse or your ID. Leave everything.”

A flash of concern crossed her face. Then her shoulders relaxed, and the tension seemed to drain from her body. A shaky breath ghosted over her lips. “I trust you, but I can’t...I can’t let you go to prison for me.”

The corner of my mouth twitched with a smile. “Trust me. I’m not going to get caught.”

And I wasn’t letting her go. I’d warned her she was trading one prison for another. Only with me, she’d be safe. A gilded cage, but still a cage. The perfect place for a broken bird, too damaged to fly free.

She seemed to accept that the decision wasn’t hers. “Okay. What about the security cameras?” She pushed her hair from her face. “I don’t know how to erase the footage, and there won’t be anyone to torture into helping us. Vic is head of security.” She chewed her bottom lip. “I slapped a patch on him first.” She glanced at Ayla. “And she can’t help us now.”

Ayla had the same drug combination in her as the guards downstairs. Her death would be ruled a drug overdose. There was nothing I could do about Madden. The pencil jammed into his neck was a clear indication foul play was involved, but that didn’t mean the evidence needed to point to the petite woman next to me.

Blood stained her hands. At first, I hadn’t noticed the gash on her arm because of the amount of Madden’s blood covering her arms, face, and chest. Fuck. She’d already been through hell, and I’d failed her, too. She’d had to face Madden alone because I’d been careless and momentarily lost the upper hand.

“I’ll take care of the surveillance system.” I assumed Madden had a CCTC system recorded to a local server. He wouldn’t want the police to have the ability to

investigate his illegal activities. If I couldn't get to the SSDs, I'd take the whole fucking computer system.

"We need to split up," she said. "I'll get changed while you take care of the system. I can be downstairs in five minutes."

"I don't know if the house is secure."

"Madden has guns," she said and rushed to the cabinet against the far wall. She stilled, her spine became rigid, and her small hands curled into fists.

I crossed the room. Drug paraphernalia littered the countertop. Needles, spoons, torches, and filters.

"I'm an addict." Her voice was soft. "I can taste the high. I crave it as much as I hate it." Tears slipped from her eyes.

I cupped her cheeks, catching her tears with my thumbs. "Nalini is dead now. Leave her here."

She nodded, turned away from me, and unlocked a hidden compartment in the cabinet. The door sprang open revealing several handguns and ammunition. She hesitantly lifted the small, black handgun.

"Do you know how to use it?" I took the gun from her, checked the chamber and the magazine, then handed it back to her. I covered her hand with mine, braced the handle in her palm, and aimed the gun toward an invisible target. "Firm grip on the handle, soft touch on the trigger."

"I know enough to aim and pull the trigger. Five minutes," she repeated, holding the gun close to her side. "The security room is downstairs. There's a hidden door next to

the grandfather clock. Run your fingers along the molding. You'll feel a slide latch that opens the door."

"Got it." I grabbed the other gun.

I'd fucked up when I'd entered the house. I'd seen the blood, and I'd envisioned the worst possible scenario. Fear had festered in my gut, boiling into a white-hot rage. If Nalini was hurt, if they put their fucking hands on her again, I'd burn the house to the ground.

She was mine now. The guard had disarmed me, but he'd failed to understand I was more deadly with my satchel. I was fighting for her. With my hands free, I'd shoved a needle between his ribs. While he gagged on his tongue, Ayla made the unfortunate decision to threaten me with Nalini.

I didn't enjoy killing women, but I was glad the bitch was dead. How many other girls had she befriended to their detriment? Perhaps Ella had been another one of her victims.

"Eric?"

I lifted my gaze from checking the rounds in the magazine. Words seem to stick in her throat. She swallowed.

I pressed my lips to her forehead. "Don't worry, baby. I've got you now." I opened the door of the office.

Nalini sucked in a sharp breath. Two additional guards slumped against the wall. Blank eyes stared straight ahead. Drool trickled from the guard's mouth, and the pungent scent of urine tinted the air.

“There are no innocents here,” I said to her.

“I know. Drug dealers aren’t the only ones who deserve to die.” She glared at the bigger of the two dead guards. “Dominic. He was Madden’s enforcer. He used him to make sure I stayed compliant.” Her voice softened. “He broke me. Yesterday, I was supposed to be his birthday present. If I hadn’t been so high, I would have slit my wrists before I let him touch me again.”

I leaned into her and whispered against her ear. Her silky hair tickled my lips, and her scent slipped under my skin. “The injection I gave him paralyzes his ability to move. He suffered.”

“Good.”

I glanced in both directions, hyperaware of every creak of the flooring, every whisper of disturbed air. “No witnesses,” I said to her. No one was going to be able to threaten her again.

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Spade

Nalini stood next to me in a pair of leggings. An oversized hoodie drowned her small frame, but it hid the cut and bruises on her body. I pulled off my gloves and stuffed them into my satchel.

“I brought you a shirt, too.” She handed me a gray T-shirt to replace the blood-smeared one I wore.

I quickly changed, balled my shirt, and crammed it into the satchel as well.

“Let’s go.” I held my hand out to her. Without hesitation, she slid her palm along mine and laced our fingers. I squeezed her hand as we stepped over the dead guard on the porch.

I could feel her gaze on me as we walked down the drive. Her fingers tightened on mine as we passed the open door. She stumbled. I wrapped my arm around her waist and hugged her close to my body.

Both guards were dead.

“Oh my god. Did I kill them, too?”

I continued walking with her tucked close to my side. “No. I did.”

“What happens now?” she asked as we approached the van. Worry clouded her eyes. Madden had put her through hell. But he hadn’t turned her into a killer. I’d done that.

I'd given her back her power only to be the next man to take it from her.

Lowering my head, I inhaled her breath and touched my lips to hers. She whimpered, and I deepened the kiss, splitting her lips and tasting her tongue. I wanted to take care of her, but fuck me, I wanted it to be her choice.

I tightened my hold on her, running my hand over the curve of her hips. Heat slipped along my spine, sizzled into my groin, and warmed my balls. The slow stretch of my cock kicked behind the fly of my jeans. I pulled her closer, grinding against her.

This was what she'd been doing to me since the first time I saw her with Kyng. Only then lust and jealousy had mixed into a volatile cocktail of rage. I hated that I wanted her. And I fucking hated that Madden had her.

Now that I knew the truth about her, I didn't want to be another man who wanted between her thighs...who only wanted between her thighs. I gripped her skull, tangled my fingers in her hair, and forced her wild eyes, flashing with fear, to mine. "Fuck, I'm sorry for what I want to do to you."

She quivered beneath my hands. "Are you going to kill me now?"

I stilled, the gravity of her softly spoken words slamming into me with the force of a nuclear explosion. There was no trust between us, but now we had a shared secret. I had control over her in much the same way Madden had.

"No, I don't want to kill you." I trailed my fingers along her neck. "You're under my skin. I shouldn't want you, not like this. I'm fucking high on power. I want to force you into the back of my van, strip you out of those leggings, fuck you hard, and fill you full of cum."

She swallowed, slightly swaying on her feet.

“I made it clear. You don’t get the choice to walk away. His prison for mine.” Where my hands would be on her ass and my name would be on her lips, begging me to make her come. “Fuck, but I want you to choose to stay with me. And I want you to kill every one of those bastards that put their hands on you. I don’t want to be one of them, but I don’t know how I let you go.”

“Then don’t let me go.” She lifted onto her tiptoes and crashed her mouth into mine. Her kiss was fire, deliciously wet with soft lips and a touch of tongue. Lips meshed.

Like the strike of a match, heat flared between us. I yanked on her hair, holding her hostage as I ate her mouth, hard, aggressive, and consuming. I banded my arm around her and anchored her against me. She gripped my shoulders, and her hips rolled against my dick.

“Get in the van, or I’m going to fuck you in front of the neighbors.” I reached behind her, slid open the side door, and backed her into the cargo section.

Nalini scrambled inside, and I slammed the door closed. I threw off the satchel, and then I was on her, sliding under her shirt, and filling my hand with her tit. I claimed her mouth again, kissing her with tongue, teeth, and bad intentions.

“Stop thinking. You’re not like them.” Her fingers fumbled with the snap on my jeans. “I’m broken. But your pieces are just as fucked up and jagged. Don’t let me go,” she said as she curled her fingers around my neck and licked her way into my mouth, hot, wet, and obscene.

“Don’t try to leave.” I fucked her with my tongue, thrusting into her mouth, as I jerked on her leggings.

She whimpered, breaking the kiss, and pushing her leggings and panties over her hips. She toed off her sneakers and finished stripping off her leggings. “I have nowhere to go.”

The words should have cut deep. She was desperate, wrecked, and alone.

And mine.

I lifted my shirt over my head, pushed my jeans to my thighs, and sat on the single bench seat covering the wheel well in the cargo space of the van. Nalini straddled my lap, wrapped her fingers around the thick base of my dick, pointed the shaft upwards, and slowly sank onto my length. A contented sigh wisped past her slightly parted lips.

“Ah, fuck.” Wet heat surrounded my cock as her pussy stretched, squeezing me, melting against me as I continued to slide inside her.

“Feels so good.” Her forehead rested against mine as we both sat motionless. I inhaled her exhale. She held me inside her, breathing, waiting for her body to adjust to my size as I split her open.

“Fuck me, Nalini.” I wanted to be the only thought in her mind, wanted her to crave me the way she’d craved her next high.

She ripped her shirt over her head and dropped it to the ground. For a moment, I could only stare at her. Crusted blood covered her arm. Bruises turned her skin purple and red, yet she was beautiful. Pretty deadly.

All that long, dark hair fell around her shoulders as her back arched and she clung to my shoulders. I followed the soft curves of her neck, first with my eyes and then with my fingertips. She was lust and temptation from the swell of her breasts to the narrow taper of her ribs. My hands rode the flair of her hips as she rocked on my lap.

With a thrust of my hips, I forced my cock deep, so deep the head pressed to her cervix. She winced, but a lustful moan rolled from her chest.

I sat up straighter, flexed my buttocks, driving my cock deeper, and wrapped my arm

around her ribcage, bracing my palm on her back. I reached between her legs and grazed a finger along her clit.

“Oh, god.” She bounced on my cock, her thighs trembling, rising and slamming down.

“That’s it, baby. Come all over my cock.”

Her nails cut half-moons into my flesh. Her bare pussy split open, creaming on every slide inside her.

“Eric.” She moaned my name as she fell, breaking apart in my arms. Her climax was a breathtaking display of tears, gasps, and soulful whimpers. I felt every fluttering pulse of her release.

A storm of filthy depravity. Juices eased my slide into her. Her tits bounced in front of me. With my hands at her back, she trusted me to hold onto her as she lost herself in the euphoria of coming on my cock.

I kissed her, ran my hands from her hips, into the dip of her small waist, and over the ridges of her ribs. I covered her tits with my palms and pinched her nipples into hard, perfect, little stones.

I ate her mouth as I drove deep inside her. Energy sizzled along my spine, my skin electrified, and pressure built in my balls. With her feet on the floor, she used her legs to lift and lower on my cock, riding me hard, and grinding her clit against my groin.

“First one was yours. This one is mine.” I pounded up inside her, forcing her hard onto my dick, sliding into her wet walls, feeling nothing but pleasure. Skin to skin.

“Don’t stop, Eric. Don’t let me go,” she whispered again. And then she kissed me, claiming me with her mouth and her hands. She came hard for the second time, her

pussy gloving tight to my dick as I railed into her body, bucking her on my lap.

A flare of heat burned through every nerve. My mind numbed, and muscles strained as I erupted. I dug my fingers into her ass and anchored her against my groin.

I growled and sucked on her neck, tasting the salty sweetness of sweat and woman. My woman. Hot spurts of cum shot through my cock. She was wet before, but now there was no friction as I glided in and out of her. I fucked her through my orgasm. I fucked her through my guilt. I fucked her like she was mine.

I fucked her until there was nothing between where I ended and she began. Her breasts crushed against my chest. I held her tight and breathed deeply. I fucked her, showing her that she was safe with me.

She collapsed against my chest, her head rested on my shoulder, and her arms draped around my neck. The scent of sex surrounded me, and I held her, feeling her heartbeat pounding in tandem with mine.

I combed my fingers through her hair. She lifted her face. Tears stained her cheeks and lit her eyes like glass, mirroring everything raging deep in my core.

A slow smile tilted her lips. “Are you ready to take me home?”

* * *

The neighborhood was quiet as we drove away. Nalini stared out the window. “Are you worried?” she asked.

When I was quiet, she pivoted on the passenger seat, turning toward me.

“I mean, this didn’t go the way we hoped. The police will know everyone was murdered.” She fidgeted with her hands resting in her lap. “If they somehow know

where I am, I'll be arrested." She sank her teeth into her bottom lip. "It'll kill me if this comes back on you."

"This is all on me. Not you. I did this." I reached over and lifted her hand into mine. "No one will ever find Nalini. She's gone." I shifted my gaze to the road, then glanced at her again. "You need to change your name. You can't spend your life never leaving the house. I want you with me."

"It's hard to think about the future when you're an addict. I was always going to be owned by Madden Kyng."

I laced our fingers. "I want to take care of you. I can protect you, give you the security of knowing nothing—and no one—can get to you, but we need to trust each other." I took a left, then turned back to her. "Are we going to do this? You and me. We live together. I tell you my secrets." She'd already shared hers. "I fuck you every night."

Her lips twitched with a smile. "Or I fuck you."

"I'm willing to negotiate the terms." I caressed her knuckles with my thumb. "I promise, no one will ever suspect you of what happened today." I stared hard into her eyes. "I don't make promises I can't keep."

She clasped my hand between both of hers. "I want you to choose a name for me."

I'd taken a queen to destroy a king. I'd fallen to my knees for her. "Reine." Queen .
"Mrs. Reine Spade."

Her brows furrowed. "Mrs.?"

"No one will ever question you as my wife. You'll own me. But nothing will be on paper. No legal ties for you to get caught up in."

“Dr. Eric Spade? Do you work at the hospital, or do you have a private practice?”

“Neither.” My phone rang from the cargo area of the van. My heart skipped a beat. No one ever called, except work. No friends or family. I preferred not to socialize. The phone continued to ring. A call I’d hoped would come in after I dropped her off at home.

Reine climbed out of the passenger seat, found the phone, and handed it to me.

I tapped on the green button. “Spade.”

Reine slid back into her seat and buckled her seatbelt.

“Sorry to wreck your day,” the voice on the other end stated. “You’re about to have a busy night.”

“Yeah, that was already my plan, but I’m sure she’ll understand.”

“Well, we need you.”

“Text me the address.” This part of my work was the most critical. And I was the best at what I did.

I disconnected the call, turned the van around, and headed in the opposite direction.

“Is everything okay?” Reine asked.

“I’d hoped I wouldn’t have to work today.” I’d hoped for a little more time.

“Is someone sick?”

“I’m not that kind of doctor.”

We drove for a few minutes. When I turned into a familiar neighborhood, Reine's spine stiffened. Her wild gaze darted from the scene in front of us to me.

"What are we doing here?" She had one hand on the passenger window and one gripping the seat bottom.

Police cars blocked the road. The uniformed officer waved me through.

"Eric." She could barely speak through her labored breaths. "Why are you bringing me here?"

"Reine, look at me."

She snapped her head around. Her eyes widened, flooding with tears.

"I promised I could make this all go away, and I can. Trust me." I pulled up to the gate at Madden's fortress and rolled down my window to speak to the officer.

"Hey, Doc." He gave Reine a half smile. "Sorry to ruin your night," he said to both me and Reine.

"What do we have?" I asked.

He took off his cap and ran his fingers through his hair. "It's a mess. You're going to be here for a while."

I nodded, rolled up my window, and headed up the driveway.

"Eric, we can't be here. I'm scared. What if someone recognizes me?"

"People see what they want to see." Without makeup and with her hair natural and soft around her shoulders, she looked nothing like the woman from the club. "Don't

worry. No one is going to connect you to Madden Kyng.”

“How can you be sure?”

“There is a reason I’ll never be caught.” I pulled up to the house, parked, and turned to Reine. “There’s a reason I know I’ll always be able to keep you safe.” I leaned into her and ghosted a kiss against her lips. “And there’s a reason I kill with chemicals, and all the deaths are ruled accidental overdoses.” With our lips still touching, sharing breath, feeling her fear in the tremble of her mouth, hoping she could feel the certainty in mine, I whispered to her, “I’m the medical examiner.”

Dear Reader,

Thank you for reading *Pretty Deadly*. If you enjoyed the story, please consider leaving a review.