



# Red Lace Manor

**Author:** *Erin Mersey*

**Category:** Dark Erotica

**Description:** Four masked men—One sinister game.

If I survive until morning, I'll be ten million dollars richer.

The only problem is these men don't just want my life—they want everything.

They need to break me, to own me, to ruin me in ways I've only dreamed about.

I thought making it until morning would be a piece of cake, but what if their game doesn't end at sunrise?

**Total Pages (Source):** 19

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:12 am*

Seth

Once every Lunar Cycle, a woman must die. It is not written in stone, but has become the way we live—whether or not we want it.

And, God help us, sometimes we wanted it.

The woman underneath Ronan struggled, her screams echoing through the high walls of the library, my sanctum. My alter. Where all the good girls came to die .

When we'd laid out the rules for tonight, I promised not to touch her. The game thrilled me, but after nearly a decade of slaughter, it had lost its luster. Everything was too predictable.

We always armed our playthings: gave them maps of the manor, weapons, a backpack with everything they'd need to survive until sunrise. That way they could claim their prize—ten million dollars in cold, hard cash. But, they never made it till morning. Not usually, anyway.

About half came close, but it always ended the same.

We'd fuck them so hard that they broke beneath us, and butcher them as if they were never human to begin with. After all, that was what we were trained to do.

The moonlight dripping through the floor-to-ceiling windows illuminated Ronan's well-muscled back.

His tanned skin is turned silver in the light, leaving the dark tattoos to pop as he arched his back and drew the knife over his head.

The blade glints, and the girl—Elizabeth, maybe—screams, begging for mercy as if that was on tonight's menu.

With one final, desperate cry from the woman, the knife slammed down.

Once.

Twice.

On the third contact, her blood sprayed like paint from an aerosol can, coating my desk and chair.

Ronan must've hit an artery, but that didn't stop him, not really.

His primal groan fills the air as he yanks the blade down.

Bird-like bones snap with his effort as he carves a gaping hole into the maiden's chest. Once he's deemed she's had enough, he stands, accidentally jostling the body as he does.

Organs pour onto the ground like leftover spaghetti spilled from a pot, pooling on my floors in a sanguine mess.

My nose wrinkled, and without looking, I knew Ronan could feel my disgust.

"What?" he challenged, tipping his deer skull mask back just enough to expose his face. "She told me to rearrange her guts, and I did."

His green eyes sparkled with amusement, and while I know that tragic excuse for a joke would have earned a chuckle from Cassian, I'm less than impressed.

A sigh hollows my chest as I slip my own mask, an all black, plague doctor-esque accessory, off my head. The chill of the room met the sweat collecting on my cheeks, and I suppressed a shiver.

"If you want to be so sloppy, you could at least finish the job in your domain." I extend an arm and point a finger out the window.

Just beyond the glass lay a seemingly endless forest. On the outskirts, there was a small, rundown chapel, but our toys never seemed to make it that far, not that they needed to.

"Well, if you wanted it neat, you could kill the broads on your own." He scoffed, running a hand over his face.

I knew he intended to scratch himself, as the masks get rather itchy after a night of play, but all he does is drag her blood across his skin. It's all I can do not to stare at the ruby streaks.

I glanced back at Elizabeth's body. The blood pooled below her had traveled up, turning her golden blonde hair into an ugly shade of auburn. The room was silent, except for Ronan's attempts to catch his breath. He's a monster with a hard cock, nothing more, nothing less.

My gaze shifts up, and I cross my arms behind my back. "Gather the others and meet me in the dining area. We have much to discuss."

Ronan tipped his head to the side like a confused puppy. "About what?"

His question is almost laughable, seeing as we have this conversation after every game. My boots click on the polished floors as I step over the cadaver and open the top drawer on my desk.

I flip through the accordion of manila folders, not looking for anyone in particular. My fingers pause somewhere in the middle, and I pluck the file out without a second thought. Dropping it on my desk, I take a deep breath before flipping the folder open.

On the first page is a photo and a name. A wicked smile crosses my face as my finger slips along the glossy material of the photograph, tracing our next victim's features as if this is my only chance to memorize them.

“Lux Rhodes.”

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:12 am*

Lux

My brain throbbed as if being rhythmically smashed against the wall of my skull. My mouth was dry, as if someone had shoved a fistful of sand between my lips and said good enough. Slowly, I opened my eyes, propping myself up to look around.

The room I was in was far nicer than my crummy studio apartment.

The sheets were made of silk—real silk, not the cheap stuff you find on fast fashion websites—and the bed was like being enveloped in a cloud. Despite the voice in the back of my head screaming that this wasn't right, my first instinct was to sink deeper into the mattress.

For the past two years, I'd been working sixty plus hours a week at a local dive bar. The days were long, and the money wasn't great, but it kept a roof over my head—even if just barely.

Maybe I'd convinced a rich guy to bring me home during my shift last night... and, if that were the case, I better make the most of a bad situation.

Once again, my eyes fluttered shut. I wiggled under the downy comforter as the weight of sleep threatened to pull me under. But, as my fingers brushed against my side, I froze.

Without thinking, I yanked the covers off and looked down at my body.

My curves were barely covered in a red lace slip dress.

The thin fabric rode up my thick thighs with every movement, pulling so high I might as well have been naked from the waist down.

Intricate floral embroidery covered my chest.

The dress, while revealing, was beautiful, and maybe even a little expensive. But, most importantly, it was not mine.

The room spun as I forced myself to sit up and swing my legs over the side of the bed. My bare feet stuck to the cold hardwood floor. Panic prickled along my spine as I realized my purse was nowhere in sight.

“Shit,” I whispered, now taking the time to fully look around the room.

The space is like something taken from the Victorian era.

Ornate wall paper and velvet curtains that barely covered the large windows, and the furniture felt like it belonged in a museum, not used.

Above me, an unlit crystal chandelier hung.

Wind blew from an unspecified location, causing the glass to brush against itself.

The hairs on my neck stood on end when I noticed the vanity in the corner. The dusty, cracked mirror seemed out of place in a room as nice as this. But, something in the imperfection made me feel more at ease.

The floor creaked as I tiptoed toward it, and I silently swore, hoping no one heard. I didn't know why I felt like I was being watched, but I couldn't shake the idea I wasn't alone. All I wanted to do was figure out where the hell I was and run as far away from here as possible.

On the edge of the vanity sat a folded piece of ivory stationery branded with my name. My fingers trembled, but against my better judgment, I picked it up.

The paper nearly fell open in my hands. I wasn't sure what I expected to see inside. Maybe a note explaining where I was? Or, perhaps a threat from someone who lured me here?

Instead, all it said was 'Welcome to The Game'.

"What game?" I whispered as if the walls might answer me.

But, no such luck.

I flipped the note over a few times, searching for a signature, or even rules, but there's nothing of the sort. Clutching the note to my chest, I looked around once more.

My eyes settled on a heavy-looking door with a wrought iron handle. It didn't look very functional, but it was worth a shot. Silently, I moved toward it, taking the cold metal in my hand and jiggling it.

But, no matter how hard I tried, the door wouldn't budge.

Terror blurred my thoughts, leaving me to pound on the wood with a closed fist.

"Hello!" I called. "What's going on? I know you're out there!"

I did, in fact, not know if anyone was out there, but the clicking of a lock confirmed my suspicion. The door groaned open just an inch, and I jumped back out of instinct.

My first thought was to look for something sharp to defend myself, but I stayed



rooted in place. A hand poked through the space, a robe dangling from its grasp.

“Please make sure you’re decent before I come in. You’re a lady.” The voice was smooth and deep, the faintest hint of an accent I couldn’t place decorated the words.

“I—What?”

The hand shook the garment at me. “You’re a woman, Lux, and I’m a man. Please ensure you’re properly covered before I come in. It’d be impolite for me to barge in on you.”

I hesitated to grab the blood-red velvet from the outstretched appendage. But, another nondescript wind blew through the room, nearly causing my teeth to chatter, leaving me to snatch it away.

I slipped the robe over my shoulders. It’s heavier than it looked. I was unsure what the material is—maybe velvet—but it glided across my skin like butter. Once it was on, I tied the belt and secured it, making sure I was as covered as possible.

“I’m decent.” My voice shook as I spoke, but I was determined to keep the nerves clawing up my throat at bay.

The door widened, this time silently, and in steps what I assumed to be a man.

He was impossibly tall, so much so that he had to duck when entering.

His frame completely hid the door behind him, as if telling me don’t even think about it.

He was clothed nearly head to toe in a black jacket that fit too perfectly to be off-the-rack.

The whole thing might be kind of suave, if it weren't for the mask.

I recognized the style from internet thirst traps, but something about the long beak of the Plague Doctor was unnerving.

Silver etches crawl across the black leather, drawing my eyes to his cheekbones rather than the sharp-looking beak.

The man shifted his head to one side, causing the light of the nearby candles to reflect off the dark lenses covering his eyes.

It was impossible to tell what he was looking at, but I could feel his gaze on me.

I clutched the fabric of my robe tighter, trying to protect myself as I envisioned what I looked like from his perspective.

Probably weak, or maybe scared. Both felt true, but I didn't want to seem helpless, especially not until I knew what was going on.

"It's nice to see that you're awake, Lux." He stepped closer, his steps all too slow. It was like he had nowhere to be, like he was used to being feared and wanted to be as non-threatening as possible.

It's not working.

My words failed me, so I pulled my shoulders back and stood tall as I watched him meander around the room.

His first stop was the vanity. He dragged his fingers across the dusty surface before lifting his head to the mirror.

I heard a brief sound of disapproval as he ran a gloved hand over the mirror.

“I could have sworn I made a note to have this glass replaced,” he murmured, seeming completely absorbed in the imperfection rather than, you know , the strange woman standing five feet behind him.

“Where am I?” The question slipped before I thought better of it.

He turned on his heels, crossing his arms behind his back before strolling to me. The heavy soles of his boots echoed off the wood, and I found myself stepping back, trying to preserve the distance between us.

He matched my strides, ending with my back against the wall as he stood unbearably close. He leaned down, leaving the tip of his beak to nearly touch my nose.

“Red Lace Manor ,” he said, as if that explained anything .

My pulse jumped to my throat, nearly choking me as I tried to heave in another breath.

“And, who are you ?” I crossed my arms over my chest, trying to hide the shaking of my hands.

Another sound of disapproval left him, and he stood straighter.

“Names aren’t really something you need,” he said.

I pushed back further into the wall, desperate for an extra inch between us, but the crown moulding in the middle bit into my spine. I fought to conceal my discomfort as the moment between us turned too silent.

I felt like an animal in the zoo being studied.

My captor cleared his throat and straightened his coat.

“If you must summon me, which I don’t believe you’ll want to, you can call me Reaper .”

My stomach bottomed out at the sound, and my mind shot to the Grim Reaper, leaving me to wonder if that’s an actual nickname, or a promise.

“W-what are you going to do to me?” My voice was soft and breathy.

Reaper turned away, arms crossed behind his back as he started to walk away.

“Come, Miss Rhodes. The others would like to meet you before the game begins .”

For safety reasons, I should probably follow him, but the fact that he knew my name kept me firmly anchored in place.

“How do you—”

“Let’s cut this conversation short.” He stopped walking and looked at me over his shoulder.

“I know everything . Your address. The way you like your coffee, typically a S’more Mocha if you’re affording yourself the luxury of a six-dollar coffee, and hidden under Vanilla-Caramel creamer if you’re trying to hide the acrid taste of the instant stuff you use to get you through the day.

” He paused as if testing to see if he was right, which, unfortunately, he was.

“I know that you cry in your car after shifts, and all your credit cards are not only maxed out, but currently delinquent in payments. To top it all off, I know you haven’t been touched by someone, man or woman, in months .

And, if you were to only consider those able to make you orgasm, well, that leaves you with you and the barely functional vibrator you keep in the bedside table that you stole from your last roommate. ”

Suddenly, I felt dizzy, and not in a good way.

“Once again, I know everything .” An almost animalistic growl stole the last word.

“And, I am not asking you to come, I am telling you that you must. So, please do.”

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:12 am*

I suppressed the world's most pathetic , desperate, whimper.

It was probably some fucked up sign that I needed therapy, or even maybe locked up in some sort of fucking mental institution.

Having Reaper know so much about me should have been terrifying, and it was, but something in the knowledge that someone had been paying so much attention to me felt good .

In a weird, maybe kind of concerning way.

Like I was the love interest in one of those stalker romance novels my friend liked to gush about.

So, while I should have probably thrown myself out the window and called the cops, I complied with my captor's demands. Did he smile as I followed? Or, was he more the stoic type? Probably the latter.

The hall was just as cold and poorly lit as the bedroom, and the walls were lined with old paintings. The kind with the eyes that followed you. I tried not to look at them directly, as they were fucking creepy to say the least. But, I could almost feel them watching me.

Instead, I focused on Reaper as I trailed behind him like a ghost. The hem of my robe whispered across the floor as we descended the spiral staircase.

“Hold the railing, Little Light , I wouldn’t want to see you fall,” he commanded,

while not holding the fucking railing.

“... Are you talking to me?” Maybe there were others in this house. Perhaps the ghosts that obviously haunted the fucking paintings, and maybe he was somewhat protective over them.

Reaper didn't laugh, but I could feel the amusement in his silence.

“Of course, you're the only light in this place.” He spoke as if this was as plain as day.

Begrudgingly, I gripped the railing. Not because I wanted to listen to what was likely a serial killer, but because the idea of tumbling down the seemingly endless steps without at least getting some answers seemed like a shitty way to go.

The wood was smooth, not even a hint of a splinter, which made the situation even more surreal.

Eventually, we came upon a set of metal doors.

The front was decorated in thorns—not roses—and there wasn't a handle in sight.

This didn't stop Reaper though. He approached the door and raised a hand before rhythmically knocking six times.

At the last beat, the metal seemed to move on its own.

I jumped as warm light spilled out from the room.

I squinted and shielded my eyes, not realizing how dark the rest of our trek had been until now.

Once my eyes adjusted, Reaper motioned for me to enter, and I did.

In the center of the room was an impossibly long dining table. There was no cloth, allowing the brilliantly shined wood to be on full display. High-backed chairs draped in black velvet flanked the table, and the flickering glow from the candelabras caused the silverware to gleam.

A sick feeling pooled in my stomach as I noticed the three men at the table.

None of them looked at me—or maybe they did—the masks made it almost impossible to tell.

The biggest one wore antlers. And not like the cute kind that went with slutty deer costumes.

Real bleached ones that likely belonged to an animal far larger than I cared to see.

The rest of the mask was bone. Some of it had likely worn away from use, leaving it jagged in some spots.

The man's mouth was completely exposed, and I studied his stubbled jaw.

He had a scar running across his top lip.

Across from him sat someone in a Jester's get up, complete with hat and bells and collar. His mask was painted like a black and white clown, and for some reason, I thought he was scarier than the bone man.

And, at the far end sat someone draped in black robes.

The sheer mass of their clothing made it impossible to tell if they were man or



woman, and their mask did little to solve the mystery.

It was made of white porcelain and had absolutely no discerning features other than the golden tears streaming down its cheeks.

My saliva thickened, and I froze. It felt as though I'd walked in on something I had no business being a part of.

"Sit." Reaper glided to the table, pulling out the empty seat beside Bone man.

My chest shuddered, and my body moved without the permission of my brain. My heart smacked against my ribs with the force of a sledgehammer at a construction zone, and I silently prayed they couldn't hear it.

I sat stiffly, and Reaper pushed me in before occupying the empty seat on my other side. Thankfully, he placed himself between me and the clown.

"Gentleman," Reaper started, reaching into the bounty in the middle of the table and retrieving a bottle of wine. "This is Lux. She is our guest for the evening."

Reaper uncorked the bottle before pouring the thick red liquid in his glass, and then in mine. It seemed thicker than most wines, and that made me trust it less than I should, which was impressive, considering the situation.

Bone man grunted in acknowledgement as he grabbed a crusty roll and block of cheese from the feast. The clown tipped his head, leaving the bells decorating his hat to jingle, and the third one... Actually, I wasn't even sure if they were breathing.

My voice had vanished, leaving me to stare in abject horror as the men slowly turned to face me, as if they were lions and I was a tasty-looking zebra.

“ Guest is an interesting choice.” An almost unhinged laugh flitted through the clown's words, and I cringed at the sound. “I prefer toy . Something for us to play with and discard once it breaks .”

Reaper passed me a glass of wine, and I didn't touch it.

He sighed, the lenses of his mask fogging up as he did.

“Until she agrees to the game, she is nothing more than a guest.” He sounded almost exhausted by this description.

Despite his mouth being covered, Reaper lifted his glass, rolling the stem between his fingers.

“Nobody ever turns down the game.” Bone man's voice was deep and raspy, decorated with the same unplaceable accent as Reaper.

Something in the low timbre snapped me to my senses.

“What game ?” Exasperation crept into my tone.

Reaper froze for a beat before placing his glass back on the table. Even the soft clink of the crystal hitting the wood made me jump.

Bone man grunted before popping the rest of the bread in his mouth, completely ignoring me, and the thing at the end of the table still did nothing. It was the clown that spared me the mercy of knowledge.

He leaned forward, planting both elbows on the table and lacing his gloved fingers. His bells jingled with the slightest movement, even a deep breath caused them to echo through the chamber.

“The game ,” he practically sang the word, “is the reason you’re here. We don’t invite pretty little things here every day, you know.”

Pretty little things ?

I stared at my distorted reflection in the wine glass, I couldn’t remember the last time I’d been referred to as pretty. And, though I knew this was a terrible time, butterflies joined the fear pooling low in my gut.

“You’ll have until sunset to prepare,” he continued, “then, all you have to do is survive until sunrise. And then BAM, you’re ten million dollars richer! No debt, no worrying, no more struggling for the rest of your life.”

My breathing slowed, and the second half of his sentence was so appealing that I almost disregarded the word survive . Once that registered, my eyes widened and I choked on my breath.

“S-survive? Like not die ?” As far as I knew, there wasn’t another definition for that word, so asking that outloud made me feel a little silly, to say the least.

A cackle of maniacal laughter left the Jester, and he nearly doubled over. Bone man joined him, and I wondered what the fuck was so funny. Still no reaction from the creep in the corner.

“Exactly that ,” Reaper confirmed.

“Survive what ?” I asked, unsure if I wanted the answer.

“ Us .”

That singular word sucked all the air out of the room, leaving me to blink at him,

slow and stupid.

“I... You’re going to kill me?”

“Kill is such an ugly word,” the Jester added. “Plus... there’s more than killing .”

“This is a hunt ,” Bone man growled. “We don’t just want to kill you, we want to devour you whole, sweetheart.”

His teeth seemed impossibly sharp, like they belonged on a shark rather than a man. My twisted, horny thoughts immediately went to them on my neck. Realistically, he’d probably murder me if he got that close... but if he didn’t?

“All of us will be hunting you. It’s what we were designed to do—think of it as a game of hide and seek.” Reaper sounded completely calm. “You can run, fight, or hide, and we will arm you with a knife, a torch, and a gun with exactly one bullet.”

“... Why?”

This whole situation seemed like it was ripped out of a bad dream, and it made nearly as much sense as one. The more I tried to rationalize everything, the less successful I was.

“The moon needs blood. And we need a bride ,” Bone man declared, licking his lips as he looked at me.

“The cycle can only end when we find a woman who takes us, as is.” confirmed the clown.

“Can’t you all download a dating app or something?” The cynical sentiment slipped from my lips, and laughter erupted from the three men near me.

The person in the corner moved slightly, confirming they were alive, but no sound came from them.

“This one has some fight in her,” commended Bone man.

“Your spunk will serve you well.” Reaper shifted in his seat. “But that leaves one question. Will you join our game? Or will you run back to a life determined to chew you up and spit you out like the piece of meat the world wants you to be.”

“You’ll end up dying anyway, sweetheart. At least this way you do it on your terms.” Bone man’s words were gravelly and dragged across my skin with just as much force.

My jaw clenched—it wasn’t fair how good their speech was.

And, what was worse, was the fact that they were both right.

The world hadn’t done me any favors. There had been no handouts to save me from starving, or life lines to pull me from drowning.

Here, I had a choice, even if it was a fucked up one.

“Have there ever been any winners?” My question came from a point of caution. I didn’t think of myself as one to do the impossible.

“A few. They all take the money and leave, their lives get better, and they forget the world that lives within these walls.” Reaper tapped his fingers on the edge of his wine glass.

“You’re all insane.” I started to play with the belt on my robe, hoping to hide my nerves.

“Not the first time we’ve heard that!” The clown cackled, smacking the table as he did.

I flinched at the sound.

“If it helps, we won’t try to kill you at first, and some of us won’t attempt to kill you at all .” Reaper reached forward, brushing my hair back behind my ear.

“What happens then?” Heat rushed to my cheeks, following the tingling his leather touch implanted on my skin.

“We fuck you like the animals we are,” Bone man rasped.

Something in his feral honesty caused something dark to curl low in my belly. My thighs clenched at the idea, and I made a mental note to find a therapist. Obviously, I needed one, and once this night was over, I’d be able to afford it.

“Fine. I’ll play.”

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:12 am*

Lux

Outside the manor was somehow worse than being trapped within its walls.

The crows above cawed as the men led me through a seemingly endless sea of evergreen trees, two in front of me, two in the back.

While they're all granted the luxury of shoes, I'm left barefoot.

Fresh mud squelches between my toes and I shiver as the five of us come upon a dilapidated courtyard.

The cobblestone ground is rough and cracked, thorns and vines poke through the gaps in the stone and I bite to my lip to suppress a pained noise as I step on something sharp.

"Be careful, Little Light, a trail of blood will make it easier to find you," Bone man snarled behind me.

My head snapped back, and I shot him a glare. I knew he was tall, but he towered over me, casting a shadow in my direction as what remained of the sunshine rapidly waned. His nostrils flared, but I couldn't see his face.

So, to push my luck, I stuck my tongue out at him. Their goal was to kill me, which meant I wasn't here to make friends.

Survive until morning.

Get my money.

Forget this ever happened.

And if I didn't do it—well, I wouldn't have to worry about rent anymore. So that was a plus.

Bone man huffed out a breath before plucking me off the ground and throwing me over his shoulder, knocking the wind from me. The world spun as he got me settled, and I involuntarily thrashed against him.

“Put me down!” I screamed, fighting the urge to remind him the game hadn't started yet.

“Too slow. Quit fighting. If I drop you your head will split open like a watermelon.”

My stomach twisted at the imagery of my blood and gray matter spattered across the autumn hellscape. And, while I didn't want to be carried, I also didn't want that , so I allowed myself to slump across his shoulders like a rag doll.

My face hit the leather of Bone man's armor, and it dug into my skin.

The musk of man flooded my nostrils. It wasn't bad, but I'd definitely forgotten what someone could smell like when they didn't use deodorant.

Plus, for the first time, I had a reminder that these four could be human, and that somehow made this worse.

I lifted my head slightly only to be brought to eye level with the crying man, who once again, was proving he was very alive, even if he didn't talk. He shook his head slowly and then clasps his hands as if deep in prayer.



At first, I feared the clown the most. But, there was something about the quiet man trailing behind us that unnerved me in ways the others hadn't. I exhaled and closed my eyes, determined to somewhat enjoy the last moments before my possible execution.

The journey didn't take long, and once we stopped moving, Bone man planted me firmly on the ground.

My eyes snapped open just in time for his hands to rest on my shoulders as if he were steadying me, trying to make sure I wouldn't fall.

The act was oddly gentle, seeing as I was about five minutes away from being hunted for sport.

He stepped back and left me to look around. Breathing in the chilly air, I surveyed my surroundings. Red Lace Manor loomed in the background, but just barely. The porch light illuminated it like a haven, but I knew for a fact, I wasn't going to set foot in that house again.

Wind whistled through the trees as I turned around to see a crumbling mausoleum. Was that where they stored the women who lost the game? Or was it just decorative? My lips pulled into a grimace, and I decided it was best to not think about that.

"Why does the game have to start here?" I asked, not really caring which man answered.

"Oh, the game doesn't start here, Little Light." The clown tossed a black canvas bag in my direction.

It fell to the ground with a heavy thud, and Reaper immediately turned to him.

“There is a loaded gun in that.” Disapproval dripped from his words.

The clown shrugged. “What’s gonna happen? She dies ?”

My eyes rolled as I bent down to pick up the bag. It was weighty, but it shouldn’t be impossible to carry. With that in mind, I tossed it over my shoulder and made a mental note to get to a safe place and rifle through it later.

“As my comrade was saying, the game doesn’t begin here,” Reaper continued. “We all have areas we like to tether ourselves to, this just gives you the best chance to run. You’ll get a ten-minute head start, but you’ll soon realize that isn’t long when your life’s on the line.”

I wrapped my fingers around the strap as I cast a lingering look around the circle of masked men. Fog slowly crept toward the area, obscuring what little daylight we had left and shrouding the area in a milky gray.

“So, when do I start?” I looked around at the trees, wondering if they’d be watching me hide. If so, that’d be a waste of time.

“Patience, Little Light,” Reaper coached, stepping closer as he did. “I need you to close your eyes.”

I stared at him.

“Trust me,” he pleaded.

“We’re about to play a game where your goal is to kill me.”

Bone man stepped forward, patting Reaper so firmly on the back that he nearly fell over. “Yeah, but Seth is a pussy, he doesn’t—”

Reaper elbowed Bone man in the stomach, causing him to double over as all the wind exited his lungs.

Seth.

One name down, three to go.

“Point is... If we’re already going to slaughter you like the pig you are, what do you have to lose?” the clown taunted.

My gaze narrowed, and I waited for Seth to hit him too. But, he didn’t, and against my better judgment, I listened.

Without my sight, I relied on my hearing to tell me if I was in danger. The snapping of twigs filled the air. Warm breath and the scent of cinnamon cascaded over my face, and just as I prepared to open my eyes, a set of lips met mine.

They were soft, and the kisses feather light. It was as if he was testing to see if I’d push him away, or maybe even run. I assumed this was Seth. A gloved hand met my cheek, and before I could decide if I wanted to bite or melt into him, he pulled away .

Calloused fingers dug into my chin, pulling me the other way.

My eyes remained sealed shut and the man’s tongue swiped across my mouth before his teeth, sharp and animalistic, met my lip.

This had to be Bone man. His kisses differed from Seth’s, rough and hungry, as if he was trying to claim me before anyone else had the chance.

When he pulled away, I barely had time to catch my breath before a laugh floated through the air. A hand fisted my hair, yanking my head back. The urge to yelp in

pain was there, but before I could a set of chapped lips crashed into mine. With each kiss, I could feel his wicked grin widen.

When he was finally done with me, I was dizzy and out of breath. I assumed the clown would be the last one, as the crying man had yet to appear at all interested in the game. But, once more warm breath collided with my skin.

This time, it smelled like wintergreen.

My lips were safe from another faceless kiss, because the last man pressed his lips to my forehead. The slightest hint of stubble tickled my skin before he pulled away.

“Keep your eyes closed, Little Light,” Seth crooned, his voice sounding farther away than expected. “Count to one hundred, and then the ten minutes will begin.”

A sudden tremble infested my limbs, and at first I listened, using my pounding heart as a metronome for each count. But, once I got to forty five, a thought dawned, how would they know? It was in my best interest to look, that way I could know if they were watching me.

Slowly, I cracked one eye, and the other followed soon after.

Despite their gargantuan figures, the men were so far away that they almost looked small.

I couldn't distinguish any exact features, but for the first time, I saw more than leather and bone.

Their masks all hung at their sides as they walked toward the house.

My head cocked as I studied them, trying to place their outfits to the maskless man

underneath. Seth was easy, his well-tailored black coat was ingrained in my mind from this morning.

His hair was short and the curly kind of unkempt that made you wonder if he'd brushed it today. The wind played with the inky strands just enough for him to reach up and smooth them down.

Next, I focused on the Jester. Long auburn hair fell down his back in almost ornamental braids. It was almost far too pretty for a man who kissed like the devil and seemed to take pride in the idea of killing me .

Bone man was easy to find too, he was the largest, and that made him hard to miss. It was hard to see in the dying light, but I was fairly certain his hair was mousy brown, short on the sides, wild on top.

That meant the man with long silver strands had to be the crying man. Even as he walked with his partners in crime, his head appeared slightly bowed, like the weight of what was about to happen physically dragged him down.

This was yet another reminder, those four were human . They could bleed just as I did. They could die just as I could. The only difference is they were skilled killers and larger than I was. I might make it. Others had. I could do this.

The wind shifted, and once again the crows cawed as the moon shifted high in the sky. It didn't feel like a normal moonrise, instead it reminded me of a machine on loop, and the entire world seemed to change as it bathed me in its celestial glow.

I'd stopped counting the second I opened my eyes, but it felt like I'd waited long enough.

My body moved on instinct, and I started into a full sprint.

Rocks and twigs dug into my bare feet, but the fresh dose of adrenaline in my system made the pain bearable.

The red velvet of my robe flowed behind me as I darted through the trees, looking for anything that felt safe .

But, when the world felt like it was ripped directly out of a German fairytale, that was impossible.

My legs started to ache, and my lungs burned.

That's when an idea dawned. Any moment, one of the men could appear and chase me, and if I couldn't bolt at a moment's notice, I could be as good as dead.

My feet slipped along the stodgy mud, pulling me forward despite my best efforts to stop.

Luckily, I caught myself on a nearby tree branch.

I swallowed a heavy mouth of spit as I gasped in fresh air.

I couldn't run without tiring myself out, and I couldn't fight until I knew what I had in my bag.

I looked up at the tree as I thought, and that's when an idea dawned.

I could buy myself a couple hours by hiding, and the men likely wouldn't look in the trees.

There were too many of them, and that would take forever .

With that in mind, I reached for the highest branch I could grasp and started pulling myself up.

The action wasn't as graceful or effortless as I'd envisioned it.

To be honest, I'd never climbed a tree and always assumed it would be easy.

But, despite my best efforts, I barely scrambled up the trunk.

The bark dug into my feet, and the branches caught on my robe and nearly pulled me back to earth more times than I cared to admit.

Somehow, I made it what felt like three stories off the ground.

That seemed safe enough, so I settled onto a sturdy-looking branch and let the pine needles shroud me from the outside world. I pulled the canvas bag off my back and planted it on my lap, yanking the zipper open as I did.

In the bare light of the moon, it was hard to make everything out; I squinted and resigned myself to pulling out my supplies one by one.

My fingers first met the metal of a handgun.

I shifted it around, letting the light catch on the silver.

It was the old type of revolver, the one with a spinning barrel that cowboys used.

After a moment of fiddling, I opened it.

As promised, a single bullet rested in the chamber.

I made a mental note to reserve it for emergencies only .

Slipping the gun back in, I rifled through the rest of the contents.

A knife, a bottle of water I didn't trust, a small first aid kit, and a length of rope.

The wind picked up, causing me to nearly drop the bag and fall in the process.

For a beat I considered tying myself to the branch, then I realized I'd potentially trap myself if I did that.

So, I re-steadied myself and grabbed the last item from the bag.

A tri-fold paper map. The paper felt thin, like the kind you'd find in a bible. I opened it, determined to look for a better place to hide.

And then the fucking wind ruined everything.

A gust blew through, turning the map into a makeshift kite. I tried to grab it out of the air, but I was limited on what I could do without killing myself.

"Son of a bitch ." I growled as I watched the paper float away in the rough direction of the manor.

I heaved out an irritated sigh, softly banging the back of my head against the tree trunk. Whatever, it was just a map. If I was going to survive, I'd do it regardless.



## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:12 am*

Ronan

The sting of Seth's hand across my cheek was powerful enough to send me to my knees, still, I let him do it.

He wasn't as animalistic as me, or as playful as Cassian, instead his sadism rested in the quiet sort of unhinged.

The kind that even someone like me knew better than to tempt.

More often than not, he wouldn't hurt the women.

After all, a gentleman never hurt a lady.

But, the rest of the boys and I weren't ladies .

"How fucking stupid are you?" he spat, bringing down the heavy heel of his boot onto my shoulder.

I nearly buckled under the weight, and I bowed my head.

"The women don't get to know our fucking names!

We've been doing this for ten years!" His words transformed into a growl.

"If she gets out, and tells anyone we live here, the same fucked up branch of the government that experimented on us is going to come here and reclaim us like lab

rats!” He stomped on me once more before recomposing himself. “Is that what you want?”

My muscles throbbed with his assault, but I sat back on my heels so I could look him in the eyes.

Icy orbs so light they almost appeared silver looked at me with a feral disdain.

Part of me wanted to remind Seth that we all had jobs, and that meant if the military gave a single fuck about finding us, they would have done it by now. But, I didn’t.

“Seth is a common name,” I said coolly.

It wasn’t like I’d told her his last name and birthdate. There had to be a million Seth’s in Connecticut alone.

“But a name is where it starts.” His gaze hardened. “I liked this one. I wanted to give her a fighting chance. I wanted to make her our bride .” His anger gave way to quiet devastation. “Now we might not even get to play with her! She needs to die.”

His jaw shook before his teeth locked. They weren’t all sharp like mine. For some reason, they’d stopped at augmenting his canines, giving him a vampire-like appearance. Something about our teeth was supposed to help make us the perfect super-soldiers, but that leg of the experiments died with us.

“And they always do! We’ve had, what, three victors?”

” I tried to place the nameless women with barely there memories of pretty faces.

“Plus, if they get out, we normally hunt them down, anyway! So we have fun with the slut, use her to fill our needs, and then I’ll paint the floor of the manor red with her

life.”

Seth didn't respond at first. Instead he turned away. His long coat swished around his legs as he paced the wooden floor of the library. Moon light poured in through the open curtains, illuminating the rows of ancient literature and archives of our games.

“Solomon warned me we should just forget this one,” he mumbled as if talking to himself.

“Solomon is a fucking weirdo who hides in the chapel while the rest of us have fun.” Seriously , the guy never fucked, fought, or killed.

Seth tilted his head back, casting me one last lingering look before snagging his mask off the desk. Slipping it over his head, he turned away from me.

“Find Lux, and don't lose her. If we want to have fun, we need to keep her in our sight.”

The stag's skull sat heavily on my head as I stepped outside the manor and breathed in.

Autumn air burned my lungs, and the scent of pine obscured any hint of Lux.

I should have stolen her napkin at dinner so I could memorize her scent.

Right now, I was essentially doomed to wander around hoping to run into her.

I was attuned to the hunt, but searching for what didn't exist would never be possible.

Twigs snapped under my steps, each one giving me hope that I'd see our Little Light. Unfortunately, I seemed to be alone in the evergreen sea. The wind picked up, and the

distant rustle of paper caught my ear.

I whipped around like a dog chasing its tail until my eyes landed on a sheet of paper wedged between two branches. With a grunt, I stalked over and noisily snatched it from the tree.

Instantly, I recognized it as the map.

“I know you’re here, Little Light!” I shouted, hoping I’d hear a nervous squeak in response.

Nothing.

My eyes rolled as I shifted my mask back just enough to uncover my nose.

Bringing the crumpled paper to my nostrils, I inhaled deep.

The scent of sweat and vanilla caused me to salivate at the knowledge of what was to come.

With my memory refreshed, I closed my eyes and tipped my head back before sniffing the air like a fucking bloodhound.

Just like they’d taught me to back in the camp.

At first, I got nothing, but the longer I stood, breathing in air and clearing my mind, the more the scent came to me. My eyes snapped open as something feral clicked.

She was close. I didn’t know how I missed it before. The area wreaked of adrenaline and desperation, and I started moving, using the scent as a map to drag me directly to my Little Light. The trail brought me directly to a large tree. My sniffs grew louder as

I circled the plant like a wolf.

She was here. I could smell it. But where ?

I looked side to side only finding more fucking forest. Out of desperation, I looked up, and that's when I saw a strip of red velvet waving in the wind, barely concealed by needles of pine. I didn't smile often, honestly I wasn't sure I knew how to anymore. But, my teeth bared into what felt close.

I sunk my hands into the closet branch and pulled myself up. Little Light had gotten herself higher than expected, but right now, she was as good as a cat in a tree. A sardonic laugh escaped at the thought.

"Here kitty kitty kitty. " My voice was gruff, need grated on my vocal chords like a knife on rope.

Lux drew in a sharp breath, her long dark hair fell into her eyes as she looked down. Panic was a good look for her.

She stood herself up on wobbly feet before steadying herself on the trunk.

She looked around as if trying to find an escape plan, but all she'd done was trap herself.

I reached up intending to grab her ankle and man handle her fine ass to the ground, but just as my fingers grazed her silky skin, Little Light surprised me.

She barely jumped to the next branch, pulling herself higher.

The motion was almost enough to make me laugh, clumsy and unrehearsed. It was a miracle she didn't kill herself before I had the chance. Still, the thrill of a good chase

was too much to resist.

I gave her a thirty-second head start before bounding up the tree.

I climbed around the other side of the massive trunk, hoping she'd be too distracted by the pounding of her heart to notice I'd surpassed her.

And, once she got high enough, I grabbed her outstretched wrist and yanked her away from the safety of the trunk, leaving her to dangle approximately forty feet in the air.

Her shrill scream pierced the night as her free hand shot to mine, clawing at my skin.

"Keep fighting like that, and I'll drop you," I warned. "You'll be a pretty splatter on the ground."

Her lips parted, coffee-colored eyes pinning on mine.

I thought for a moment she'd continue to fight, after all, better to die on your own terms. But, the good girl listened .

It was hard to climb down while reserving one arm for carrying her.

But, somehow, I managed. Once we had about ten feet left, I dropped her.

Lux was smart enough to not try to catch herself with her hands or legs, leaving her to roll to the ground. Her robe pooled around her, and twigs stuck to her hair. She dragged in a gasp like she was preparing herself to scream or cry, she just couldn't tell which.

Once her life was confirmed, I jumped down, landing with a knee on either side of her full hips.

Most girls we brought here didn't have much to them, but Lux was full figured and fuck was I eager to dig my fingers into her supple flesh.

It'd been a while since I'd had someone so meaty to play with.

Her feet wildly kicked at the ground as she tried to crawl out from under me, and I let her for a beat. Once she was completely out, reaching for her bag and preparing to dart, I grabbed her ankle and yanked her back.

"Where the fuck do you think you're going, whore?" I growled, my cock hardened at the way her ass swayed as she continued to try to fight herself free.

I fisted her hair before yanking her over, pinning her on her back under my weight. Her bag rested under her head like a survival pillow, and I made damn sure to keep track of her hands. Last thing I needed was for her to stab me while I ruined that needy cunt of hers.

Her chest rose in small bursts, her breath clouding the air between us as the fabric slipped off her shoulder. Her porcelain skin was nearly flawless in the moonlight, practically inviting me to sink my teeth into her skin.

I bet she was a screamer. I held her arms over her head with one hand and used the other to hold her jaw. I gripped her hard enough to bruise. The game had just begun, and I wanted everyone else to know I'd claimed this one first. There was fire in her eyes as she glared at me.

"When someone talks, you answer," I ordered.

"Fuck. You ."

Her voice was weak from panting, but what she lacked in verbal venom she made up for by spitting in my face.

A guttural growl formed in my chest as I released her jaw and slipped my dirty digits between her lips. Feisty thing chomped down on me, but the pain only made me want her more.

Her teeth dragged along my fingers as I pulled them out, sucking her spit off my skin.

“You gotta get meaner if you want to scare me away.” I didn’t notice I was bleeding until I trailed my touch down her cheek. Ruby streaks stained her skin, and I swiped a tongue over my lips.

Guess it was time to return the favor.



## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:12 am*

My free hand snapped to the front of her robe, and I yanked.

The audible tear of the fabric echoed through the forest, leaving her in nothing other than the lacey red slip we dressed all our toys in.

It was tighter than normal, leaving the shiny material to ride up with every movement.

My cock throbbed in anticipation, and I made quick work of pulling it out of my pants.

She kicked and scratched and screamed, one of her nails catching my cheek. I felt as blood welled to the surface, God; I wanted her. I wanted her raw. I wanted her feral. I wanted her desperate. But, while I wasn't above killing her, I wasn't a monster, none of us were.

"You want me, don't you?" My growl caused her to still.

Her eyes met mine, her pupils completely blown with a look of unbridled arousal. Maybe Seth was right about this girl being a fitting bride. She seemed to be as fucked up as us. She audibly swallowed before nodding once, after that silent confirmation, she continued fighting once more.

Which meant I had to fuck the feist out of her.

I leaned down, my tongue trailing up the sensitive skin of her neck.

She bucked against me and I didn't miss the subtle clench of her thighs.

My teeth met her shoulder, biting hard enough to make her shriek, hard enough to mark, but not hard enough to mar.

I slid my free hand down her side, savoring the way her soft flesh caved under my touch.

The position required to reach up her skirt was uncomfortable, but not impossible.

My fingers trailed along the satin only to find it soaked with her barely contained need.

“Dirty slut.” I scoffed. “Are you seriously getting off on being hunted for sport?”

Good .

With one finger, I snapped the material of her gusset and ran my tip along her slit. I stroked myself once, causing her to jolt as my cock hit her clit.

“I’m going to tell you my name, and you’re going to scream it as loud as you can, okay?”

Lux didn't answer me. Her pouty lips parted as her chest heaved, and I wondered if I'd scared the words out of the poor thing. But, she parted her legs just enough for me to slip in all the way .

Her head tipped back, her eyes sealing shut as she dragged in a breath.

“ Ronan .” My name sounded foreign on my tongue, like I had no business saying it. Right now, I really didn't. “Now scream my name before I rip your jugular out with

my teeth.”

She blinked up at me as if she couldn't tell if I was serious or not. But, as I thrust into her again, she got with the program.

“Ronan.” Her whisper was sweet, but not loud enough.

I pistoned into her, rougher now. “Louder.”

“Ronan !”

Her scream disturbed a few birds, leaving them to vacate the area, and while it wasn't perfect, it was a start.

I paused and her eyes fluttered open. Her half lidded gaze was full with a drunken level of heat, and I was willing to keep going until she was an overstimulated, sobbing mess right here in the middle of the forest. But, the night had just begun, and while I wanted to claim her as mine, her pussy felt too good to hoard.

“So fucking tight.” I snarled, rolling my hips more violently. “Like you were fucking made for me.”

Her tits bounced with every thrust, and in the barely there light of the moon, I could see a rosy flush creeping up her neck.

Beautiful, fucking beautiful.

Her cunt gripped my cock like a vice, and it took every ounce of self control I had to not blow my load in her right there.

“You like being fucked like a feral little thing in the dirt, don't you?” I sunk my

fingers into her hips, pulling her closer so I could get that much deeper in her.

Her legs started to shake as a broken moan exited her chest.

“You’re going to cum for me, right now,” I ordered.

Her head shook with a desperation to deny my one request, but her body betrayed her. Her thighs trembled and her chest shook like she’d forgotten how to breathe. Her fingers dug into the moss below and her hips arched.

An animalistic scream tore through her as she shivered, her pussy constricting and releasing with the beat of her heart.

I didn’t last much longer than that. Maybe two pumps if I’m being generous.

That didn’t stop me from staying buried in her, wanting to keep my cum inside as long as possible, wanting to do anything I could to mark her from the inside out.

“ Mine ,” I growled, no intention to let go.

No part of me wanted to see her go, but the night was far too young to end it here. Plus, there was no fun in round two if I didn’t chase her first. So, slowly, I pulled out.

She was a shaky mess as she rolled to her side. Her dress was still hiked up, my cum having spilled out onto the milky part of her inner thighs.

“Run, Little Light,” I commanded. “The next time I catch you, I won’t hesitate to kill you.”

Lux’s hair bounced with frantic nods as she fought onto her knees. She stumbled twice but found her feet and snatched her bag off the ground before running away on

shaky knees.

Part of me wanted to follow her, but now that I had her scent, there was no getting away from me. Plus, few of our toys ventured into Solomon's chapel, and that is exactly where Little Light was headed.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:12 am*

Lux

I had no idea how fast I could run until I needed to run for my life.

Each step jostled the bag, causing the weight of it to crash into my sore back.

The fall from the tree hadn't disabled me, but every movement caused a new type of agony.

It was as if I'd been bruised from head to toe, and every step felt like someone pushing their fingers into freshly purpled flesh.

I didn't scream, even though I really wanted to.

Instead, my teeth dug into my lower lip.

"You can run but you can't hide, Little Light!" Ronan's voice echoed through the forest, and I moved a little faster.

There was a definite reverence in the way he'd touched me, but I had no doubt that he'd meant every word when he said he'd kill me if he caught me again.

I didn't have a watch, and my survival skills were limited to say the least. That meant I had no idea how much longer this night would last, but I had to keep going.

This was a small price to pay for the life of comfort soon to come.

The trees passed by in a blur, my slip caught on some of them. The snagged material tore, but it didn't slow me down. I could have my decency once the sun rose.

A building of cracked stone came into view. Thankfully, it didn't appear to be connected to the main manor. Seeing as Ronan was outside, I assumed the other three were patrolling the house, waiting for the skull headed man to chase me into the safety that came with the familiar.

I bound up the crumbling steps two at a time and used what remained of my strength to push open the massive oak doors.

Their deafening groan of the hinges felt like a personal attack, as if the environment was alerting every living creature within a ten-mile radius of my location.

Still, I pressed inside the building, allowing the doors to slam beside me.

My eyes quickly adjusted to the near perfect darkness, the only light came from the moon streaming in through bits of broken stained glass, forming sporadic spotlights, highlighting abandoned pews and a large cross covered in cobwebs.

Instantly, I froze, goosebumps forming on the back of my neck. A deep-rooted feeling of dread filled my stomach. I quickly dismissed it as the creepy location getting to me, but it almost felt as if I was being watched, again .

I shook the idea off and tiptoed down the aisle.

As I approached the pulpit, I noticed a small wooden booth tucked away in the back of the church, hidden behind a large wooden pillar.

I didn't hesitate to go that way. It looked as though it'd been forgotten, and that made for a perfect hiding place, at least in theory.

Once I reached the booth, I yanked back the curtain. A plume of dust erupted at the motion, and I suppressed a cough.

Definitely forgotten.

Without another thought, I slipped in, closing the curtain behind me.

The small box around me was a mess of dust, and the grime stuck to me as I slipped into the seat. This might not be a place to stay for long, but at least I could catch my breath.

As quietly as possible, I shifted the bag to my lap and unzipped it, and blindly fumbled around for the water bottle. I still didn't trust it, but right now, I was desperate.

Dust tickled the inside of my nose as I cracked the cap off the plastic bottle.

Pressing the top to my lips, I took a tentative sip.

For a beat, I waited to see if it was poisoned, even though I wasn't entirely sure I'd be able to tell either way...

And, I guess if they wanted me dead, they would have already done it.

Realistically, if I were to meet an untimely demise that wasn't caused by them, it'd probably ruin the game. That lingered in my head for a moment, but it vanished the second the chapel doors creaked open.

My blood turned to ice, causing me to freeze in place. The plastic bottle crinkled in my grip, and I quickly capped it and tossed it in my bag, not wanting to risk making any unnecessary sound.



Slow footsteps echoed through the chamber, and I pressed myself further into the booth, trying to will myself invisible. Against my better judgement, I slid the curtain open just enough to peer outside.

The steps paused, as did my heart.

Then, after a moment, they continued, now softer than before. My position made it hard to see anything, but eventually, a willowy figure cloaked in black climbed onto the pulpit. The golden tears on his mask glinted in the moonlight, and my eyes widened.

The crying man .

At least it wasn't the Jester. Still, something in the unyielding silence nearly killed me. Slowly, he stretched his arms out, facing his palms toward the sky as he looked toward the heavens.

My mind told me to flee, to sneak out as quietly as possible and run as fast as I could to God knows where. But, terror paralyzed me.

The crying man's shoulders lifted, shrugging off the black robe obscuring his body.

The heavy material pooled around his feet, leaving him clothed in a clerical collar and slacks.

The exposed skin of his chest was so pale it bordered translucent, and his well-defined muscles made him look more like a marble statue than a person.

He reached up, and with a reverent touch, removed his mask. Long silver strands of hair fell down his back as he stretched toward the sky.

I couldn't see his face from where I was, but I had a stunning view of his side profile. Strong, sharp features and high cheekbones. A glitter of silver stubble dusted his chin, and he reached up to scratch the area.

He was beautiful in an otherworldly sense, like I had no business even looking at him. He resumed moving, gliding around the church as if he were a ghost. He placed the mask upward on a pew as he circled the area, softly humming as he did.

My heart rattled against my chest as I waited for him to leave, to glide out of the sanctuary just as he'd entered. He passed by the booth, and I held my breath, hoping this would be his last lap.

His back turned away, and he slowly started toward the entrance, leaving his mask and robe near the front. My chest started to ache from lack of air, and just as I thought he'd forget about me, the unthinkable happened.

The dust poisoning the air around me once again tickled my nose. I drew in a hiccup like breath, trying to suppress the inevitable. The crying man turned around, his nearly black gaze pinning on the booth.

Shit. shit. Shit.

Think quiet thoughts.

Think quiet thoughts, maybe he won't—

My sneeze broke the silence. It wasn't very loud, but in the graveyard that was the church, I might as well have screamed .

The crying man's lips pulled into an all too wide smile as he continued to glide toward me, silver hair swaying in the wind behind him. His hands were outstretched

as if preparing a hug, but I knew better. And, though I'd never heard his voice, he began to sing.

“ There's a Little Light at my front door.

Does she even know what she's here for?

If she wants to see tomorrow,

it's time she'll have to borrow.

The morning comes too soon

And by dawn she will have expired.”

The rhythm rested somewhere between a nursery rhyme and a hymn.

Every muscle in my body turned to stone, and I was sure he could hear the thundering of my heart.

He continued to sing as he got closer, and just as I prepared for him to stop and yank me from the safety of the booth, he turned to the other side and vanished.

It was impossible to tell where he'd gone thanks to the silence of his steps, but I'd convinced myself if I just waited here for long enough, I'd be safe.

I could count to one hundred and make a break for the door. Sure, I'd have to run like hell the second I got outside but—

A wooden slat I'd missed slid open, right beside my head. Impossibly dark eyes flecked with silver locked onto mine, and I nearly died from a heart attack on the

spot.

There was an all too quiet moment, and part of me wanted to beg him to walk away. He didn't seem as interested in the game as the others, but just as I started to string together the right words, the crying man spoke.

“Forgive me father, for I'm about to sin.”

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:12 am*

Solomon

Little Light's breath audibly hitched as I stared at her.

Even in the dark of the confessional, I could see her clear as day.

Years ago when we existed as experiments rather than human beings, each of us had a sense augmented, improved to the point of being a weapon.

For years, I envied everyone in my house, except for Seth.

Enhanced vision was wonderful at night, but during the day or in a bright room, I was functionally blind. Luckily for me, my sense was coming in handy. Sweat beaded along her temples as her dark eyes widened. She probably thought she was clever, hiding all the way out here.

She was wrong. But, what she lacked in brains, she certainly made up for in beauty. I reached forward and undid the metal latch on the sliding door and slowly pushed it back, giving me more space to watch her.

Lux flinched away, but didn't dare to move, and I reached out to grab her hand, wanting to keep it that way.

The night was only a few hours old, and the poor thing was already covered in dirt, small cuts, and...

my eyes fell to her lap and my lip quivered— cum .

To top it all off, she'd lost the robe meant to keep her warm, and her dress had certainly seen better days.

Little Light was barely covered, and that certainly wouldn't do, but that was a problem for after .

I guided her palm into place, savoring the softness of her skin against the weathered surface of mine.

“You’ve had quite the night, haven’t you, Little Light?” I kept my tone light as I guided her knuckles to my lips.

She didn’t pull away, but she didn’t seem comfortable in my presence.

Not that I blamed her. When a lamb is left with a lion, the best thing it can feel is fear.

It protects it, keeps it alive when face to face with a predator.

Little does the lamb know, its blood is of no interest to the lion, and perhaps, it may even enjoy the company.

I ghosted my fingers up her arm. Poor Little Light was freezing cold, and I wondered if the sensation even registered, or if she was so hopped up on fear and arousal that she hadn’t noticed.

“You’re hurt and in desperate need of some care, aren’t you?”

Lux swallowed hard, and I wished I could read her mind. The subtle tremor running across her body told me more than she ever would.

My gaze drifted across the tattered remnants of her dress, dragging my thoughts to less than holy places.

Her thighs strained against the remnants of lace, and her full breasts rose with every shaky breath.

Her soft stomach pressed into the front of the dress and my cock stirred.

Curves like these were made to kneel . Made to beg .

Made to worship until the brink of disaster.

This had to be why Seth was so fond of this one, even if he'd never admit it. She was just his type... all of our types, really.

“Little Light,” I hummed her name. “Do you know what this box is for?”

Slowly, she shook her head side to side, the only evidence she'd been listening to my rambling.

“This is a confessional. Sinners come here to confess and be forgiven.” I planted a hand on her thigh. “And, my sweet Little Light, you are covered in sin .”

My voice darkened as I swiped a finger through the cum still slick on her skin. I rubbed it in with my thumb, causing her to wince against the pressure.

She tried to clamp her thighs shut, but I held them open. After all, it was far too late for modesty.

“Most of our toys don't venture out here to play with me... So, why did you?” My fingers trailed higher as I spoke.

Heat radiated from her core, and I wondered how desperate she was at this moment. My breathing slowed as I thought about shoving my fingers into her sex, oh how divine a pussy like hers must feel.

“I...” She seemed to forget how to speak, folding her arms over her chest as if to protect herself. “I was running.”

“Let me guess. Ronan?”

His name slipped, and I realized she likely didn’t know it. For her safety and ours, we didn’t share our—

She nodded.

I suppressed the surprise begging to cross my face.

“He said if he caught me again, he’d kill me,” she explained softly. “I need the money, I’m not ready for the game to end.”

Her voice pitched up as her brows drew together before a look of resignation sprouted on her features.

“A-are you going to kill me?” Her eyes pinned on mine, resting somewhere between hopeful and terrified out of her mind.

“None of us kill until we’ve had our fun.”

She stiffened, but she didn’t pull away.

My hand dragged higher, knuckles grazing the plush underside of her belly.



I gave it a tentative squeeze, mostly to see how she reacted.

I'd read online some women like her were uncomfortable in their bodies, that smaller men refused to savor every inch of them. I was not a small man.

My fingers danced to her needy center. From just the barest whisper of contact, my Little Light was already throbbing in anticipation. My thumb grazed her clit, and she jolted.

A half smile pulled at my lips.

"It's impolite to come to a man's altar when dripping with another's sin. You know that, right?"

"I—" She leaned forward, fingers curling around my wrist. It was probably hard for her to speak, considering I'd started lubricating my fingers in her essence. Still, the stubborn thing continued. "I—I'm sorry."

"No need to be sorry, Little Light." Honestly, it was more Ronan's misdeed than hers. After all, he was the one who chased her into my domain. "But, for you to be here, I need to cleanse you, and no that will not result in your immediate demise."

I slipped another finger into her and her head tipped back with enough force to thud against the wood.

"My God you're tight. Tell me, Little Light, how many times have you came tonight?" I dropped to my knees, not really caring if she answered.

"Once."

The wood creaked under my knees as I settled in front of her, pulling her legs apart

and digging my fingers into the supple skin. I hoped my grasp left finger-shaped bruises, ones that would stain her corpse and serve as a permanent reminder than she was mine , if only for a brief time.

I drug my tongue along the mess one of my friends had so carelessly left on her before pressing my tongue to her core. Instantly she jerked, fingers flying to my hair, and I made it a silent mission to devour her whole.

I lapped at her as if I were a man drowning in sin and she was my only shot at salvation, and my God was I going to earn it. Her gasps echoed off the walls of the church. The sound only ignited a fire within my soul.

I buried my face further into her, determined to drown in her if that's what was required to make her reach nirvana.

The slight salt of Ronan's cum lingered in her cunt, but that only fueled me with the determination to get rid of him.

I wasn't just feasting on all she offered; I was replacing everything left by Ronan with the memory of me.

Her hips rose, pressing herself into me, like she was desperate to feel what came next.

Like she was eager to see what it felt like to be broken by me, but I wasn't giving it to her yet.

I tightened my grip on her thighs and slammed her back down.

The plush flesh bulged between my fingers and I growled into her cunt like I was nothing more than a dog and she had the audacity to take my treat.

“Stay still,” I ordered against her. “I will decide when you finish.”

She whimpered, and that was a sound deserving of a reward.

I wanted to drag this out, to see if I could keep her pent up until the morning light and only take her once she’d survived.

Once she’d proven she could be a fitting bride for four savages such as ourselves—not like I’d let the others even try to kill her, but that wasn’t in the rules.

If she won, she got ten million dollars and a life of luxury until one of us would end her, a punishment for the unjust greed.

But, she’d also be offered to stay, to become our mate, to live with us and become part of our lives.

And, I’d grown rather tired of the cycle of chase and kill, and I wasn’t the only one.

But, the others lacked the common sense to realize we had to present our potential brides with a life worth choosing.

We couldn’t just terrorize them with orgasms and blades, we needed to prove our devotion, that a life with us would be more than abject horror and having to sleep with a knife under their pillows just in case.

And, edging her wouldn’t prove that. I needed to reward her for the horrors she’d seen and prove we were more than sharp edges.

Her thighs squeezed around my head, and I prepared for the most wonderful of deaths. Her entire body seized as an orgasm ripped through her, and I didn’t slow my teasing. I kept licking in just the right spots, picking up the pace until her moans

turned into something broken.

She held onto my hair as if it were the only thing anchoring her to this world and I groaned, welcoming the pain.

“Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God .” She panted, body still tense, completely unprepared for the second orgasm I’d forced on her.

I wanted her to leave this chapel covered in sweat and craving the feeling of my tongue. I needed her to feel like she couldn’t live another day without my specific brand of worship .

When I finally pulled away, she was panting, twitching, and so beautifully red that it put a sunset to shame. Her big brown eyes were half lidded, still dazed with the ecstasy only rough sex could provide.

I drug the back of my hand across my mouth before licking up what remained of her arousal. She was too sweet to let it go to waste. Once I was done, I pulled her down onto the filthy floor with me, determined to force her to savor herself on my lips.

My kisses were rough, each one bringing me closer and closer to the lust I associated with the moon. Unfortunately, this wasn’t the fun kind of craving that sex could satisfy. No, it was deep, and savage, and dangerous, and completely involuntary at this point.

She blinked up at me as I pulled away.

I took a few calming breaths, trying to quell the ugly urges that I carried deep in my chest. She inched back, fingers finding the strap of her canvas bag, and while she was well within her rights, I wasn’t ready to say goodbye.

“You’re filthy, Little Light,” I murmured, wrapping my arms around her, preventing her from fleeing no matter how desperately she wanted to.

“I’ve been—” She stopped to catch her breath. “—running through mud. All night.”

I nodded, trying to prepare a half-hearted apology, even if it would be a lie. Instead, I buried my face in the crook of her neck, breathing in the scent of her sweat.

“Come with me. There’s a creek out back,” I whispered, lips buzzing against her skin. “I have an extra set of clothes hidden in the rectory. Once I’m done, you’ll be more fit to tackle the night.”

Once I was done speaking, I lifted my head to see if the weight of my words had landed right. Unfortunately, she still seemed skeptical. Good. She had little to no reason to trust me.

Still, I pulled her to her feet and dragged her with me, whispering sweet nothings about how none of the others could hurt her when she was with me. I just hoped I’d be able to hold myself to the same standard.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:12 am*

Lux

There was absolutely no reason for the creek behind the church to be warm.

I'd spent half this night shivering, and the other part running for my life...

or being fucked, but I wasn't going to complain about that.

As much as I should hate everything going on, the dirty part of my brain was living for this level of attention.

And while the fear was definitely there, if it wasn't for the whole threat of being murdered, I could get used to this.

The water of the creek rivaled most baths I'd taken, leaving me to relax in a way that wasn't safe, not right now. I was beyond tired, and just as sore. I sank to my knees, letting the water rise to my shoulders as I closed my eyes for just a moment, trying to think of what to do next.

The crying man was... odd, to say the least. But, he wasn't a threat. That was a bonus, but I wasn't sure how much protection he'd offer if Ronan charged at me.

There had to be somewhere for me to hide.

The water shifted as the crying man waded in behind me, as he promised he would. I didn't look back at him, I couldn't. Right now, he was the least of my worries.

“I’ve never seen a bride get this dirty so quickly,” he scolded, running a hand down the curve of my spine.

Even from the slight gesture, I could tell he was unnaturally tense.

I cast him a look over my shoulder. “I’ve heard bride a couple of times today. Why?”

He cupped his hands together and scooped up more water before dumping it on my head. My skin prickled.

“Because, the goal of this ritual isn’t unnecessary bloodshed. It’s to find a wife who can take all of us at our worst and lead us back to the light .” He combed his fingers through my hair, and I shivered at his touch.

“Mmm, sounds like a lot of responsibility to take on for four men who kidnapped me.” I folded my arms, resting them on a grassy part of the bank before resting my head.

The crying man moved down my back, softly kneading my shoulders, and I almost moaned. Then, a thought dawned.

“Hey–That’s not like, some weird stipulation for me to get my money, right?” Realistically, I probably should have checked, or at least asked to see the ten million to verify this wasn’t for nothing.

“Not at all. Past victors have taken the money and went on to enjoy the rest of their lives. But, I’d prefer it if you were different.”

He said the last part so softly I nearly missed it. Once again, my eyes snapped open. This time, I tilted my head back, looking at the fractured sky poking through the tree branches. It seemed darker than it’d been all night, and in my mind, that meant it was

at least midnight.

I knew from my fair share of staying up too late that the sun started to rise around six. So, at worst I had to make it six more hours, and best maybe a few less.

“What do you mean?” I murmured, keeping my gaze anchored on the stars, silently counting them as a way to ignore my nerves.

The crying man didn’t answer right away. He scooped more water over my head before slipping his hands down my arms. He was shaking now, but I had no idea why .

“I would like to be loved as if I were a man and not a monster. Seth is the same... The other two will come around,” he finally said.

My nose wrinkled, both because I believed him, and because that was a whole lot of not my problem.

“My name is Solomon, by the way,” he added.

Solomon. Ronan. Seth. All I had left was the clown.

“We don’t often tell the brides our names.” He positioned himself over me, obstructing my view of the sky and looking down at me.

Silver hair fell around us like a waterfall, and the near perfect black of his eyes caused my stomach to twist. They weren’t human, not entirely, which made Solomon feel somewhat uncanny.

“Then why did you tell me?” I whispered.



“I told you, Little Light, I want you to be different .” He smiled as though the idea of that hurt him.

Or, maybe, that’s not what caused him agony at all.

Perhaps it was the knowledge that, deep down, he knew I wouldn’t be different.

I had no reason to be. Still, seeing Solomon’s softer side did dull the hatred I harbored for these men.

Maybe, they weren’t always like this. But, now they were, and that’s all that mattered.

He leaned in slowly before pressing his lips to mine and planting his hands on my shoulders. As he deepened the kiss, his nails bit into my skin. I let out a small hiss and shifted.

“You’re hurting me,” I explained, not pulling away.

Solomon stilled, but he didn’t let go. And, something in my chest told me he wasn’t just deep in thought. Instincts caused me to pull away, but, just as I’d partially broken free, Solomon reclaimed me. Worse than that, he used all his strength to shove me under the water.

I screamed beneath the surface, kicking and screaming as I clawed at his wrist, trying to do anything in my power to free myself.

But it was no use, he didn’t budge. My thrashing kicked up silt, turning the already murky water down right muddy, making it impossible to see.

Earth and water filled my open mouth, and my lungs burned .

My chest convulsed, constricting tight enough to crack my ribs, begging me to just take a breath.

And I wanted to, I really did. But there was no air down here, no matter how desperately I needed it.

Darkness crept into the corners of my vision like TV static blurring an old show.

My lips parted, allowing what remained of my air to leak out in small bubbles and my body jerked one final time before going still.

The type of stillness I couldn't fight. The kind of stillness that was final .

And, just as my body started to go numb, he let go.

My fight-or-flight reaction kicked in, propelling me to the surface though I'd already considered myself dead.

Muddy water exited my lips in a vomit like stream as I clawed at the bank, caking mud under my nails as I successfully pulled myself out.

My knees were weak, and I found myself unable to stand, but I knew I needed to get the fuck away from here.

"Lux, I'm sorry," Solomon's voice was barely audible over the pounding of blood in my ears. "I-I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to—"

He put his hand on me.

Panic speared through me. Solomon was going to try to drown me again, and this time, he'd succeed.

I kicked his hand away and scrambled back, patting the ground until I found the strap of my bag. My fingers wound in the canvas material and I heaved it onto my shoulder before bracing myself to run despite the fact I had absolutely no fight left to give, and then I noticed it.

A large stone within reach. Without thinking, I hauled it out of the earth. Worms writhed in the mud, likely cursing me for unearthing them, but I didn't care. I needed this more than they did.

“Lux, I need you to listen, I didn't mean—”

Solomon's pleas were silenced as the rock connected with his temple. I looked back just long enough to see him fall into the creek and silently prayed the watery grave would claim him just as it almost had me .

I didn't stick around to see if he got back up, instead I forced myself up despite the protests of my naked body, and I ran .

My lungs were raw from drowning, and my muscles ached from everything else, but I had to keep going. Stray branches bit into my skin, causing slight scratches that stung every time the water from my dripping body slid into them.

All I wanted to do was stop , but I knew in my soul that would be a death sentence.

That feeling only worsened when the silence of night was broken by voices.

“Come back here, slut, I'm ready for round two.” Ronan cackled, heavy steps echoing just behind mine.

My heart slammed against my ribs, causing me to run faster.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

Small sticks stabbed into my feet as the manor came into view. My stomach bottomed out, as that was the last place I wanted to be, but I didn't have the time to change direction, not with Ronan hot on my tail.

“You can run, but you can't hide! I can smell your scent for miles!” he promised.

Okay, so, run past the manor, maybe then I can see what's on the other side? Maybe there will be a cave, or—

“Lux! I'm sorry!” Solomon joined the chase.

His voice wasn't taunting like Ronan's. It was desperate , and somehow that was worse. It felt like I was going insane, but right now, I didn't have time to think about that. The manor loomed closer, and I stepped into the backyard. It felt safer than passing the porch.

Ronan's laughter pierced through the air. “You're not getting away from me!”

“Lux! Stop! I'll protect you from him!” Solomon promised.

Like hell he would.

I just had to get past the manor, and then I could come up with another plan—but then I saw it .

A set of wooden double doors coming up from a concrete slab in the ground. I had no idea where they'd spit me out in the house, but, right now, it seemed as good an option as any.

My feet skidded against the wet ground, nearly causing me to fall as I changed course. With a few steps, I'd closed the distance and pulled open the door.

Just below sat a set of stairs and near perfect darkness. I stared at it for a beat, wondering if this was actually a good idea, or if it was the last bad decision I'd ever make. Then, a twig snapped behind me, and I decided it was my only choice.

I nearly jumped onto the steps, and scurried down just enough to close the door. I fumbled around for a moment, hoping there was a lock. My shoulders slumped in relief when I realized there was.

I blindly clicked it shut before sinking to the ground and grabbing my bag. I zipped it open and patted around. First, I found the gun. But, seeing as it had one bullet, it'd do me no good if they both broke in.

I felt around a moment longer before finding the knife. With the blade in hand, I zipped the bag shut once more and positioned myself on the ground, staring at the locked door and ready to fight like hell if someone got in.

The subtle shift of bells behind me caused me to jump. And, just as I tried to get up, to potentially see where the sound had come from, a hand clamped over my mouth.

“Boo!”

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:12 am*

Cassian

Little Light trembled like a leaf in the wind, leaving me with the melody of her chattering teeth.

Poor thing didn't even scream into my hand.

I'd initially placed it there to muffle the sound, as I'd rather not go deaf tonight.

My fingers trailed down her neck and squeezed as her pulse erratically drummed against me.

"It seems like someone's scared," I whispered into her ear, getting as close as my mask would allow.

She flinched against me, and I admired her determination to keep a brave face.

I squeezed just enough to remind Lux I could and would kill her, but we still had time.

It was a little past one when I'd come down here, and Seth was still brooding in his library.

All he needed was some good pussy and the rush of watching someone kill our newest bride.

But, before he got his dick wet, it was my turn.

Finders, Keepers.

I pushed her to the ground, causing her to groan, but a small noise was fine. Was she keeping quiet thanks to the hunt going on outside? I'd heard Solomon try to drown her almost a mile away, the sound was faint, but unmistakable. I couldn't remember the last time he got to play, good for him .

“You stay there, I want to look at you before you break.” A laugh distorted my words.

My excitement was impossible to contain. Having sex once a month was rough , and while Solomon had been campaigning for a forever bride, I had little hope that a woman crazy enough to take all of us would ever exist .

I turned away, my fingers trailing along the brick wall until I met the oil lamp mounted in the wall. My fingers danced around the cool surface until I found the key to adjust the wick.

Soft shuffling hit my ears, far too close to be from either of those idiots prowling around outside. I assumed Lux was just trying to get comfortable, after all, she'd have to be brave or stupid to disobey me, and it took a certain level of intelligence to make it this far.

I patted my pockets to find the box of matches I kept on me before retrieving one.

I struck it along the wall and the orange flame sprang to life with a small sizzle. I dropped the whole thing in the lamp's mouth.

The lamp whooshed to life with a sudden burst of light and an almost unbearable sound.

To the rest of the world, it probably went unnoticed, but to me, it was like someone'd fired a gun next to my head.

My ears rang , deafening me to the world for just a moment.

I turned around to watch Lux, more out of habit than actual need, but the second I found the spot reserved for her. My eyes widened.

Where the fuck was she ?

I spun around, coming almost eye to eye with her, a silver blade glinting in her hand.

I sucked in a breath, and on instinct, tried to knock the knife away.

But, while I'd prevented her from stabbing my neck, the movement only rerouted the blade.

It made contact with the lower part of my side, slicing through the flesh and leaving me to grit my teeth as white hot pain seared through me.

Blood leaked out from the wound, staining the Harlequin pattern of my Jester costume.

“You fucking bitch ,” I growled, shoving her away.

Lux crumpled on the floor, and I could tell by the crazed look in her eye, that I didn't have long until she tried something else. I hadn't heard a gun fire tonight, which meant she still had her bullet, and if she could get to her bag, I'd be in trouble.

I clenched my teeth as I pulled the knife out, placing a hand on my side as I groaned through the pain. My first thought? Stab the blade into those all too wide eyes.



She looked far too innocent to be such a bitch, and I was about to change that. But, as much as I wanted to feel her orbs pop like a grape between my teeth, Seth hadn't had his fun yet, and I still needed mine.

She scrabbled against the floor, finding her feet and not reaching for her bag. She was probably smart enough to know she'd never make it.

I stalked over to her, blood drenched knife in my hand.

My costume was warm, wet, and sticky against my side.

The sharp ache of the wound had me feeling a level of euphoria I'd not had for a long time.

My cock was already half mast at just the idea of making that little cunt pay for even thinking she could kill me.

"Look at what you did," I grumbled, reaching out and grabbing her shoulder.

I yanked her toward me and she fucking squeaked. A nervous, unsure, sound. The most she could do without alerting the others.

"You made me bleed ." I snatched her hand, pressing it to the still weeping wound. I didn't think she'd hit anything fatal, but fuck was this cut dramatic.

Fresh blood slipped through her fingers, drop by drop, running out just enough to fall onto the floor. All the color drained from her face, but I wasn't sure if it was a sign of guilt or regret.

"You marked me ," I rasped, bringing my lips to her forehead. "Did you want the world to know I'm yours, Little Light?"

Her fear was palpable as she sucked in a breath. She'd yet to speak, and my mind spun with the possibilities of what could come next. An apology? A half assed excuse? Or maybe a vehement denial that she wasn't into our sick little game even though the skipping of her heart gave her away.

Traitorous organ.

I shook from the thrill of her defiance. I'd never had a toy try to break me , and that made the idea of devouring her all the more enticing.

"Most girls scream." I reminded her, enjoying the way her breath warmed me in quick puffs. "But you didn't scream, or cry, or even beg for mercy even though you're about to need it. No. You fucking squeaked ."

A delicious shade of pink crept up her neck, infiltrating the smooth skin of her rounded cheeks. Finally, some sense must have returned, because she tried to step away from me. I grabbed her tighter, reminding Lux she wasn't in control here.

"You stabbed me, you earned me, Little Light ," I hissed, turning the two of us so I could shove her against the wall.

There was a soft thud when her back hit the brick, her skull clacked just loud enough to let me know the impact hurt. Good.

"What's the matter, you terrible thing?" I tutted, shaking my head in disapproval. "Cat got your tongue? Maybe I should cut it out with the knife you stabbed me with ."

My fist shook as I raised the knife, placing the dull side against her flesh.

She shivered, but other than that, remained outwardly calm. It pissed me off.

“I should make you lap every drop of blood on my side before making you choke—either on my knife or my cock, your choice .”

Her eyes widened, pupils pin pricking for a beat. She should have been fucking terrified, and maybe she was. But, her fear didn’t erase the subtle clench in her thighs or the longing look in her eyes, fucking freak.

I flipped the knife, pointing the blade toward myself, slamming the side of my fist into the wall. “If I were a lesser man, I’d stab you back.”

“But you didn’t.” Her whisper broke her self imposed silence, and my lips twisted into an all-too wide grin.

I wished she could see my face under the mask, and maybe someday she would. But for now?

“That’s because I’m going to do so much worse .” I laughed through the words before grabbing her by her greedy little neck. She fought against me, but I was bigger than her, I was stronger than her, and I was going to make her regret stabbing me.

Together, we fell to the floor, and I miraculously didn’t stab either of us, not that I cared if I did. She thrashed against me and the wind whistled outside, bringing with it the sound of both Ronan and Solomon calling for her.

“I could open the door and let them know you’re in here right now .” I threatened, placing my knees on either side of her hips. “And, while I’m willing to spare you for some fun, I know Ronan would rip your throat open with his teeth. I’d get off either way.”

And just like that, the fighting stopped.

“You’re fucked in the head.” She practically foamed at the mouth as she snarled at me.

I was fairly certain that was supposed to be an insult, but I took her mockery as a badge of armor. Especially, because thanks to her naked state, I could see the way her nipples pebbled in arousal. If I flipped her over and drug my fingers along her slit, Lux would probably be dripping wet.

Filthy thing.

But, that gave me an idea. So, I crawled off her.

“On your hands and knees. Ass in the air, arch your back.” I pointed the knife at her as I stood.

Her lips parted in a look of utter disbelief, but she listened.

She shifted onto her knees, plush thighs spread wide open just as I ordered.

Her stomach hung slightly and her tits pressed to the floor, leaving her perfectly round ass in the air.

I cupped the soft flesh, admiring the smattering of bruises and scrapes she’d gained throughout the night.

“Can’t believe I’ve got the bitch who stabbed me on her knees, trembling, waiting for my next move.”

“Go fuck yourself,” she hissed under her breath.

I hummed for a moment as I swiped my fingers across her needy cunt.

She jumped and released a breathy moan. God, I wondered what her face looked like when I did that.

Did it scrunch in surprise or did her eyes widen before they rolled back in ecstasy?

Seth said this one didn't have much luck with sex.

At least we made her final night alive the best one she'd ever had.

"I'd rather fuck you, my dear," I whispered, bringing my slick coated fingers to her lips. "Clean these for me, and tell me how you taste."

Her full lips parted, and she took my digits down to the last knuckle, noisily sucking on the digits. My cock sprung into a full erection as if saying me next .

And while I wanted to know what that smart mouth of hers felt like, I had a better idea.

## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:12 am*

I took my spit soaked fingers and rubbed them along the plastic handle of the knife.

The dark material glistened in the light of the lamp, but it wasn't enough.

Instinctively, my hand fell to my side, and I coated my skin in the warm sticky blood.

Once I had enough, I smeared it on the handle and took a moment to admire my handy work.

Yeah, that should work .

I was just going to slam my cock into her ass, but this seemed like it'd be more fun.

Placing a hand on the small of her back, I anchored her in place.

This would probably be more pleasant if I stretched her out with my fingers, but that required fucks I didn't give.

I held the dull side of the knife and pushed the handle into her ass.

She cried out in pain, and I clamped a hand over her mouth.

“Remember, Little Light.” I pointed up. “If they find you, they'll kill you.”

Lux choked on something, either spit or air, but as her knees started to shake, she nodded. I took a little pity on the girl and helped roll her to her back.

Lux's knees had gone red from the pressure, little indents of the stone below decorated her flesh.

My fingers danced along the area and I pulled her ankles to rest on my shoulders.

I needed to be careful with what I was about to do, lest I accidentally cut my dick off.

Her thighs glistened from how wet she was, and I swiped my fingers along the surface.

"It takes a special kind of whore to be dripping wet with a knife in her ass." Maybe it was why no one else had made her come. She was a fucking freak.

Her chest heaved as she looked away. With one hand, I pressed down on the softest part of her stomach, and with the other I toyed with her clit, dragging my thumb across it in slow circles.

"Bet you feel full right now, don't you?" I taunted, trying to hide how badly I wanted to fill every. Last. Hole .

Ass, pussy, mouth. Fuck, she had two empty hands, but at that rate, we'd run out of dicks in the house. I wanted to see her glazed in the cum of four separate men and sweating under the pressure of more orgasms than she'd ever taken. I wanted her weak-kneed and overstimulated.

I wasn't sure if I'd ever get to see that happen, but the idea alone was fucking beautiful .

She nodded, and I should have just left it at teasing her. But, fuck , I needed to know what her greedy cunt felt like.

I reached down and twisted the knife, making sure the blade faced down. She tipped her head back and moaned with the motion. Her knees shook, and just as she collected herself, I carefully slid my pants down and slid into her warmth.

Inch by inch, I gave her all I had to offer. Every little movement caused a different part of her body to move, tits, stomach, hips. A coil of arousal knotted low in my stomach and I bit my lip to prevent myself from coming on the first pump.

Bad ass murderers didn't do that.

Her lips moved in a nearly silent prayer, one anyone other than me would have missed.

"Oh, my God ." A little whine curled around the last word, and I wondered how many times she'd said that tonight.

"He can't help you now , Little Light." I grunted, and reached forward to rest my fingers on her neck, savoring the hammering of her pulse. "God turned his back on this house a long time ago."

My hips rocked into her, causing her whole body to move.

Fuck, she was beautiful. If she beat the odds and got out of this, I wasn't sure if I'd be able to hunt her down and reclaim what remained of the money, as we'd done with previous victors.

Instead, I'd probably spend my days snapping the neck of anyone who dared to look at her.

My thrusts grew violent at the idea of killing for her. Would she like it if I did that? Should I bring her souvenirs of the kills like some sort of fucked up house cat?



No, I was getting ahead of myself. Right now, all I needed to do was focus on the wet heat of her cunt and the way it pulsed around me. My eyes fluttered shut, and I wondered if the mask made it better or worse for her.

If given the opportunity, would she kiss me? Maybe she'd bite my lip and lick the coppery taste from the surface.

Her breathing grew ragged, and I wondered what she'd be like if I'd gotten to her earlier. When she had more energy to fight.

My mind swam with the terrible idea of morning sex and breakfast in bed, things that were never meant to be.

Her face scrunched, her lips parting in a desperate moan, and that completely fucked me.

The coil in my stomach snapped, leaving cum to spurt out of me and directly into Little Light's cervix.

I gripped her thighs and hoped I bruised them; I wanted proof I'd been here, and if it weren't for the knife being shoved in her ass, I would have carved my name into her porcelain skin.

I nearly fell over once my relief finally washed over me, but I kept myself steady, easing off her and falling onto my ass. Once I was on the ground, I lifted her legs and removed the knife before tossing it far, far away.

"You don't get that back," I panted before laying with my back to the ground.

Once the thrill left my system, I was left with a dizzy haze in my head, and an unpleasant ache in my side, I was still bleeding. Fuck, now I see why people didn't

get stabbed for fun.

I heard Lux sit up before crawling over to me on hands and knees. My mask made it impossible for her to see my face, still, she gazed directly in my eyes.

“How long do I have until you try to kill me?” She asked cautiously.

“Depends,” I joked, a smirk pulling at my lips. “Are you going to suck me off?”

I laughed, causing a shooting pain in my side. My hand flew to the spot, pressing in as if that’d help.

Lux’s wet hair stuck to her forehead, but she did the best she could to put it back as she watched me with complete concern.

“No,” she whispered. “I want to help you.”

Once again, I wondered if this girl was stupid or brave . But, the idea of being cared for, even by someone potentially on death row, made me tingle in ways I couldn’t explain. But, maybe that was the blood loss talking.

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:12 am*

Lux

It was impossible to read the Jester's face, considering it was still hidden behind a mask.

But, if I had to guess, he looked at me with complete and utter confusion.

He was one of the four men trying to kill me, and any logical person would have taken him being injured as a chance to run.

But... if he wasn't going to jump up and try to drown me like Solomon had, there was nothing for me to lose by helping, and everything to gain.

Maybe, if I bandaged him up, he'd take pity on me later and wouldn't let his friends turn me into the human equivalent of a Bear Skin rug.

"You're still bleeding—" I pointed to the red pouring from his side.

"Yeah, that happens when someone stabs you, Lux." Sass dripped from his words, and I rolled my eyes.

"I have a first-aid kit in my bag. Let me get it and—"

"You also have a fucking gun in there," he scoffed. "Baby girl, if you want to finish me off, just stab me one more time and we're good."

"I'm not trying to kill you, dumbass." The words slipped and my face heated, it was

then I realized I probably shouldn't talk to him like that.

He let out a breathy laugh before practically melting into the floor. "Fuck it, do whatever you want."

My gaze narrowed. He had a lot of spice for someone potentially dying in front of me, but part of me wondered if that's how they felt when talking to me. I moved slowly and grabbed my bag before making a show of grabbing the plastic first-aid kit and not the gun.

With my bounty in hand, I knelt beside him.

"I need you to take your shirt off."

"There are better ways to get me naked, Little Light." There was a smug quality to his voice, once again I rolled my eyes.

"Your dick is still out, that means I've seen everything interesting."

His hand flew to cover his modesty, and I wondered if he even thought to ask for his pants back. After all, they were very much within reach.

"Fine, but I'm only getting naked because you're naked." He pointed at me with a circle of his finger.

Once that was done, he sat up just enough and peeled his shirt off.

He winced as he threw it as far as he could.

I sucked in a breath as I took in the sight of his bare chest. The clown was more defined than I expected, leaving his torso a map of lean muscles.

His pale skin was dusted with freckles and stained with more scars than I could count.

Some were fresh and pink, others faded and white, each of them told the story of a man molded by violence.

And, after tonight, once I left, I would be nothing more than another one of his scars.

That stirred something cold deep in my chest, a feeling I couldn't explain. I chalked it up to the exhaustion looming over me and moved on to what I had to do. Snapping the case open, I scanned the contents before pulling out a wad of gauze, antiseptic spray, and a few butterfly style bandages.

I'd used them a few times when someone cut themselves at the bar. They weren't as good as stitches, but they'd be close enough for now.

"Stay still," I mumbled before spritzing the mouth of his wound with the antiseptic.

This resulted in him screaming like a big baby .

"Oh, come on, you didn't even act like that when I stabbed you ," I reminded him.

"Yeah, but that was kind of sexual. This is just torture."

"Are you always this dramatic?"

He hissed through his teeth as I continued to doctor him up, but I knew that was the only answer he'd give. I interpreted that as a big, fat, yes .

The clown propped himself up on one elbow as I continued to work.

The silence between us was nice, but I'd be lying if I said I didn't worry about him

potentially getting revenge by stabbing me back.

So, I kept an eye on him while I worked.

Eventually, I was ready to apply the first butterfly bandage.

He winced when I did, and something in the action must've reminded him that he can, in fact, make conversation with me.

“So... If you make it out of here alive, and you get the money, what's the first thing you'll do?” The question struck me as strange, and I wondered if my pity strategy worked better than I'd expected.

Still, I paused and considered it. Ten million was a lot of money, and while I had the general plan of improving my life, I hadn't considered the first thing.

“Is it possible to rent a bathtub?” I laughed.

Saying it out loud felt sad, but the creek was the closest I'd gotten to a good soak in years.

My studio apartment didn't even have its own shower.

Instead, my floor had a dorm-like bathroom, luckily I only had to share with three other girls.

Still, the water was often cold when I actually got to use the shower and I wanted a proper bath.

The kind with salts and oils, I wanted it to start scalding hot and for me to stay in it so long that it grew cold.

“You know... we have a few bath tubs,” the Jester offered.

I stared at him for a beat, trying to decide if he was being serious.

“Yes, because a nice long bath in murder mansion seems so relaxing,” I deadpanned.

He shrugged. “It’s only like this once a month, you know, full moon and shit... But, if we found a bride, we could stop the ritual.”

There it was, the word bride . It settled on me like a weight, and I’d remembered Solomon explaining the whole thing. They wanted to be loved, but they needed someone who could accept them at their worst, which had to be this.

At least, I hoped it was.

And, while I had no reason to consider staying, the idea didn’t appal me as much as it had earlier.

“I’ll think about it... If you take your mask off.” That request seemed like a way to stop this conversation before it started.

He went completely still, eyes trained on me as if I were the predator. And then, ever so slowly, he reached up and slipped the mask off. The bells jingled as he raised it up and over his head before tossing it in the vague direction of the rest of his clothes.

And, holy shit , the man under the jester mask wasn’t what I’d expected at all.

His face had an almost regal quality to it.

Some of the auburn hair I’d noticed earlier had fallen out of the braids and stuck to the sweat glistening on his skin.

Yet another scar spanned his cheekbone, but this one was mostly hidden under reddish freckles.

To top it all off, he had dark green eyes that looked through you.

“My name is Cassian , by the way,” he said almost sheepishly. “I know yours, so it’s only fair.”

“Solomon said you guys don’t really tell brides your names.”

A crooked smile lifted one side of his lips, exposing a few perfectly white teeth.

“We don’t.” His voice was low and rough. “But, I’ve also never had a bride bandage me up... Or stab me for that matter. So, thanks for that.”

“You’re welcome,” I said matter-of-factly as I placed the last bandage. “So, if the brides don’t usually stab you, where did you get all of those?”

I gestured toward his chest, and he looked down as if the scars were news to him. He ran a hand over the marred skin, lips twitching into a frown. He was strangely expressive for a man who ran around in a mask for fun.

“I uh... it’s a long story.” A wry laugh twisted his words.

“I have time.”

Cassian’s gaze flickered toward the locked cellar door, his crooked grin instantly falling.

“No, you don’t.” He remained completely focused on the wood separating us from the outside world. “Ronan’s outside the door, I can hear him breathing. He smells



you, so it's only a matter of time before he busts in."

I froze, trying to hear any of what Cassian was talking about, all I got was the pounding of my heart.

Was he fucking with me?

"You can hear that?" I whispered.

He gave a small humorless laugh that made me believe he was telling the truth, but he didn't elaborate.

"Look, you can't stay here. If someone catches me, I have to go from cuddly to murder , and that would really kill the vibe," he snorted.

"Then where am I supposed to go?" My nerves picked up, and suddenly the idea of exploring the manor became even more daunting.

Cassian stopped for a moment, gnawing on his lip as if deep in thought. Then, a heavy stomp threatened to break the cellar door.

I nearly jumped out of my skin, and Cassian forced me to my feet. He used his free hand to snatch my bag and tossed it to me. I stumbled, but I caught it, even if just barely.

"If you keep looking that way—" He gestured toward the darkest part of the cellar. "There's a tunnel. It used to be a passage for servants or some shit. Seth's the one to ask, not me. It's too small for Ronan to fit in, and it'll pop you out somewhere in the west wing."

I stared into the void, trying to picture any of that.

“Then what? Hide?” That’d been my plan the entire evening, and I’d failed miserably.

Cassian shook his head as another, much harder stomp, caused dirt to fall in around the cellar door.

“There’s a library—Seth keeps random shit there. If you want answers, that’s your place. Just, GO!”

As if on command, the cellar door caved in. Moon light poured in around Ronan’s massive figure.

“I’ve found you, Little Light.” His snarl barely sounded human.

My heart lurched to my throat as he leapt in, not daring to use the stairs. Without further prompting, I sprinted toward the tunnel, but I wasn’t the only one.

Heavy steps echoed behind me, fast ones too. My fear propelled me forward, and as my eyes adjusted, I noticed the cobweb covered opening in the corner.

Without a second thought, I dashed into it, and, as promised, Ronan couldn’t fit.

His arm swiped wildly into the hole, cursing me, threatening that my death would be worse if I continued to run. But, I didn’t listen. Instead, I inched toward the library and hoped to God that Cassian wasn’t just setting me up.

## Page 13

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:12 am*

The library of Red Lace Manor looked more like it belonged in a storybook and not real life—especially in a place like this.

The floor to ceiling windows were uncovered, leaving moon light to spill in, illuminating the plethora of book shelves covering the walls.

Each one was stocked with different genres of books, classics, sci-fi, horror, even a few modern romances I recognized by the cover alone.

And, if that wasn't enough to make this room feel out of place in the ancient mansion, the computer on the desk would have done it.

My first instinct was to turn it on, but when I tried, nothing happened.

This caused me to wonder if someone in the house cut the power for this event, but I didn't have time to think about that, not with Ronan potentially closing in on me any second.

So, I focused on looking for the answers Cassian promised were hidden up here.

But, the only problem was I had no idea what to even look for. If they were on the computer, I was shit out of luck.

Water audibly trickled through the pipes, and the ceiling crackled above me.

I jumped on instinct before looking around the room.

Blowing out a breath, I took comfort in the closed doors around me.

There was one nestled between two bookshelves, that had been the one I came in through, and just outside of it laid a narrow hallway.

It was larger than the tunnel I'd crawled through to get there, but not by much. Then, directly across from me was another. I wasn't sure what laid behind the redwood, but I wasn't exactly eager to figure it out.

I reminded myself that, for now, I was safe before scanning the room again.

At first, nothing new popped out, but as I turned toward the wall behind me, I noticed another portrait like the ones I'd seen earlier in the night.

But, where the other ones had been perfectly straight, this one was just crooked enough to catch my attention.

Holding my breath, I reached forward and lifted the frame ever so slightly. Behind it was a hidden compartment lined with large envelopes and exactly one leather-bound journal. I glanced over my shoulders once more before grabbing the papers with shaky hands.

Carefully, I laid them out one by one on the desk. There was no way to tell how much time I had, so I made it my mission to leaf through all of them as quickly as possible. I bent back the metal clasp on the first one and pulled out the papers.

In big, bold letters, the first page read Project WRAITH—final phase candidates.

My eyes widened slightly as I moved to the next sheet, what looked like a mug shot of Cassian greeted me. He looked younger and bore none of the scars I'd seen just moments prior.

Enhanced auditory tracking. Neural rewiring successful. Subject capable of tracking prey in complete darkness.

Under that was charts and a bunch of numbers that made zero sense to me, but, on the bottom, stamped in red ink were the words PUBLIC SAFETY THREAT/ DO NOT RELEASE.

I continued to flip through the papers, finding similar ones for Solomon and Ronan. The only difference was that their notes dealt with sight and smell, respectively.

Then, I got to Seth.

I hadn't seen his face until that moment, but he was prettier than I expected. Strong jaw, pouty lips, and impossibly blue eyes. Dark tattoos snaking up his neck topped all that off. My stomach did a strange flip, and I reminded myself that he was likely the mastermind behind all of this.

I reminded myself not to drool over a psychopath and instead focused on reading his notes.

Enhanced sensitivity. Extreme responses to physical stimulation, pain threshold drastically reduced. Do not sedate. Last attempt resulted in the deaths of four medical staff.

The house creaked again, and it was all I could do to not fly out of my seat. I shuffled the papers back into order before slipping them into the envelope and moving onto the next.

These documents detailed the experiments performed on the men in brutal detail –it even listed the surgical procedures performed on each of them and the varying levels of success.

They'd sharpened Ronan's teeth to make him more lethal without a weapon, but they couldn't do the same to Seth.

They tried, but the sedation didn't work, and I assumed that was the incident that killed medical staff.

These men had been through hell . Treated like they were never human to begin with.

Isolation chambers, physical punishments, even a month-long period where each had every sense except the altered one taken.

A shiver ran down my spine as I tried to imagine only being able to hear. No sight, no touch, no smell.

My eyes started to burn with sympathy that had no right to exist. I swallowed the lump in my throat and put the documents away. It was probably for the best that I left the envelopes alone... but, my curiosity got the better of me with the journal.

The book felt heavy in my hands, and I turned it over. At one point in time, it was probably expensive, but years of wear and tear had left the leather dull and the spine cracked.

I opened the first page to find: property of Seth Kline. Part of me hesitated, and I wasn't sure if I was silently opposed to invading his privacy, or if I was afraid of what I might find. Against my better judgement, I flipped the page.

The first few entries were fine. He was bored and unsure what he'd signed up for. And then, everything shifted.

My skin is on fire. It hurts when air moves too fast. I can't feel my fingers.

I pressed my fingers to my lips but continued to read on.

The following pages were no less grotesque.

Seth wrote about being able to feel his blood flow through his veins, about how they'd dropped the four of them off in a random desert with nothing but the clothes on their back and essentially said good luck .

Somehow, they all survived. They worked together to hunt and watched each other's backs while they slept.

After those pages, everything turned completely illegible.

The letters were too sharp, too crooked, and the few places I could decipher made absolutely no sense, that was, until I got to the last page.

Don't want to kill.

Once a month. Keeps the urges at bay.

Need to find a wife.

Need to prove we can be loved.

Need to prove we're still human .

I barely suppressed a gasp before I snapped the book shut. Did I fully understand their crazed line of thinking? Absolutely not. But... part of me felt bad for them, worse than that, part of me wondered if these men could be fixed.

I didn't have long to marinate with that thought though. Just as soon as it crossed my

mind, the creaking I'd been ignoring grew closer. The rattle of a door handle soon followed, and on instinct I fell to the floor and crawled under the desk.

These men had enhanced everything, and I had no idea who might barge in, that meant I needed to be as inconspicuous as possible.

A door squealed open, and footsteps echoed in the otherwise silent room. I clamped a hand over my mouth, hoping it'd prevent me from breathing too loud. My pulse pounded in my ears, so disorientingly loud it made me dizzy.

The steps grew closer, and I forgot how to breathe. Hot tears slid from my eyes and down the fingers starting to dig into my cheeks. I suppressed a sob and tried to curl in on myself.

The floor beside me shifted, and a hand curled around the lip of the desk. Drops of water fell to the floor as someone slowly leaned over, bringing themselves to my eye level. Icy eyes stared at me for just a moment before the silence finally broke.

"It's impolite to snoop, Little Light."



## Page 14

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:12 am*

Seth

Lux cowered under my desk, her rabbit-like pulse practically shook the floorboards.

She was completely naked, other than the cross strap of the bag I'd given her at the start of the night.

Her once long and wavy hair was matted with sticks, like it'd been full of mud and then dried.

Her hands and legs were spattered with blood, but it didn't look like it'd belonged to her.

The only wounds decorating Lux were slight scrapes, likely from running around outside, and bruises.

Never had a bride even thought to prowls around in my library, let alone find those. And I wasn't sure what to do about this faux pas. Anyone with an ounce of decency knew not to look for what their host had hidden. But our Little Light didn't seem to be very ladylike .

I stood slowly, not wanting to jostle the surrounding air more than needed. Normally, I didn't shower until the full moon was done. But this whole thing had me so on edge that I needed the feeling of water on my skin.

But now that I was out of the shower, my body still buzzed from the steam, and the rapidly cooling droplets, mixed with the damp towel sticking to my waist, had formed

my own personal hell.

My knees cracked as I stood up and fingered the first drawer on my desk. It slid open just in time for Lux to shift. My skin prickled with the movement, and my jaw locked. The razor-sharp fangs the WRAITH project decided I needed dug into my lower lip, causing tears to prick my eyes.

The taste of copper danced on my tongue as I patted around the drawer before finding the plastic frames of my glasses.

I'd never needed them before the experiments, but after I lived for a month with nothing other than my sense of touch, my vision never fully came back.

Like some type of fucked up joke.

For the most part, the others healed. Ronan was fine. Cassian was fine. Solomon couldn't smell the best, but that was it. I was the only one permanently damaged.

Sure, glasses fixed most of it, but losing sight wasn't the worst part. It was the chronic overstimulation, the need to trudge around in fleece-lined clothing to prevent everything from being overwhelming, even in the summer.

Fuck—if my skin got slightly too dry, it felt like I would explode.

My life had become a series of endless steps to make what I'd become somewhat more bearable.

And for a while, I thought I wanted to be loved.

Somehow, in my fucked up mind, if we could find someone to shine despite our darkness, that we could bask in the glow and heal.

All we needed was a little light.

But we were now ninety minutes away from sunrise, and somehow, Lux Rhodes had not only survived, she appeared to be thriving.

Most brides were dead by now, or simply being toyed with. Sometimes tortured. But, Lux, while scared out of her mind, still roamed the house. No mortal wounds. Nothing that would even scar.

I should have yelled for Ronan the second I felt the air shift in here. He wouldn't hesitate to rip her apart limb from limb. The thought caused me to grip the desk so hard that I was shocked it didn't splinter.

Once a month, a woman must die. As is written, not in stone, but in our way of life.

I've grown used to this, and though I'd started this evening praying that Lux could be our Little Light, our bride, the one who loved us though we'd forgotten how to love ourselves, the thought of changing our routine killed me.

On our worst days, we were no better than sharks. Mindless creatures driven by a hunger that food could never satisfy, and little to no impulse control. We knew not to attack each other, but Lux would be different, right ? And, when blood lingered in the water, what existed to stop the slaughter?

Nothing.

One of us would snap, hurt, or even kill her, and the family we'd cobbled together would dissolve.

I could feel as Ronan stalked the halls. His steps were far too heavy, leaving the earth to rumble under my feet. That meant I should march over to that door, tear it off its

hinges, and demand he take care of the pest in my office. After all, it wasn't in my nature to hurt a lady.

But something heavy in my chest anchored me in place. I slid my glasses into position, careful not to drag them across my skin. I blinked twice as the world came into view, and once more, I crouched down to look at Lux.

She shook like a leaf, but didn't dare move, other than to shift her bag to her lap.

"I'm going to count to three, and you're going to crawl out from under the desk. If you cannot do so, I will come and get you." I stood once more after my warning. "If I have to come get you, I will make anything else that happened this evening look like child's play."

I turned and faced the now-empty wall, glaring at the outline of the missing portrait before counting.

"One." I kept my tone clipped, knowing she'd fucking test me.

Because, why wouldn't she? She'd already learned my name and made it further than most other brides. Who knew what the fuck she'd done to my men.

I forced out an irritated breath. "Two."

Lux breathed, stirring the air around us, but it was a sign she'd braced herself for what was to come.

"I swear to God , if I get to three--"

The floor creaked. The slow brush of her hand followed the sound. Goosebumps prickled my skin, and I cursed myself for taking a fucking shower. This would have

been so much easier with my mask and heavy jacket.

I turned on my heels, and at first, I didn't see Lux. Then, I looked a little lower. She was still on the ground, now positioned on her hands and knees. Her gaze was trained on mine, and thanks to my glasses, I now had a much better picture of Lux's wounds.

Most of her bruises seemed intentional, except for the ones on her back. She hadn't died , not yet. But tonight certainly hadn't been easy for her.

And though she looked scared, no part of her looked ready to beg for mercy.

"Up," I ordered.

Without thinking, I extended a hand.

Her eyes flicked to my palm, and then to me. Lux didn't take my hand, and I wasn't sure she'd considered it for even a moment. Instead, she pushed herself up, using the desk to steady her posture.

Lux's whole body shook, and I could tell by the gentle sway in her stance that she was exhausted . It was likely that her adrenaline had run dry, leaving her to face the rest of the evening on her own.

Good .

I curled the fingers of my outstretched hand into a fist, letting it fall to my side.

"Did you find what you were looking for?" I asked, doing my best to sound calm rather than paranoid.

Lux gnawed on her lip for a beat, and I wanted to scream at her to stop. Just watching

her caused my skin to crawl. And then, her chin tipped up and her face turned into the picture of defiance .

Something in her stubbornness caused my stomach to twist.

“No.” Her voice was raw and barely audible. “Your handwriting’s shit, by the way.”

I blinked twice. “Excuse me?”

Lux crossed her arms to her chest and cocked a hip against the desk. “Your handwriting is shit . It’s barely fucking legible. I think most preschoolers could keep a better journal than you.”

My chest heaved. I couldn’t remember a bride ever being this mouthy.

But, fuck me, I liked it.

“Which files did you read?” I pointed at the stack on the desk.

She flicked her hair over a shoulder and shrugged.

“Nothing important. They mentioned your name a lot.” A teasing lilt decorated her words.

I took a step closer, and despite all her bravado, she flinched. Lux recovered quickly, but I could tell how hard it was getting for her to hide her fear.

“I bet you think we’re monsters ,” I rasped.

That was the only word for us.

But, Lux shook her head. “I know you’re human. All of you, even Solomon.”

I breathed a little slower at the mention of another’s name. She wasn’t supposed to have my name, let alone anyone else’s. And, while I should have been mad at that fact, I couldn’t get over the sound of Solomon on her lips . Anger flared in my chest.

This was my house. My game. My pack of rejected super soldiers. The only name on her lips should have been mine.

My fingers twitched at my sides, begging to dig into her flesh. I didn’t hurt women. It was impolite, but, fuck she was doing something dangerous to me.

“Bet you’ve fucked all of them tonight, haven’t you?”

Another step closer, and another flinch back. She nearly sat on my desk now.

“Yeah. I have,” she said, unabashedly. “I thought that was part of the game.”

The twist in my stomach tightened.

“How many of them came in you?” I barely managed the words through my gritted teeth.

“All except Solomon.”

There it was again. His name on her lips.

His name on my lips. Everything about Lux Rhodes was made for me.

Made for me to worship . Made for me to keep .

Made for me to ruin. No one else, and though I never minded sharing with my comrades, the sound of Solomon's name on her tongue was enough to make me snap.

With one hand, I held her wrists, the other, I tangled in her hair. Yanking on the strands, I forced her to look up at me. Her lips parted, big, dark, doe eyes stared into mine. I shoved her the rest of the way onto the desk, nearly knocking over my monitor.

She gasped but didn't scream, and I savored how soft her skin was against mine. Most times, it hurt to touch or be touched, but not right now. For the first time since the experiments, the warmth of another's body felt good.

I barely had time to process that fact because she spread her thighs without needing to be asked.

What a good fucking girl.

"Even with all of them, you still want me? Greedy Little Light." I scoffed, looking down at her with mock disdain.

A shy smile curled one side of her full lips. That was the first thing I'd noticed about this bride; everything about her looked so soft, so inviting, so touchable .

Mine. Mine. Mine.



## Page 15

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:12 am*

My heart skipped, each thunderous beat forced more and more air out of my lungs.

Letting go of her hands, I dropped my towel. It was easier to breathe now that the saturated bamboo fabric pooled around my ankles, but only slightly.

“Why do you insist on playing with the dark, Little Light?” I husked, grabbing my shaft and running it along the moist heat of her slit.

She felt so good that my knees nearly buckled. I couldn’t wait to destroy that tight cunt of hers.

“You guys aren’t the dark... you’re just lost,” she breathed.

Her words landed like a shotgun shell fired point blank into my chest, leaving me nothing more than a stringy mess of muscle and tissue, allowing her to see right through to my heart, or more so, what remained of it.

I was a man with a lab number where my soul should be, we all were, and she had the gall to suggest we were just lost ?

For years, I’d believed a bride could fix us, and even when seeing Lux’s file, I assumed she might be able to do it.

But, as this night wore on, the idea of her felt like a saw slowly slicing through a tree.

The cut would start slowly but ended in a deafening boom that could be heard for miles—the kind that reduced the tree to a stump.

I wasn't ready to be a stump.

I pushed inside of her slowly, with far too much care for what I was. Her cunt gripped me with an almost unbearable heat, one that burnt away what little remained of my good intentions.

“You think we're lost?” I glowered, slipping out of her slowly before slamming in full force. She turned away and hissed out a pathetic breath, leaving me to grip her chin and force her to look at me, to see the monster she denied existed. “You think that the four men who've been terrorizing you all night are just lost ?”

I thrust in again, this time her hiss turned into more of a cry, her fingers gripped the desk so hard her knuckles turned white.

“No, Little Light, we're not lost . We're fucked in the head.

We are what they wanted us to be,” I grumbled.

“They rearranged us, piece by piece. They cut us open and turned us inside out to shape us into what they wanted. They rewired us and drowned us in the life they wanted us to become. Why don't you see that? ”

I stopped thrusting, and her lips parted with a quivering breath. My chest heaved, and I tightened my grip.

“Answer me, Lux.”

“If you've been rewired once, why can't you do it again?” Her eyes never left mine, and it was in that moment that the fear buzzing under her skin, like a bunch of angry wasps, disappeared, leaving her to sit tall.

But, the insects didn't disappear into thin air, instead, they bit into me, burrowed into my skin and devoured the sane parts of my psyche. Fear coiled in my stomach, wrapping around the white hot arousal like an anaconda. My cock twitched, still buried to the hilt.

“You think it's that fucking easy ?” I snapped, each word punctuated by a brutal thrust, one that stole Lux's breath and made her toes curl against my legs.

My hand slipped from her chin to her stomach, and I pressed in hard enough to feel as my length ruined that tight little cunt of hers. My lips parted just enough for me to pant through my teeth.

I didn't give her a chance to answer, part of me feared what she said next would make far too much sense. I gripped her by the hips and pulled her off the desk before crashing into my high-backed chair. I lifted the armrests, making room for two in the space normally reserved for work.

Her eyes flickered toward the door, and rage burned through me at the thought that Lux would up and run after shattering my brain.

I gripped her by the waist and forced her to spin around before I slammed her back onto me.

She cried out as I impaled her. My cock was rather fond of its new home, and it didn't need any invitation to enter.

Her pussy clenched around me so tight that I nearly blacked out.

A pathetic moan left my lips, and I thrust into her violently, punishing her for forcing me to make such an embarrassing sound.

“Mine,” I growled, looping my arms under hers, locking her in place. “You want to fuck with my head and then think about escaping?”

My mouth found her shoulder, and I barely restrained myself from sinking my teeth into her pulse. Instead, I kissed the space, and she tilted her head to the side, making more room for me.

“You think you’re going to say that shit and then disappear with a suitcase full of blood money?” I rasped right next to her ear.

Her hips rolled against mine, her arousal dripped out onto my thighs. The frantic sound of our breathing and the slap of skin on skin filled the room.

“You think I’m going to let you survive and leave , like none of us ever touched you?” I slid one of my hands down her body, cupping her breasts before resting it on her belly. My fingers splayed wide across the soft surface. “ If you make it out of here, you’re never getting rid of me.”

I thrust again, this time harder.

“You feel that, Little Light?” I hissed, as my teeth dragged along her neck.

Just the barest whisper of my fangs caused blood to well to the surface. I ran my tongue over the scrape, savoring the copper of her blood. She hissed in pain, squirming against me, but her walls constricted once more, like her body knew who she belonged to, even if Lux herself didn’t know it yet.

Bite her .

Not yet .

“I’m going to fill you with me .” My lips brushed the shell of her ear. “You’re mine now. You’ll carry my child, you’ll grow round for me. And I will fucking find you Lux .”

Heat surged through my body, and my vision blurred.

A guttural sound started low in my chest, and it was all I could do not to come at the idea of Lux Rhodes, heavy with my child.

Her tits would grow, her stomach would round, and she would be undeniably marked as mine.

I’d let her think she got away for a while.

She wouldn’t die like the rest of the victors. Instead, I’d wait until she felt safe and drag her back. It didn’t matter if she kicked or screamed; she belonged to me. Her back arched into me, and her moans slightly unraveled, leaving the sounds breathy and full of need.

And, something in my mind screamed that she wanted this as badly as I did.

My orgasm hit more violently than any I’d had in the past, leaving me unable to breathe as my seed flooded her cunt.

The feeling of everything was almost unbearable , and that alone reduced me to nothing more than an animal.

My teeth sank into the flawless skin of her neck like scissors through packing tape. I hadn’t even realized I’d bitten her until a pained scream rang through the air. Swallowing hard, I got a mouthful of thick, sticky blood.

Lux's scream faded to a gurgle as I let go, unable to swallow the liquid in my mouth. She fell forward, hitting her knees on the ground.

I didn't realize she'd left her bag on the ground until she clawed around for the strap. My lips parted, intending to tell her to stay still, the faster her heartbeat, the more blood she'd lose. But the second my mouth opened, her blood tumbled out in a thick wave and coated my chest.

Lux paled as she looked back at me and scrambled to her feet. And the second I stood, the door slammed open.

Lux

My breaths came in uneven, shallow bursts. Each one caused the dizzy feeling in my head to grow. Hot, sticky liquid poured from between my fingers. I didn't need to look down to know what it was, not with Seth standing in front of me.

His eyes were wide and wild, glazed over with an emotion I couldn't place, and dark sanguine splatters decorated his chest. I had no way of knowing how deep he'd bitten me, but I swore I could taste copper, and it felt like my lungs were slowly filling with liquid, making it impossible to draw in enough oxygen.

He didn't move. Fuck, it barely seemed like he was breathing. All he did was stare at me, and part of me thought he might have been in shock, and if he was, the feeling was mutual.

Keeping my hand on my neck, I looked toward the crashing sound from moments prior. I'd assumed Ronan finally caught me, but oh, how wrong I'd been. He was there, but Solomon and Cassian flanked his sides. None of the men wore masks, and two of them brandished wounds I'd created.

Time seemed to slow as we all entered into a staring contest. Then, what little sense I had left returned. My chance of survival felt slim right now, but if I wanted it to be a nonzero chance, I had to run .

And that's exactly what I did.

My legs moved without the help of my brain, and the world around me spun, making

it impossible to choose a destination, even if I wanted to.

My bare feet slapped along the tiles until I came across a staircase.

One so massive that I had no idea where it could possibly lead.

Something in me said it was a bad idea for me to climb the stairs, but as I stopped and tried to collect myself, a thunder of steps caught my attention.

I couldn't stop to breathe, no matter how desperately I needed it.

Because if I tried, they'd catch me, and if they caught me, I'd die.

I bounded up the stairs, two at a time, gripping the banister as if I was trying to rip it out of the wall.

Each step sent a bolt of agony through every last overworked muscle.

The edges of my vision started to vignette like an old photo, but still, I didn't stop running, not even for a second.

I blinked, and suddenly, I was somewhere strange. The floors were unfinished wood, and boxes littered every corner. Tall, gothic windows stood behind me, allowing me to look out into the landscape around the manor. More importantly, I could see the sky.

The night was no longer black, and there were no stars to count. Instead, a purple twilight greeted me. My shoulders slumped for one second of beautiful relief. My face tingled, and I thought maybe I had a fighting chance to wait out the last few minutes of the game.



Then, the floor behind me creaked. I didn't have to look, it was like I could feel them.

My heart lurched and my skin crawled, as if begging me to find another escape.

But, I'd cornered myself. Worse than that, I was slowly losing control of my body.

My knees transformed into jelly, and I spun around—not because I wanted a last look at the men who'd shortly take my life.

But, because I wanted to lean against the windows in hopes they'd prop me up.

The men of the Red Lace Manor may have won, but I would be going out with my dignity.

The glass stuck to my bare back, and made me acutely aware of the sweat decorating my skin.

My lips parted as the world continued to blur.

Pre-vomit saliva collected in my mouth, but I swallowed it down.

Four predators stared me down as they formed a semi-circle around me—shoulders squared and knees bent.

A sleepy blink clouded my vision for one second as I searched for Ronan.

It wasn't that I favored him or anything, but he was the one man I'd yet to see maskless in person.

Tawny hair, square jaw, and scars just like the rest. His face wasn't as perfect or sharp as the others; instead, his features were boxy in an almost charming way. His

nose had a few bumps, like it'd been broken a few times.

So that was the face of the blood-hungry beast prowling for me all night.

I forced a smirk as I started to involuntarily slide down the window.

“Cute.” The word came out warbled. I coughed twice, causing something hot and wet to rush over my lips. I ignored the feeling as well as I could. “It’s rude that the last man I’ll ever see isn’t better looking.”

My ass met the floor and a few splinters poked into me, but I didn’t flinch. I barely had it in me to blink right now, let alone react to the barely-there pain. My eyes burned with the desire to shut, possibly for good now. My head lolled back, smacking into the glass with a dull thunk .

Cassian was the first to move. His boots whispered across the wood with feather-light steps, and I tensed, preparing for him to stab me to make us even for earlier.

My gaze shifted to Solomon just in time to see his jaw tense.

His silver hair matted to his forehead, blood darkening a few of the strands.

I’d put up a hell of a fight tonight, and if they thought I’d let it end like this—they had the wrong bitch.

My limbs moved like molasses as Cassian crouched near me.

It was like he didn’t know what to do with me now that I had stopped running.

Eventually, I got the bag to my lap and unzipped it.

Cassian's emerald eyes widened, but I didn't bother to look at the other men.

Clumsily I shoved my hand in the bag as I searched for just a moment before meeting the cool metal of the gun.

My fingers encircled the grip just as Cassian reached for me, but he yanked back when I pulled the weapon from the bag. It was heavier than I remembered it being at the start of the night, or maybe I was just weaker.

Either way, it wasn't like it mattered.

The gun shook in my grasp, and despite my body's protests, I pressed the barrel to my chin.

"Lux, you don't have to do this." Seth's voice seemed completely disembodied to me. I couldn't pinpoint where he was, and I didn't care to look.

If I were going to die, it'd be on my terms.

My only response was pulling the hammer of the gun back. I exhaled, closing my eyes, and wondered what was going through the men's heads. With how quiet they all were, I wondered if this was yet another first for a bride .

My finger wrapped around the trigger, but just as I went to pull it, heat smashed into my back. Golden sunlight filled the dusty room, and the predators around me shrunk away into the shadows. And though I had no idea if the sun had actually risen, it felt like I'd won.

The gun fell to my lap, and I didn't have the strength to lift it again. Masculine voices came from around me, but they were distorted, as if I were trying to listen underwater. And, while if I wanted to, I could have fought against the current and

potentially risen to the surface.

I was so tired , plus, those sick bastards probably wanted to see me struggle.

So, instead of continuing to fight, I let myself go numb and vanish into a deep, blissful, painless sleep.

## Page 17

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:12 am*

Lux

For a while, my body was weightless. I couldn't feel anything, I couldn't open my eyes to see anything, and I assumed this was death.

No heaven, no hell, just an absolute sea of nothingness.

The spiteful part of me wished I had a way to contact my family.

I'd accepted their religion out of love for them, but I'd never believed in it.

And, I felt like a big, fat, I told you so, would really boost my morale.

Then, ounce by ounce, the weight returned.

A deep-seated ache embedded itself in my bones, and the scent of antiseptic flooded my nose, and nearly caused me to gag. A painful breath rooted itself in my lungs, and, begrudgingly, my eyes opened.

I expected to see a hospital room, or maybe a dungeon, but instead, I was in a bedroom?

Not one I'd been in before either. The walls were a clean white, and wooden furniture decorated the space. It was like someone had taken a photo from an interior design catalog and made it a reality, down to the lack of anything that made it feel like home.

The soft clink of metal on metal greeted me, and I tried to sit up, only for a strong arm to appear on my chest and push me back down.

“Hey, can you maybe not do that?” A deep but playful voice called from beside me.

My brow furrowed as I turned toward the sound. Cassian sat beside me, a metal tray loaded with bandages and a pair of scissors perched on his lap.

There was no jester mask or harlequin costume today. Instead, he wore a grey T-shirt that clung to his biceps and a set of dog tags.

What the fuck was going on ?

I tried to open my mouth and ask him just that, but my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth like it'd been glued there. My eyes shot to his in a near panic, and he sighed.

“Water?” He asked, as he leaned over and grabbed a glass from the nightstand.

Condensation beaded on the sides, rolling down as he moved it. My heart skipped a beat at the idea, and I nodded, or more so, I tried to. A sharp pain in my neck stopped anything of the sort.

Cassian shot me a half-lipped smile and fished an ice cube out with a gloved hand.

“Open up,” he ordered, holding the cube to my lips.

I did as he said, not really caring if it was a trap or not. My entire body relaxed as the ice hit my mouth and started to melt.

“Take it slow, you’ve been out for a few days, and if you drink too fast you’ll—”

CRUNCH .

My teeth cracked through the ice and Cassian rolled his eyes.

“You were supposed to suck on it.”

“You should’a specified.” My voice was husky and weak as I swallowed down the ice chunks. “Can I have more?”

I looked at the glass.

Cassian’s lips pressed into the thinnest of lines before he sat me up and brought the glass to my lips. Instinctively, I put my hands on his, and I was glad I did, because he tried to pull away far before I was done drinking.

“Quit, you’re going to make yourself throw up,” he lectured, voice far too concerned for a man I’d stabbed.

Still, he didn’t pull the cup away, and I didn’t really give a shit if I vomited. I just wanted the dryness in my mouth to go away. He waited until I’d drained the glass to move it away, then he put pillows under my back and laid me down, like I was something precious .

“How do you feel? You’ve been out for a long time.” He reached forward and pressed a hand to my forehead.

“How long is a long time ?”

Cassian scratched his neck, causing his auburn ponytail to move. “Seventy-seven hours?”

My eyes widened—that was like three days, right? Maybe a little more.

“And you guys didn’t kill me?” Oh shit, that brought me to the next issue.

Why the fuck wasn’t I dead?

Cassian winced as if the question physically hurt him, then, after a moment, he recovered, like he understood why that was a reasonable question.

“Well, I mean, to be real, Seth almost did—” he pointed at my neck.

My fingers flew to the spot and landed on a mass of gauze and not an open wound.

“But, you won the game. Sun rose, you survived, why would we kill you?” he said matter-of-factly.

And I hesitated a moment because he was right. But that just raised even more questions.

“Why didn’t you just let me die then?” I was fairly certain I’d almost bled out.

Cassian looked at his lap, shaking his head as he played with the dog tags around his neck.

“Ronan said we should have, that you’d ask too many questions,” he mumbled under his breath.

“Well—he was right.”

Cassian shook his head once more, swiping a tongue across his lip.



“Why didn’t you just let me die?” he challenged, lifting his shirt to expose the wound on his side.

Gone were the butterfly bandages, and in their place were a set of messy stitches.

“Where’d you get those?” Did he go to the hospital?

“Where do you think I got them?” He scoffed as he tugged his shirt back down. “Do you know how hard it is to stitch yourself up when you’re drunk?”

My nose wrinkled. “Why were you drunk?”

“... Do you know how much harder it is to stitch yourself up sober ?”

I snorted, an ugly, raspy, unladylike sound, but it was a genuine one. Honestly, if my chest didn’t hurt so much, I probably would have laughed.

“If you could stitch yourself up, why’d you let me play doctor?”

Cassian shrugged. “Wanted to see what you could do.”

“That’s a hell of a way to test someone,” I muttered, trying to cross my arms.

My entire body felt like mush, so the motion came off as less sassy and more clumsy. Cassian’s smirk turned into a genuine smile, and the feral part of my mind wanted to bite him. You know, just to see how one of them liked it.

The room fell silent for a moment, other than the humming of a fan in the corner.

A gentle breeze blew between us and tickled my cheeks.

The air between us was heavy with the things we'd both rather leave unsaid, like you know, hey, sorry I stabbed you .

Or, you know, the real reason he didn't let me die.

Cassian cleared his throat and looked away from me.

"It's uh, it's been a while since I've had to fix someone I care about." His admission was soft, almost sheepish.

And honestly, I should have pushed him to figure out what he actually meant. But that was a lot to unpack, and I didn't think I had the mental energy to deal with it right now. Plus, there were more pressing matters.

"I'm still thirsty." I declared as my eyes darted to the empty glass. "But, I don't want water—I want iced coffee."

"Jesus-fucking-christ." He ran a hand down his cheek with so much force that it pulled his lower eyelid down.

His face snapped back into place once he let go.

"Seriously?" Exasperation crept into his tone.

I stared at him for a beat before nodding.

"An ice-cold Coke Zero would work too."

It might even work better. I practically salivated at the idea of the sweet bubbles dancing along my taste buds.

Cassian groaned before mumbling something under his breath.

It sounded suspiciously like spoiled little brat , but I didn't push the issue.

Even though I wanted to remind him I was well within my rights to act like a diva, they were the ones who kidnapped me and forced me into a killing game... Even if I did agree to play.

Cassian lifted the metal tray from his lap and placed it on the nightstand as he stood. He then offered me a hand. I stared at it as if it were a trap.

“Come on.” He gestured for me to take his hand.

“What? Where are we going?”

I held both my hands to my chest, not trusting him.

“The others want to see you. We've gotta get you moving, it'll be good for you.”

“ No .” The word came out horrified.

“ Yes .”

He pulled me to my feet, completely against my will, and I still didn't have it in me to fight him.

The world spun a little, and I almost fell, but Cassian caught me. And that was when I realized I wasn't naked, or dressed in lingerie, or anything weird. Instead, I was draped head to toe in what looked like a very expensive set of pajamas.

“These aren't mine.”

Cassian made a sound that suggested I was one comment away from giving him an aneurysm.

“No shit they’re not yours. We don’t have any of your clothes, and Ronan offered to let you borrow a shirt of his.”

I nearly gagged at the idea. He wasn’t exactly the cleanest... but the rest of the guys were so thin that I didn’t think I could comfortably fit into theirs.

“And then, Seth threatened to kill him the next time he slept, and then Seth and Solomon went out and got you something soft .” Cassian waved a hand at the navy blue, buttery smooth outfit I’d been dressed in.

“So, congratulations. You now own four sets of luxury Pajamas, and have a manhunt for your honor.”

Cassian started pulling me to walk, lacing his arm under mine, and I followed on shaky feet.

“They went out in public?”

He nodded. “I wasn’t gonna fucking do it. I wanted to leave you naked.”

I glared up at him, and he didn’t care.

As my legs carried me forward, the weight of exhaustion started to press down on me. And, once we reached a set of wooden steps, I knew there was no fucking way I’d be climbing those.

And, I think Cassian thought that too—that or he knew I was going to argue with him and wasn’t in the mood—because he picked me up and carried me bridal style.

I'd never actually been picked up... I liked it.

When we reached the top of the stairs, the soft murmur of voices hit my ears. Cassian paused for a moment and looked down at me. A wave of tension crossed his features, but it vanished as quickly as it came.

"Ready?" he whispered.

Absolutely-fucking-not. I was sore, disoriented, and quite frankly, I'd rather go back to bed. But, something deep in my soul made me nod.

Cassian pushed forward, and a blinding rush of sunlight hit my eyes. I gasped, digging my palms into the sockets to block some of it out.

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:12 am*

As we got closer to the rest of the men, it was like the air shifted. I could feel their eyes on me long before I opened my own. This worsened when Cassian sat me down in the corner of what I assumed to be a couch.

“I swear to fucking God , if any of you rush her,” he warned, resulting in a chorus of unsatisfied groans.

I cracked an eye and looked around me. Once again, I was stuck somewhere surprisingly modern. Green walls, a flat screen TV, and leather couches decorated the area, and the men had scattered themselves around the room.

Ronan stood next to a window, arms crossed, staring me down. The weight of his gaze caused me to shift, and I looked to Solomon, who was curled at the other end of the couch, dark sunglasses on, reading a book.

I couldn't remember much of his file, but I knew his eyes had been enhanced. And, I wondered how terrible that felt on a sunny day. My stomach twisted, and I didn't want to think about that.

Which left me to look at Seth, who was walking directly toward me.

My heart skipped a few much-needed beats, and I instinctively tried to claw my way back into Cassian's arms. But, it was no use. Seth had me.

His arms wrapped around mine and my body went uncomfortably rigid as I prepared for him to finish me off... except, he didn't .

Seth just held me with a shaky grasp, breathing me in.

“I’m so sorry,” he whispered, lips brushing the shell of my ear.

His words were so soft they were barely audible over the thudding of my heart, but as he pulled away and lowered me onto the couch, he looked genuine .

More than that, he looked tired. Dark circles hung from his eyes, making me wonder if he’d slept since our game. He fell onto the couch as if intentionally inserting himself between Solomon and I. Cassian perched himself on the arm of the chair, earning a dirty look from Seth.

A heavy silence fell on the room, and I wondered just how many of those I’d face today.

“Look,” Ronan started, walking closer and settling into an armchair. “If we’re all done being weird, Little Light has a choice to make.”

... I do?

Seth sighed, reaching out and resting his palm on my thigh. Once again, I tensed. Then, his thumb ran up and down the material of my jammies, and my body involuntarily melted, even if just slightly.

I must’ve had the worst survival instincts in the world.

“So, as you know, you were promised a lump sum of money if you survived... which you did,” Seth said, suddenly sounding a little unsure.

“But, since you went poking around in his shit—” Cassian gestured toward Seth—“you know we want a bride.”

“That means you can stay.” Ronan shifted, causing the chair under him to groan.

“But, only if you want to.” Solomon didn’t look up from his book.

This whole thing felt disturbingly calm, and I wasn’t sure I trusted it. I bit my tongue to prevent myself from saying as such.

“You said it yourself... you don’t think we’re monsters,” Seth added, looking away from me but keeping his hand in place.

“Yeah, but why would I stay?”

Ronan leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. “Because you want to?”

He sounded far too hopeful for my liking, but, as much as I didn’t want to admit it... he was right.

I should want to run for the hills and never look back. The money they promised me was more than enough to make a comfortable life. But, despite all of the terror still lingering from that night, the fucked up part of my brain thought it was fun .

“So... not saying I am , but! If I did stay, you guys wouldn’t hunt me again, right?” Not that I was totally opposed to the idea, but it would be nice knowing they wouldn’t actively try to kill me once a month.

“Never again,” Seth whispered. “We’ve been talking about it a lot, and we have a plan to keep you safe, even if one of us were to get a craving .”

And by craving, he probably meant the urge to drain the life from any living creature that looks at them the wrong way . But, again, it seemed like he meant it.



Taking a deep breath, I looked around the room, at the men who'd endured more than one person ever should. They'd found a family in each other, one that they were willing to open to me.

It was a fucked up family, to say the least. But, it was theirs. And in some bizarre way, I wanted it to be mine too.

As strange as it sounded, I had a feeling these men would keep me safe. I wouldn't have to worry, I wouldn't have to want, I wouldn't have to keep working until the point I broke. Plus, I didn't think they could be any worse than the family I'd come from.

Plus, the sex was phenomenal .

"Fine," I murmured, my voice coming out surprisingly steady. "I'll stay ."

Seth looked back at me as his shoulders slumped in relief. Without his mask, I was free to see the slight smile dancing across his lips. The one that showed the start of his fangs.

"Little Light, I promise, from now until forever, we will work to give you everything you deserve."

"Fuck that noise--We've got a bride!" Cassian cheered, pulling me to his chest and crowding me, exactly like he'd told everyone else not to do.

I compared this moment to the night of horror I'd faced, and that alone made it impossible not to laugh. The decision I'd made probably wasn't a smart one, but I knew deep down, I needed to see where this led.

Lux

Six months later...

In my time with the men, I'd gotten to know them a lot better. The world they'd created that night was just for show, and while that made absolutely no sense to me, it seemed completely logical to each of them.

So, I didn't question it. I just let them keep playing dress up and decorating the house like a haunted mansion once a month. At least they weren't doing drugs. And, to top it off, things were getting kind of serious between the five of us.

I rested my head against the passenger window of Cassian's RAV4, watching the pine trees race past the car. I closed my eyes, and my shoulders slumped at the knowledge that we were almost home.

Calling the manor that felt strange, but over time, I'd grown into it. It was like a pair of good leather boots; at first, they caused your feet to blister until they bled, but once they were worn in, you never wanted to take them off.

And, I could say, without any doubt, I never wanted to leave Red Lace Manor, not forever, anyway. If my men were there, I'd be there. It was as simple as that. A smile tugged at my lips, and I realized just how much two days away had made me miss them.

If I had to guess, Seth probably sulked in his library for the entire weekend, and, when we got back, he'd pretend he didn't notice we'd left.

But, he'd be the first one to say he needed my help with something.

Maybe he couldn't find a book, or he just needed someone to bounce ideas off of.

Either way, he'd force me to sit down with him, offer me candy, and whine for an hour because Cassian hogged me all weekend, then once he was done complaining, he'd hold me while finishing his actual work.

Ronan wouldn't say anything, he'd just corner me the next time I showered and force himself in. He'd stare at me for a minute or two, but never once admit to missing me. Instead, he'd hold me hard enough to bruise and kiss my neck in ways Seth was banned from doing.

Solomon would wait until I went to bed tonight and slip under my covers. He'd act like he was a little cold, and I just happened to be in the closest bed. He'd then ask me never to leave again.

How did I know all this? Because that was exactly what each of my unbelievably clingy men did whenever Cassian and I went to the grocery store, and I couldn't imagine their reactions being much worse this time around. Even if Cassian and I had been gone for two days as opposed to two hours .

Normally, Cass took all the chaos with a grain of salt. He'd put the groceries away and let each of the men steal their moments with me. After all, they were still relearning how to love and be loved, and he understood that better than I did. But, right now, Cassian looked pissed .

Shooting him a sideways glance, I noted how tense he seemed. His knuckles were white as he gripped the steering wheel as if it were trying to run away. He'd barely spoken since leaving my parents' house.

And, while the silence hurt in ways I couldn't process, I didn't blame him. My

parents were a lot .

They loved him, of course. Cassian was charming, ex-military, and had a stable career in the medical field.

We just so happened to leave out the fact that Cassian's job was essentially video chatting with people who couldn't afford insurance and essentially telling them they were dying badly enough to warrant calling an ambulance.

He'd then tell them small things they could do to die less and send them a bill for two hundred dollars.

To my family, he was a real man , with a career, a mortgage, and a house big enough that we could move in together and not share a bedroom. You know—to keep Jesus happy or something.

And I was, and always would be, the family disappointment. Even if they didn't know about my other three genetically modified military rejects, or that we essentially recreated horror movies in the backyard for fun.

I laid a hand on his denim-covered thigh, he jumped, not like I'd hurt him, but like I'd startled him.

“You okay?” I whispered.

He'd taken out the earplugs he'd disguised as hearing aids, and I didn't want to be too loud.

His lips pressed into a line as he shot me an askance glance. His chest swelled with an irritated breath as he looked at the GPS mounted on his dashboard. We had twenty minutes until we got home, and I would harass him the whole time if he didn't tell me now.

“Your dad’s a dick , your mom’s a cunt , and your sister’s worse ,” he grumbled, adjusting his grip on the wheel.

I blinked twice, drawing slow circles on his leg with my thumb.

“So, I’m guessing you liked them?” I joked.

Cassian huffed.

“No– Lux –I didn’t like your family. They spent the last two days insulting you and acting like I’m some sort of fucked up Savior who lowered his standards far enough to accept someone as troubled as you.

” We came to a straightaway, and he gestured with his hands; it wasn’t like the action added anything, but more he needed to move for a second before returning them to the wheel.

“They don’t know that you found a house of literal murderers , called it a home and fucking saved us . ”

The anger in his voice should have been the first thing I noticed, but my mind lingered on what he’d said. He thinks I saved them. A happy wiggle infested my shoulders, and I couldn’t fight my grin.

But, my enthusiasm didn’t last long, instead, the feeling was replaced when Cassian reached over, slipped a hand up my skirt, and squeezed my leg harder than he ever did.

“If I don’t blow off some of this anger, I’m going to explode.

” His voice dropped into a gravely whisper as he crept his fingers closer to the line of my panties.

“I need you to be prepared. I know it’s not a full moon, but the second you get out of this car, I’ve called the boys and they all know we’re hunting that pretty ass of yours.”

My thighs involuntarily clenched at the idea, and a sly smirk crept onto Cassian’s lips.

Fuck. Yes.

The car ride home had turned deathly silent, other than the sound of tires on the gravel road. Moonlit pines and a sea of fog guided us home, yellow light poured from the windows of the manor, and from here, I could see shadows pacing.

My teeth sank into my lower lip, and I was so excited that I’d started to shake. The second Cassian pulled in, he unbuckled my seatbelt for me, and I opened the door and darted into the woods.

This time, I had shoes on, so I didn’t have to deal with twigs sinking into the meaty part of my foot, unfortunately, this made my steps louder.

I wasn’t sure where I was going, but that didn’t matter. Even if I got lost, it was a matter of time until someone found me.

Heavier steps followed mine, and it wasn’t long until brawny arms wrapped around my waist and tossed me over their shoulder like I weighed nothing.

I thrashed against a chest that was distinctly Ronan’s; he grunted in response, holding me tighter.

“Nice try, Little Light,” He rasped, marching me back toward the house with long strides. “I’m startin’ to think you like when I chase you.”

After I moved in, we had a long talk on why deodorant was important, not just for

you, but for those around you. It took a while to find one that didn't give him a headache, but now that we had, the funk from the first time was gone, leaving him to smell like a clean, musky man.

"If I say I do, does that ruin it?" I panted against him, my skin slick from sweat.

They might have been built for running, but I sure as fuck wasn't.

"Nope, just makes it fun in a different way."

By the time we got back to the house, Solomon was outside, a length of black rope wound around his hand.

"There's our Light." He stepped closer, taking me from Ronan's arms.

Solomon wasn't as rough as the others, but he was trying, and that's what mattered. Once I was safe against his chest, he peppered my cheeks with kisses before laying me down on the wooden slats of the porch.

Ronan promptly scolded him for not taking this seriously, and Solomon argued back. They did that a lot, so I just tuned them out, which was easy because Cassian had returned, knife in hand.

My eyes widened as he straddled my hips and gently ran the dull part of the blade under my chin. Goosebumps erupted from the cool kiss of the blade.

"Sleeping in separate rooms was bullshit," he spat, lowering the knife to my blouse. "And, I'm going to right that wrong, even if I have to fill that pretty cunt of yours all night."

My stomach knotted in arousal as the sound of heavy boots stomped across the wood. Seth took a knee, gripping my chin with a gloved hand. His face was blank, other

than the subtle glint of jealousy in his eyes.

“Her pussy belongs to me and me alone,” Seth growled, tightening his grip on me. “But, I would appreciate it if you unwrapped her for me.”

That last sentence drew the attention of the two fighting like a married couple, and before I could process what was happening, Ronan was behind me, propping me up on his knee while Solomon wound the silky rope around my wrists.

Cassian took his time slicing through the buttons on my shirt, letting each of them hit the porch with a soft clatter before moving onto the next.

Seth pulled at the silky material, exposing more and more of my chest with each pop.

I continued to kick and scream, but it was only half-hearted.

We all knew I loved it when they did this, so it was more for show than anything.

Eventually, he got to the last button, leaving the red material to hang off me.

With my hands bound, they couldn’t exactly get it off, but if they cared, it didn’t show.

Cassian made quick work of slicing through my skirt and then my panties.

He stopped at the last one, bringing the soaked material to his nose.

“Jesus fucking christ, how are you this wet for us?” He rasped, breathing in my scent.

Butterflies erupted in my stomach, and I shifted around as much as I could. I tried to rack my brain for a smart ass response, but the second I opened my mouth, Cassian shoved my underwear between my teeth.



The taste of my arousal flooded my tongue and muffled any sound I might make.

“Alright, she’s ready, get her boys,” Cassian commanded, drawing a skeptical look from Seth.

But he let it pass. Solomon pulled me higher, and Ronan stepped off to the side, letting Cassian slip in behind me. He wrapped an arm around my waist as he slipped a finger into my ass.

I gasped, writhing against the slight burn as he prepared me to take more than his fingers. Ronan and Seth both watched with hungry eyes as my breathing grew ragged and heat crept up my chest.

My eyes sealed tight as Cassian pushed his length into my ass and my hands fisted. Nails dug into my palms, and that must have been the sign they were waiting for, because Seth positioned himself in front of me before slamming his cock into my incredibly greedy cunt.

I shot forward, my head resting against his shoulder, but this didn’t last for long. Ronan gripped my chin and forced me to meet his gaze before removing the panties from my mouth, which I then clamped shut.

“Open up, Little Light. It’s not fair that I’m left out of the fun.”

My lips clenched tighter out of spite, but Ronan knew how to deal with my attitude. He squeezed my cheeks until my jaw involuntarily parted. He slipped two dirt-covered fingers into my mouth, running them along my tongue as I bit him like a savage animal.

It’s probably why he didn’t put his dick in there at first. He’d tried that once and learned.

He removed his spit covered fingers and replaced them with his throbbing cock.

Together, the three men worked in tandem, pistoning in and out of me while I struggled to breathe against both the pleasure and the unbearably full feeling they'd forced upon me.

Solomon reached down, slipping a hand in my bra and kneaded my left tit.

His fingers danced along the nipple, tweaking it in a way that almost made me see stars.

The heat in my chest became unbearable as my whole body tingled. Tightening and burning with the ache of release. I choked on a barely there breath as an orgasm tore through me, leaving my lips to rumble against Ronan's testicles as I tried to scream.

He pulled out of me, ran his hand along his dick twice, and a ribbon of cum flew from the tip. I closed my eyes just in time for it to hit my face, a few drops of his salt dripped into my still-open mouth.

Cassian came next, digging his fingers into the soft part of my waist as he filled me. And finally, Seth joined the party. His weak moan filled the air as he trembled against his release. His cum poured into me with hot bursts, leaving me completely and utterly stuffed.

As the men pulled out, I didn't stand a single chance in hell to get myself up to the bathroom. Luckily, I didn't need to. As long as I lived here, my men would make sure I was taken care of, whatever I needed.

And, despite the glaze of cum still lingering on my cheeks and lips, they finished their hunt by taking turns kissing me like I was all that mattered in their world. Which was fair, because despite all odds, these freaks had become my everything .