



Run, Starlight (The Royal Ballet Presents #3)

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Category: Romance

Description: THE ROYAL BALLET PROUDLY PRESENTS THE RETURN OF A BELOVED CLASSIC: GISELLE

She twirls over a pointe, majestic and irresistible, translating her pain into art. I watch her every day from the shadows, waiting for the time to strike.

One move to the next, she's a star, my Marcella.

My brother says I'm obsessed. I shouldn't desire her as much as I do. Only he knows the kind of monster I am, but now it's too late for salvation.

She's mine.

He watches me with narrowed eyes, trying to protect her from me. If I'm bad, he's not much better. The right thing to do is to walk away, both of us, but we were never experts on doing the right thing.

To save her, he follows. To have her, I lie. We wrap our little star in a web of deception. She has no idea what lengths we will go to take what we want.

By the time she understands, it's already too late.

Run Starlight is an MFM Giselle retelling with dark themes. It's a standalone and can be read independently.

Total Pages (Source): 32

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Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:23 am

ENZO

We stand together in the back of the theater, two shadows melding with the darkness.

The director doesn't see us, nor do any of the dancers.

If a tech were to look, they likely wouldn't notice us either, though we could be spotted.

I watch her, and my brother watches me. The risk, the secrecy, her .

I'm so hard it hurts. It's been this way all week, a luscious torture poised over the tip of her pointe like a knife to my heart.

"You've been watching too long," Lucky, my brother, whispers.

"There isn't enough time in eternity for such a thing, Lucciano," I answer, using his full name to impress the weight of this moment on him.

Dark hair hits her mid-back as she moves to center stage.

Glossy strands glisten under the overhead lights.

How does hair shine like that? She narrows her eyes to the audience, almond-shaped and just as dark as her hair.

The near black is in perfect contrast with her golden complexion and the freckles

scattered on the bridge of her nose like old blood spatter.

Everyone in the room stares, just as mesmerized as I am.

Her features take me far away to another world.

“This is becoming too much, Enzo, an obsession.”

It's been an obsession for seven days now.

“You aren't interested?” How could he not be? Look at her.

“Of course not,” he says, grinding his teeth beside me. The grating sound interrupts the rhythm, sparking hot fury on the back of my neck. There aren't many things he does that truly bother me, but this is one. Respect the music .

“If you're going to lie, at least stop interrupting me.”

His warnings don't interest me. They never do, so I tune him out in favor of her black pointe and matching leotard.

They're a shock against the light pinks surrounding her.

The snake tattoo weaves down her arm and comes alive with every move.

The music starts, swelling and pooling saliva on my tongue.

God, what I wouldn't give for a taste of her.

My heart drums with the first notes. I thought I lost that organ years ago.

Marcella Serra.

She gave it back to me.

“You know the things you grow fixated on never survive long.”

He thinks he knows me, but he cannot guess how I’ll act when this feeling is unprecedented.

I’m not hunting my Marcella; I’m captivated by her.

When I’m not watching her at the theater, I’ve taken to scrolling her social media.

She thinks her secret is buried so deeply, but she’s only been on my radar for seven days, and I’ve already uncovered almost all of them.

The Myrtha Queen as if she isn’t so obvious.

The last of her secrets are being gathered as I watch.

“You’ll come to understand in your own time,” I tell him. I can’t be mad at my brother for being trapped. He always has been. If I let him limit me, I would still be a scared little boy like him.

Marcella rotates her chin as she starts dancing, stretching her neck and rolling her shoulders with an athletic elegance that lights me up from the inside out.

Her body moves with a precision not many can truly appreciate.

But I can. I’ve killed and dismembered so many people I could pick a person’s musculature apart with nothing more than my eyes.

I do that now, scouring the muscles, tendons, and attachments that make the greatest dancer I've ever had the pleasure to set eyes on.

Marcella is exceptional.

The perfection she strives for glows in every move, every pirouette.

She lifts her right leg as she goes into a jump, and the left follows after in a perfect arch as she twirls to face the audience.

Her spine curves back, and she lunges forward; her hair flies loose around her like pitch-black liquid moving to the beat.

She surges with it, both controlled and free, evocative in her mix of classic training and new application.

Marcella is breathing art, which I have never in my life appreciated more than the dead kind, yet here we are. Ballet might be her chosen canvas, but all the world's her stage, just as it is mine. Why couldn't we dance together, both divine players in this tragic comedy?

My knife is my paintbrush, her body is music itself, and we're made for each other.

My eyes follow her as she moves. I've become addicted to deciphering her cues and understanding each element of her choreography as if it's a love note she leaves me.

And that's exactly what they are. Each move she makes upon this earth is for me.

What I wouldn't give for her to perch beside me as I created my own art, for her to dance some macabre number to match them as they died .

Perhaps she would choose something more spirited.

For all her darkness, she seems kind, so she might like to give them something lovely and gentle to die by.

One day, I will ask her. An intense drumming interrupts the classical music and my little daydreams. Her steps become desperate, and she acts with every fiber of her being.

Her face morphs with the emotion of the music, letting it sink into her bones and change the fabric of her being.

She and I are bonded, so it affects me too, grabbing me by the heart and carrying me with her.

“It’s time to go. We have a job.” When did Lucky’s voice become so very tiresome? I used to care more about what he had to say. I’m sure of it. Maybe?

Marcella dances faster, scared and confused.

She’s so good that anxiety catches me in a chokehold, and I nearly forget it’s all an act.

Each emotion she asks me to feel bursts within me, and I’m not the type to be so easily affected.

I ball my hand into a fist, holding myself back from running to touch her.

There doesn’t seem to be a lot of good reasons for caution, yet I resist lifting her into my arms and displaying her to the world.

My brother has warned me that could result in too much attention and things might grow unnecessarily complicated. Sadly, he's right.

"Are you even fucking listening to me, Enzo?" he spits.

"No," I finally answer. Why the hell would he think I would listen when Marcella is dancing?

Lucciano worries about the world around us.

I seek our true calling. Marcella does the same thing.

She inspires, and I appreciate someone who does what they're supposed to.

I would love to put her in a pretty cage and hang her from the ceiling, but she's where she ought to be.

It's not time to pluck her out of her performance .

"I'm tired of arguing with you. Cygnus texted the next target. Come with me or stay here."

"I'll stay behind." I barely spare my brother a glance.

I'm not going anywhere until the music's over, and she's done showing everything she has to anyone who will watch.

It's the same for all dancers; they need an audience to experience their art, but Marcella has so much more to offer.

I don't acknowledge him, my eyes stay glued to the stage.

“Even if I'm the one to finish the job? She's danced every night this week, Enzo. When did you last kill? I've never known you to be patient.”

I have no reason to leave until Marcella tells me she's done.

My brother is clearly concerned about my lack of killing this week—I've been busy. Who knows what might happen if he doesn't handle me properly?

The sarcasm is thick even within my own thoughts.

I may do things my own way, but that doesn't make me what Lucky fears.

“I don't live for blood, brother. I live for Marcella now.”

He scoffs like it was a ridiculous statement, and I nearly turn to punch him in the gut for his audacity. Lucky fails to realize that he spoils me more than he discourages me, and frankly, I'm fine with that. It means there's more blood for me to spill.

“Enzo, no,” Lucciano warns me. I can practically feel his growing concern. His worry is a constant drain and nag on us both. He's seen where this is going, and I'd prefer he not act surprised now when it's been clear for days.

“è pìrfetta,” I whisper back to him, not planning to be dissuaded by anything, especially Lucky's negativity.

“And not for you,” he replies in Sicilian too, but what the fuck does he know? Sometimes people steal. I've spent days wanting her, and that's more than enough to act .

The air leaves my lungs slowly as the music dies down.

Marcella turns on her last pirouette and falls dramatically to the floor in a heap of black.

She's graceful even in her pile of black tulle, and the beauty in her stillness leaves a mark upon the world.

My cock hardens at the sight of her, the thought of slipping beneath that tulle and spreading her soft parts, this time in pink.

"Serra," I tell him, finally facing his way. "It's Sardidian. Beautiful, isn't it? It will be a pity to change it. The children can hyphenate it, Serra-Bianchi."

"Enzo, Cygnus is waiting," Lucciano repeats as if he doesn't hear me. Once again, I'm in my own higher world, and he's swayed by earthly contracts.

"That's too bad for Cygnus."

I chase opportunities to express my art to the deepest extremes like my Marcella.

My pieces may be too gruesome for most tastes, but they are evocative, draw questions, and horrify—everything art is intended to do.

Cygnus is the local crime lord, and his need to remove dissenters gave me the canvas I needed until now.

A worthy ally and a fulfilling life in a dangerous city where people turn up dead every day.

I've gotten to impress my will upon the world.

But what is my will now when my eyes can't leave her slumped form?

My choices made sense until Marcella. The life my brother and I built made sense.

The lifetime of pain and suffering we left behind for a life of power all made sense.

But nothing in the world matters now that I've seen her dance.

I can't see one reason to follow Cygnus instead of her.

My will is my own; my art is my will. Her body is my obsession, and the breath she draws is my soul's one heavenly link.

"Do you even care if you make our lives unnecessarily difficult?" he asks. "Does it bother you at all that you're fucking everything up?"

"No," I tell my brother, not caring anymore about anything but the rising pile of tulle. That's one of my favorite parts of the act, when she lies there unmoving until the audience grows truly concerned she might be hurt or unwell.

"We're here to watch the prima ballerina, not the third row."

"You're not funny." I caution him not to insult her. He'll regret his own actions soon enough if he's unkind to her.

"Why are you doing this?" he asks, and I can hear the first hint of him backing down in his voice. If experience has taught me anything, he'll be putty in my hands soon.

"She's special to me, Lucky. I can't let this go."

"We can talk about it." My brother softens to my whims just like he always does.

Despite us being ten months apart in age, his face is incredibly similar to mine, and

both of us look just like our mama.

Dark brown hair and eyes, nose a little too big for western beauty standards, but quite handsome where we come from, and matching dimples that have gotten us out of years' worth of trouble.

I prefer suits and slick my hair back, while he dresses casually with a buzz cut.

Still, most days I can't tell us apart. Outside of our looks, our relationship is closer than most, and some days I'm forced to ask where does he end and I begin?

I lose myself looking at him. He has everything I need, everything I'm missing, and I don't think I could live without him.

I wonder if there was some cosmic mistake, and we're one functioning person split into two half souls.

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MARCELLA

Fabrizio stands in my doorway with a soft smile on his face.

He reminds me of our mother. His features are so much like her it's funny he's a boy.

Brown curls and eyes so dark they're nearly black.

The mischief behind his eyes always makes me giggle, and when he laughs, it's contagious, but there aren't any laughs today.

His eyes are flat, lacking his normal spark.

Something feels off. I haven't seen him in almost two days, and that's strange too.

He looks around the room, finding me lumped over my homework at the desk.

I have a bad attitude this afternoon, or so Mom and my teachers tell me, but I'm just tired and not in the mood to talk to anyone.

Fabrizio is the exception. When my big brother comes in, I feel just a little better.

He stands several feet back and stares at me until I put my pencil down.

"What's going on?" I ask, excited for whatever he has to say. It's always a good day when I have my brother's attention. "Where have you been?"

He doesn't say anything, and the dark circles under his eyes stand out to me.

"Fabrizio, are you okay?" I ask, starting to really worry now. This isn't like him .

"I just wanted to look at you," he says, but I'm not sure what that means. His voice sounds all wrong, not just too deep but filled with sorrow, some pain I don't understand.

"Fabrizio, please," I say, not even sure what I'm asking for. Maybe for him to step all the way inside so he can tell me about whatever is bothering him. I know he was having some problems with bullies at school, but his face looks like he hasn't slept in the whole time since I've seen him.

"You're a good sister, Marcella. I love you."

His tone raises every alarm I have, and I'm already standing from my desk to walk over to him, but before I push out the chair, he smiles at me, that goddamn soft smile.

I didn't realize before his hand was behind his back, but it's so clear when he pulls out a gun that he was hiding it on purpose.

What the hell? Why would he have a gun? I'm not even afraid for myself because he would never hurt me.

I'm still smiling back, not understanding what he would need that for.

It could be a fake gun until the moment he opens his mouth and sticks it inside.

POP. The shot fires, a blast that rings in my ears and rips everything I have right from inside me. It happens too quickly, the flash like the light of the camera he used to take pictures of me on my birthday just a few weeks ago. My own screams merge with

everything else.

One second he's smiling, and the next, his brains are all over my My Chemical Romance poster. I drop to my knees beside him like I can shove them back in his head and get him running again, but he's not coming back, and neither am I.

The scream scratches my throat on its way out, like vomiting nails from between my cracked lips, and they taste the same every goddamn night.

"You did it again, Marcella." A voice comes from the darkness, and I almost scream again when I don't immediately recognize it. My eyes open to the dark room, finding the fine outline of light from the streetlamps outside my window. One thing I can see to prove the dream isn't real.

"Marcella?" Anna, the most recent of my roommates, demands.

Two, something I can hear. I must have woken her again with my screaming.

There's a distinct lack of sympathy in her voice. Cars pass on the street below, and I look for something I can taste or smell to help my body calm and realize it wasn't real and only a dream.

My sweat-covered body is cold. I'm shaking like a leaf, with the distinct scent of fear-filled sweat, and I guess that counts as number three.

The room is too small for these types of disruptions, and my roommate isn't happy living with me, and this is probably not even the worst part. She's the third one I've had this season, though, and I know she won't last much longer. They never do. I don't blame her really.

I know I'm hurting her sleep as much as my own, maybe more, and she was patient

for a while.

“I’m sorry,” I say as I settle back in bed. “I’ll make it up to you.”

“I don’t know how you can give me back my missed sleep,” she says.

There’s more than anger in her voice. There’s a hint of tears starting.

I feel really bad that she’s tired, but I’m not doing this on purpose.

I don’t want to see this horrible shit over and over.

The company housing only has so many available options, and I have to sleep somewhere.

“Neither do I,” I agree, but I’ll still try.

“I really don’t want you to make it up to me,” she spits, and I’m sure our time together will be coming to an abrupt end. “I want you to get a therapist.”

Her words sting despite how many times I’ve heard them, and it’s a fair assessment from an outsider.

She thinks I haven’t exhausted all possible treatments. That I haven’t spent years with doctors, working, hoping, and dreaming toward being normal again with little progress.

She just moved into my room three weeks ago and has no idea that this is the healthiest I’ve ever been.

A couple of nightmares a week is nothing.

“I have two,” I answer, never having learned when to just shut my mouth in an argument.

“Well, they suck.” She’s getting even meaner the less I react, and this is another thing I’ve seen before. Sleep-deprived people are the angriest people. I should know, I’ve been one of them for years now.

“Just go back to bed. I told you I’m sorry.”

She humphs, but she rolls over to get comfortable in her blanket, and I stare at a warm halo of light in the distance as I wait for her breathing to turn heavy, and I’m sure she’s back asleep. Once she’s out, I get out of bed, finding I can’t shake the horror of the nightmare.

It’s all around me, the smell of gunpowder thick in my nostrils like Fabrizio really just died.

I very carefully open the door leading to the balcony.

The cool night air sweeps over me, washing away the phantom smell.

The blood and brains still stain the back of my eyelids, but I stare at the stars and blink until they clear.

I pull my phone out of my pocket. My notifications are in the thousands, but not even my double life as an internet sensation can keep my interest right now.

The dopamine hit I usually get from going viral doesn’t even faze me, and I simply close the phone and put it away.

My hands and feet go numb with cold as I wait for my system to accept that it’s

today, not ten years ago.

The sky is lightening by the time it works.

My eyes drift from the sky to the sidewalk, and I find a dark shape a half block down.

It looks like a man, but it doesn't move, and I stare for a while, wondering what it could be.

A shiver runs through me when he finally moves after a very long time, revealing that it was a man standing completely still on the street all along.

I don't have any real reason to think he was watching me back.

I couldn't even tell which way he was facing, but for some reason, I can't shake the feeling that he was.

Chills cover my body, a mix of the too cold night washing away my nightmare, and the fear of realizing he might have been watching me.

Leaving them both behind, I tuck back into the room just in time to catch my roommate waking up for the day.

She gives me a dirty look as I climb back into bed.

I'm so cold my whole body shakes, but at least my mind is close to clear.

"I'm staying with a friend tonight," she says, just as angry as when we last spoke despite having slept.

"Okay," I tell her, the weight of my exhaustion already pulling me under.

“I don’t know if I can keep living here.” Her foot taps impatiently on the floor like she’s expecting more of a reaction.

“Okay,” I say again. I could argue or beg, but I’m tired, and everyone is entitled to their own limits. If I could choose to be with someone other than me, I’d take that opportunity in a heartbeat. How can I begrudge her?

“You know, Marcella, people said you’re a freak, and I didn’t want to believe them, but it’s true, and it has nothing to do with the way you dress.”

The door closes behind her, and I know she meant her statement to be scathing, but how can anything anyone says matter in comparison to what I’ve been through? I’m worse than a freak. I’m broken beyond repair.

I’ve spent ten long years trying to understand what my brother did and why. I’ve given up on ever knowing the answer, but I can’t help but feel that’s the only thing that will free me from this torture. How could he do that to both of us?

The blue sky shines as my eyes finally flutter closed, but I know I won’t sleep for more than an hour before I’m forced to wake up again.

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MARCELLA

Eyes follow the new prima ballerina as she enters, carrying a box of donuts.

Whispers follow her. She's covered in tattoos, the name Diego across her throat, and everyone has a theory about it.

I couldn't care less who she's fucking, though I hope for her sake they're still together. That would be a shame.

She smiles wide rather than letting their stares affect her.

"Good morning, everyone! I have low fat today!" she announces as she takes a turn around the room, offering them out. My head stays down as she parts the crowd. Instead of watching, I reach for the hand sanitizer in my back pocket and clean my hands one more time.

She passes one to everyone but me. When she's headed my way, I look up at her like a deer caught in the headlights.

Her light-colored eyes meet mine, and I shake my head at her hard and fast before she can take a step in my direction.

Her cheeks turn pink, but she doesn't come closer, giving me a little nod like she understands.

She smiles at me anyway, making the embarrassment sting all the more.

She seems genuinely kind, and I'm chasing her away.

While thinking about what an awful friend-repelling person I am, Bea bumps into me.

Her clammy hands touch my bare back, and I jump away from her before she manages to mouth an apology.

The smile freezes on my lips. Even as she moves away, I can feel her hands on me.

I can't stand to be touched if I'm not ready for it.

Maeve catches the whole thing, her eyebrows bending in concern, and dammit, that's almost worse than anything else. I don't want anyone's pity either.

I hate the dressing room because it's all the things I struggle with in one place.

The morning crowds make the air feel hot and used.

The dancers love to hang around and gossip before rehearsal, and my skin crawls with their proximity.

They share makeup and hug each other—all things I can't stand.

I suppose it's a good thing they don't want me anyway.

My black pointe is wrapped nicely inside my locker.

I refuse to dance in anything else unless it's a show day.

I don't dance for conformity but as a way to escape my constant suffering.

I take the pieces of my practice ensemble and replace my sweats and T-shirt.

I have a system, everything needs to be in place so I can make my escape as quickly as possible and touch almost nothing.

Anna, who is probably already my ex-roommate, talks to a group on the other side of the room, including two other girls who have already tried and failed to live with me.

I don't look, but it doesn't matter. I feel their eyes on me.

I'm grateful they're the only people talking about me instead of the tattoo-covered prima ballerina, but they're not keeping their voices down.

Maeve seems more interesting than me, and I must be old news for everyone else .

I don't care. I don't care what any of them think of me so long as they all stay away. It's better than dealing with them touching me or, worse, finding out how bad my problems really are. Screaming in my sleep is nothing compared to how bad it gets.

Dancing is all that matters. The soft music takes over the dark corners within, filling them with something close to light.

Or maybe a better comparison is fullness after great hunger.

When I dance, I don't see Fabrizio or think about my parents' pain or the phobias that cripple me and only seem to multiply with time.

My shoulders tense when someone coughs to my right. I hold my breath as I think about their saliva aerosolizing around me, and a vivid picture of myself inhaling the drops fills my mind. I'm lightheaded as I finish lacing my pointe as quickly as possible and leave without offending the cougher.

“She’s going to get kicked out,” Anna says at full volume behind me, and I silently pray she’s not right.

Whispers follow me as I leave the dressing room and enter the studio.

The dancers already inside stop to stare, and I can tell from their expressions they got an earful about last night before I came in.

I wonder how Anna described it for them all to be so openly hostile.

People love to find a villain to gossip about.

They tried to make the new prima ballerina that villain, but it’s not working out.

Maeve may be covered in tattoos, but she’s smiling, beautiful, and happy.

She brings donuts every day, for god’s sake.

That’s extremely kind, and even they can’t hate her.

There’s a stark difference between the two of us. She’s the star—tattooed and different, but sweet and happy. All I am is a girl who can't live with herself without music playing loud enough to block the memories. Our choreographer, Antonella, stands at the front as I take my position .

“Ready, Marcella?” She points a glare at the room, and I know for sure they’ve been gossiping.

“Always,” I promise, and she nods. She rolls her ankles, stretching. At least someone is happy to see me today.

I dip my chin and start warming up. My fingers reach for my toes, and I breathe out, feeling the muscles expand.

When I sit down, my head touches my knees, and the stretch is deliciously satisfying, already filling some of the hunger I was talking about.

My body slowly feels like my own again. The worst of the obsessive thoughts fade, and by the time the stage is full, I'm back to my center. As long as no one touches me or coughs.

Antonella claps her hands. "Positions!"

No one hangs around to be asked twice. The music starts, my heart drums in sync with the beat, and a singular peace overwhelms me.

On the count of one, I step forward with my right foot, and with the left, I glide across the floor, one step after the other on a chassé.

Next is the pas de bourrée, a sequence of three small and quick steps to the back, side, and front.

With soft arms in fourth position, I prepare for the pirouette.

Act one feels like sleeping over the ocean and letting the soft waves guide you. It's ethereal, full of graceful turns and archer arabesques. Technically, it's not the most challenging sequence, but the lightness of the notes can bring attention to any mistake.

So I don't get it wrong.

When my head turns for the last pirouette and my hands fall into the final position, I

catch Antonella's eyes, and her nod of approval satisfies me. I can't get roommates right, or people touching me, or breathing around me, but I can dance.

She knows I'm eager to implement a new style to this choreography, and if she trusts me, she'll let me do that much faster.

Nailing the choreography is a must at all times. It's my only job.

Floquet Ballet Company prides itself on being innovators. They have the most diverse cast of any company I've ever seen—from a range of different bodies to people covered in tattoos like our new prima ballerina. Still, they're dancers, and dancers compete.

Maeve came from a prodigious company across town, and there are a lot of rumors about the cause.

The most believable one I heard is that the prima ballerina married the director, and she couldn't go any higher.

She's too good to be passed over for any of the other reasons rumored.

I danced my whole life and never thought I'd find a company that would want a ballerina like me, but I finally did and won't be ruining that like all my roommate attempts.

It doesn't matter what they say, I'm not out .

I've been pushing more daring choreographies to try to earn my place here. Maybe I'm overcompensating for my shortcomings, like being a nuisance to the house, but I showed them a sequence last week, and they seemed to like it.

My changes would fit really well with the second act, and I'm waiting on the director's answer. Antonella says I need to show I can do this perfectly first, and only then can I raise the bar. So that's what I'll do.

I wish I could show them the choreographies that made me viral, but they're too much.

I can get by without the likes and comments, though. I just need to prove I can do this with my eyes closed and then show them how daring I can be when they're open—simple.

The rehearsal lasts for hours after that.

Antonella pushes us to our limits, and I appreciate her firm hand.

I need someone who believes I can do better but doesn't touch me in the process.

So far, Antonella has been perfect. The sweat drips between my breasts and soaks my leotard.

If I think about it too long, the sensation will make me sick, but I don't stop dancing even when the other girls are done and ready for a break.

As long as I keep dancing, it will all be okay.

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MARCELLA

The silence settles in when the last group leaves, and their voices die down as they reach the end of the hall.

Once alone, I check the notifications I saw early this morning.

My video from yesterday is still going, but why stop when you're hot?

I'm still missing that usual surge of dopamine, but maybe I'll get it after this post.

I prop my phone on the floor and test the angle for the shot.

This is my little secret, the one thing I do for myself and all of them .

Four years ago, I shared a video online of myself dancing.

It was to look for mistakes, and when I didn't find any, I decided to post on a whim.

Just like that, The Myrtha Queen was born.

The handle is a spin on a character from my favorite ballet, Giselle , and a clear call out to myself.

Just like Myrtha, I dance until exhaustion while suffering from a broken heart.

The numbers climbed, and I gained followers quickly even though I never engaged

with any comment.

I didn't quite understand how I became addicted to it at first. Solitude was never a problem for me.

I don't get along well with others and don't need the attention.

I was already performing regularly in front of an audience.

Honestly, sometimes the reactions to it stress me, but other times, it's a high unlike any other.

That's what art is about, evoking emotion.

Despite the ups and downs, it feels good to share myself with the world in a safe way, a way that doesn't make me cringe and sweat at all the contaminants.

Art was never meant to be left in the shadows.

Someone out there needs the music just as much as I do, or maybe I just need another hit to get by.

Whatever my reasons, I press play and start my routine.

Ballet is the foundation of my choreography, the ground on which I build other things.

I take jazz dance, which has very similar steps to the mix, and I bring the energy up with modern dance.

Last summer, I learned belly dancing, and I've been incorporating that too.

The moves come out of me as if they want to connect with the music, and I am their instrument.

My eyes fill with tears, even as my brain can't quite follow the sadness weighing on my chest. The music translates what is inside, and I dance as the tears run down my cheeks.

That's a part of many of my videos, but not all.

It happens when you dance as a means of self-expression, and the self you are expressing is so dark and twisted.

Fabrizio dies a thousand times in front of me.

I see his eyes and his smile, and I hear his voice.

I pirouette into madness, my heartbeat speeds, and I pour everything into the dance.

The music takes my sadness away, even for just a little while, and by the time I reach my final pose, I'm empty of the sorrow and filled with art instead.

The tears eventually dry because they always do. All things must eventually end.

When I grab the phone back, I find two messages from my mother, but I can't deal with that now, so I just ignore them and upload my latest video.

I can't poke my wounds, not when I feel at peace.

My mother and I have an extremely complicated relationship—always have.

The endorphins won't last long, so I plan to savor them.

I guess I truly am addicted to the chemicals I can force out of my own brain.

I pack up and head back home without bothering to read what my mother said.

When I return to our room, Anna is nowhere to be found, just like she said, and I'm grateful.

Dancer housing isn't glamorous, but it's one of the perks of the company.

I'm not forced to live here, and I wouldn't if my options weren't so grim.

My parents don't live far. I could easily live with them or, with a little more struggle, get my own place, but I need to be away from the mausoleum we call home, and this was an easy answer.

My parents' home isn't a home anymore. It's a museum to the favorite child they lost. Fabrizio's pictures hang on every wall.

His bedroom remains exactly the same as he left it.

My bedroom is also the same as before, minus the blood splatter they painted over, but in the dark of night, I swear the outline glows.

The company accommodation is the best alternative for me, given how much worse the nightmares are at home.

It's selfish, seeing as how much of a burden I am, but I'm unsure how to survive.

Now on my third roommate, I wait until Floquet decides I'm too much trouble.

Maybe I should make the move myself so I don't jeopardize my place in the company

as well, but the thought of sleeping in the room where he died makes my skin crawl.

Moving to the bathroom, I start the shower, turning it as hot as possible.

My clothes have grown cold, and I refuse to think about the sensation as they drop wetly to the floor.

My phone is blowing up, and my fingers tingle with the first hints of that dopamine I was missing.

I click on the post, confused why I have so many comments this fast.

_doralisss: Girl what

heartofa_tramp: Dude, is she safe?

heather554: This is so creepy

Those are not the only comments. One after the other, they keep coming, always wondering about my safety. Goosebumps break on my arms, and I lean against the wall, scrolling through them all, trying to understand what is happening.

What are they talking about? Can they see how I'm teetering on the edge?

Bookhoarder86: It's probably just part of the performance. Y'all freaking out because of a paid actor lol

What is part of the performance? My hands tremble as I close the comments and press play on the video.

I follow each of my steps, my heart trying to escape my own rib cage as I watch

without even drawing a breath.

There's nothing wrong per se, perfect moves, an intensity that might unsettle—"Oh god." I gasp.

A man stands at the back of the stage. His shape is so similar to the one I saw on the street early this morning, the one I wasn't sure was a man at all.

Now it's clear that someone is watching me.

My heart races as I grow more certain of what I'm seeing.

I check the room around me like I'll find him in the bathroom beside me, but of course I'm alone.

He hides backstage; the shadows provide him safety, but he's there.

The breath catches in my throat, the exhilarating sensation I felt the first time I went viral mixes with fear until I'm vibrating, finally feeling something other than pain.

My knees are weak and my mouth dry, yet I can't stop looking.

I don't move to get in the shower. Instead, I watch the video again and again, always trying to catch a glimpse of his face.

I pause it at every frame, and still, I can't see anything.

Someone stood in the background and watched me as I poured my heart out.

For the first time in so many years, I was truly not alone.

Someone was there at my lowest moment. Someone who wasn't invited.

I gasp for air, emotions exploding in my chest. Why was he watching me?

What did he want to see? Did I give it to him?

a crazy voice inside me asks. Will he come again?

And why the hell would I want something like that?

People argue in the comments whether I planned this or not.

At every interaction, the views climb, and it doesn't take long to be my most-watched video by far.

Finally, I can't watch anymore because the sensation of my own skin is too much for me.

I place my phone down and get under the spray, closing my eyes as the water washes over me.

How many other times was he watching me, and why?

Does that actually matter when someone is stalking you?

And I'm at least partially convinced that's what's happening between the street and the studio in just a few hours of each other.

To me, the motives count for a lot. Perhaps that's my most unhinged thought yet, but I'm at my most vulnerable when I put on these performances. I scream in terror through the night.

The motivation is everything. The idea of someone being there for me through it is oddly appealing. Who would watch from the dark corners instead of running? Those routines and those tears are usually much too intense for people. Who would seek me out at such a low?

I shake my head at myself. Am I this pathetic?

I wish he had spoken to me and told me why he kept watching.

If anyone was watching last night. God, maybe it was someone just walking their dog.

That could have just been a man standing on the street.

I snort at myself. Why would someone be obsessed enough to stalk me?

I didn't even see if there was a man-shaped prop before jumping to conclusions.

Thousands of people interact with my content every day, but this time feels different. This time, I find myself craving a two-sided connection.

The water does as I hope, and all that adrenaline settles down.

I love the intense rush. I can't stand its intensity forever, but a pleasurable sensation is left in its wake.

A pleasurable heat buzzes between my legs.

I lick my lips, and before a second of doubt, I slip my hand between my legs.

The first thing I find is the barbell perfectly nestled through the sensitive flesh of my

hood.

The sensation is so intense that my hips buck when I first rub it.

Chills race down my arms. Intense orgasms are another chemical addiction of mine.

The image of him watching me hangs behind my eyelids as I chase the orgasm.

He's out there, watching me and hiding in the shadows.

I feel warm, protected, and seen. His eyes on me make my toes curl on the tile.

Under this water spray, I don't judge myself for feeling like this.

I want to feel it. I need it badly, and my body is in agreement.

My nipples are stiff peaks, my breasts heavy when I let out a whimper.

My hand works fast, and my piercing heightens the experience.

I need it...

I need him to watch.

Fuck, I want to come for him.

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LUCKY

I've been aware that something has been off with my brother since we were first assigned here, but I'm officially worried since my disagreement with him at her last rehearsal. Enzo isn't the type you can leave alone and hope for the best. He's far too dangerous for that.

Before this moment, I couldn't grasp what this ballerina had done to steal his focus.

I needed to figure out what was happening here and how much danger we were in. It's hard to fault him now.

She moans, raspy and sinful. My cock grows and pushes against the zipper.

I've never seen anything more sensual than the way she touches herself, the rhythm of her hand, and the way she falls into her own pleasure.

For a moment, I feel as taken as my brother is with her.

We shared an intense moment early this morning, staring at each other for the better part of twenty minutes.

Since she didn't have night goggles, she wasn't able to appreciate how intensely we were watching each other.

Since then, I've been more curious than I'd like to admit.

I watched her film herself dance, and my interest only grew.

Whatever is calling my brother is calling me too, but unlike him, I'm not fool enough to answer.

When I broke into her dorm, I didn't expect to stay around and watch her.

I was here just to satisfy the gnawing, to put an end to it all and finally find a foolproof angle from which to change Enzo's mind.

When I found her like this, though, stripped naked and touching herself, how could I resist watching her?

I needed to know far more than just what would interest my brother.

Not many things grab my brother's attention, and now the same woman has managed to appeal to us both.

She is beyond special. But this can't be anything more than a passing interest, no matter how much she calls to me.

My brother needs a keeper because surviving is one of the things he doesn't find interesting enough to do.

Without me, there wouldn't be an Enzo, and the truth has been a part of me for as long as I can remember.

We can't bring her into this. I couldn't guarantee her a good life or a long one.

He may be my little brother by only ten months, but it's not an issue of maturity.

Enzo is different as a result of the worst trauma, the kind of thing most people don't ever come back from.

I came from the same monster he did, but it never affected me quite as badly as it did him.

In the dark recesses of my mind, I'm much more like him than I care to admit.

I just don't dance along the edge of sanity quite the same way he does.

My brother has never had a pressing interest in the women he's fucked before. He's always casually gotten his dick wet and moved on. That's what I'd grown to expect and what I was comfortable with until her. This strange little ballerina is changing everything.

When Cygnus sent us to the ballet company, we were inclined to say no.

We're not security guards for pretty girls; we're mob enforcers.

We break things, we don't keep them safe, but I guess he trusts us.

When he flashed the associated paycheck, we were forced to graciously accept his task.

Hell, if he wants to pay through the nose for murderers to watch his girl spin around, that's on him.

This was supposed to be so simple that we would be bored, wishing we had taken any other assignment.

Nothing about this is simple anymore. I've only ever seen this look in Enzo's eyes

when he kills.

The focus, the fascination, the devotion—they're part of his murder ritual. He doesn't feel those things while he's hunting his next art project.

He feels them during, so I know Marcella is particularly special to him, as she's becoming to me.

Since Enzo locked his eyes on her, she's the only thing on his mind.

He's a predator circling his prey, his eyes follow her wherever she goes, and soon she'll be caught in his trap.

Will I be able to fend him off when that moment finally comes?

Suddenly, I'm invested in how that works out for her when we get there, and I can't help but laugh at how off track we've gotten from Cygnus's hope for things.

I'm not sure I even remember what his Maeve looks like anymore.

Marcella is all that fills my mind. She's small yet her tits are too big for a ballerina, and her ink is done right.

She's pretty, yes, but we've seen pretty before.

There's a lot of pretty out there. Marcella Serra has something else about her that woke the rabid animal inside Enzo, and now I'm here, at her dorm, trying to figure out what it could be, and I'm not finding it that difficult.

She is simply stunning. I can't remember the last time my cock was this hard or wanted for anything this badly.

I can never give in because Enzo only destroys. We would ruin her.

Her hand works fast between her legs, and I watch in fascination as the digits split her pretty pink folds.

I can't tell the water from her juices, but I want to lick and suck them all the same.

The idea of her hot and wet around me fills my mind, too potent to ignore.

My mouth waters as she whimpers. I should turn around and leave, but my feet are rooted to the spot.

The glass between us is fogged, making me bold enough to assume a measure of privacy.

I widen the door just a little and watch her closely.

She's an internet celebrity. Her page has half a million followers, waiting for her videos to drop every day, and that's just another reason we should keep our distance.

Everything about this adds up to and spells out trouble.

We depend on the shadows. We don't mess with people who can be missed.

A lot of people would miss her, and hell, I think I would be one of them.

My urge to touch her is growing to nearly insane heights, but I'm not the passionate brother who lets everything go for the pursuit of art and vision.

I'm the practical one, the one who will keep us both alive and in line when my brother forgets that eating and breathing are even a priority.

I don't have the energy to care for them both, and she has that same lost artist's look in her eyes that tells me she forgets the time and melts into her own vision—just like him.

The cons column only grows, and I'm a reasonable man who takes my own good advice.

But then she throws her head back, and her raspy moan is like a hand squeezing my cock.

I'm not the type of man to take my own advice.

I'm weak and uncomfortable under my collar.

There isn't a chance in hell I would leave even though I know for sure it's for the best. She lifts one arm to rub her breast, and she turns ever so slightly so the water can hit her clit with her as she strokes.

I love the way women masturbate. They're so ingenious. Through the fogged glass, she looks my way. I take a step back, trying to avoid her line of sight, but it's too late.

Shit .

Her dark eyes lock on mine, but she doesn't scream in terror like I expect.

A whimper works its way out of her throat as her hand keeps up its steady movements.

Her eyes flit over me, and just as I'm wondering what she thinks, she shatters, coming hard on her own fingers while she stares right back at me, a stranger lurking inside her bedroom.

The vision is obscured for both of us, but she knows I'm here and continues to rub herself until it's over.

She lifts her hand from her pussy, showing me the tips of her fingers. "Do you like the way I come for you?" she asks.

She's filthy, and I want to tell her she comes so pretty, so perfect, exactly how I want her to, but I don't say a word.

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LUCKY

One foot after the other, I force myself to leave.

If I stay here a moment longer, I'll end up going in and showing her what happens to girls who like being watched too much.

I'll take her tight little cunt and be selfish for once in my damn life.

I'll take her for my own instead of saving everything for my brother like I always do.

Would Enzo even know if I fucked her? What would all her followers think of the show I would put on?

I shake the insanity out from behind my eyes, not sure what about Marcella's orgasm made me more animal than man, just like how I described my brother earlier.

I shiver at the thought. My pulse hammers, and I can't remember the last time I felt anything so intensely.

My brother always feels something, but whether it's inspiration or insanity, I can't say.

When I exit the dorms, I shove my sunglasses up my nose and curse as I make my way to the car.

On one side, I have Enzo with an obsession, and on the other, I have a chick with no

self-preservation.

Then there's me in the middle, somehow tempted to give them both what they want.

This is a recipe for disaster, and my cock is still achingly hard.

How do I keep my brother away from her when I don't even want to?

"Where were you?" Enzo asks when I slide into the driver's seat.

Guilt pours off me like the cheap perfume they sell in street stalls. I roll my shoulders back before starting the car. I don't answer to my brother, and I surely don't let him make me nervous unless it's about what stupid, dangerous thing he can cook up next.

"Got caught up." I don't bother to lie, but I won't share the express truth of the matter either. How would I even admit to him how deeply my distrust of him runs? If my brother is anything, he's unpredictable.

"I got coffee." He nods toward the paper cups between us but is unusually quiet and suspicious.

His eyes dip down to my overly tight pants, and I sit still rather than acting like anything strange happened.

The fact his mind went there at all tells me he's more aware of my interest than I hoped.

Yes, he's been pushing the idea of her relentlessly, but I've never given any indication I shared his interest. With my brother's eyes on me, I quickly soften.

"Thanks," I say as I lift my cup and take a sip.

It's good, but it came from the little café near the dorms. Is he watching me after all this time?

He continues observing me as I drive, seeming to wait to see if an explanation is coming.

If anything, he's going to admit he followed me and not the other way around.

"So where were you?" he finally asks as we're leaving the city behind and only a mile or so from our destination.

"Since when are you up my ass, Enzo?" I shoot back. My brother usually couldn't care about anything but his vision, which often means ignoring what's happening with me.

"Just returning the favor after all these years." My hands tighten on the steering wheel, but I don't give him the satisfaction of a response.

The address Cygnus gave doesn't look quite like I expected.

Our work takes us to a lot of apartment buildings, warehouses, and even a few mansions, but very seldom do we find ourselves outside a small house out in the 'burbs.

Whatever this guy did, he was reaching far outside his normal sphere of influence, and it was worthy of pissing off the most powerfully connected man in the city. I'm actually mildly impressed.

"I'll call you in soon," I instruct Enzo.

His fingers drum over his perfectly pressed pants, releasing the pent-up energy.

Enzo is not a patient person, and I've already kept him waiting.

He doesn't care about doing the job right, keeping our noses clean and our asses out of jail.

Killing is practical for me. It takes the edge off the rage a little too hard to contain at times, but I don't need it.

He's a berserker, though, and barely pays enough attention to aim at the target.

I learned a long time ago that it's best to only bring him in when it's time for his particular brand of art.

As I approach the house, the sounds of a TV follow down the path.

Cygnus didn't provide us with any information on who's inside or what they've done.

There's only one fate for people when he calls us in.

We're not low-level enforcement. We're a threat and statement wrapped into one.

I reach the front door, listening and deciding it's a children's show playing. Maybe he's a pedo. That would track.

If there is a wife and some kids, I'll have a real hard time traumatizing them. My own past is enough to make me think long and hard about leaving witnesses to live with the aftermath, especially children. I don't let the memories in, though.

I have work to do. So I knock with a peaceful cadence and wait until someone comes.

A little girl pushes open the door, and I give her a smile.

Her hair is long and blond but dirty. Little bits of all kinds of things are stuck in lopsided braids.

It looks like she did them herself. I'm not around kids much, so it's not like I'm an expert or anything, but she's got to be younger than ten.

She looks at me with distrust but not fear, and that's unusual.

Ink covers most of my body, and my eyebrow has a thick scar.

I'm not the type anyone wants to have around their kid, and I usually make them nervous when they see me walking past. I'm nothing compared to what she's seen, and I know how to smell a fucked-up situation when it's right in front of me.

The girl is too skinny, and her bones stick out of her wrists.

Her eyes are intelligent, suspicious of me as she should be.

Whoever is in charge of her has been doing a very bad job.

I'm instantly on high alert, eyes scanning the block for signs of trouble or even someone looking out for her.

I find nothing. No one is even standing outside with a dog.

How strange. The block is lined with run-down houses.

This one might look like any other home in this suburb, but nothing regular is happening inside.

"Hi, sweetie," I say very calmly. "What's your name?"

She shakes her head, refusing to tell me, which is smart but also concerning. Most little kids don't have reasons to guard themselves so intensely unless they know how bad the real world is.

I crouch to her level, trying to even the playing field and show her I mean her no harm.

She steps back, attempting to close the door on me, but that isn't going to happen.

Cygnus might have sent me here, but now, I have my own reasons for staying.

My hands hold it open, forcing her to let me help her.

Her pretty brown eyes widen, and now she's scared. Dammit, I don't want to frighten her.

"Did you eat today?" I ask, sure that if she hasn't, I've got my in.

She doesn't answer at first, narrowing her eyes, before finally shaking her head.

Despite it being almost five in the afternoon, I'm not surprised, but I am angry.

I have a box of donuts in the car for Cygnus's woman.

She has a fascination with them, and I learned fast that anything is okay by her if she's fed.

I've had to bribe her a few times this week when we were following Marcella instead of Maeve.

Now, I always try to keep a stash with me in case I need to distract her and follow my

brother.

“I have something in the car. Do you like donuts?”

She narrows her eyes but talks for the first time. “I can’t go to your car. But you can give me donuts before you leave.”

She nods, seeming to think about what she offered and determines it’s safe. Poor thing still has some innocence left if she doesn’t realize you shouldn’t take food from strange men either, but I’m proud of her for being so careful when she’s practically starving.

“Is your mom home?”

She looks over my shoulder to the parked car as if now all she can think about is the food. “Mama died.”

“I’m so sorry that happened. You must miss her.” I know I miss mine.

She covers her mouth like she just realized she wasn’t supposed to tell me that much.

“Your dad home?” I ask.

“Yes,” she whispers. “Sleeping. I shouldn’t be talking to you. ”

She doesn’t try to close the door, though, because she already has her sights set on the donuts. She’s a careful kid, but she’s too hungry to be too safe right now. I can work with that.

“I know you don’t want to say your name, but mine is Lucky. I want to talk with your dad, and while we talk, you can sit in my car by yourself and have the donuts.”

The kid looks over my shoulder at Enzo, waiting in the car. “Who is he?”

“That’s my brother, Enzo. He’s coming in to talk to your dad too. No one is going to be around you while you eat.” I take the car keys from my pocket. “And you can keep the keys.”

She giggles. “I don’t know how to drive.”

“Good.” I smile with a nod. “I don’t want you robbing me, huh? But you can keep the car safe while I talk to your dad.”

The gears in her head turn. She looks from me to the car and then over her shoulder, and when she does, I spot her dad passed out on the couch.

She watches him for a long moment, and I think she’s going to say no and close the door on me.

I can kick it down and remove her, but I’d prefer if she agrees.

I don’t want to upset her even more. She surprises me, though, when her eyes are back on me because she looks determined.

“Are you really here just to talk to Dad?”

I dip my chin. “We have business.”

“Did he hurt someone else? That’s why you’re here? Are you a cop?”

Her eyes shine when she asks. I’m something way worse than a cop, but she doesn’t need to know that. Every word coming out of this kid’s mouth adds an hour to her dad’s suffering. Today, he’ll pay for his many sins .

“Not a cop,” I tell her, and I watch when she deflates. “But I can help.”

“How?” she asks, though the door opens a little more.

I nod toward the car. “Let’s start with donuts.”

I back away and give her space. She’s clearly skittish, and I don’t want to crowd her.

She surprises me once again by following me, at a distance, her eyes scanning the street as if she’s ready to run at any moment.

Enzo sees me and the girl coming and jumps out of the car.

He doesn’t ask what I’m doing. It’s not the first time I’ve had to move an innocent party out of the way.

She still has the keys clutched in her hands and takes Enzo’s seat eagerly.

I grab the box of donuts from the back seat and give it to her, she doesn’t even look at me after that.

The girl is so hungry that she dives in at once, her mouth full of powdered sugar.

Satisfied with her safety, I ring Cygnus as I return to the house with Enzo.

“There’s a kid here,” I say.

Cygnus curses. “What the fuck? She’s supposed to be with social services already.” He pauses a second as he thinks. “I’ll send someone. Stay on task.”

“Send a woman. She’s scared,” I tell him. “I’m going in, but I’m not sure what awaits

me. Enzo is with me. I had to leave her in my car.”

He knows what I mean. I should go in, do this in a clean way and then grab the son of a bitch and bring him to our place. Enzo doesn’t do things following a protocol, and since he’s coming in with me, I don’t know what this will lead to.

“I’m sending someone,” he replies. This time, his voice is hard. “Try holding Enzo back. Make sure to grab his computer. He has something he shouldn’t.”

I hang up when we are right at the doorstep. I look at my brother, imagining if for a second I can hold him back, and he blinks at me, unaware of my thoughts. When I push the door open, he asks me one question.

“Did he hurt the kid?”

“Yes.”

If he did something more than starve his own kid, I’m not sure yet, but that is enough in my books. Enzo nods, and something shines behind his eyes. For once, I don’t want to hold him back.

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ENZO

Lucky leads the way to the house, but I'm the one who closes the door and turns the lock.

The girl in the car is blond and frail, a little thing who shouldn't be old enough to know much about the world and sick fucking men, but she does.

People have this special look when they've seen too much, and age doesn't matter.

This child has definitely lived a hell well beyond her years.

The bourbon smell hits me once we're locked in. The paint is peeling off the walls, and not even one window sits open. Lucky narrows his eyes and treads carefully, signaling me to do the same. I'm not interested in quiet after what I've seen, having a particular grudge against piece-of-shit dads.

My hand and knife reunite as I walk into the house like I own it, and I only stop at the sight of the man curled into the fetal position on the couch, sleeping or more likely passed out.

From the smell, I'm sure he's drunk. That's why he never noticed us removing his child or coming inside his house.

His mouth is open, saliva dripping down his chin, and his snores are the only background sound. I hum a song to tune out the sawing.

Lucky makes a beeline for the computer on top of the table.

I'm sure there's some important information there, but I've never been the type for office work.

I crouch in front of the man of the hour instead, truly hungry for what's to come next.

The tip of the knife gently slides over his skin, but he doesn't so much as twitch.

Lucky types on the computer behind me, and the sound of his clicking is better than the snores, but it's still interrupting the song I'm humming as I apply just a little more pressure.

The blade travels from his temple to his chin.

His skin opens in a shallow slice, a white line that wells with blood an instant later. Finally, he opens his eyes.

"Who are you?" he asks, but he's smart enough not to move when he feels the knife.

"I'm wondering about you. Who are you and what have you done?" I ask. My brother doesn't offer up any insight, so he must not know either. Lucky can't contain himself when he thinks he's right.

"Me? I was sleeping, man!!" Either he's a better actor than I would have thought or he's so drunk he's actually confused.

"A nobody with detailed photos of the Cygnus operation," Lucky says behind me.

Terrified eyes stick to my brother's back. He breathes faster as he realizes where Lucky is searching. So he was spying on Cygnus? If his house and child weren't

telling enough, this seals the deal. Not just evil but not very smart, it seems.

“You fucking bastard,” my brother spits.

My knife presses to his throat, and my heart beat picks up in excitement when Lucky stands and marches over to us in a fury.

From behind, he grabs the man by his throat.

My brother is a big guy, and he looks bigger when he’s angry.

Fury oozes off him, and I take a step back, letting Lucky play a little.

He gets involved so rarely that it’s always exciting when he does.

He grips the man’s neck, forcing a yelp, and before he has a chance to understand what’s happening, Lucky throws him against the wall.

A giant crash echoes as the side table falls.

With it, all the half-drunk bottles of liquor crash to the floor, breaking and spilling as they slosh across the carpet.

He only leaves Lucky’s hands long enough to hit the ground before he jumps in again, his legs over the man’s legs to stop him from moving as he delivers punch after punch.

“Stop, stop.” His desperate pleas go unanswered.

Does his daughter beg for help, or has she already learned there’s no help here to be found?

His eyes bulge as Lucky continues to work on him.

My brother isn't an artist like me, but he's a hard worker, and his effort is a craft of its own.

Glorious and efficient in his own way. Blood coats my brother's knuckles, and while I'm envious of all the delicious pain he's inflicting, I appreciate him in his natural element.

Lucky always has a good reason, and there's something dependable about that.

"What did you find?" I ask, sure it must have been something to inspire such a reaction from him.

Lucky delivers the last punch, wet and fleshy, right to the bottom of his lung.

He coughs and heaves, trying to catch his breath but failing.

Lucky takes a breather, still holding him by the filthy collar, prepared to beat him further.

He turns his head, long enough to meet my eyes as he says, "He has fucking naked pictures of his kid."

I take a step toward the computer, but Lucky stops me. "Don't. It's not good."

My brother is pale, his eyes hard, and his breathing shallow as if he is nauseous.

I don't look at the pictures. I don't want to see them.

I might be sick, but I'm not a curse upon this world, something sick enough to feed

off his own blood or the innocent.

Instead, I move the knife between my fingers, planning exactly where I'd like to put it, breathing in the stagnant air in this forsaken house, the same putrid rot the girl would have to smell.

"Put him on the table," I say.

There's no right place for art, no right place for justice.

It happens when it needs to happen. Fate itself is on my side.

Lucky nods, surprising me. He's usually so careful, but it makes sense he's willing to take more risks for this one.

He really is a miserable excuse for a monster.

Lucky drags his ass to the kitchen table.

It's covered in more bottles and some paraphernalia, but there are no other signs he's using dope, so this might belong to a friend.

Lucky uses his body to swipe the crap away to the floor.

The crash fills the room, and finally, he lies on top of an empty table.

Once he's lying flat, he's been beaten thoroughly enough that he has no hopes of escaping.

He barely thrashed against the table, scared but holding on to his consciousness by a thread.

I stand over top of him, savoring what must be done, the beauty the universe calls me to make out of his disgusting, betraying flesh.

My knife finds the slight cut on his face I opened before, and I widen it into something ghastly.

The blade cuts through him like butter, quickly finding the bone beneath.

He screams, but I use the opportunity to shove a nice embroidered napkin in his open mouth.

I pulled it from my own pocket. He isn't the type to spend his money on anything but his vices.

Moving to his chest, I open the shirt, spread his arm, and start my work.

A while later, he's on his stomach, his shoulder pulled apart in delicate pieces, a testimony to my skill. I splay the shoulder blade out to display it like a spreading and lifting wing. By the time I do so, he's passed out from the pain or dead. It doesn't really matter now.

Death, angel's wings, fly off the canvas and lift into the sky to freedom and divinity. This is the greatest thing his body has ever done in this world, and even this is doomed to rot, to sour before the sun even fully sets.

Most people wouldn't expect it, but I believe in God, a hungry, vengeful one who receives tribute through sacrifice and gruesome representations of art, madness, beauty, and devotion. I think of Marcella as I move the pieces into place. Would she understand my work? Would she appreciate it?

The thought of her running from me, rejecting me, is so painful I nearly slip and

make a mistake in my work, but only nearly.

It's far too precious to me for that. Lucky moves around the house as I cut, but like usual, I pay very little attention to him.

The door opens, changing the atmosphere in the room entirely as someone enters what I've just ordained as sacred space.

I almost turn on them, but I know better enough for that.

A few minutes ago, I might not have been able to stop.

The child speaks, but her voice comes from farther away, and I hope no one lets her see.

I know all too well the effects of seeing a parent dead can have on a child.

I've certainly never been the same since that night.

Someone talks to the kid about the pictures on the computer, asking her if she remembers a camera. She does.

One of Cygnus's men checks the perimeter.

I think his name is Rat, or some other stupid, useless nickname that fits him perfectly.

From the sounds of the commotion, Cygnus is angry that I decided to do this here.

That amuses and annoys me in equal measures.

I like him knowing that despite us choosing to work for him, he doesn't ultimately

pull the strings, but on the other hand, aren't they impressed at all?

I'm doing all this without my usual tools, and the execution of the final pose really is exquisite.

Don't they understand that there's no waiting in poetry?

There's no reason in chaos? Some things simply have to happen as they are and without explanation.

Fate is cruel and decisive. He had to die in the place he caused so much pain, the place he betrayed his own blood for his perversions.

This is where I repay him with all the pain he brought to others.

This is the place where he takes his last breath.

I'm not sure when he died exactly, but I'm sure now that he is.

All I can think about is Marcella and how I know Lucky lied to me about seeing her earlier, but what happened to get him so worked up?

I didn't see that. My Marcella makes the world better.

She fills this worthless scrap of rock and flesh with music.

I hum the song she danced to in her last video.

Her raw passion is unmatched. It moves me, and all I want to do is run back to her.

I should bring her a present, something that tells her just how much she changes me,

from the inside out.

“Enzo?” I hear my name.

I turn back to the exposed ribs, using the profoundly sharp tip of the knife to separate one rib from the cage.

I pull the slippery bone free, long and beautiful, and decide this will do.

It’s the thickest of his ribs, strong, perfect for my plans.

Someone clears their throat, and I’ve finally settled from my frenzy enough to pay them my attention.

I look around, seeing the room for what feels like the first time.

I’m a different person before and after the haze.

Cygnus is here. Diego is his real name. Dark eyes and hair, more tattoos than anyone really needs. There’s a rumor that his dick is pierced seven times over too. I’d ask him about it, but he’s never seemed too friendly. He’s watching me with unease.

“Are you finished?” he asks, but it doesn’t feel like I have a choice.

The people in the room are pressing closer, each of them watching me like an animal.

My eyes turn to my brother, and I settle down when I see he’s watching them, not me.

He’s on my side like always. My plan will work.

Looking between the rib in my hand and the table, I decide that I’m done here.

“The little girl?” I ask.

“She’s taken care of,” he says.

I nod. I don’t need to know anything else. I’m not some fairy godmother who came to save the day. I did my work and she will be safe now. Lucky stands by the door, his knuckles still bleeding from his outburst. My eyes move to the bone in my hands, the blood and connective tissue still attached.

“You won’t miss this, will you?” I ask.

He looks perplexed by my question. “Can’t see why I would.”

“Thanks,” I say as I leave the house behind and head to the car.

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MARCELLA

I'm losing my mind. I mean, what other reasonable excuse is there for a girl who realizes she has a stalker and starts masturbating?

Oh, then sees her stalker watching her in her room, but instead of screaming, she has the most intense orgasm of her life?

I know I'm broken beyond repair, none of that has been a secret to me for a long time, what I didn't know was that being a dirty little freak could make me come so fucking hard.

The things inside my dorm look the same.

I wish I could say he took something and it was just a common thief, but nothing of mine went missing.

Anna had already taken her belongings, so there was nothing of hers to steal.

He was here for one reason. He wanted to watch me.

Instead of chasing him away, I gave him a show.

I asked him if he liked how I came for him, and he didn't fucking answer.

Last night, Fabrizio visited me again. Same smile and same gun blowing his brains out.

I have a stalker now. I should be having nightmares about that instead, but I didn't.

Just the same damn torment all over again.

I don't think I'm even afraid of the giant hulking shadow.

If I were, I wouldn't be so excited about the idea of him coming back.

I'm relieved Anna decided not to come back, that she held true to finding a friend to stay with, but there are no single rooms, and I fear I can't escape the fallout of my solitude forever.

My feet drag to practice since I don't have a choice but to force some order into my life.

Dancing is all I have, and the only reason I'm not back at home waking up to the same wall we cleaned Fabrizio off.

Despite all the excitement of last night, the views climbing into the stratosphere, my face is devoid of emotion when I reach the dressing room.

You need real sleep, or you start to fall apart.

Last night was just one in a long string of sleepless nightmare-filled nights.

For years, I've had to act like I'm not falling apart at the seams, and today is no different.

I'm falling apart, yet I simply have to hold it all together.

Tulle wrapped and en pointe, I leave the dressing room with a myriad of eyes on me.

Anna must have been talking last night. I take my position as I would any other day, ignoring the looks and whispers.

Antonella starts us from the top. We are going over Act Two today, so the room is not as full as it usually is with Act One.

I can't imagine what they were saying earlier.

The sequences are heavier, full of emotion and arm choreography.

The tension in my shoulders melts, and I give myself to the music once again.

An hour passes as we finish that section, I move to third position and wait for the music to start again when the shocking red hair of Tracey Garry interrupts our rehearsal.

My eyes fall closed, and I take a fortifying breath.

Tracey is the housing administrator. Since arriving, I've met with her each time a roommate asked to be moved .

Antonella calls my name, and I nod. Third time's a charm, right? They can't keep giving me roommates every few weeks.

I follow Tracey to the office, and I'm halfway to tears, assuming the worst. If I have to go back to living with my parents—I'm not sure I can take it.

I shake myself off. No, I'll do anything before I'm back there listening to my mom cry all day, but the only option I can really think of right now is begging on my knees because rent is insane in this city.

She smiles at me, but I can't return it, and when she waves for me to follow her down the hall, it's like a rock sinking to the bottom of my stomach.

"Sit, please, Marcella," she tells me as we arrive in her office.

The small room is beyond cramped, the table pushed against the far wall, and I can barely see anything under the piles and piles of paperwork. This is even worse than the last time I was here, and I feel guilty about adding more to her plate when she's clearly overwhelmed.

"Anna is moving in with another girl," she says, not mincing words or wasting time. We've been through this.

"Did she say why?" I ask, curious what she's telling people.

"Not anything I expressly believe." Tracey hums and opens a cardboard box with cookies. "Take one."

I do, but I hold it in my hand instead of biting into it. She doesn't take long with hers, eating as she looks down at her documents. I wish she would just tell me what the hell this means for me instead of leaving me hanging.

"I think this is probably our last option since we can't keep doing this."

"I understand," I say, already poised to pack.

"Here." She hands me a document. "Sign it for me."

I breathe out and sign it. There's no point in being difficult. I don't even blame the girls. I just wish I could do something to make this better.

“Take the day off rehearsal and move for me, please, Marcella.”

Oh shit. What does she mean by that? I can't move right now! I don't have anywhere to go! I need to find a job too. They know better than to think I can pay rent solely with what they pay me. My silence stretches, and she finally looks up, her smile melting off her face when she looks at me.

“What's wrong?”

I swallow my tears. “I can't move right now, Tracey. I need to find a place. Can you give me a couple of weeks?”

She blinks slowly, and my heart is hammering inside my chest. Ballet is my job. I'm not made for anything but dancing myself to exhaustion.

“Marcella, did you read the agreement?” she asks.

I shake my head because no, I didn't.

She hands it back to me without saying anything.

My eyes zoom through the words, and I read some paragraphs twice; it's too good to be true.

They aren't sending me away. What I thought was a standard agreement covering their asses to refuse me housing is actually a transfer to another block and a brand new dorm with no roommates.

“I have a private room?” I ask after reading it three times.

“Good, huh?” Tracey nods and takes the document from me.

I bite into my cookie. It's pretty fucking good .

I head back to what is no longer my room and pack up my stuff.

Anna stands there watching me with a snooty look on her face, all the things she took with her are back, and she's got a friend with her already poised to sleep in my bed.

I'm not sure if she thinks I'm getting kicked out of housing or what, but neither of them asks, and I never tell them what's happening.

I'm not sure where they're transferring me, but even if I have half the space I have here, I'm going to be far better off alone.

Just not having to worry about waking someone up will be great.

Maybe I can concentrate just on myself and how to get rid of the nightmares.

It takes me about an hour to pack everything up.

Anna gives up glaring at me and moves on with her day, seeming to accept my eventual absence as a consolation prize worth moving on for.

My Doc Martens are by the door, and I push my feet into them, looking around to see if I have forgotten anything.

All I have is a bag over my shoulders and a couple of boxes piled over my old bed.

I have no idea where the new block is, so I have to wait for them to move me, but I'm in such a good mood, I don't even mind.

Another half an hour goes by until there's a knock on the door.

I practically skip to answer it and find a very large man waiting.

Goosebumps break over my skin, and I get a feeling like I've seen him around the theater, but I can't remember where.

He fits the doorframe perfectly and towers over me by at least a foot.

We are both in black, me jeans and a Ramones T-shirt and boots, while he's in a dark suit with a haircut that looks like it's more expensive than most people's rent.

His eyes are caramel and sharp, his features strong.

"Can I help you?" I ask.

"Are you Marcella?" he asks, and despite his voice being masculine and sexy, it's gentle, maybe even unsure beyond the question at hand. Is he nervous?

"I am."

"I'm supposed to show you to your new room. I'm Enzo," he says, and it's such a handsome name.

"Is that short for something?" I ask .

"Lorenzo, Miss Marcella. I'm happy to help."

I smile broadly at him, finding something about him so endearing. Despite his good looks, he has that feeling of being an outsider, like me, and I instantly feel a connection with him, an urge to reach out.

"That's really nice of you," I say.

“Can I help you with your things?” He doesn’t wait for me to answer, stepping into the space to grab whatever he can. Anna stares at him with open-mouthed hunger, but I ignore her and so does Enzo.

“I just have a couple of boxes.” I point at the pile I planned to carry myself.

His suit is too nice for manual labor, and I want to tell him not to bother, but he’s already stepping between me and the boxes. He’s so large that I stumble back to give him room, and he grabs the boxes before I can stop him. He has everything in his massive arms, making it look far too easy.

“I could have taken those,” I say.

“No need with me here.” His answer brings a slight blush to my cheeks. Oh man, when was the last time I had a crush? I can’t remember, but he is extremely cute.

We leave my room and walk down the hall in companionable silence.

The two flights of stairs are nothing compared to rehearsal, but I’m impressed when he keeps up and isn’t the slightest bit winded holding the boxes.

When we step out on the top floor, we see a big, beautiful window looking out over the city.

It’s gorgeous and spacious. Even the hallway is wider, with only a couple of doors compared to the packed floor below.

“Right this way, Miss Marcella,” he says, drawing me away from the view.

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He says my name with a different accent, the way my grandad used to. I'm dying to ask if he's Italian too, but I just follow him to the door at the very end of the hall.

I'm assuming they put me up here because I'm an inconvenience. If you need a room alone, you're going to be the farthest away from everyone else. That makes sense to me and seems perfectly fair. I don't mind being hidden away. As long as I can stay here, I'm happy.

When Enzo opens the door, my expectations crumble. Whatever I thought I was getting, this is far outside the mark. It is not a tiny forgotten corner of the Floquet housing I find, but a massive apartment with a view.

"Wait...what? Who?" I ask, turning around, and my backpack falls to the hardwood floors.

Hardwood floors? This is insanity.

Each dancer has a budget attached to their employment.

Our housing is factored into that, and while I may be one of the higher-paid dancers here, there's no way they would give me this much in housing, certainly not because I keep making things awkward for my roommates and forcing them out.

I'm not being rewarded for bad behavior.

I'm not , I tell the obsessive voice in my head before it can get consumed with evening the score.

He shrugs. “I don’t know, Miss Marcella, but don’t look so upset. It’s a really nice room.”

It’s more than nice. It’s surprisingly beautiful and spacious, but not only that, it’s been warmly decorated in ocean tones that I love.

It’s spacious enough that I can even dance here.

And I never need to worry about my roommates’ dirty clothes or used pointe wraps.

I rub my chest, feeling overwhelmed with the good news, but I manage to turn to Enzo with a weak smile on my lips.

“Call me Marcella,” I tell him.

“Marcella.” His voice takes on a whole new cadence I didn’t hear before. “That’s an incredibly beautiful name, especially for a dancer. It suits you.”

Clearly, there's some flirtation going on here, or I’m being stupid?

Jesus, as if a crush on my stalker isn’t enough.

I smile at him and turn to hide my blush.

Walking to the window, I take in the view while watching the cars down on the street.

Even when the mean voice in my head tells me not to trust it, I can’t stop myself.

This is happening, and I’m happy. His shoes on the floor catches my attention, and I turn around in time to see him placing the boxes on the counter of the kitchenette.

“Thank you,” I say, hugging myself.

There’s a damn kitchenette! I can’t believe it.

I can prepare simple meals without having to elbow my way through the ballerina kitchen, which is hardly bigger than a closet, and expected to be enough for all of us.

I guess it doesn’t matter since we’re not intended to eat, but I have no plans to starve, and that will be a lot easier here.

“Do you need anything before I go?”

His eyes burn when he asks the question, and I suspect his intentions aren’t fully innocent.

His voice has a deep and raw quality that makes my knees melt.

He looks me up and down long and slow, eyes caressing my curves, clearly appreciating what he sees.

It’s been so long since I’ve gotten any, and I’m so horny after last night, I seriously consider inviting him to christen my new bed with me.

God, I’m beyond ridiculous. He’s just a nice guy helping me with my stuff.

“Maybe another time?” I offer shyly. This won’t be the last time I see him, so there will be more chances if I don’t decide it’s a bad idea before then.

“Whenever you want, Miss Marcella. Whatever you want.” And the promise is so salacious it raises goosebumps all over my body, but he’s still calling me that .

“Maybe another time then,” I say, enjoying the chemical charge between us.

He leaves, and I take until I can’t hear his footsteps anymore before I react.

Giggling, I run to the bed and jump on it, my arms open.

The softest pillows and blankets absorb me, and I only barely bounce since the mattress is of such high quality.

I’m breathless and happy, surrounded by down when I roll over on something hard that sticks to my back.

I roll to the side and grab the object. My eyebrows furrow at the knife resting inside a leather sheath.

Where did this come from? I draw the knife, perplexed by it.

The blade is wickedly sharp, but instead of metal it’s made of a yellowish material.

This isn’t anything I immediately recognize.

It’s lighter in weight than I expected, and there seems to be some natural pattern or grain, but I don’t know enough to tell for sure.

Careful designs have been carved in the handle and blade alike, and the whole thing looks both dangerous and fragile, like it could shatter in the same instant as it would kill.

I turn it over in my hands, jumping slightly as it pricks my skin and draws a red bead of blood. Who the hell would leave this for me, and what is it made of? Like everything beautiful today, I decide it is now mine.

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MARCELLA

My legs tremble with exhaustion by the time Antonella finishes with us.

The first performance is fast approaching, and she won't take anything but excellence. I wait for the rest of the dancers to filter out, using the excuse of extra practice, but all I want is to go back to the dressing room when it's empty.

I practice the pique turn until my form is perfect, and I finish in an arabesque so high it looks like I was photoshopped.

Antonella would be proud.

By the time I make my way to the dressing room, they're all gone.

I use my towel to dry off the sweat, excited that I have a shower and a huge room waiting for me.

Anna and her friends were surprised to see me today.

I wonder if they thought I was going to be fired over her complaint.

I'm pettily enjoying their disappointment, but they deserve it.

Fabrizio was only seventeen when he died, but even as a teenage boy, he was kind.

He always told me to be nice to people because you never know what they are going

through.

Anna shared a room with me for weeks, and she never bothered to even ask what haunted me so badly.

I felt bad for being an inconvenience, but not anymore.

There are worse things to be but hurt and loud.

The black flimsy ballet skirt pools at my feet, and I bend over to grab it.

As I'm folded, I hear something shifting behind me.

Alerted, I turn around, my eyes scanning the dressing room.

Silence follows, but a tingling on the back of my neck tells me I'm not alone.

Mixed with my recent experiences, I have no doubt who's here.

Chills run down my arms, yet I know I'm not only scared. I'm shamefully excited.

My lips part, and I breathe slowly as one hand moves behind my back. I reach for my new knife inside my backpack. It's easy to find in the outside pocket, and quickly, I feel the carved wood of the handle between my fingers. Carefully, I draw it out, my eyes narrowing.

"Leave me alone, creep." I arch an eyebrow.

I want to sound tough and commanding. He could be a psycho killer for all I know, but inside, I'm melting. Fuck, I don't know what's wrong with me, but this stalker thing messes with my head.

I'm hot, wishing I were back in my shower rather than here so I could play with myself in peace.

I keep my head on straight. Even when I hear him again, I don't scream or beg him to make me come this time.

His careful steps come from somewhere around the lockers.

There's no response, and certainly no sense that he's left. "What do you want with me?" I ask as I move too, my knife pointed in the direction of his steps. "Why do you like to watch me?"

He chuckles.

Damn. It's a growly chuckle, masculine and raw. It weakens me, and I gasp, gripping the knife harder as every hair on my body stands at attention .

"What do you want from me?" I'm brave enough to ask, but I'm not sure I want the answer. Maybe I prefer my delusions.

There's a weighted pause, and I hold my breath. I can't believe I'm here talking to him instead of running for my life.

"I can't stop," he says. His voice is so deep, he hardly sounds real.

"Why not?" I ask, trying to sound strong and determined but instead sounding breathy like I'm remembering the last time we stood together too clearly.

"The piercing in your cunt, Little Star. Show me." He's out of a perverted dream of mine. Maybe this is the last of my sanity seeping out of my brain and leaking out my ear.

“That’s all you want? If I show you, you’re going to leave?” I ask. Why am I already wet?

He doesn’t answer, but I hear his steps again.

They’re faint, and I’m not as good at pinpointing where they come from.

The dressing room is big enough with rows and rows of lockers and a lot of shit the girls leave around.

He has plenty of space to hide out. Do I want to play this game?

I shouldn’t have asked if I didn’t want to.

“I can’t leave unless you show me.”

I think about it for a second. He’s already watched me come, so what difference does it make?

“Okay. I can do that,” I say, pretending I’m braver than I am. I know it won’t lead to anything good, but I’m so horny I’m irrational, and that’s when people always make the worst choices.

He only asked me to show him the metal resting against my clit, but maybe I can up the excitement for both of us, squeeze some more delicious chemicals out of my brain since I’m diving in and playing with my stalker.

Instead of flashing him from the side of my leotard, I slip my shoulder straps down.

My breasts come next, then my stomach, and it falls to my ankles before I remove it completely.

I brush my long hair behind my back and stand completely naked with just my knife.

“That’s it?” I ask as if it’s nothing as if showing my pussy to my stalker is an everyday occurrence.

“I can’t see your piercing.” He nudges. “I can’t get the picture of it out of my head.”

My face burns. I didn't think he was literally asking me to peel my pussy open for him and show him.

My heart beats so loudly. I hear it as I bring my fingers to my pussy and spread myself for him.

The cold air touches the metal, instantly chilling it and sending waves of overstimulation through me.

Everyone has a different experience with hood piercings, but mine has been nonstop entertainment.

I breathe deep, not sure if this is fear or exhilaration, but either way, I don’t want it to stop. I show off the piercing for him as well as all my other bits. I’m drenched, the slickness coats my thumb and forefinger even as I try to school my expression.

“You’re so needy, so wet for me.”

I shake my head as my chin drops to my chest, shame swamping me. “I’m not wet for a fucking stalker. I’m not that broken.”

“I’m not—I didn’t...” He fumbles for the right words, and it only makes me want him more.

“This isn’t stalking?” I ask, but we both know it is, and all I get back is silence.

“I can’t stop,” he admits.

I don’t think I can either, but this can’t last. His whole interest in me makes no sense. He’s not like my followers or the people watching when I dance ballet. He wants to see inside me. He wants me to show him my insides.

“I’m a fucked-up mess because I don’t think I want you to,” my weak voice replies, still holding my pussy open for my stalker. Shit, I’m turning this whole thing into a therapy session and I’m dripping.

He tsks. “Something good, something perfect. Too pure for all this...”

It’s a whisper, and I don’t know how to handle it.

There are millions of things wrong with me.

Perfection is very far from what I am. I’m so wet and ready, and he’s right, I’m dying to see his face between my legs.

I want the darkness to take me, and I don’t want to be afraid anymore—not of the ugly parts of me, and all the phobias I carry over my shoulders.

“Do you want me to touch myself?” I ask.

I silently beg for him to say yes. Ask me to touch myself for you, tell me how you want to see my fingers play, ask me to be unafraid. He doesn’t say anything to me.

I continue to hold myself open as I wait, but the silence stretches for minutes until I accept that he’s gone.

Holding my pussy open for so long leaves it freezing cold, and I feel all the more like an idiot for presenting myself to him.

I put my clothes back on, no longer humiliated that I wanted that from my stalker, but rather, because even he rejected me.

Even as I climb the stairs to my new dorm, I can't shake my embarrassment off. What is wrong with me? Yesterday, a perfectly good man was flirting with me, and I decided I was too shy to act, but when a stranger lurks in the shadows? I offer to touch my pussy for him.

God, this is not okay. My cheeks are on fire, and I rub them as if I can remove the feeling of my skin, but the shame follows me to the top floor.

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MARCELLA

Each time I think about last night's humiliation, my stomach falls out and my cheeks glow red.

If anyone is particularly watching me at this rehearsal, they're probably thinking I'm overworked and exhausted.

That's usually what it means when a ballerina is red in the face, but not this time.

I just can't stand the feel of my own skin after what's happened.

Rehearsal comes to a close after a couple of grueling hours.

The eyes on me are uncomfortable rather than thrilling.

The attention that fuels and drives me is more like sticky humidity.

The other dancers talk to one another, and it seems like they're dawdling far more than normal.

Finally, the room clears, and I wish I could go with them, but I simply won't be able to shut down for the night. I have hours left of energy to spend.

Some girls say they dance their problems away, but fortunately for me, mine are infinitely spawned by my own brain and able to multiply at the slightest command.

I need to dance until I'm too exhausted to torture myself.

That buys me a few hours before the nightmares come.

I suppose it's a good thing that I'm a professional ballerina.

Once they're all gone, I take a long look at myself in the mirror.

The entire room reflects back at me, every inch of my body that I willingly revealed for my stalker stares back at me.

My flesh holds questions my brain doesn't want to answer, accusations I can't bear to confront just yet.

It's the first time I've faced myself since I asked my stalker if he wanted to watch me masturbate, and he didn't answer.

How could I manage to attract a stalker and chase him away so quickly?

That's an impressive level of fucked up.

What are you doing, Marcella? I ask myself.

There are no answers other than dancing, and I know that amounts to ignoring my problems, but knowing you have issues doesn't give you the tools to fix them.

And what about when you've searched through all the tools available and none of them work on you?

I was a relatively normal girl before my brother killed himself in front of me.

There isn't a one-size-fits-all fix for that level of destruction.

I don't have any goddamn answers or ways to get back to that girl, so I just keep fucking dancing.

That's what I am now, a physical vessel for art and nothing more.

My feet get ready in fifth position, arms soft in port de bras, as I wait for the music to reach the point I need.

I dance my piece for the show, but it's not taking the edge off.

My heartbeat speeds, the tension rolls off me, and I need more, something that will leave me drained and exhausted so I can forget my own disgrace.

I throw my head forward. My hair flies loose from the bun.

Stepping to the side, I use my hips to create rhythm within the classical music.

I might be the only one hearing the daring notes underneath Tchaikovsky, but I don't need anyone else to hear what I intend to translate for them.

Arms, legs, position, and pirouette. It flows through my body, wave after wave crashing against my chest. The drama feeds me, I give all my sadness to the performance, and it translates into beautiful, haunting art.

I fall to the floor, landing with soft and practiced elegance.

A new sequence emerges while I'm down. My leg goes long when I push against the floor.

I work my hips down and roll away, transitioning to my back.

I push against the floor, and my chest goes up with the rhythm as if my heart is beating as loud as the music and forcing me off the ground.

I work my hips again, and it might be the frustrations from the past few days—the masturbation and being followed last night.

It's all coming out now with a life of its own.

I fuck the air like a whore, and my hands wander over my own body?—

The lights abruptly turn off, and with the darkness, I'm plunged into silence.

I gasp at the sudden change. An exit sign in the distance flips on, but the building has a backup generator for emergency signs and escape routes, so I'm not sure if we're entirely without power.

I sit up, trying to see anything, but it's completely dark outside with just those red letters in the distance. I try to stay reasonable as I sort out what's happening.

Even the hallway is pitch black. My heart speeds, and fear curls in the bottom of my stomach.

I don't like the dark.

Fabrizio killed himself in front of me, unworried that his blood would soak my pink rug and stain my wall, and it's spread far beyond that since.

I went from a relatively happy and social person to terrified.

Where I had nothing but confidence, I was suddenly filled with fears, anxieties so bad they would become disordered.

The list of things I can't stand after his death only grows instead of shrinking: the dark, sickness, animals I'll never see in real life.

Fears that I can't explain, nightmares that repeat over and over again.

They play despite their audience booing, fully unbothered by my screams of exhaustion.

The silence invites all those thoughts running through my head like wild horses unable to be tamed, powerful enough to drive engines and push me past the last edges of my sanity.

I rub my temples, begging to fly out of my body and become anyone but me.

Instead, my lungs seize, grasping for oxygen they can't find.

I start hyperventilating. Every breath hurts, and my eyes fill with tears.

It's been less than a minute, and I still don't know who turned out the lights, and I haven't even asked.

Why am I like this?

My lungs clear, a gasp fills them, and a sob follows.

"Miss Marcella?" a soothing and familiar voice asks as a beam of light flashes over the space. It's not enough for me to see, but I'm sure he can.

“Enzo?” I ask, desperate for it to be him. I couldn’t stand someone else seeing me right now. Even if we only shared one flirtation, I feel closer to him than anyone else here—other than my stalker.

“It’s me.” His voice is a balm to my soul. When the light reaches my face, I flinch away, but that means he’s found me. I’ll be safe.

“I’m sorry,” he says, turning the flashlight off. My fear ticks up again, but then his hands are on me.

He’s warm when he reaches me. His cedar and masculine scent almost makes me feel better, but I’m too far gone. I reach for him, grabbing his shirt between my hands as I take desperate gulps of air.

“What’s happening?” I ask. “Why did the lights go out?”

“They’re doing work on the power lines,” he says. “They dropped off a flyer earlier.”

I didn’t see it. I wouldn’t have stayed here.

My lips are dry, and I can’t decide what to say next.

Thoughts after thoughts arrive at a blinding speed, and I open my mouth just to close it again.

I try to sit, but he stops me with a hand covering my chest, a trapped breath comes out ragged as I collapse into him and let him hold me.

It’s just my arm against him and his hand on my chest, but it’s everything to me.

He’s so warm, his heat burns through my leotard.

I let his shirt go and grip his hand with mine, afraid he'll move before I'm ready to let him go.

"Are you afraid of the dark?" he asks me gently, but I can't answer him.

"Squeeze my hand once for yes and twice for no," he gently instructs, somehow managing to give me a way I can manage to interact right now.

Squeeze.

"I was afraid of the dark once too. Can you believe that?"

Squeeze, squeeze.

He laughs softly. "Are your eyes open?"

Squeeze.

"Close them."

But I don't respond this time. It won't change anything but I can't do that. My heart speeds up again, and I don't like this. I'm scared of my own mind too, and the nightmares that follow me when I close my eyes. I don't want him to know I'm scared of so much, yet I'm helpless here.

"Marcella, embrace the darkness."

I can't. My hands stay still around his.

"When darkness comes, you need to make sure it's on your own terms. That's what I had to do," he says.

The quality of his voice changes. It goes lower, raspier.

It brings chills to my skin, but I feel like I'm missing something.

He sounds like he knows too much about accepting your demons, and I don't want that either. He's too kind.

"Close your eyes, Marcella."

Not Miss Marcella. Not the soft and well-mannered man who arrived yesterday, but something different that has me pausing for a second.

The thought comes, but it's like trying to hold on to smoke.

It seeps through my fingers, and it's gone.

Instead of trying to figure out what feels odd about him today, I close my eyes.

His other hand moves to my cheeks, and his thumb grazes over my eyes as if checking that I'm following his instructions. His fingers force them to shut.

I gasp. It's dark enough that the only difference when my eyes are open or closed is the red letters spelling exit in the distance. That is the scariest part of it all. I know I can't open my eyes to escape.

I can't ever escape. It's hell, and it's inside me all day long.

That sign is a taunt. There is no exit, only an endless cage built from my own pain.

"Choose the darkness," he says again, interrupting my thoughts, changing them, and offering me a solution I hadn't considered.

I shake my head. I don't want darkness. I want light and peace and a full night of sleep. I wasn't born for the darkness. Fabrizio tossed me into it and left me behind. A pang of guilt follows on the heels of that thought. He wasn't trying to hurt me. He just didn't want to die alone.

"You can't escape it. It's here to get you whether you want it or not. But you do have a choice."

He lets the offer hang there, tempting me out of my shell.

"What's my choice?" They're the first words I've spoken, and they take a lot of effort.

"Be the predator who uses the dark to your advantage. Dance with it. Hunt in it. "

What does he mean?

His words shake me, but they also tickle something deep inside me that has been hungry and desperate to regain my power for a long time.

How do I become what I'm most afraid of?

I'm not even sure where I begin and Fabrizio ends anymore.

With my eyes still closed, I try to feel like a predator instead of the prey.

I don't even know how someone stronger would react.

Would they realize Fabrizio wasn't well?

Would they be a better sister and help him before it was too late?

Enzo's hands grab my chin a little too forcefully, and he tips it up. "Tell me what you're so afraid to say."

"Why?" The word comes out cracked from my lips.

"Because you're not afraid anymore, are you? You're the predator."

His fingers are rough on my chin, a contrast with the quality of his clothes. His words quiet the ghosts haunting me enough that I can concentrate on the feeling of his hands. My cheeks burn when I notice how close we are, but I push that embarrassment away.

It's not very predator of me.

"Yesterday when you asked me if I wanted anything else I lied," I say. I'm not ready to talk about my brother or all the other things I'm hiding, but I can manage this one truth.

He hums in a masculine way, raising the hairs on my arm. "You wanted something more?"

"Yeah."

I became this shell of a person when I was too young.

Men have been the last thing on my mind as I've pursued the only career I could manage.

I'm not built for other things, including coming on to someone, but it could be fun, right?

Take the initiative. I don't have to shove him down on the ground and make him eat me out—even thinking about it gets me wet between my legs—but I'm pretty sure all I have to do is ask.

“Tell me now. What do you want?” His words encourage me, and the darkness itself encourages me for once.

“I want you to eat me out,” I say, afraid, but finally of something scary, putting myself out there, being rejected like my stalker turned me down yesterday.

He's silent for a second too long. I hold my breath, thinking I went too far and made him uncomfortable, and I'll be turned down twice in as many days.

The doubts melt from my mind when he comes closer, and his warm, minty breath fans over my face.

The moment is loaded with electricity, and his lips graze over mine.

“Tell me exactly what you want me to do, Miss Marcella.”

Heat snakes up my spine and reaches my warm cheeks.

Here in the dark, he's different. When he knocked at my door, I was attracted to him.

Enzo is a good-looking man, so of course I noticed.

But now he has an edge I didn't see before.

Something in the quality of his voice today makes me unnerved and hot at the same time.

“Eat my pussy, Enzo,” I say, shifting from aroused to desperate.

He growls, and I gasp when he takes me in his arms, shifting me so we can move.

He's careful putting me down on the couch against the city view I love so much.

My legs apart, he brings his warm hands up, and I shiver in anticipation.

I don't dare open my eyes yet, not when I'm so close to being fearless.

He shuffles away. I wait quietly, expecting him to remove my clothes, but instead, I feel silk over my eyes.

“What—” I ask.

“I'm tying my tie around your eyes. Are you afraid? ”

I swallow the lump in my throat. “A little.”

“Good,” he groans, working the knot behind my head.

I don't get a chance to ask why it's good to be afraid. A flash of cold touches my skin, making me jump. I understand that it's a blade too close to my skin when he slashes my leotard and exposes my skin to the air.

Why does good-mannered Enzo have a knife on him? His tongue parts my pussy, and I grip his hair as a moan slips free. Suddenly, there are no thoughts left, just him.

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Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:23 am

LUCKY

I stand in the hall, watching as my brother slides his tongue across her cunt.

The barest hint of light from the emergency signs illuminates them, but from the direction of the light, they're blind to it.

I didn't know I could feel jealousy for Enzo, but that's what this is.

He may be the man possessed, but that little cunt is all I've been able to think about for days.

He's getting to taste it first, and my hands clench at the thought.

But I control myself. She's not mine, and she isn't his either.

My brother may be crazy, but I've never known him to be stupid. The door was left open for a reason.

Enzo confirms my suspicion as he turns and glances over his shoulder, and locks his eyes on me, not surprised to find me there.

How long has he known I'm watching? I turn the flashlight on my phone, illuminating the space, but her eyes are already covered, so she can't see.

I nod back to the hallway, a silent plea that he abandons this madness and goes back to killing scumbags for Cygnus.

This girl doesn't deserve to get caught up in his web where things go to wither and die.

I'm not God, I don't pretend to know who is done with their time on this earth, though that's exactly what we do. We end their days as if we have the right. But every asshole who has been over Enzo's table wasn't innocent.

She is.

Protecting anyone who isn't Enzo doesn't come naturally to me, but that's what I have to do.

As if the devil is listening to my reluctant thoughts, my brother smirks at me before diving between her legs.

She moans, throwing her head back in a erotic gasp, and fuck me if it doesn't make me dizzy. She parts her legs even farther, an invitation that he takes greedily.

Her big tits bounce at every breath. She's so fucking responsive it's criminal.

"Miss Marcella..." Enzo bites her thigh.

"Give me more," she whispers.

"Is that an order?"

She licks her lips and hisses, "Yes."

Enzo chuckles, using his finger around her clit and taking a whimper from her this time. He turns to me, nodding to her.

He's inviting me in, and I shake my head. Fuck, I don't want him to have her. Why would I get into this mess?

Enzo smirks again and pushes two fingers into her. Marcella shakes around him, and a curse flies from her lips. I'm so fucking hard, it's difficult to think, and he's messing with my head.

He fucks her with his fingers while mouthing, "Come on." My brother always gets his way, I know it. And he does because I always make sure to keep him happy, but this?

I should be the voice of reason that takes him away from this girl before I'm cleaning up her blood. Not to mention that if Cygnus's woman finds out we are messing with one of the ballerinas, it might gain a very powerful enemy.

I don't have time to kill Cygnus. That's why I made sure to be an ally when we found ourselves in his territory. He needed enforcers, and Enzo needed his art.

Everything is heading to a messy end all because of this woman, yet I step forward, heading their way.

Maybe I'm just as insane as he is.

My steps are light, making sure I don't make any sound. I keep the flashlight on but don't shine it on her, afraid she can't see it under his tie over her eyes.

The soft light makes her even more beautiful. Her bottom lip is fat and plentiful, begging for my bite. My gaze drops to between her legs. I watch Enzo's fingers disappear inside her cunt. She takes it all so greedily with a whimper and a curse.

Filthy language sounds delicious coming from her.

I betray my own beliefs when I sink to my knees in front of her altar. I'm the one who stops the madness. I'm the one tasked with protecting Enzo from the world and the world from Enzo.

He removes his fingers, giving me the room.

She smells so good it waters my mouth, and my need for her only grows. He knows this is the way to rope me in. He's willing to share his obsession to make sure I can't stop him.

She tastes like a dessert I shouldn't try. I give away a little of me when I part her cunt with my tongue and savor all that she has.

Enzo steps away and lets me have it, satisfied that he won once again. I growl between her legs. I sound so much like an animal, she gasps in surprise.

I don't play games like my brother. I'm not an artist. I fuck like the beast I am, no refinement just pleasure and release. When I eat her cunt, I eat it because I am starving for her.

My tongue explores, and every move is for me, not for her. I take my time before I reach her clit. I'm stealing from her, and I act like it.

The fact that Enzo is sharing his new toy and she doesn't even know weighs a little on my mind, but any time I feel guilty, she moans and washes my guilt away.

My tongue works over her clit, and I feel as she melts in my mouth. Her climax is threatening to arrive, and as soon as it does, this madness will end.

"I'm almost there," she tells us.

I put space between us, and look at my brother over my shoulder. He watches us with a soft look I'm not used to seeing on him.

“Say what you need,” he asks her.

“Fuck me with your fingers.”

She's getting excited about her commands, I can tell. Proud of herself that she can boss Enzo around, not knowing we are always in charge.

I push three fingers inside her. She's a tight grip, and I imagine how it would be to fuck her the way I wish I could. I'm not sure if she could take me. If either of us could survive.

With my tongue on her clit and my fingers fucking her deep, she shatters with a gasp. Her legs shake as I drink hungrily from her cunt.

It's over, and it's only the beginning.

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Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:23 am

MARCELLA

The pirouette ends with the fourth position, the music swells to an end, and I assume the final pose. I don't need the extra practice, but I stayed behind today to think.

Yesterday, things got out of hand. Enzo asked me to be bold, and I did. I don't regret that, but my intuition tells me I'm missing something.

The music starts again, and I dance. I think about the moment I shared with the stalker and the way he made me feel when he chuckled that low.

Enzo makes me feel like that too, but it's different.

He makes me feel precious and unique. I feel good when he looks at me, like I'm worth something.

The stalker makes me feel like I'm worth nothing.

Why is that hot too?

I used to go to therapy years ago after Fabrizio's death.

My therapist was nice enough and capable, but after I turned eighteen, I decided to stop.

It didn't matter how many times we went over it.

Nothing could stop my nightmares. Each day, I woke up fearing something new, as if my nightmares were opening the doors to my unconscious and sneaking phobias in.

Nowadays, all I do to keep sane is dance. And so I do, faster and harder until I don't feel guilty for what happened in the dressing room, and I don't feel shy about what happened with Enzo.

The overhead lights flicker once, and the whole theater descends into darkness. I gasp, but before my eyes get used to the dark, the lights right above me turn on so bright I have to shield my eyes with my hands.

“Hello?” My voice echoes around the empty theater.

I'm sure someone is just testing the lights, but after a minute without any answer or change, the hairs on the back of my neck rise, and goosebumps run down my arms.

“Can you turn this down, please?” I ask again.

Nothing, just a single light perfectly centered on me.

It's him. I know it's him.

“Who's there?” I scream once again.

My stomach twists into knots when I realize I'm craving him.

I hold my breath, waiting to hear his dark chuckle or to call me a star.

I shouldn't want the attention of someone who is stalking me.

He has access to this whole theater, dorms, and much more.

I should tell the administration, but even as the thought comes to my mind, I know I won't do it.

The lights change again. The single headlight softens, and the music turns on in the background.

My heart is hammering, and I don't trust the change.

I stay frozen in the middle of the stage, watching as the lights act as if there were ballerinas to follow.

It follows the sequence that we'll perform tomorrow night during our opening.

After a long minute, I shake myself off.

There's no one watching me. Not today. Part of me even thinks he wasn't ever there, and I dreamed about what happened in the dressing room. No one can move like a ghost that way.

Convinced it's just my mind playing tricks, I start dancing once again. Trying to follow the cue the lights and music provide, I jump into action mid-choreography and fly across the stage in a jeté.

There's a lot I could do with this ballet if they let me. They want to be daring, but even daring people seem to hold themselves back. A lot of artists mix mediums to achieve the best results. Why not us?

I push aside the choreography that I should practice and dance my version instead. I assume the lights were on automatic with the music, but as soon as I change, they change too.

Reds and dark blues come out, the mood changes, and it fills me with a desire to push the boundaries. My body works the rhythm and new moves, and the lights are now my partner in crime. I know someone is up there doing this, but I don't care anymore.

More than letting someone watch, I need them to.

If no one ever sees my version, at least I have this moment. Sweat drips down from my neck, but it doesn't bother me. I don't think about how my damp skin clings to my leotard or how under my breast is so soaked in sweat, people can see it through the dark fabric.

This time, it's not the sensorial hell I walk through each day because my art is worth it. Today, the effort and sweat are part of the performance. I'm not the instrument anymore; I'm the art.

The music ends, and I fall to the floor in a heap. The single spotlight is burning over me once again, but now I feel deserving of its attention.

I stand, feeling that I accomplished something, and right when I'm turning my back, ready to head to the dressing room, his dark chuckle fills the theater.

"My little star... Again."

There's admiration in his tone. Even as he chuckles, it doesn't feel like he's making fun of me, but it seems he is rather filled with awe.

My hands shake, and I ball them in a fist, trying to hide how nervous I feel. I was right, the feeling is at least validating. I felt him watching me, and he was, and now I'm here, standing under his eyes and not running.

I should always run when I hear that chuckle.

I step forward, my hand blocking the worst of the spotlight, and I try to find where in the lighting box he is. I wish I could get at least a glimpse, but I can't.

Instead of running, I dance.

ENZO

She starts again, moving away from the spotlight, not afraid of being in the shadows. Marcella makes me so hard, it's difficult to control myself and stay in the shadows. I watch mesmerized as she starts dancing once again. She knows she's the star and the lights will follow her wherever she goes.

As her faithful servant, I do just that.

The body of the man who was here before me lies at the corner, his eyes still open and mouth agape in shock. I wanted a privileged position to watch my Marcella, and he had the best seat of them all. Now, I do.

I'm not necessarily a professional, but it wasn't hard to figure out the buttons to help her shine. Marcella is right; the choreography they gave her isn't daring enough. I wonder who I have to push to make sure she gets her way.

"Enzo..."

The voice doesn't surprise me. My brother is the only one who can track and sneak up on me. I don't take my eyes off the stage as he approaches, playing with the lights just to watch her dance again. This time, she knows it's for me.

Lucky stays quiet for a long moment. He can try to hide, but she has him as much as she has me.

"I needed you today," he finally said. "Cygnus sent a target."

They don't interest me anymore. Being sent to finish an uninspired task doesn't feel like it used to. Not when it compromises my time watching her. I don't reply to Lucky. He knows me enough to read through my silence.

"Why do you change your tone when you talk to her?" he asks instead.

Now, that is a great question. I smile. Marcella just performed the most graceful landing after a triple pirouette, as if she's weightless.

"Enzo, the housing guy," I tell him.

"I understand that part. But I heard you with her. You're... soft."

"She deserves softness." I nod to myself. "Don't you think? She's precious."

The spotlight I command follows her across the stage, and she once again impresses me with the perfect choreography, even if it's slightly different from before. That just means she's dancing from the heart and changing as she goes.

"Enzo, we have to talk about this."

This time, I turn to him. Anything we had to talk about was talked about last night. He tried her. He knows what's at stake here.

"What do we have to talk about, Brother?"

"Her," he says, but he doesn't look at her. I wonder if he does this to keep himself from falling.

"There's no talking," I remind him. "Only destiny, only art. She's both. And she's ours. "

“You never asked me if I wanted her,” he replies, and I hear anger in his voice.

“We have the same destiny, Lucciano. If she’s mine, she’s then yours.”

How can he not see? We are brothers, but our fate runs deeper than blood. We only have one another on this earth. Our souls are linked as if we are the same.

“Destiny doesn’t ask,” I tell him, returning my eyes to my little star.

He sighs, disappointed, but I don’t see why. If anything, I deserve a grateful acknowledgement that I found her and brought the universe’s plot to the forefront of our lives. It’s important to follow your soul’s purpose.

“When are you planning to take her?”

I haven’t looked at a calendar in years. I don’t know what month we are in, and I don’t see a reason to learn now. Timing is only divine. It doesn’t follow a schedule. Lucky knows this.

“Let her dance at the opening show,” he says when I don’t reply.

That’s fair. She’s not the prima ballerina. It’s a mistake, of course, and maybe I should fix that. Although we were brought here to protect the prima ballerina, our mission changed.

“She’ll do fantastic,” I declare.

Tension rolls off Lucky’s shoulders when I accept his terms. I wish my brother could see the bigger picture. It’s not good for him to be so grounded in the now. He always focuses on the tangible and the details instead of looking ahead and believing every move brought us here.

Our crappy childhood, the twists and turns that pushed us to Cygnus's territory and entrusted these tasks onto our hands. He's stuck on what we have to do instead of asking why .

Why did destiny take so much care of us? Why are we here in the theater right now?

It all culminates in her.

At this stage, she's tired. Marcella pushes herself more than anyone I've ever seen, another quality of a star. It's not only the talent but how committed you are to hone your craft. She should rest for now. A lot is waiting for her in this life.

I turn off all the lights abruptly. I know she'll get what I mean. Go, Little Star. Rest. Lucky turns the soft light to illuminate her path, warm and barely there, but it's enough to guide her backstage.

"She'll learn to love the dark," I assure him.

MARCELLA

The seamstress ties the corset, and I gasp, feeling like I can't breathe.

I don't say a word. She's torturing all of us, one by one, as we try on our costumes.

She grumbles under her breath as she laces mine.

She's fighting against my chest, and I'm afraid my boobs will win once again. They usually do.

"She's extra grumpy today," Connor whispers to me when she moves away.

Connor is one of the dancers. He's new too and not very into gossip, so he's one of the few people who doesn't look at me like I'm a ticking time bomb. Rarely do people care to talk to me, but his face is so open, and his smile is so sincere. I nod and smile back.

"If she thinks my chest will get smaller because she wants it to, I'm afraid she'll be disappointed."

That was okay. A normal interaction, right? Connor looks down at my chest. It's quick before he looks up again.

"No one wants that."

Oh. So Connor is also straight. That's nice.

I smile shyly. Not that I don't have enough on my plate right now, but I like that he's being kind and just talking to me.

I keep the conversation going, feeling normal for the first time.

He's nice and funny, a real charming character, and I end up giggling a lot.

The seamstress fusses over many of us. It's the final costume fit, and she knows it needs to be perfect for opening night. We have a packed house.

I drag my feet to the dressing room once she's done.

The girls hang around, but I don't pay them much attention.

I'm getting used to their eyes following me around.

Anna made sure to tell them all how much of a nightmare I am as a roommate, and they are all speculating what made me this big of a nutjob.

Humming the song to myself, I climb the stairs knowing that a beautiful room is waiting for me, and it doesn't matter what anyone says to me. They can't rob me of that. Like me, they probably don't even know it exists.

I'm almost on the last flight of stairs when a hand covers my mouth, and I'm pulled against a hard chest. I try to scream. My feet lift from the floor and dangle midair, but I can't fight back. Whoever has me is at least three times my size.

"Are you crazy?" he growls in my ear.

It's a bold statement from the man who just jumped on me in the middle of the stairs. I don't get to tell him that, though, since he has my mouth firmly shut.

“Fucking walking target,” he complains and shuffles with me in his arms before taking us both the rest of the steps up.

His voice is low. A growl from deep in his throat as if he doesn’t use it much.

His tone is nothing like my usual stalker.

The sentence sounds insane as it echoes around my brain, but I don’t have time to judge myself.

I’m small, but my legs are strong. I use everything in me trying to shake away his hold, yet he can easily drag me wherever he wants.

My kidnapper opens my door with a key he produces from his pocket, and a cold takes over my body.

This is bad.

I try to scream, but his hand firmly covers my mouth, and all I can do is rethink every one of my decisions. I never should have played this game. Now a stranger has me in his arms with a free pass to my room.

He closes the door with a kick, and I'm tossed to the floor without any ceremony. Scrambling to my feet, I make sure to stand as far from him as possible, brushing my hair out of my face and breathing hard. This is a horror movie in the making. I press my back to the wall and gulp a breath while I take in every inch of him. He's tall, with black tattoos down to his knuckles and a mean face. He sneers at me like I was the one doing the kidnapping. If I wasn’t so fucking scared, I’d call him on that.

“What are you going to do with me?”

It's a bold question because I'm not ready for that answer.

I don't want to know if it's too graphic.

I hope he just kills me quickly. I don't want to suffer for too long.

His black T-shirt clings to his muscles and dark jeans.

I don't see a gun anywhere, so maybe he has a knife?

Stabbing sounds like a slow and painful way to die?—

Knife!

My eyes whip to the bedside table where I store the strange knife I found on my first day here. His muscles look big enough to break that knife, but it's the only defense I have. He steps forward, and I find an excuse to angle my body, finding if I calmly make my way there, he won't be so alarmed.

"I'm trying to save your fucking life!" he roars and steps forward again.

I respond by running backward until I hit my bedside table. I'm here. Now I just need to remove the knife from the drawer before he makes it all the way here. I'm concentrating so hard on how to stab him that I almost miss his words.

But they ring in my ears demanding attention.

"What?"

He snorts, shaking his head. "I saw you talking to him. Are you fucking crazy? Do you want his death on your conscience?"

I shake my head, but it's not in denial but rather in absolute confusion. "Are you sure you kidnapped the right girl?"

The question is so stupid, but I can't stop my own mouth. I have no idea what he's talking about, and if he was never meant to be here, I'd like him to leave as quickly as possible. I can show him to the door and all.

"Kidnapped?" He moves my way again, and I slap my hand over the drawer. He looks at my hand and laughs. "Grab the knife. Go ahead. Grab it."

He knows I keep my knife here. That's bad, and the fact he's telling me to grab it feels like a trap. But I open the drawer, still looking at him, and my fingers close over the wooden handle. I remove the leather case from the blade and point at him.

"Better?" he asks.

"No, there's still an asshole in my room."

He looks around and nods. "Yes, how's this a kidnapping? I kidnapped you to your room?"

I don't lower the knife. "You took me from one location and brought me to another."

He opens his mouth to argue but ends up closing it with a snap. I grip the knife harder, trying to think where I can stab him just once and be effective enough to run without him catching up with me. I don't want to kill him or anything. Just fuck him up enough so I can escape.

"Like I said, you're fucking insane. You're playing with fire."

I'm becoming more frustrated than I am scared, and that's saying a lot. "I don't know

what you're talking about!"

The words barely make it out of my lips, and I regret them already. He reacts quickly. Someone that big shouldn't be so fast, but he is. It takes a second, and he's on top of me, the knife between us and against his hard chest.

I was so wrong a million times over. I never had a chance.

"You were flirting with the dancer just now. What if he sees it? What happens then?"

My cheeks burn. I wasn't flirting with Connor. I was being nice to the only person in this theater who doesn't think I'm insane. I don't explain myself to him, though it's irrelevant.

"Who is he?" I ask instead.

He steps closer, not worried whatsoever about the knife between us. It pierces his T-shirt, and a second later, wet blood spreads over the fabric. My arms falter. I don't like blood very much. Not mine, not my kidnapper's.

"You're playing with fire. A man who watches your every move and thinks of you as his. So I ask again, do you want that dancer's death on your conscience?"

My eyes don't move from the fresh wound I'm creating. I've never hurt someone before. If someone were cutting my stomach like that, I'd be screaming, but he doesn't even look bothered.

"Marcella?"

The way he says my name snaps me out of it. He has a soft accent when he says it, as if he knows how the name should be pronounced. I look up at him. The words taste

bitter in my mouth. “Nothing is going to happen.”

A lie. He knows it’s a lie. “He made you a knife out of bone. Do you think he’s sane?”

I blink and look down at the knife. I never could tell what material it was made from, but now that he says it’s bone, it makes complete sense.

“Animal bone?”

He shakes his head, and the fear grows in my chest. Embarrassment too. I let this go for too long. I ignored how much I was in real danger, and now I have another stranger here letting me know.

I look down at the knife I’m pressing on him, annoyed and impressed at the same time. “Doesn't it hurt?”

He follows my eyes and shakes his head. “It’s sharp, but he’d never give you something lethal.”

The hand holding the wooden handle shakes as I take in his words. Of course it was my stalker who got me the knife. It was here in the bed waiting for me. This man knew about it.

“Anything can be lethal if used right,” I tell him with my chin up as I apply more pressure to the knife.

I could sink it all the way to his stomach. He can say whatever he wants, but I could defend myself with a fork. The knife is small, yes, but frighteningly sharp. Maybe he doesn’t know my stalker that much.

“Do you work with him?” I ask next.

“You think you’re worth the two of us?” he mocks.

He comes closer, and my hand trembles. He knows I can push the knife the whole way, but he’s playing chicken with me. It’s not the knife that’s the problem. It’s me.

“I don’t think I’m worth much,” I reply honestly, but my eyes are between us and the blood soaking his shirt.

Bile rises up to my throat. He’s braver than I am, and he’s willing to sacrifice himself to prove that.

I don’t need this lesson to know I’m scared of everything.

I feel it every day of my life. My knees are wobbly, sweat coats my skin, and my mouth is so dry my lips crack.

My vision blurs at the corner, and suddenly, it’s just me and the blood.

His T-shirt is black, so I can’t tell the red color, but the metallic smell sends shivers down my spine.

“He thinks you are. He thinks you’re worth a war.”

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His words float over my head, but they're like water seeping through my fingers.

Nothing makes sense to my ringing ears anymore.

My hand shakes until the tight grip I have on the knife loosens, and it drops with a resounding clang between us.

Next, my knees give up the fight, and I drop to the floor, gasping for air on his feet.

"Tell me." He crouches in front of me.

"I don't like blood," I say, hating how pathetic I sound.

He snorts, but I don't get what's so funny. "You look like a badass, though."

I shake my head. I'm not. I'm scared of everything, I'm scared of the new things I'll fear tomorrow. I can't rely on my brain. It plays tricks on me. All I have is my feet to dance, that is while my mind doesn't destroy that too.

"I think you're in over your head," he says.

His words weren't meant to be comforting.

I hear the finality at the end of the sentence.

He feels for me. He thinks I'm stupid. My cheeks burn, and I hate myself for that.

I don't know why I kept that knife if I'm not strong enough to use it.

The intention that makes the killer, and I just proved to him I have none.

"Tell me how you know him," I ask, looking down, unable to look at him.

He tsks, "That's the wrong question to ask. Why aren't you asking what he wants with you?"

This time, I raise my chin and look at him straight on. "What difference does it make? The gazelle doesn't ask why the lion is chasing her. But I want to know how many lions are out there."

His eyes sparkle with life, and he smirks before suddenly wrapping his hand around my neck. I cough and gasp even though he's not adding much pressure. He tips my head up, and so I don't choke, I move with him as he drags me up.

He's much taller than I am, and when we are like this in front of each other, and his hand is around my neck, I truly understand that my life is in his hands.

His grip changes, just a little tighter than before, his dark eyes follow my reaction, and I'm scared to do anything in case it is the wrong thing.

"What got you so afraid? Anyone hurt you?" His voice is low, almost soothing, and it doesn't match the hard lines on his face or his hand firmly around my neck.

"My brother," I blurt out.

Shit. It's not a secret or anything, it was on the front page of every newspaper when it happened, but I don't usually talk about it. His grip gets tighter, and he growls.

“No, not like that,” I tell him quickly. “He killed himself in front of me when I was fifteen. The nightmares, the phobias...”

I trail off because I don’t need to connect the dots for him.

I don’t even think I can truly connect the dots because something is truly wrong with me beyond Fabrizio.

I feel it growing inside, infesting each part of me.

Fabrizio’s death was only the catalyst. I can’t blame him for the choices I made.

“You don’t look that delicate.” His thumb caresses the line of my jaw. “When you dance, you look like a force of nature.”

“Have you seen me dance? ”

“You’re a star, aren’t you?”

My stalker called me a star. Suddenly, I don’t think he’s telling the truth.

He’s not some random stranger who came here to warn me off Connor.

His voice hits me, and while different, I know it’s the same guy from the dressing room.

I taste his masculine scent in the air when he steps even closer, and my neck cranes to look at him.

He licks his mouth, and I watch, knowing this is exactly what is wrong with me.

The monster that grows inside me feeds off the dampness between my legs that only this type of man can create.

He looks at me with a devilish expression, and my knees wobble.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” he asks, his eyes on my mouth.

“Like what?”

“Like you want me to fuck some sense into you.”

Jesus, If he fucks me, it’ll only make it worse.

“I thought you were making sure no one touched me for my stalker.” I grow bolder. His eyes burn over my skin, and I’m feeling good about the attention. “I don’t think you can fuck me.”

“No?” He shakes his head, and his grip on my neck is so tight I gasp.

My legs tremble. I’m flying too close to the sun, taunting a man who is easily three times my size.

But the moments with him flash in my head—the time he watched me getting myself off in my bathroom.

When he asked me to see my pussy in the dressing room.

All the times he could have hurt me, and he didn’t. That has to count for something, right?

My pussy is soaked, and I’m trying to work on the reasons why this is okay.

He has keys to my dorm, yet nothing happened to me.

I don't know why he needs to pretend he's not my stalker when he obviously is.

No one is out there watching me like he does, but if he wants to play this game, I can do it too.

"You say he's possessive," I whisper with the little air I can gulp. "So why do you think he'll be okay with you touching me like this? I'm his."

The words sink right where I want them to, and before I can stop him, his lips are on mine.

His kiss is rough and demanding, and I can barely keep up until he removes his hands from my neck, and I can breathe again.

He lifts me, his hands under my ass and my back hits the wall and I finally can really dive into the kiss.

My tongue wrestles with him. He kisses me like he's angry.

I know I pushed his buttons, but he wanted this, right?

But I don't have time to think about that because it all moves fast. He's hard against me, his cock lined with my pussy, and even through the clothes, he burns.

He tastes like minty chewing gum and energy drinks, and his cologne is woodsy, masculine, and expensive.

His hands carve on my ass as he angles me just right while rubbing his length against me.

Not for a second do I think this is for me.

He's taking pleasure for himself and using me for that, and the thought makes me crazy.

His teeth sink into my bottom lip, and he growls into me, making me devour his desire.

His mouth is back on mine, feral and impossible, and I bump my head against the wall when he takes my lips.

I feel his hand between us, undoing his buttons.

Rough fingers push my leotard to the side, and he thrusts into me, stretching me to the limit before I have the chance to wonder if this is a good idea.

It's not. But it's delicious.

He slams home, hard and not asking for permission, and I tremble in his arms. My mouth falls open because it hurts a little. I've never had anyone as big as him, and it doesn't matter how wet I am, it takes a minute for my body to get used to the invasion.

"You're so fucking tight, Little Star. You're going to make me come so good."

His words run down my spine like chills. I knew he would ruin me if he fucked me. There's no sense in denying what I'm feeling.

He grabs my chin and brings it up, looking me in the eyes. "Come for me, Marcella. Strangle that cock, my little slut."

I whimper between his lips. He fucks me harder and faster, and I see stars under my eyelids, pleasure running through my body, and I come around his cock. He grunts and keeps going, letting me milk him until it triggers his own orgasm and his hot cum fills me up.

I'm surprised when he plants a kiss on my forehead, confused by the sudden change in attitude.

"I'm going to protect you from the darkness. You'll be just fine, Little Star."

ENZO

“I’m going to protect you from the darkness. You’ll be just fine, Little Star.”

I watch my brother fucking her from a dark corner.

Pride fills my heart from the sight, but it all comes crashing down when he opens his mouth.

I can hardly believe my ears. Why would he do it?

I’ve wanted to share her from the beginning.

We share a fate, so I know this is the right path for us.

I’ve been pushing everything along until we reach our destined conclusion, and here he is, not only taking her but saving her.

She doesn’t need saving. She’s finally where she’s supposed to be.

Rarely in my life have I ever been so angry with my little brother. He guards inside his own being part of my soul. He accepts the darkest part of me with ease and always guides me when I find the world outside us too tedious. Has he forgotten who I am? Who is he?

My cock is hard and leaking into my briefs as I watch them both come at the same time.

How can he even doubt that she's perfect for us?

We are darkness, and she is ours. We talked about this, and I foolishly thought he understood.

My fingers open and close as I think of how to deal with them.

My first instinct is to kill them both, but I pass that over quickly.

I care far too much about them to live without either.

That would be my death sentence too. Marcella might be a new addition to my life, but unlike my brother, I have no interest in fighting fate.

They finish, and I don't bother to watch any longer.

I'm too angry and I have too much to do.

Tomorrow is the opening night, and I plan to sit back and watch as Marcella dances, enjoying the beauty that so inevitably belongs to me, but how can I accomplish that when my suddenly saintly brother plans to protect her from her destiny?

Pathetic , I grit to myself as I leave them behind. Anger oozes off me as I make my way out of the theater. Lucky made me promise to keep an eye on Cygnus's woman for a while, but she doesn't interest me. He put me on a schedule as if that alone could keep me on a leash.

Fate is knocking on our door, and if Lucky wants to ignore it, I have to do the work for us both.

I climb into my car. The only thing keeping me sane is the knowledge that until now,

everything was going according to plan.

Having to convince Lucky is a bump in the road, but not the end.

They will both embrace the darkness, whether they want to or not.

It's not every day that I seek Cygnus. Lucky is tasked with all communication, leaving me free to do what I want with the targets handed to me.

But I turn the car around and head his way, knowing that a big man like him has a never-ending list of enemies, and right now, I need a name to cross off.

It doesn't matter who. I just need them on my table. Cygnus is smart. He won't turn me down.

A faint glow shines from Cygnus's office when I show up outside the warehouse.

I would have gone to his house if I needed to, but it's better that I find him here.

The smell of blood and death surrounds me as I step inside.

What would repulse most people makes me feel at home.

I take out my phone and turn on the flashlight, not trying to draw attention from passersby.

Glass covers the floor. I'm not sure what just happened here, but I can't help but feel slightly envious when I see the dried blood on the shards.

Someone had some fun.

Cygnus's office is up on the top floor in the back, where it would be really complicated to get a shot off if you were trying to snipe him.

A back elevator with a security-cammed entrance is the only way up.

I press the button to alert him of my presence, though I'm sure he's already aware I'm here.

You don't get to be where he is without knowing what is happening around you at all times.

The elevator doors slide open, I step inside, and it closes just as quickly, whisking me away to the top floor with much more speed than you would expect from something inside this rusted-out warehouse.

On the top floor, I'm greeted by darkness except for the end of the hall where Cygnus awaits me.

I hope he doesn't ask about his woman because I don't even know her name.

From the moment I saw Marcella, she became the only mission I cared about.

"That's ridiculous, Diego. I can boost here and here," a feminine voice says. "I used to work in those streets."

"And I was watching you," Cygnus replies.

"Watch me again. I'm not going to be sitting pretty just because I'm your wife now. You know I like to have fun."

I reach the door and find a brunette woman in sweatpants and a leotard on top, her

hair is in a bun with a few strands falling to the side.

Interesting. I thought I was supposed to be watching her, yet here she is.

She's sitting on his table, looking down at his plans spread over the table while Cygnus rests his back on the leather chair and has one hand over her leg possessively even when alone.

They turn my way when I approach. The woman smiles warmly, and I wonder if she's a little crazy. No one smiles at a monster approaching in the darkness.

"Enzo," Cygnus dips his chin.

"Rat found that target for me?"

Cygnus tips his head to the side, watching me in a way that makes my skin crawl.

"Yes." He finally drags out.

My skin prickles with his eyes on me. I don't like to deal with anyone, especially when I feel this much rage.

"Are you alright?" his woman asks.

I blink and look her way. She looks too kind to be his wife, too prim to be in this warehouse.

"Yes," I say simply even though I'm the furthest from alright.

"You owe me one, Enzo. I asked no questions." Cygnus arches an eyebrow like I need a reminder.

I don't stay in debt to powerful men. I'm smarter than that.

“Yes.” I force myself not to snap.

“Pay it. Rat is guarding the door,” he says, his eyes calculating.

The voices in my head get louder, and this might be the perfect solution. If Cygnus wants me to pay for the favor now, that's better for me. I have enough rage to burn.

My back is to them before more words are exchanged. I follow the corridor to the left where I find Rat guarding a locked door.

“Bring him to me,” I say.

He dips his chin down, and I move away once again, tired of all this interaction. Lucky should be here. I should be back by my table just waiting for the delivery. My rage shouldn't be aimed at my own brother, yet this is where I am.

Fragile, it feels. Without Lucky by my side, I feel weak and vulnerable, a feeling that makes me want to tear the world apart to prove to them I'm not.

Cygnus's lackey brings the man to me after a few minutes.

His feet drag over the floor after a beating, and I growl in annoyance.

I don't like it when they come to me like this.

There's no artistry, just senseless beating.

My palms are itchy, and I grab a scalpel as the man is being tied to my table.

Shoulders back, I click play on the old radio player loaded already with the songs I like the most.

Art is never appreciated in its time. The big painters in history died penniless.

I understand not everyone can connect with the universe like I do, feeling its beating as if it's the same rhythm of my heart.

I carve the man in front of me, sinking the blade into his neckbone.

He wakes up with a blood-curdling scream, trying to yank his arm free.

"I don't like noise," I tell him.

It's good to let people know your boundaries.

He has a chance to keep this quiet, or I'll take his own hand and stuff it into his mouth before he interrupts my favorite movement in Giselle.

He doesn't listen to me, which is awfully rude, so I grab the saw and take his hand.

He flings his stump around for a second, spraying the room with blood, but soon he faints, and I'm not bothered anymore.

She needs another present, something pretty like she is.

I take his hip bones, wondering what I can create for her this time.

She likes the knife. She's been carrying it around, and it fills my heart with pride.

The words Lucky said to her replay in my head like the music I don't want to listen to

anymore.

It scratches my brain, raising the hairs down my arm.

Destiny can't be fought. She's perfect for us. She belongs to the darkness just as Lucky and I do, and it pains me he doesn't understand.

As I cut what used to be a man on my table, I decided on a plan for the first time in my life without consulting Lucky first. He will never bring her to me. I heard it from his lips, so I will bring her to him. I will show her how dark it can get and prove she was made for this life.

She was made for us.

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MARCELLA

There's electricity in the air as we wait backstage for the signal.

The prima ballerina cracks her neck, releasing tension.

She's not alone here. A monster of a man is beside her.

He's covered in tattoos with a mean face to anyone who looks her way.

I heard her calling him Diego, which is the name around her neck.

That's all they talk about, even with the imminent show about to open.

Instead of stretching, they are whispering between themselves, going up on their pointe shoes, trying to get a good look at the couple.

My legs tremble when I think of my stalker and the way he fucked me against the wall.

I was never taken like that before, but I can't say I don't like it.

I came so hard, and even now I see the stars behind my eyelids.

The prima ballerina's man is as tall as my stalker but not as strong.

He's leaner, his eyes alert and watching everyone's moves.

My stalker looks like a tank. He's pure muscle and bigger than anyone I've ever seen.

Enzo too. Actually, it's funny I'm involved with them both when they are easily the biggest men I have ever seen. I wonder if Enzo is big everywhere too.

God, what happened to me?

I lost my virginity when I was still at school, with a guy I liked a little.

I was deep into my grief, but the therapist told me I should do more stuff like a regular teenager.

Prom, sleepovers, boyfriend. I took her advice as if it was a checklist waiting to be miraculously cured once everything was done.

I had sex with him to see if it was going to fix the black hole left in my soul, and it wasn't a surprise when it didn't.

Enzo going down on me was the first time I wanted to be intimate with someone, expecting just pleasure.

I didn't want him to fix me. I didn't think it was the normal thing to do.

The same happened with my stalker. He walked to my room, and if anything, the right thing to do would be to run away, not have sex with him. But I did, and it was addictive.

The lights flicker three times, letting us know it's time to go.

I move with the other dancers, avoiding Connor like the plague.

When I arrive at the stage, I assume my position below the soft light.

The silence before the music starts and the curtains open will always be my favorite.

Anticipation runs free through all of us.

That's something unique I share with every dancer here.

Even the ones I don't like, even the ones who hate my guts.

We all share this moment and the same goal.

The music starts, my heart speeds, and the heavy red curtains open, triggering their applause. I take a fortifying breath, and I dance with all my soul.

The first act is soft and melodic. It relies on skill and grace.

I love how fast paced and demanding the second act is, but some moments right now are the ones that will forever be in my heart.

The movement makes me feel like I'm floating.

I let myself be soft with a smile on my face.

Dancing is freedom, is being who you have to be at that moment without any fear.

I push myself to perfection even when I'm in the last row of dancers.

It doesn't matter that I'm not front and center.

I have to be good for me, and not anyone else.

But right as the thought crosses my mind, I feel the weight of a stare, and it's not the crowd in front of us.

To my right, waiting by the third curtain, is Enzo.

He looks at me in awe, nothing but pride coming from him, and my belly explodes with butterflies.

I dance for him, showing off at every movement, and when the music stops, I practically run to his arms.

“What are you doing here?” I ask breathlessly.

“I had to watch you dance. It was incredible, principessa.” His eyes dart between mine, and I want to kiss him, but I feel shy as the dancers make their way around us to walk backstage.

How does he even have permission to be here? My mouth opens to ask him more questions, but his gaze moves from me to something over my shoulder. I turn around to see what the problem is, but I don't see anything but the prima ballerina at the other side of the stage.

“Come with me.” He pulls my arm.

I giggle. “I have to get ready for the second act!”

He comes closer to whisper in my ear, “I need to be between your legs. It won't take long.”

His voice is low and seductive, and I'm wet just thinking about it. I don't know if he means he wants to eat me out again or fuck me, but if I'm honest, I want both. I want

everything.

I let him guide me away. He's fast, and I have to jog beside him to make it. I guess we are in a hurry. He leads me to a door at the back of the theater, and ushers me to a black car. I take the passenger seat, and he starts driving.

"I don't want anyone to see us."

I want to tell him we can't go far because I don't have much time, but before the words make it out of my mouth, his hand dives between my legs, under the tulle, pushing the leotard to the side.

"You're soaked, Marcella," he breathes out.

I bob my head up and down, unable to speak when he starts fucking me with two fingers.

All my worries disappear from my head. I don't care about the second act anymore, or the cars passing through.

I throw my head back and hold one hand to the door and the other to my seat.

My hips start moving, helping him and asking for more.

"You're so beautiful. So perfect. Look at you squeezing my fingers. I need to put another one in. You need to take me, and this is not enough."

I whimper when he adds the third finger, the heel of his hand pressing over my clit and my pleasure climbs at the same rate as my moans.

I'm loud today, freer than before. I don't tell Enzo that having sex with my stalker

last night made me feel a little more liberated.

I don't tell him that his fingers sting a little after taking a man that size.

"You're so greedy today, aren't you? I wonder why."

"I want to come," I say out loud things I never dreamed to say to anyone, yet they come out so easily around him.

"And you're going to come so pretty, principessa. Around my fingers, my tongue and cock. I'm going to take you and use you every single day for the rest of your life. I'm never going to get tired of coming between those thighs."

He's faster, harder, and his words work wonders on me. I'm worried about the forever between us, but I don't have time to answer. He drives one-handed, sending me glances so hot I'm ready to come over and over again.

"We are almost there. You need to be faster."

There? Where are we going? Maybe we're back at the theater, or maybe he just wanted to drive around so people didn't notice the car parked with a screaming ballerina inside.

Very little makes sense in my head right now.

All I want is to come for him, to take the other things he promised me.

He presses over my clit and it's finally too much.

I come hard, my eyes squeezing close and a curse flying through my lips.

My toes try to curl, but I'm still wearing my pointes. I'm in full costume, and now that I came, reality sets in.

He parks the car, removing his fingers from my pussy with a sound so depraved I blush.

Lasciviously, he dips the fingers into his mouth and groans, making me sweat in desire all over again.

“You’re too good for me.” I can’t stop the shy smile. “Let’s go.”

I expect to look through the window and find the theater, but it’s a warehouse. I turn around, trying to see what else is out there, but it looks pretty remote. When Enzo circles the car and opens the passenger door, I feel my panic set in.

“What are we doing here? Where are we?”

He lowers to the ground, eyes incredibly dark on me. “I have to show you something important. Can you trust me?”

He offers his hand and I take it, without thinking straight. I don’t know if I trust him, he helped me through a panic attack, but I don’t think that’s enough to establish any kind of relationship. But he smiles at our joined hands, and I forget to be smart .

It’s a warm night, but it feels wrong to be dressed like this anywhere that isn’t the stage.

I ruin my pointes as I crush the gravel beneath my feet, but I follow Enzo wordlessly.

The warehouse looks rusty and abandoned.

I wouldn't look at it twice if I were passing by; it's one of those features every big city has, and we barely ever wonder about.

The oversized door stands open, which is more foreboding than a lock.

Enzo leads the way, and I follow him into a massive machining warehouse.

What's left of the equipment is long abandoned, picked over, rusted, and wasting away.

I gulp when the smell hits me, too pungent to be ignored.

Chemicals fill the air, like someone desperately trying to bleach it clean, but under all that, I can smell layers of decay and rot.

I bring my hand to my nose to stop the assault to my senses.

Enzo looks back at me with an assured smile, unbothered by it at all.

He leads me down a long hallway that reminds me of this horror video game Fabrizio played.

At the end, we find an elevator, we ignore that in favor of the terrifyingly rickety stairs.

The creak as we step up and the sound terrifies me nearly as much as the dark used to.

Enzo notices and he places a hand over my shoulders, his thumb caresses my skin, settling my heart for a minute.

“Nothing bad will ever happen to you,” he says. “Not when you have me. Remember when I told you to be the predator? That wouldn’t fear the darkness if you were?”

I nod, and he takes my chin between his fingers, planting a kiss on my lips. It’s the first time we kissed, and I wish it wasn’t here. It wasn’t this fast.

“Be the predator,” he whispers before we climb the rest of the stairs.

Enzo leads me to a room at the back of the building, where the smell is even stronger and I cough. He squeezes my hand, reassuring me but my head is a mess.

“Enzo...” I say quietly. “We have to go back to the theater.”

We stop in front of a door, he holds my cheeks with both hands and kisses me again.

“You will dance again.”

I don’t have time to ask him what that means before he pushes the door open revealing what is waiting for me.

A man dressed in all dark clothing with tattoos down to his knuckles is standing by a sink, washing his hands of blood. It’s dark and he takes time with the soap, trying to remove the stain off his nails. I gasp, and he looks our way, his face transforming when he looks at me.

It’s him. My stalker.

Enzo pulls me closer, but I step away, too confused to follow him this time.

“Enzo... what did you do?” my stalker says with so much disappointment in his tone.

Beside him is a table with a body stretched over it.

His face is irreconcilable, changed forever by a bullet.

I fall to my knees, the memories, the smell, everything hitting me at once.

When I close my eyes, Fabrizio smiles at me for the last time before putting a bullet in his head and looking exactly like this body.

I hear my own screaming, and I feel arms around me. It's Enzo.

"Calm down, principessa. Breathe. Embrace the darkness."

I can't breathe, I can't think. I can't open my eyes because the body will be there, waiting for my reaction. I hear a commotion, steps coming my way. A hand touches me, and I know it's my stalker.

"Marcella, breathe. Breathe with me. "

It hurts to follow his instructions and I shake my head. "Why? Why?"

Fat hot tears roll down my eyes and ruin my stage makeup. My knees scrape over the rough floor of the warehouse but I'm far from caring now.

"Why did you bring her here?" my stalker asks, still holding me.

"Because she belongs here. With us." Enzo replies in a tone I never heard from him.

"There's a way to do this, Enzo. This wasn't it."

"I heard you, Lucky." Enzo spats. "Protect her from the darkness? She's darkness like

us.”

“She’s innocent!” my stalker screams. “She doesn’t belong here.”

“She belongs to me.” Enzo settles. “And wherever I go, she goes. Now and forever.”

I look from my stalker to Enzo, both of them breathing hard, angry with one another. I’m dizzy, confused, the questions pile over my tongue and begging me to spill them all but my heart is hammering inside my chest and my vision is blurred.

Maybe Enzo is right, because after this, darkness takes me.

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LUCKY

Her weight is nothing in my arms. She feels especially weak, like she's not eaten or drunk since long before the performance, which is not even over yet .

What the hell was he thinking in that fucked-up brain of his?

I normally have more patience for him, but I can't imagine what he thought he stood to gain.

Why would my brother do this of all things?

Marcella's gossamer skirts are layered in vibrant blues, draping from my arms like I'm suddenly a part of her performance.

I have never looked at things like that.

I am not my brother, and I don't need to imagine beauty in every evil act I do.

I'm not an artist, and I'm not a prop in her show.

I'm violent and a killer. Despite the fact he doesn't want to face it, my brother is the same.

The soft straps of a peasant's corset cover the leotard clinging to her upper body, and puffy little cap sleeves make her especially innocent.

She's too innocent, pale like death from fainting.

She looks more like one of the corpses tossed into the incinerator than something living that will make it out and thrive again. How the hell could he do this to her?

My hands are so full with her it's hard not to notice, even in my anger. Her ass rests against my arm and her wetness seeps from her leotard, dampening the fabric. I look at my brother with a whole new accusation poised. He didn't just bring her here, so why is she wet like she already came?

"This was wrong, Enzo," I seethe, not able to put voice to more of my feelings right now.

I have always considered him my greatest ally in this world despite being responsible for him, despite owing him too damn much. This was a step too far.

"Only you would be bold enough to think you get to rewrite destiny." His pupils are blown out like he's on some serious shit, but I know he's not.

He would never even take his meds, since he doesn't like how they change him.

Can't he see how he's changing in front of me right now? Things are only getting worse.

"Only me? Are you aware of what normal people are even like? Everyone fights destiny every day. It's you, brother, who pursues what you see as destiny no matter what it costs to other people.

" I lift her in my arms to make my point.

I am so very tired from always carrying his weight; hers is nothing, yet he felt the

need to bring her into this, to force her into this.

Maybe he does count this as a betrayal, but what about all the times I've betrayed myself for him?

Her breaths come softly, and while I'm sure she's alive, I'm growing extremely concerned with how long it's taken her to come out of it.

She's not built for this life. She proved that over and over again.

A girl full of phobias shouldn't be in a place like this, but my brother rarely sees reason.

There are so many germs in this one room alone that if she could see the reality of it, she would likely never wake up.

This is where the worst people come to die, and for some reason, he thought he could bring a fucking angel to the party.

"What the rest of the world does matters little to me," he waves me off. "We have to bring her to Bianchi Bay."

I snort a laugh. Many times over, I took his lunacy seriously, and now I see that our position is my own fault. I didn't create the monster standing in front of me, that was our father, but I handed him the damn key—a man who isn't interested in reality. If anything, her blood is on my hands too.

"I'm not kidnapping her," I clarify. No one is going to Bianchi Bay.

About two hundred miles east of here lies an old family property that we don't often visit because it's filled with cruel and painful memories.

We aren't the first monsters in our bloodline.

Bianchi Bay was a refuge for us as children, but it's also the site of the worst moment of our lives.

I don't think about what happened to our mother often, and I refuse to face the place where it happened just so Enzo can play God once again.

"Destiny isn't kidnapping. How long will I have to suffer you refusing to see the divine plan!

" His voice rises, showing he's truly frustrated with me for the first time in years.

Usually, whatever game he's gotten himself caught up in is much more interesting than his own brother standing beside him.

"Divine? Brother, if there is a God, we will never be in his favor." I was raised Catholic, but I'm not a believer. I've seen and done too many wicked things for that, but I know where my brother lives, and I have to meet him in the middle if I want any chance of him seeing reason.

His face cracks as the words spill from between my lips.

He's not used to me confronting him. He's used to me standing by and letting him do what he wants, cleaning up the fucking blood he spills like it's a gallon of milk and I'm stopping Dad from beating him.

He's claimed many times that God had a plan for us, and I never argued.

At least it gave me some way to reach him, and it shows where that's gotten us now.

“Shows what you know! All the divine asks of us is to fulfill our true calling. I am called, and I answer . When do you answer even your basest instincts? Who do you live for because it isn't Lucciano?!” He’s shouting now, and my own anger is so intense that if it weren’t for the woman in my arms, I might have hit him.

“I’ve lived for you, and that’s been a damn mistake.”

I expect his anger, fury even, but he seems happy with my answer.

“Then live for her , Brother. I know you want to!”

My mouth hangs open, and I’m not sure what to say. I’m considering a lot of options when her eyes flutter open.

“What’s happening?” she asks, her voice soft and airy, disconnected like my brother, and I resent that I even had the thought; she’s not a part of his destiny. She can’t be.

I reach for her, my hand over her warm, soft cheek. Her eyes turn to me, and she blinks softly. Little flashes of the prettiest brown peek at me.

“Tell me your name,” I say, hoping more than anything she’s still okay in there. I promised to protect her, and I’m beyond disgusted that I managed to fail that task so quickly.

“You tell me yours,” she bites back, taking the worst of my fears. That’s still her inside there.

“Lucciano.” I allow my Italian accent to fully color it. Despite what I told my brother, I want her to know me, the real way you say my name. Lucky is easy, it’s what I give everyone, but maybe part of me wants more from her .

“Lucciano.” She tastes my name on her tongue, and a deep protective urge swells inside me. I’m a trustworthy enough person. Despite all the killing, I’ve helped enough old ladies cross the street to get a Boy Scout badge or two, but for her, I want to be something more.

“I’ll bring you back,” I whisper back to her. She’s going back to her big pretty dorm, where she belongs.

Marcella gasps, her eyes roll back, and her mouth falls slack. Panic hot and ripping tears my insides apart as I search her face for the cause of her passing out again, finding nothing, I lift my eyes to my brother, looking for his help. That’s when I see he’s stuck a needle in her arm.

“What the fuck did you do?” I roar.

“Bianchi Bay,” he replies, standing.

“We can’t bring her! She has a life here! Her career!”

“Her life is with us, Lucky,” he repeats, as if I’m the child not listening. “And the clock is ticking. We don’t have much time.”

“Destiny is keeping time?”

Enzo looks down at his watch and back at me. “Cygnus knows I took her. He’ll come for us soon.”

My eyes fall closed, and frustration grabs me by my throat.

When I open them again, I take a long look at the man in front of me.

I notice his eyes and features like mine.

I pay attention to his expression, and I wonder how we got here.

He pushed me into a corner. He knows Bianchi Bay is the only place we can go now that Cygnus is looking for us.

I rise on my feet, Marcella still in my arms, and nod to my brother.

He starts packing. There's not much he would miss, but I hear him stuffing it all in a bag.

I wait by the door with her, my stomach sinking when I think about what we're doing.

What I'm letting him do. I don't worry about clothes or guns.

Our car has always been packed, waiting for this moment.

I always knew Enzo was too wild to stay here under someone's thumb, but I never thought I would load a woman in the car with us.

We make our way out of the warehouse and to his car. I put Marcella in the back seat and make sure she's okay before taking my place in the driver's seat. I turn on the key and look in the eyes of my insane brother.

"We can't keep her," I warn him.

But he won't listen. He never does.

MARCELLA

My eyes open, and the strangest sense of peace encompasses me.

I don't know where I am, or what's going on.

I can scarcely remember my own name. Marcella , I think to myself, and the only other thing I know is that it's been years since I truly slept—except last night.

My bones have relaxed to the point of fusing, and I've become one with the gloriously soft mattress beneath me.

I know I'm not in my normal bed, but could I still be in my dorm with my normal wave machine playing?

The sheets are soft between my legs, and I sigh in pure happiness.

It takes me a while to open my eyes. Despite how long I've slept, I'm still tired.

I feel like if I just drifted off, I could sleep forever and never rise from this bed again.

At this moment, I feel nothing but the overwhelming need to keep sleeping and push away anything that bothers me.

In the back of my mind, something screams for attention.

It's far away at first, but it comes quickly to the forefront, and I open my eyes at

once.

Enzo. My stalker. Lucciano. With a sudden dread, I sit up and forget every ounce of relaxation I had managed. Where the hell am I?

At first, the room is too bright to see, white from the sheets to the bed. My eyes slam closed, a headache threatening to come, and I put my hand in front of my eyes to block the blinding brightness.

I climb out of bed, ignoring how large and gorgeous the room they've placed me in is, and run to the window.

Is that... water? Sure enough, I heard waves, and it wasn't my sound machine.

My mouth hangs open. I've only been to the ocean once with Fabrizio when we were young, and while this is more of a bay, the similarity takes my breath and crushes my heart.

Maybe this is a nightmare. It makes sense.

It's always a nightmare. I fall to my knees onto the hard floor, trying to breathe.

My heart hammers inside my chest, and I gasp for air while trying to make sense of everything.

This feels too real. It's then I realize I'm not wearing the same costume I was in for the performance.

Someone changed my clothes. The realization hits, and fear makes my knees weak once again.

Before the thought is even formed in my head, the door opens, and one of them stands there.

The someone who dared to change my clothes while I slept.

I can't believe I didn't connect the dots when I saw my stalker for the first time.

They are so similar that my drowsy head can't make sense of who is who right now.

Everything I've thought, felt, and experienced these last few weeks was a lie.

"I'm so sorry, Marcella," he says.

He looks me over, and I notice the tattoos down his arm and realize he is the one who I haven't spoken to repeatedly. The one who held me in his arms last night if I had to guess. My stalker .

Though I guess I have two.

The tears are still running down my cheeks.

I'm sure he's only apologizing for them, though he doesn't even understand.

I'm only crying for my brother, for the waves in the distance, for my fear of being trapped here.

There's nothing he could have done to bring this kind of pain to my heart.

I don't care that my stalker, of all people, betrayed me. I'm not that stupid.

"If you were sorry, I wouldn't be here." I wipe my tears with the back of my hand.

He's holding a covered plate and puts it over the bed. I have no interest in asking him what's on it. I'm not sitting here and having breakfast with him. I want to look tough, to push him away and curse him out, but in the silence, more tears form in my eyes.

"I wish it were that simple," he says like I'm a child, and my fists clench.

It doesn't lead me to fight, though. I try to concentrate on the now, but I can practically hear Fabrizio's laugh on those waves, and I see his death in what happened last night.

It's all crashing into me right now, my past and my present.

One big mistake that I carry heavily over my shoulders.

This isn't some big attractive man I want to flirt and fuck around with.

He's a killer, my stalker. I've been so stupid for encouraging him, even when I knew what he was.

At least Enzo had the decency to pretend to be sweet.

"Am I going to die?" I ask.

That would explain a lot. I sit with the idea of death for a second. I wished for it for a long time. I was too scared to make it happen like Fabrizio did, but I prayed for a long time simply not to wake up. To leave this world and rest somewhere where my grief wouldn't follow me.

I look at the waves outside, the bright sun and white sand. This is a nice place to die .

"Everyone dies, Marcella, but I promised I would protect you. Killing you certainly

wasn't part of the plan.”

Plan . So there was a plan and ulterior motives. Of course there were. How else could the two of them have gotten me to this point if there weren't? He steps closer to me, and I scramble backward, making sure to keep space between us.

“Please don't be afraid of me,” he says, raising his hands. “I never would have shown you that last night. I promise, Marcella, I may be a monster, but I don't mess with what is innocent.”

I don't feel very innocent. Not after I asked Enzo to go down on me, and I fucked the man I knew was my stalker. None of that sounds like the actions of an innocent woman. I don't say that to him, though. If my innocence is what is keeping me alive, I have to hold on to that.

“It doesn't seem like this was part of your plan either, yet here we are.

” My entire body shakes, and it's not an act.

Memories are coming back in rapid fire, and the image of the body stretched on that table is vivid in my mind.

I glance at his big hands, and another memory flashes of him washing the blood away.

It was too much, just like Fabrizio dying in front of me, and I can't think straight about what was there and what is now.

“I know. All I ask is for you not to be afraid. You're safe with me,” he pleads once again.

The door opens at that precise moment, and I push myself even closer to the wall. The other brother strolls in, and it's obvious they're related. I bet they're even twins. I feel stupid about how obvious it is right now. The more I look, the worse it gets.

“Should she be afraid of me instead, Brother?” Enzo says—if that even is his real name.

My heart races, and stark fear floods my system.

For a moment, I feel like I might pass out again.

Lucciano is one thing—I always knew he was my stalker.

Something had to be unsavory about the whole thing, or he wouldn't be stalking me.

But Enzo? Sweet, helpful, naive Enzo? It's like learning that not only am I clueless about most things, I have absolutely no instincts to protect myself.

“What do you want with me?” I ask. Isn't that what the smart question is when you've been kidnapped and they claim they're not intending to kill you?

“Your pretty pink cunt for breakfast, if you're taking orders, Miss Marcella,” Enzo says, and the mocking lilt to his voice reveals the character he roped me in with was entirely fabricated.

“Shut your mouth,” Lucciano grits angrily, but my pussy flares with need. “She isn't up for you saying crass shit to her.”

Well, maybe I am just a little. I shake my head at myself because it's this exact type of thing that got me into this circumstance to begin with.

“I bet you eighty-five dollars she’s wet right now,” Enzo says.

“Eighty-five dollars?” Lucciano’s face turns the brightest shade of red I’ve ever seen.

“We are not betting on her pussy.”

“Why that amount?” I ask, truly perplexed.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out his wallet, flashing to me that he has exactly eighty-five dollars. “If Lucky won’t bet me, maybe you will. It’s all yours, Marcella. All you need to do is bend over and not be wet.”

I gasp, and Enzo crouches closer to me, his eyes on fire, his fake sweet personality long gone. “I know how that pussy tastes, Marcella. You’re ready to have me filling you up good while Lucky here takes your ass. You’ll be stretched to your limit. ”

My cheeks are burning, and I’m at a loss for words. I’ve never been so wet in my life.

“Stop, Enzo,” Lucky says. I think Lucciano suits him far better, intense and strong like he looks.

His jaw is set, and my gaze lowers to his zipper, and he’s clearly hard.

Apparently, I’m not the only one losing this bet.

Being so painstakingly wrong about everything is intensely humiliating, but can anyone including God himself explain why that makes me even more hot?

I know my face is telling all that Enzo needs to know, and he stands up with a satisfied smirk. “Show me that cunt, Little Star.”

Enzo doesn’t even have the chance to finish mocking the nickname his brother gave

me before Lucciano lunges toward him with a fist that is balled and ready.

The hit is loud. I suck in air in shock, and I watch as Enzo's face shakes with the strength of his brother, yet he turns back with a laugh as he holds his chin.

"I can't remember the last time you hit me." He chuckles.

"Put the money away before I beat the shit out of you," Lucciano says. "You flash money at her again for her pussy, and I swear to god."

My heart actually warms at how he defends me, and that's when I know I'm positively fucked up beyond repair.

"Oh Brother, it seems like maybe you care about destiny after all." He sings the words, and for a moment, I can see them as bickering children so clearly.

Lucciano doesn't respond to the taunt. "No one is going to hurt you, Marcella. You don't need to show anyone any part of you that you don't want to, and despite my brother having a fucked-up idea of things, this will all work out okay for you. I promise."

For some stupid fucking reason, I think I believe him .

"How about this for a bet?" Enzo offers. "If your pussy isn't wet right now, we'll take you back to the theater and leave you alone, for good."

"No," I say immediately, and his eyes flash wickedly.

"Because you're wet, Marcella."

God, he's right. What the hell is wrong with me?

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ENZO

“I’m not wet.” She’s quick to deny, but god, she’s a terrible liar.

“No, Marcella?” I tip my eyebrow at her. “Are you sure?”

“I’m sure.” But her voice shakes, and I have to bite back a smile.

“Well, then why not take the bet? It’s your freedom after all. You wouldn’t be wet for awful men like us, would you?”

That’s the part that my brother doesn’t understand.

The pretty ballerina has a twisted side.

If she was so innocent, she wouldn’t let him fuck her like he did.

She loves the danger, and she belongs to us.

Her fears are just an obstacle we’ll overcome quickly to make her whole again.

This is a bet I’m not worried about losing.

“I—” She stops to think about it. There really isn’t a right answer for her or a good way out of this, but fortunately, that’s not what she wants. What she wants is permission to say yes and fall into the darkness with me where she belongs .

“You want to leave us, don’t you?” I ask, and Lucky shifts me a glare, threatening me if I do anything rash, but he doesn’t know all my plans nearly as well as he thinks he does.

She nods her head, but she doesn’t meet my eyes. “Of course I do.”

“And we’ve already done all manner of nasty things together.”

My brother’s fist balls, but he won’t hit me again without it turning into a slug out.

“Enzo,” he growls. When did my brother become such a soft piece of shit that he’s upset about me calling what we’ve done nasty? Does he think it’s art? He hasn’t seen art yet. That will be when we’re both inside her. He has no idea what the final masterpiece will look like.

“Bend over and show us, Marcella.” I poke her.

She’s shaking, her eyes darting between us.

I have her right where I want. Anything she says is confirmation that my brother needs to understand that this girl isn’t made of light like he thinks.

She’s not a poor little lamb. Marcella herself doesn’t understand.

I see the confusion in her dark eyes, but that’s okay, I’ll explain.

She doesn’t accept her own power. That’s okay too. I’ll show her everything she’s capable of.

“Don’t ask her to do that,” Lucky growls between gritted teeth.

I chuckle, crouching down to look into her eyes. “Show us the true you. Whatever it is, don’t be scared. Predator, huh?”

She doesn’t know that while I faked the soft-mannered man she met, our conversation in the dark was one of the realest things I’ve ever said in my life. I spent too long being just like her, a scared little shit who depended too much on Lucky, until one day I understood my place in the world. My eyes opened, and I realized darkness sought me because I was part of it. She’s the same, and she’ll see it soon.

Something in my words lights a flame behind her eyes, and she tips her chin up, finally accepting my challenge as I always knew she would, as she’s destined to.

“Fine, you want to see that I’m not wet for you? Look for yourself.” She sucks her lip between her teeth, and there isn’t a chance in hell I believe her.

She places her hands on the bed as she obeys me and bends over.

She has the most elegant body I’ve ever seen.

The swells of her hips are so full and womanly despite how slender her figure.

Her ass forms the perfect shape of a heart and the curves of her thighs form a perfect keyhole, flashing me a view of her cunt.

Her eyes stay screwed up tight, and she seems to be focusing very hard on something.

I shake my head and flip up the bottom of the flimsy nightgown Lucky insisted on dressing her in.

She could stay naked every single day. There’s no one here to see what is ours.

Her round ass is so incredibly tempting I can scarcely believe my luck.

My hands slide over her bare cheeks; at least my brother didn't put panties on her.

I smile and look at Lucky. His jaw is set, and he's angry for some reason.

They were just talking when I got here, and now she has her ass up in the air—seems like a reason to be happy.

He should be thanking me.

I can tell she's wet even before I dip two fingers into her heat.

She's glistening, so fucking ready and pink for me.

She's as soft as silk, but wet and succulent like ripe fruit as I peel her open.

My fingers dip into the flesh, slipping deep inside her.

She lets out a moan, and her raspy voice takes on a new cadence when she whimpers for me.

Her pussy grips my fingers, and the wetness she denied drips down the digits and pools in my palm like she is an overripe peach waiting to be plucked. I have to chuckle.

"I win," I tell her, already drooling with the thought of licking all this delicious cream off her.

"Fuck you," she tries cursing me, but it ends with a sinful moan when my fingers increase their speed, rubbing at the same rhythm but deeper, applying expert pressure.

I open my zipper. I don't bother with underwear because I want my cock accessible for her at all times.

I never stop my fingers, and my cock bobs free.

"Enzo, don't..." Lucky tries to argue with me but no one in the world can stop me from fucking her.

Marcella's gaze finds him, and I can tell the moment their eyes connect. Her pussy tightens around my fingers, and rather than slamming into her like I'd like, I use the middle finger from my other hand and the two already inside her to spread her wide so my brother can see the willing wet pink.

"Fuck, Enzo." She curses me again, and I throw my head back in a laugh.

"My brother can barely look at you because he's so turned on. How about I make things worse for him?" I ask.

I trade my fingers for my cock, and her slick wet heat is everything as it engulfs me. Poor Lucky wants this so badly, but he's stuck up on his moral high horse where there is no pussy, just altitude sickness.

She milks my cock with all she has, muscles deep in her pelvis, the core of her being pumping in time with my thrusts, desperate to drain my balls inside her.

She's so fucking perfect that I barely have the words to explain what she means to me.

I dreamed about this moment for a long time, but even in my wildest fantasies, I couldn't understand how otherworldly destiny would feel around my cock .

She grunts like an animal as I fill the deepest parts of her, pushing out whatever light my brother sees to make room for her truth, the darkness waiting to take us all.

I fit behind her cervix, and I know this position might be too much, but she only shifts her hips to take me better.

I'm so deep inside her, I might wind up coming out her throat.

I carve my hands into her side, holding us together and fusing our beings.

I fuck her with my soul. I give her all that I have, allowing myself to become one with her, a marriage as binding as any laws man can impose upon you.

She deserves much more than just a fuck. She deserves poetry.

My hands slide from her hips to the perfect swells of her breasts.

Most dancers don't have tits like this, and I palm them greedily, squeezing them like it's their fault I've been denied their softness these past weeks.

Her nipples harden like pebbles under the thin material of her nightgown, her tits overfill my hands, and I'm a big man.

She cries as I play with them, liking this too much for a girl who wants to leave.

She moans low, unintelligible letters spilling past her lips like she's trying to say something but not speaking up.

"You need to ask for what you want, Marcella. Tell me, and it's yours. Stay quiet, and we'll both come just like this."

Another person might worry about her answer. What if she asked to leave with my dick this deep inside her? Could I even do it? Probably not, but I'm not concerned. I may not know what she'll say, but fate will not disappoint me.

She doesn't answer me, though. As a perfect servant of fate, she tips her head to Lucky. "I want to suck you off." Her voice is so fucking sweet that if he denies her, I'll pummel him.

I groan, and play with her clit as a reward, a way to pass the time as she waits for him to man up and let her suck him.

"You're such a filthy girl, Marcella. Look at you," I coo.

My brother hasn't moved since this all started. He could have left the room and claimed I was insane, but he's here, watching as she begs for him. They are both in this. They just don't know yet. Call me any names, but at least I face the truth.

I place a hand over her mouth, first playing with her lips until she gets the idea to open for me.

Her plush lips slide open and her tongue swipes her own juices off my fingers as she sucks on me.

She takes me so far down her throat, I'm tempted to ask who taught her this just so I can kill them and give proper homage to my gratitude.

When I try to remove my fingers for my desperate brother, she sucks harder trying to hang onto me.

I squeeze her cheeks to make her open for him.

“You like the taste of yourself?” I ask her, and she practically wags her tail on my cock. She’s such a good girl.

“Are you going to make her beg?” I ask Lucky, watching the pain and desire all over his face. He needs her as badly as I do.

She’s not a breakable doll. She’s a queen.

LUCKY

My brother's laugh is maniacal as he holds her mouth open for me. Her long eyelashes fan over her rosy cheeks and I'm tortured by how something so delicate can beg for my cock like that.

This isn't what I wanted , I remind myself. At least it is not what I had planned. It's not a surprise that even when I've drawn a line, Enzo winds up getting exactly what he wants. This is the nature of our relationship. He pushes, and I give in because more than blood, we are trauma-bonded.

His eyes have an unusual shine, and his claims of destiny weigh differently since we stepped into this mausoleum. I knew it was going to fuck him up to be back here. It's messing with my head too, but he was right. This is the only place no one can reach us.

Besides not ever wanting to step foot in Bianchi Bay, or my protests about involving Marcella in our messy lives, we end up here, making his dreams a reality. I couldn't say no to her when she looked into my eyes and begged for me.

To walk away right now would mean giving Marcella up. I'm beginning to understand the rules of the game. I can't keep pretending I'm not playing when Enzo's got me right where he wanted—accept what he's offering or give her up.

I growl under my breath while undoing my pants.

Unlike my brother, I'm civilized and wear underwear, so it takes me a second to free

myself.

Marcella watches each of my actions with hungry eyes, and my brother fucks her slower as I slide my hand over her cheek and replace his.

He puts his hands back on her hips and picks up the tempo.

I can't help but melt into her pretty brown eyes as she looks up at me, whining with his cock deep inside her.

Why didn't she ask for anything else but this? I'd give her anything. All she had to do was save us all.

I feed her my cock and groan as I slip over the wet suction of her tongue. God, she's hungry, hot, and willing, and my eyes roll to the back of my skull.

“How does she feel, Lucky?” he asks me, but I ignore him in favor of staring into her eyes as I use her mouth just like I would her pussy or ass.

Enzo's crazy ideas are already taking root in the base of my cock.

I can't help but think of the future and the ways I want and need to fuck her.

I have to nip this in the bud, find a way to be okay with leaving her behind as a warm memory, but just as she sucks me off and looks up at me, I'm already dreaming about a day when I can taste her while she tastes me.

I twist her silky hair in my hands. The black strands make the perfect pattern with my tattoos. I savor the caress of her skin on my fingers, the kiss of her hot mouth all over my cock, and the way she looks at me like I'm a god and she's ready to serve.

My brother finds the pace I've set, and he uses the moment to thrust her into me, and we find our rhythm easily.

I've never had a blow job with so much force behind it, and even when she gags, she doesn't stop or complain.

She sucks me all the way down and whimpers into my cock.

The vibration takes the whole experience to a new level, and I growl in desire.

Enzo throws his head back, his eyes closed in bliss. "This is just the beginning, Lucciano. We have the rest of our lives to be free, to fulfill the universe's desires and stuff our Marcella with cock."

He's insane, and I shouldn't encourage him, but she sucks harder as if his insanity turns her on.

Her spit slips over me as her lips twist and pop, and I don't have any hopes of keeping my cum in my balls.

I'm starting to agree with my crazy fucking brother that it belongs in her, on her, rubbed into her skin until she stinks like Bianchi pheromones.

I shake the filthy thought out of my head, unwilling to give in to this insanity anymore than I have.

How am I supposed to do the right thing and leave her alone when she feels like this?

"Fuck yeah, Marcella. Jesus, she's strangling my cock," Enzo says before slapping her ass. "Come for me. Come all around me."

She grips the white sheets, her eyes closed in ecstasy. How easy would this be if she weren't this hungry? If she didn't take us so well, like she was born for it?

A sweet and sinful gasp breaks free from between her lips, announcing the exact moment that she comes. I'm not strong enough to deny myself, and I give up the fight. I can't hold back anymore.

My balls draw up, and I spill into her, feeling a flush of extreme pleasure right before a surge of hot guilt. Her tongue swirls around my shaft like I'm a popsicle, and I go off, thick ropes of cum coating her tongue. She cleans me and my guilt, and I'm forever changed after what we shared .

My brother comes too, but I ignore it because that's sick, and I should have said no to all of this to begin with. The moment he told me she belonged to me too, I should have left town and never laid my eyes on her.

In the end, my cheeks are hot, and I'm disgusted to admit I want to trade positions and take her other hole while he has his turn with her mouth. I wonder what she would think about that and if she wants more like I do.

Her body falls to the mattress like a doll, and I step away, trying to process it all.

There's no coming back from this. We've officially crossed a line.

Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:23 am

MARCELLA

They both leave, and I stare at the white walls, Enzo's cum leaking from my pussy and Lucky's from the side of my mouth. When your captor asks what you want, anyone would say freedom. Maybe curse him to the high heavens.

I asked for dick. I begged even.

The feeling sits in the pit of my stomach, as if I betrayed myself.

I close my legs and sit on the bed, shaking as I rub my chest. Enzo keeps telling me to embrace the darkest parts of me, but he's crazy, and his advice is the last one I should follow.

I assumed bad things happened to me because life is random, but maybe Fabrizio decided to kill himself in my bedroom because he knew the type of darkness I hid.

Tears fall down my cheeks, and I feel unclean, and it's not because of the sex, but rather for me wanting it again and again.

The way I want it. I judge myself deeply in this moment, desperate to release all the bad sides of me instead of embracing them.

I was a normal kid until my brother killed himself in front of me.

I was just a ballerina when they arrived at my door and awakened desires I didn't know I had. I don't want my destiny to be with two killers.

I sit with my feelings for a long time, but I'm still exhausted, and my eyes itch until I accept the sleep. My head falls to the white pillows, and I hug my legs, dreaming I'm someplace else.

The waves wake me up once again, and there's no confusion this time.

I know the nightmare I'm in. The nightgown sticks between my legs, a crude reminder of what happened in this room. My cheeks warm with the memory, and I get up before I have a chance to feel sorry for myself once again. I find a bathroom that I missed the first time I opened my eyes, and I'm grateful when the shower works and the water is warm.

Another black nightgown is waiting folded on the bed, and I look around, trying to spot a camera or something. I shouldn't be surprised that they know my every step, but I feel the tingling behind my ear and the feeling I'm being watched.

I'm surprised when I twist the doorknob and I can push the door open.

I expected it to be locked, but I won't complain about my luck.

Soft carpet leads me to a wooden railing—to my right are three doors and to my left are two.

Stairs on both sides lead me downstairs, and the biggest crystal chandelier I've ever seen hangs right in the middle.

I look down and find Lucciano sitting on the couch, his head down with no Enzo around.

There's no reason for me to feel drawn to him, but his sadness calls to me, so I go downstairs, my steps certain until he hears me and brings his head up.

“You’re awake.”

His voice is just as rough as the first time we spoke, when he accused me of flirting with Connor, warning me of the danger. It feels like it was a lifetime ago, yet no time has passed.

“Are you hungry?” he says when I stand there, watching him.

I lick my lips, shaking my head slightly. “What’s happening here? Am I your prisoner?”

Lucky rakes his hand over his dark short hair. “No. But we need to lay low.”

“You’re feeding into his madness.”

His eyes fall, and I wonder if he thinks about this a lot. If he blames himself for the things his brother wants and says. How much weight does he carry? I shouldn’t care, but I do.

“We were hired to look after Maeve, the prima ballerina. She’s married to someone very... important. Dangerous people are always after them.”

“That’s how you both had access to the theater and dorms. Okay.” I’m not sure why I say okay since it’s anything but. I have about a hundred questions about the prima ballerina, but who cares about her when I’m the one who was abducted?

“Enzo says that her husband knows he took you. That’s not something he’ll tolerate. We weren’t supposed to mess with the ballerinas. That’s why I agreed to hide you here. I might be soft with him, but I was going to stop this madness.”

His words are empty, and his sorrow means nothing.

In the end, he chose him and his brother over me.

He says they weren't supposed to mess with the ballerinas, which means no one is looking for me.

I'm innocent in all this, yet I'm here. I hug my midsection, moving away from him and reaching the floor-to-ceiling window.

"Where are we?" Sand and water as far as my eyes can see. Nothing that I recognize, and while it's the most beautiful place I've ever seen, I'm scared of his answer. I turn from the window and face him again, not giving him a chance to answer my first question. "Did you drug me?"

I know I must have fainted when I saw the body, but I know I didn't that second time.

"Enzo..." He shakes his head.

Rage like nothing else grows from the bottom of my heart over to my throat, and I spit at him, "Is that your excuse for everything?"

"He drugged you. Cygnus?—"

"No," I yell. "At least Enzo is honest about what he's doing. You're hiding under him."

He stands, jaw set when he meets me under the chandelier. "I promised to protect him. I promised?—"

"You could have left me behind. Drugged or not drugged. You could have left me," I spat.

I'm not sure why it bothers me so much, but I can't stand him telling me this is all Enzo when he was there too. It was in his arms I fell.

"You wanted me to leave you? Drugged in the warehouse?" He shakes his head, taken aback. "Do you understand the type of men walking those halls?"

No, I don't like the idea of waking up completely alone beside a body in that warehouse, but he needs to accept that he had other options. He chose to buy into this plan, so he can't blame Enzo anymore. I won't let him.

"I want you to take the blame here."

He comes so close that my chest bumps into his. I feel hot under the nightgown, the vivid memory of sucking his dick while his brother fucked me is playing in the back of my mind but I'm so angry words fail me.

"You don't think I feel it? I know I let Enzo do it all. I know I created?—"

"Oh god." I roll my eyes and push against his hard chest. "About me! Not him! You made the choices. You want me, and you can't say it. You can't fucking say it. At least Enzo is brave."

I'm done with him, done with his excuses. I push him one last time before turning around and leaving him behind.

ENZO

My wife and brother scream at each other in the other room.

I want to pay attention, but even though their voices are loud, I ignore them.

This is our happily ever after, whether they fight it or not.

The growing tick pokes at the back of my neck and takes all my attention.

Like hot wax dripping, drip, pain, pain fades, pick it away, but it keeps happening until I think I might go insane.

Marcella comes in, surprised to find me here so quiet while they argue, but she doesn't understand what this place is doing to me. Bianchi Bay was the perfect place to bring her because no one knew about it except us, but I didn't expect how it would feel to be back.

This house killed the old Lorenzo many years ago, and I turned all that pain and spilled blood into art. The man who stands here today shouldn't fear these walls, yet here I am, reliving the memories I try to suppress.

Lucky comes after Marcella, his jaw ticking in a clear sign that she pissed him off.

My eyes fixate on them rather than the room around me.

We've redecorated since my mother died, but this room still reeks of her.

A full-body shiver takes over me, and I look at my brother with his shoulder tense and his eyes sad.

Maybe this was what Lucky meant when he said this was a bad idea.

Could he be thinking of me too when he said we should stay away?

“Come here, Marcella, I want to hold you,” I say, my lighthouse through the storm glowing like a beacon behind her eyes.

She and Lucky look at each other, speaking quietly with glances about how insane they think I am. I’m not. She’s my wife, and this place is messing with my head. I need her.

“Hold me?” she asks, and I just nod. “You’re not serious.”

Memories swell all around me. I flinch with the wet thump as my father beat my mother and her desperate cries.

It happens right now, in front of me, just like it happened before.

I watch Lucky begging him to stop, but when I blink, he’s not a teenager anymore.

It takes everything in me to tune out their voices, but they are louder than reality as many things are for me.

The splatter of blood drips down my face as he keeps swinging, reducing the woman who had given us life to nothing in his fury.

I shake my head. This is not now. I’m not that boy anymore.

“Please hold me, Marcella,” I ask again.

“Enzo, are you okay?” Lucky’s voice sounds so very far away.

The blood covers him too. It’s on our clothes, in our mouths. I choke with the blood of my own mother, but it doesn’t matter how loud our pleas are. He doesn’t stop. He won’t stop.

“I’m not fucking holding you or anyone else until someone takes some accountability and tells me what’s actually going on here,” Marcella says.

She shouldn’t hold me, no. Not when I’m covered in blood like this.

When I’m filthy with a death that I should have stopped.

The colors blur, the sounds become feelings rather than words, my skin vibrates, and though I’ve been told this is called dissociation, all it feels like is spiraling free through the universe without a tether.

My tethers are the only thing keeping people around me safe.

I don’t need them because I don’t care what happens to me.

My fingers dig into my arms, squeezing as hard as I can, but all I feel is the pressure.

The pain doesn’t register. My fist swings, colliding with my leg, and that pain doesn’t register either.

I should feel pain. I should feel something, but I’m nothing at this moment.

Not human, not an artist. Just a thing like he once was.

“What the fuck are you doing?” a female voice screams. Is it Marcella or my mother? I’m not sure of my own name anymore.

Please stop, Vincenzo! My mother’s cries are behind my eyes and ears and under my skin.

I carve my nails into my arm, trying to physically stop the hurt.

If I bleed, it’ll stop. I’m certain. Lucky’s voice is far away.

He’s calling for me, trying to bring me back, but I shouldn’t be here.

I swing my fist again. I want to fight the man I couldn’t fight all those years ago. I’ll beat the demons out of my mind.

The side of my head pulses, but the sensation still doesn’t feel like pain.

“What the fuck? What the fuck are you doing?” There’s crying now, tears that mean something to me, and I know somewhere deep inside I want to respond to them, but I can’t. I’m lost.

“Back up, Marcella, please. I know how to help him when he’s like this.”

Does he? I’m beyond help. The boy who stood here and watched his mother die in front of his eyes was too far gone to come back. Lucky can’t help me. And I don’t want him to.

I want my Marcella. He didn’t want my Marcella . Soft hands touch my skin, it’s a flame in the middle of the chaos, too soft for the life I lived, and I look up. The before and the now join in one picture, and she blinks at me with her long eyelashes and dark eyes full of hurt.

“I’m here,” she says. “I’m here. Please stop hurting yourself,” she begs.

That’s not my mama’s voice. I begged for her. She never had a chance to beg for me. I shake as I center myself once again and search her eyes for forgiveness. I know I’m looking into the wrong eyes, but I need to hear from someone that it’s okay that I didn’t kill him.

“Lucky, get the fuck off me,” she shouts, and her harshness takes me by surprise.

I stumble back, but she does the unimaginable and reaches for me. Soft fingers trace my jaw. Her touch is a balm to my desperate soul, and I let out a ragged breath. She kisses me. Her mouth is warm and so good that it takes me by surprise. I’m not used to good things.

Finally, the pain comes for me. It’s a train with no stops, my skin is on fire, and I groan, but right then, she’s there with me.

“You’re okay,” she whispers.

Fuck, I did a number on myself this time.

I open my eyes, and the first thing I see is my brother staring at me.

His gaze is weighted with accusation, the obvious conclusion to why he was trying so hard to fight destiny.

He knows more than anyone what kind of monster lives inside me.

I’m barely a man, but just a thing made of murder, pain, and lunacy.

He wanted her safe, yet she’s on top of me, her whole body over mine, trying to save

a man who can't be saved .

His eyes say I told you so, but his mouth spells it out for me, “You’ve endangered Marcella for the last time.”

I would speak if I had words, but I’m hollow. My mouth is dry, and my body drained. It turns out I don’t need them, though. Marcella turns to Lucky on my behalf, her eyes hard over her shoulder.

“I’ll decide that for myself, thanks.” She turns soft when she looks back at me. “I’m going to hold you.”

And in what’s probably the single greatest moment of my life, she wraps her arms around me, and those tethers snap tight. This time, they don’t connect me to my brother, but instead, my Marcella.

Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:23 am

MARCELLA

The waves call to me, and I step out of the house, my toes sinking into the warm sand.

The sun is setting on the horizon. This is no doubt the most beautiful place I've ever been.

The sea is clear blue, the sky has not one cloud, and the breeze is so warm that for a second, I wonder if I'm not dreaming.

My hands shake, and the memory of what just happened back there flashes in my mind. This is not a dream.

This is not even close to a dream.

There are too many rotten pieces I'm missing to this story, things that Enzo yelled in his maniac state that don't make much sense, but I know this place holds as many traumas to them as my mother's house holds to me.

After the funeral, I thought my parents were going to sell the house. I couldn't imagine why we would live in the same place where we had to scrub Fabrizio's brains off the carpet. But I was surprised when they showed no interest in leaving.

"This is our home, Cella."

Home .

I look at the beautiful mansion by the sand. No one would think something bad could happen in this paradise, but just like my suburban home, these walls hold a tragedy. It was once their home, but the floors are soaked in blood.

Darkness took them. Its claws close around their ankles and pull them into it, and now Enzo is haunted by the past, just like me.

Fuck.

I shouldn't feel so much kinship toward him, but at that moment when I realized what was happening, I couldn't stop myself. So many times, I wish someone were there to hold me after a nightmare. I couldn't leave him wanting. Begging.

Steps in the sand bring me back from my thoughts, and I find Enzo coming in my direction. He's looking better, a little red to his cheeks after what happened. He's dressed in all black, as usual, with the top three buttons of his shirt undone and sleeves folded over his elbow.

"There you are."

He looks too good to be this crazy. People like him should come with a warning, yet he's one of the most handsome men I've ever seen. The other is his brother. He's carrying a manila envelope, but I don't want to ask too much. I know enough already.

"How are you feeling?" I ask, hugging my midsection.

"On the edge of insanity, of course."

"So as usual." I nod.

And he smiles. Oh god, he smiles, and I have no chance to win this war against

myself. His teeth are beautiful. I didn't know teeth could be this beautiful, but his are. His eyes are dark but so warm, and the way the orange sunset lights up his golden complexion is nothing short of a crime.

Enzo surprises me by sitting on the sand, his mysterious manila envelope is pushed to the side when he takes his arms around his knees. I don't want to just stand there and end up taking the spot beside him.

"Lucky warned me that coming back was a bad idea," he confesses. "I thought that boy died a long time ago, so I didn't need to worry about his scars."

"What happened here?" I ask even though I don't want to know. I can't care for my captor more than I already do.

Enzo shrugs. "The same old, same old. Cruel man, good mother. He killed her in front of us. I remember the taste of her blood." He licks his lips in thought, his eyes to the sea. "A boy shouldn't learn the taste of his mother's blood."

"No." I agree. "Or the cruelty of his father."

"Being scared is a choice." He turns to me, his eyes so intense I have to turn away from them. "It eats you up until you're nothing. Until you can't move in a corner. I told you to be the predator. I was the prey before. It'll kill you."

"My brother killed himself in front of me," I tell him even though I have a feeling that he knows. He knows far too much about me to miss the event that shaped me into who I am.

"There's dignity in going on his own terms," Enzo says.

My eyes fill with tears. No. He's wrong. There's no dignity in killing yourself

because you can't stand being alive for one more second. There's nothing in this life but a slow painful death for the ones who stayed behind, wondering for the rest of our days what we could have said.

My silence alerts him, and he turns my way and curses when he sees my tears. "Lucky is right sometimes. I'm not fit to care for something so beautiful."

I wipe my face with the back of my hand. "How would he leave on his own terms if he left because he was in too much pain?"

Enzo takes my face in his warm hands, his thumbs wipe my tears off, and I let him because it's been a long time since anyone cared to wipe them.

"I don't understand life and death like the other people. I'm sorry. I don't—" He shakes his head. "Fuck."

"Do you think he felt the darkness inside me too? And that's why he decided to come to me to die?"

He makes a sound with his throat. "Marcella, if I was going to die, I'd too choose to look at who I love the most one last time."

I laugh between my cries. I never thought that maybe Fabrizio loved me so much even though his last words to me were kind.

When someone decides to take their own life in front of you, that's all that you remember.

The burning smell and blood. The shotgun that gets you jumping at every sound. You don't remember the kindness.

“I thought I was fucked up for a long time,” I confess.

“Aren’t we all? Some of us are worse than others.

You’ve been running from who you are for far too long.

I don’t know who that girl was before, but you changed when your brother died.

And she is clawing her way out ever since.

” He places his hand over my head. “Someone else was born the second that gun went off. The more you are afraid of her, the more she tries to take over. I died here once. I let that boy lie in this sand, and I became who I am today. And here is where you leave behind the afraid version of you. It’s time. ”

He puts space between us and hands me the manila envelope that I was successfully ignoring. With a little smile, he stands up and leaves me be.

I look at the waves and the lilac sky, my heart beating fast because I know Enzo is many things, but he’s not a liar. Whatever is in this envelope will change me forever and make me decide who I want to be.

My trembling fingers open the flap. I’m not ready to choose the darkness. I’m not ready to walk away yet.

But I take the document inside, and I know I ran out of time.

LUCCIANO

“What’s in the envelope?” I ask my brother when he comes in, but all he does is smile and head to the kitchen.

I’m not an easy man to be ignored, so I follow him. He leans over the expensive marble, with a crisp green apple, his first bite is loud and annoys me that he’s now so relaxed.

She did that. She held him and fixed him in a way that I had never seen before.

That I never could do. Yes, Enzo listens to me.

But I can’t calm him down that quickly and not before getting seriously hurt in the process.

I think back to the softening in his voice when he talked to her in the theater.

I thought he was faking, and I think he thought so too, but now I wonder if this domesticated version of him was inside all along.

“What have you planned?” I poke him.

“Nothing.” He shrugs. “The next move will be hers and only hers. Does that make you feel better?”

No. Her last move ended up with my cock between her lips, so I don’t think she’ll

take us out of this mess.

“You should cook, Lucky,” Enzo says. “Make Mama’s pasta alla norma for her. I bet she’s hungry. A girl can’t live off cock alone.”

I ball my hands into a fist, but I don’t say anything. Instead, I make my way to the kitchen, taking a pot from the cabinet. He’s right. We should feed her. After all we did, the very least I should do is feed her.

It’s not a surprise when I find all the ingredients for Mama’s pasta in the kitchen.

Even with the fresh ingredients, the eggplants look locally sourced, and when I ask about it, Enzo just smiles.

I underestimated my brother. I assumed his insanity was enough to hold him back, but I see now how far he planned behind my back.

He told me his focus changed when he laid his eyes on her, and I should have listened to his words. He never lies.

I slice the eggplant carefully like Mama taught me and follow every step with the image of her in this exact kitchen.

Those were the only times I’ve seen her happy. She was proud of who she was, and cooking was a big part of that. I was never interested in the kitchen, but I’m glad I still remember this recipe. Otherwise, it would have died with her.

Enzo follows me with his eyes and a satisfied smile on his face. He takes over preparing the tomatoes and the antipasti, humming that same silly tune he likes so much.

Marcella comes into the house, but she never enters the kitchen, and we don't call her in until everything is ready.

Enzo grabs a wine bottle from the old cellar and helps me bring everything outside.

I step into the past when I see the big table set right on the sand. The night is warm, and the waves replay the soundtrack of my childhood. It reminds me of times when this house was actually a home.

"I will grab her," Enzo says, skipping out of the room to call the only woman worth his attention .

I stare at the dish Mama taught me, and I'm overwhelmed with feelings.

This house still plagues my nightmares, and I know Enzo feels the same.

I made sure he never had to come back here, yet here he is.

The one who orchestrated our return. Judging by today, he wasn't as ready as he thought he was, but I'm surprised he even knew how to find this place without me. I was sure he blocked it out.

Marcella and Enzo come in holding hands, and the mysterious envelope in her hands. She places it in one of the seats, as if it's the fourth person at this dinner. I open my mouth to ask, but before I can address it, Enzo opens the wine and serves us all a healthy glass.

"Saluti!" He raises his glass, and we follow suit.

Enzo is in good spirits. I know I should be happy he found someone who can calm him down. I saw it happening today, yet everything is a mess in my head. I can't

make sense of what is happening.

“Come here, Marcella, you have to try this,” Enzo says as he plates the pasta for her.

To my utter surprise, she opens her mouth when he holds out a forkful to her. She moans, licking the sauce off her lips.

“This is incredible,” she says.

“It’s all Lucky,” Enzo says with pride.

She turns to me with admiration. “It is gorgeous, Lucciano.”

The praise hits me right in the chest, and my sense of self just crumbles a little more. I dig into my food, deciding that maybe it will feel better with a full stomach, but Mama’s recipe is not as comforting as it was before.

Enzo keeps filling up our glasses until there’s no more wine, Marcella laughs once or twice at something he says, and I feel like the ground beneath my feet is shaking. Is she happy?

“More? I can grab another bottle from the cellar.”

“God, no.” She giggles for the third time. “I’m feeling a little dizzy already.”

He parts a piece of bread between his hands and dips it into the olive oil, “Have this.”

She eats from his hand, a shy smile when she mouths a thank you.

I rub my temple with my forefinger and thumb, hoping the pressure is enough to relieve my headache. Tension rolls off my shoulder, and I’m scared of this type of

happiness. To eat bread with the woman we kidnapped. To sit and have our father's wine after he murdered our mother.

What's going on?

"Lucciano? Are you okay?" she asks me.

I open my eyes to her concerned expression, but words fail me. I can't start to explain the turmoil inside my chest, festering off my doubts and fears. Maybe it was Enzo's plan from the start. He doesn't only destroy what Marcella is to rebuild it, he wants to do the same with me.

"I'm okay." I dip my chin, and she accepts my lie.

Marcella looks more at peace than I am at this moment.

She has a healthy glow about her. This dinner proved to me that she's not a captive anymore.

I don't know what she is. It doesn't matter what my brother says, she's not a wife.

If I were guilty of dragging her to this life, I can wash my hands now. She's here willingly.

Yet my heart sits like a stone inside my rib cage.

Marcella's words ring in my head. Her accusations are fresh to my ears, echoing the words I fear too. I've been hiding behind my brother for far too long.

It was easy to say my every action was to prevent his, but I loaded her into the car.

Every step of the way, I bought into my brother's madness.

I'm not just his keeper. I'm not just someone watching it all happen, unable to stop. Until this afternoon with Marcella I was the only one who could manage my brother. Yet here I stand. I'm just as responsible as him, there's place in his madness for me too and it took me too damn long to accept.

I release a shaky breath, taking the responsibility of my own madness for the first time in years. The wine, the insane brother, the willing captive. It's all part of a surrealist painting I refused to be part of until this moment.

The last sip of my wine feels good, and I savor it as it goes down smoothly. Marcella interrupts my thoughts as she clears her throat, her eyes locked on the envelope I forgot about. Shit. No more surprises, please.

"Let's talk." My heart drops.

MARCELLA

When I sat in the front row at Fabrizio's funeral and heard all the words meant for him, all I felt was confusion.

Their speech didn't match my brother. Their grief was over a young man who lost his life, but he wasn't just a young man. He was Fabrizio.

I was starved for stories about him, moments that I, the little sister, didn't know about, but to everyone present, Fabrizio was just a cardboard version of himself.

For years, the questions with no answer made grief heavy on my shoulders until that afternoon when Enzo handed me the manila envelope.

He drums his fingers over the table, excited when I address the elephant in the room. The salty air dried my tears hours ago, and devastation morphed into a million different feelings that I guard inside my chest, unable to address them all when they barrel into me, trying to be the prevalent one.

Enzo did his research. I don't know how, and quite frankly, I don't know if I care how, but he found out everything about my brother and every single asshole who messed with Fabrizio.

"Kyle Kelper," I say, looking at the insane man who thinks I'm his destiny.

"He sounds like an asshole." Enzo nods with a wicked smile.

Lucciano clears his throat. "Can anyone explain to me what is happening?"

I nod. "Enzo found out what happened to my brother. And the name of the asshole who harassed him until he had to take his own life."

A lump forms in my throat when I remember the most graphic parts of the document Enzo provided. Kyle Kelper wasn't just a regular bully. He wasn't satisfied with making fun of Fabrizio's every move and pushing everyone to laugh at him too.

He assaulted my brother. Repeatedly.

The words flash in my head, as if I were reading them for the first time. Vomit threatens to come out and destroy our picturesque dinner, so instead of putting it into words, I just slide the whole thing toward Lucciano and let him have the displeasure of reading it.

I only realize my hand is shaking when Enzo takes it in his and pulls me to him. I let him move me until I'm on his lap, his strong arms around me.

"It's you who needs to be held now."

He's not wrong. The document was gruesome.

It contains every part of Fabrizio's day-to-day life until his death. I barely made it through the reading, but I knew I had to honor my brother and read it. It's not fair that he had to live it while I can't even read about it.

I pushed myself to be stronger, and anger took its place when I stopped shaking and the tears dried .

Something dark got me by the throat and told me I was its bitch. Even as I sit here,

hours later, I feel its claws sinking their black nails into my skin. The darkness spreads like wildfire, and Enzo's words are replaying in my mind.

He said I belonged to darkness. He knew it.

Lucky finishes reading and puts the document down with a sorrowful expression. "I'm sorry, Marcella."

His sorrow isn't what I need right now. I need him to be vicious just like his insane brother.

Enzo's arm tethers me to earth. He's warm and safe, and I rest my back on his chest, breathing out.

Giving me that file was the most romantic thing anyone ever did for me.

Words will never impress me, not when people give them away without a thought.

Enzo is too crazy for me to take his words into account. He told me I was his destiny, I'm his queen, but until he understood what would give me peace, I couldn't believe in anything.

Just like he predicted, my grief and fear turned into anger and power.

"I want to kill Kyle Kelper," I say.

Enzo hums into my neck, his hand reaches my breast, and he feels it in his palm. The words make him as hard as a rock. I feel it against my ass and a faint smile comes to my lips.

"Say it again," he whispers in my ear.

“I want to kill him.” My voice doesn’t waver. There’s no hiding from my wants.

“God, you’re amazing,” Enzo says, pushing the nightgown neckline down and spilling my breast to the warm breeze.

Lucky’s eyes follow the movement, but he shakes himself off. “Marcella, I know this is a lot?—”

“He gave the answers I needed. Things are clear now. ”

Enzo chuckles behind me, and without asking permission, he lifts my skirt, exposing my pussy to Lucky. I don’t stop him, he deserves to take me as he wants, on this table and right now. I’m getting hot just from his hands on me and his warm breath in my ear.

“This was a graphic reading.” Lucky grits out, “Maybe you need a couple of days to digest.”

I lean forward, disturbing Enzo, but he doesn’t complain. “I don’t need a couple of days, Lucciano. I’ve been living this nightmare for ten years, and Enzo finally gave me the keys to freedom.”

“Talking about keys...” Enzo chuckles.

“Death is not freedom.” Lucciano insists as if he doesn’t understand this firsthand.

A snap in my conscience, and Enzo’s words sink into me. “What have you done?” I ask over my shoulder.

His smile comes out slowly. He’s so proud of himself. “I got you Kyle Kelper.”

I blink at him, confused, but Lucky understands his brother more than I ever could. “You brought this scumbag here?”

My heartbeat speeds, and I turn on Enzo’s lap to look right into his eyes. “Is he here?”

“Not here in the house. No,” he explains. “I drugged him and left him loose over there. He’s a little fucked up and has no idea where he is, so...”

He trails off with a smile, and something big grows in my chest. A chance for revenge.

“Enzo, what the fuck! What the hell are you thinking about bringing a rapist this close to Marcella?”

I shake my head. “I’m the predator. Enzo is right.” I turn again to face Lucciano. “I’m tired of being the meal. It’s my turn now.”

Enzo growls and pushes two fingers into my pussy, making me gasp at the end of my speech. “You’re so perfect. So wet when you plan your revenge. Look at you.”

I sit back on his lap. “I was afraid, and now I’m revenge.”

Slowly and deliberately, I part my knees for Lucciano and let Enzo push his fingers into me, showing it off to his brother. His other hand takes my breast, rolling my nipples with his fingers, and I shiver with pleasure.

Lucciano’s next words are strangled, as if it took everything in him to get them out. “I understand you’re angry?—”

“No.” I cut him off. “I’m beyond angry. I’m furious with Kyle Kelper and with every

asshole who watched what happened and did nothing. Kyle is only the beginning. Every fear I felt in the past years, I'll make them feel."

"Turning into a serial killer is not the answer here."

Enzo takes his fingers from my pussy with a pornographic sound and circles my clit spreading the wetness around, and I throw my head back. "It's the rightful conclusion," I argue with Lucciano.

Damn. Enzo takes good care of me. He's a balm to all the anger.

It doesn't extinguish the flame but gives me the strength I need to keep going.

His hands bring me back to earth and remind me that I don't need to sit with this rage like I sat with my fears.

I can conquer them when I have Kyle's head bleeding on my lap.

"We can bring this to Cygnus."

I don't need to address this comment. It's Enzo who laughs, shaking his head. "That's what you think Marcella deserves? A man she doesn't know settling her score? No. She has to draw the blood herself. She deserves it. "

Lucciano shakes his head and gets up, pacing in front of us, showing trepidation at every step.

It's funny how hard this is for you when he is used to killing.

I'm the ballerina here. This is not my world, yet I feel at home finally.

I hold Enzo's arm, making him stop, and I get up, standing in front of Lucciano.

His eyes are lost and dark, and too many feelings are trying to come out. I place my hands on his warm chest, his heart speeds with my touch, and I tip my head to the side.

"Why is it so bad to embrace what we are?" I whisper.

"Because I don't think that's who you are." His voice falters, and I feel bad that he doesn't see it.

"If none of this had happened, maybe I'd be this good and innocent girl you keep talking about. But it all happened, and I have a choice now. I can close that file and leave this place and be forever scared, or I can kill what is killing me."

His eyes trace my features, looking for doubt, but he won't find it.

Not anymore. Just like Enzo, I had a funeral for the old Marcella down at the beach.

I mourned that girl and let her go because there's no space for her inside me now that I read the file.

Kyle Kelper killed the old me, just like the boys' dad killed old Enzo.

"Would you still want me if I'm not the person you thought I was?" I ask him, afraid for the first time.

He covers my hands with his, blowing out a pent-up breath. "I've always seen you. I'm not mistaken about who you are. I just wish you'd chosen a better path."

I smile. Lucky doesn't fully understand just yet. He doesn't see that this path is the

best for me. I walked the other path for ten years, and all it did to me was make me scared with a collection of phobias. This is me taking action. There's no better path than finally accepting who you are.

He's meant for this too. Enzo is right. "Come to the darkness with us," I whisper. "Forget everything and embrace this and this moment."

And I kiss him.

MARCELLA

His mouth takes mine with enthusiasm. Lucciano always kisses like he wants to devour me and take my soul. I go on my tiptoes, wrapping my arms around his neck, and he growls into my mouth when my chest rubs against him. Even with his shirt between us, the feeling sets me on fire.

His hand sinks into my hair, and he takes control, showing me how he wants me. “You drive me crazy.”

We are all at the edge of madness. One way or another, we are ready to jump.

I’m finally ready to do it, but I can’t without him.

My stalker. He’s my protector and always watching my back.

If Enzo is the force driving me to finish this for Fabrizio and me, Lucciano is the calm in the storm. I need him, I crave him.

I’m still kissing Lucciano when a wet splash covers my ass, Enzo’s hand immediately follows it, splitting my ass cheeks and lubricating that tight hole. I look back in shock, finding him holding a small bottle of lube.

He shrugs. “I’ve been dying to fuck your ass, Miss Marcella .”

Flames rip up my neck, making me explode with need from the inside out. I’ve never particularly wanted to be fucked that way before but everything is good with them,

hot naughty and delicious.

“Do you always have to make things a production? Can’t you just?—“

“Lucky is going to fuck that tight pussy while I fuck your ass. Isn’t that right?” Enzo interrupts Lucciano’s complaint.

The idea makes me hot, my cheeks warm, and my insides turn into liquid heat, but I never did anything like that. Both at the same time? The thought is as arousing as it is intimidating. Both brothers are big in every sense of the word; they alone stretch me to my limits.

Lucciano’s fingers trail my jaw and bring my eyes back to him. “Did you like the last time we both fucked you?”

I nod. I loved having them both inside me at the same time. If I close my eyes, I still can feel Lucciano’s cock slipping past my lips at the same time Enzo fucked me. It was heaven to be used like that, to be the reason they both groaned desperately.

“Come on, Lucky,” Enzo says, pressing a finger into my ass. “Give our girl what she wants, whenever she wants. That’s what you want.”

Lucciano thinks about it for a second before he nods. Electricity crackles in the air, and my fear turns into excitement.

“Pick up your leg, Marcella,” Enzo says from behind me, and I shiver with desire.

He whispers his desire to me, and all I can do is give it to him, show him I can do that and more.

I use my perfect flexibility to stretch my leg up and over my head, fully exposing

both my holes for them.

I've never realized how implicitly sexual ballet can be, and I see now why they were so hot watching me, imagining my naked skin beneath.

Enzo is the first to get undressed and slides his zipper down, his hard cock slips free to nudge my ass.

I can't whimper when he starts spreading me.

It's good, but I know I need more to take the edge off.

I bring my hand to my piercing and clit, circling slowly and my shoulders relax.

Suddenly, I feel Lucciano's hand removing mine before he takes over my clit.

"There you go. That feels good, baby girl?"

I relax into Enzo, and he goes in, I moan and tip my ass back begging for more. "I love it."

"Fuck," Lucky grits, but he's watching the spot his brother penetrates me. "Do you like that?" he asks.

"I'd like it even more if you were inside me too."

He groans, but he doesn't give me what I want. "See if you can take it all first. You have no idea how full you'll be with both of us."

God, I can't wait. It feels so right, so good. I don't want to be without them for a minute longer. "Enzo, tell him to fuck me."

Enzo is usually with me in this, but he says nothing.

He just slides an inch deeper. I cry out as he does, unused to the sensation.

There's a touch of pain, but mostly it's uncomfortable, with a slight edge of wrong.

Lucciano holds my face. He can't hide the smirk playing on his lips.

His other hand slips to my raised leg and helps me support it.

I'm shaking in pain and need, but I know it's not enough.

It won't be until they are both inside me.

"I want you in me too," I grit. I crave that feeling. I know it's going to be a lot, but I need the intensity of them both inside me.

Enzo groans and pushes the last inch inside me. "You feel so fucking good. So tight. Jesus Christ," he says, resting his forehead against my back.

I throw my head back. "Lucciano, I'm ready. I can take it, please."

Enzo chuckles. "She needs it, bad."

I wish I could curse him, but he's right.

I think Lucciano will refuse me again, but he surprises me by making quick work of his pants.

I salivate when he takes his cock out, and it's hard and leaking a thick pearl of cum.

He doesn't torture me anymore, and I'm grateful for that.

He slides his cock up and down my lips only once to coat himself before dipping inside.

My mouth falls open in shock when he makes his way inside me. It's a lot at once. I can't breathe, and Lucciano is not even fully seated.

"Touch yourself, Little Star. Relax for me," Lucciano says.

Enzo grunts and grabs my hair, sinking his teeth into my neck as I go back to my clit and work myself up again, releasing any doubts.

"Enzo, slow fucking down," Lucciano orders.

"Can't," the brother behind me says.

They are going to drive me insane. Lucciano curses in Italian, but he goes in, inch by inch, filling me completely. He takes my breast in his hand, his thumb teases my nipple, and the two of them finally start to work together, one beautiful rhythm that has me mewling like an animal.

"Are you okay, Miss Marcella?" Enzo asks.

"Too good, might die," I answer, making him laugh.

I rub myself a little faster, chasing my orgasm, my pussy twitches, my pleasure uncontrollable, and when it happens, it's wet and desperate. They both groan for me.

"Milking our cocks so good, Little Star," Lucciano growls.

“She’s so incredible,” Enzo says. “Look at her taking us so good.”

His brother agrees, and their praise is everything to my ears, especially when they come. They fill me, cocks pulsing as they come in time with each other. The rhythmic beat is the most inspiring thing I’ve ever felt, and I can’t wait to explain it to a composer.

They take up all the space inside me, all the dark corners and holes. They changed who I am for something better—stronger and free. There’s only us in this world, and I’m ready to become who I’m meant to be.

LUCKY

Rules are rules. No hunting assholes in a nightgown. I give her simple black pants, sneakers, and a T-shirt. It's skintight, and she looks fantastic, but it's just a happy coincidence. I don't want her clothes getting stuck on anything out there.

My skin feels too tight for my body when I hand her a knife as long as her forearm, and she smiles sweetly, testing the weight in her hands.

“This one too.” I give her the bone knife back.

“Oh, yes, I like this one better.”

“That's great, but use the big one,” I warn her.

She rolls her eyes.

Marcella thinks I'm just fussing over her, but I'm uneasy with this arrangement. If Enzo already brought this asshole over, why can't we kill him? This could be done in a five-minute break, and for a celebration, I fuck Marcella's ass. Done.

She makes a face when I strap a gun around her thigh in a holster .

“That looks badass and all, but I don't know how to shoot.”

“Aim and go boom,” I tell her, crossing my arms over my chest.

She shakes her head and tips her chin up. “It’s unsafe to use a gun without knowing how. I’ll do well with the knife.”

I bite back a chuckle because she's actually serious. “Are you a professional in stabbing?”

“No.” Her cheeks turn red. “But I stabbed you.”

This time, I can't stop my laugh and touch the small stabbing wound from just a few days ago. It’s so shallow I barely remember it’s there. “More accurately, I forced my body into your knife.”

“You guys always have fun without me,” Enzo complains from the bed.

This brings my attention back to my brother and the way he calmly lounges on the bed, his arm bent under his head and feet crossed like our woman going to hunt a rapist isn't something to worry about.

Marcella giggles at his comment, and I realize she finds his craziest behavior endearing. I don't know if she understands that he's dead serious here. Stabbing is his definition of fun.

She touches my arm, and my eyes move back to her. “You’re going to watch me, right? If I need it?”

“Always.” She can't possibly think for a second I'm letting her go without being absolutely certain she's the predator.

“And look at this...” Enzo sits up and turns his laptop.

I watch the real-time map of the property, a blinking red dot moving east from the

house. “Is that...?”

“Yes. Kyle. I got him chipped.” Enzo smiles. “Have fun. The next kills won’t be as recreational. ”

The idea is so repulsive that I accidentally growl under my breath, attracting their eyes.

I shake my head and wave them off. There’s no good reason to start this conversation right now.

Enzo wants to turn a ballerina into a serial killer, but I’d like the killings to be few and far between. We’ll talk when she’s done with Kyle.

She’s wearing a determined expression, her eyes certain as we go down the stairs and reach the beach.

“Be careful and use all your tools.” I arch an eyebrow at her. “We’ll be a step behind you at all times.”

“But we’ll give you space to do your own thing,” Enzo says on top of me. “Be creative. Follow your instincts.”

“Okay, okay.” She’s getting done with both of us. “I’ll see you on the other side.”

She winks at us and leaves, and we stay behind, watching her go. There’s a stone in my heart, weighing down the pit of my stomach and filling me with unease. My eyes follow her steps in the sand until she makes her way into the coastal forest and disappears in the middle of the high vegetation.

“How long will we give her?” I ask my brother without taking my eyes off the place

she last was.

“Let’s look at the cameras,” he replies, and I’m glad to hear a little more concern in his tone.

We move to the living room. Enzo turns on the big screen, and in a second, we can see the first four cameras. Marcella is on the top right, her eyes narrowed and attentive.

“She doesn’t know how to track,” I say.

“Kyle doesn’t know he’s being hunted. I bet he’s leaving behind all kinds of clues. Give her a chance.”

I sit on the couch with my back straight, uncomfortable with the idea of giving her a chance to do this on her own.

We watch as she moves from one camera to the next.

Enzo flips through them and follows her progress, and it’s not a surprise when she finds a scrap of clothing left behind. Enzo was right.

“Do you think she’ll go through with it?” I ask the question running through my mind.

We understand what it means to kill another person more than most. She’s running off anger, and for a reason.

Enzo exposed everything done to her brother, and the reading was beyond graphic.

I don’t think he was trying to push her over the edge, but rather present her with all

the details she was denied before.

While I hate that she had to read those words, I understand why lying wasn't the right move.

But right now, she craves revenge. She thinks she can do it, but it's a different game to witness life draining from someone's eyes.

"Yes." My brother's reply leaves no room for doubt. "But you don't. Why?"

I rest my back on the couch as I watch Marcella find his tracks. "Clever," I whisper to myself. "I think she'll stab him once or twice. To kill someone takes more."

More of your soul. Enzo hums under his breath. I'd think he is considering my words if I didn't know him better.

"If you understood what we are made of, you'd see how she was born to do this."

"To kill?"

"To avenge her brother. To shed her fears and be magnificent." His eyes shine as he looks at the screen.

I wish I saw as much beauty as he does. I wish I could shed my fears and judgments too.

"Some people are put in this world to do good, Brother. Angels of light. That was our mama, and she was so good that someone like Dad couldn't fathom how to handle something this precious.

Other people are here to protect those beings.

We are not made of light. We follow what the universe calls us to do.

The day Mama died, and we couldn't do anything, something broke inside both of us.

It's hard to see your destiny so clearly in front of you just to be stopped before you're able to fulfill it.

Darkness was put inside us, and that's where we belong, just as Marcella did.

I recognize the essence of her. It doesn't matter if she never used a gun or a knife. Nothing can stop her from her destiny."

He finishes his speech, and my heart breaks again.

For our mama, for Enzo. We couldn't protect her, and we are now doomed to replay the moment that she died again and again until we find any salvation for either of us.

I understand his kinship with Marcella now.

She carried the same weight, and he sees that when he looks at her.

Marcella crouches down to the dirt, her eyes narrowed, when she stumbles into Kyle's track. "She's almost at him," I say.

"Yes." Enzo breathes in slowly and gets up.

We promised her that we'll be close. I told myself that I might have to finish the job, but maybe Enzo is right. I won't stop her from her destiny. I would give anything to kill Dad, but by the time we were old and strong enough, one of his enemies had already taken him.

She deserves this.

I follow my brother out, armed to the teeth, while Enzo just strolls out with a mean look on his face.

MARCELLA

Kyle Kelper .

My memories of him aren't distinct. I can't think of the color of his hair or his tone.

All I know about the person who was instrumental in my brother's final days is in that file. I bet he didn't think it would come to this when he was pushing Fabrizio around, tormenting him, making him wish he was anyone or anything else, including dead.

When he raped my brother and told him his life would be worse if he said anything, I doubt he ever thought one day he'd pay for his sins.

Fabrizio, Fabrizio, Fabrizio. His name is a whispered chant of vengeance running constantly through my mind. He's the driving force that pushes me forward today as much as he was before. The only difference is that now I know how to settle the score.

He's not worried about covering his tracks, and I can easily spot his heavy steps printed into the dirt. I follow him with caution, the knife never leaving my hands. I hear his cries getting closer, and I take a fortifying breath before arriving at the clearing where he stands .

His hair is dark, and he's balding on top, taller than me, but definitely not as big as the brothers.

He shakes from head to toe, his whimpers pathetic as he looks around the forest. I

could stab him now while he has his back to me.

It could all end in a blink of an eye, and I'm back at the beach house for lunch.

I clear my throat instead, and he turns my way, his face lit up.

"Oh, thank god! Who are you?—"

He runs my way, but I lift the knife. It shakes between us, and I don't look as frightening as I should, but his whole body trembles. Maybe I have the edge here.

"Kyle Kelper," I say, it's not a question.

"Yes, that's me. You're safe with me. I'm not going to hurt you. I'm a father. I'm a good person. I don't know why I woke up in this place, but I should be home."

Fabrizio. Fabrizio. Fabrizio.

I step closer, never lowering my defense.

It doesn't matter how shaky I might look.

He takes me in for the first time, really looking at the person in front of him.

It doesn't click at first. He recognizes me, but he doesn't have any clue where.

I suppose I don't blame him. I look a lot different, and I was just the little sister of a loser he enjoyed picking on.

He stares for a long moment, and his mouth opens like he's going to ask who I am, but then awareness lights his eyes, and he closes his mouth.

“You’re that girl, the little sister of the guy who killed himself,” he says.

The words don’t ring true, even though they are. I’m the little sister of the guy who killed himself, but that doesn’t cover the true story.

“The guy who killed himself?” I say slowly, my head tipping to the side .

Fabrizio. Fabrizio. Fabrizio. The chanting grows louder, sharp and high, undoing me from the inside out.

“Yeah, senior year. I remember you at the funeral and in school after. You were just a kid.”

That was my first year in high school, right after his death.

People left me alone. I barely remembered those years because the grief was too much for me to carry.

I know I passed my classes. I know I did enough to graduate and start dancing full-time, but I couldn’t stand being in that place anymore.

When I don’t reply and don’t lower the knife, Kyle takes a step back.

“Say his name.”

It’s not much to ask. If you’re going to torment and rape someone, you should be able to say their names.

“Whose name?” He takes another step back.

I advance, rolling my shoulders back and feeling the full force of that file. There’s

only one truth, and Kyle can't hide anymore. It's coming for him as it's coming to all of us.

"My brother." I spit. "Say his name."

"I-I don't remember. What's happening here? Who are you? Where are we?"

"Kyle Kelper, you'll die at the end of my knife regardless. You should tell the truth before it's too late."

His eyebrows push together, and I can practically hear the stone hit the bottom of his gut when his stomach sinks.

"I-I didn't know him well. It's really sad what he did to himself." He sounds like he's practiced this, and that makes me all the more sick. Did he know exactly how responsible he was all along? Was he afraid someone would eventually ask questions?

"If you didn't know him well, then why did you target him?" I ask, ignoring when he looks around for a way to run. "You could have chosen anyone. Why my brother?"

The blade glistens with the indirect sun coming through the trees. It really is so profoundly beautiful. It's almost too pure a death for someone like him.

His anxiety grows until beads of sweat drip down his face, and it might as well be a flashing sign devoted to his guilt.

"Say the name of the man you raped before you leave this earth, Kyle." Bitterness coats my tongue when I say the words.

Bile rises from my stomach, and I know the moment he says my brother's name is the

moment he'll die.

There's no forgiveness for him. Hearing the name coming from his lips will only light a fire inside me, but it's the right thing to do.

He doesn't get to stick to his lie and act like Fabrizio was some kid who killed himself.

"I didn't rape anyone! Especially not a dude! You've got the wrong person!"

He gets red in the face, and I realize the years were not kind to him.

I can't remember how he looked at seventeen, but now he has hard lines over his cheeks and around his eyes.

His coloring is off, and his eyes are empty.

I should let him know I don't have the wrong person, and that the truth will set him free.

He might find peace in the afterlife if he surrenders his sins, but then I smile. A tiny smile that only grows bigger.

I hope he never finds peace, not now in his last moments, not ever. I hope the lines in his face are marks that he was treated just as badly as he treated people. I hope this is the easiest moment for him, and in the afterlife, he only meets pain and nothing else.

Kyle jumps backward when I make my move. He whimpers as he looks at me. I know I look maniacal with the smile planted on my lips, but spilling his blood is going to feel good, and I won't deny myself.

I'm not a trained assassin, but he's not either. He's tired and disoriented after a couple of days in this place. He's an easy target when I'm ready, fed, and a trained athlete.

It's not hard to be quicker than him. My sneakers crunch the leaves covering the ground, while he scrambles in his bare feet. My knees are strong and squared in a plié when I bend them before I jump into his back, grabbing his neck with my left arm as I sink the knife with the right.

His screams are music to my ears, and a full-body shiver takes me when his blood sprays from his neck to my arm and down to the forest ground. Kyle falls to his knees, and I take the opportunity to push him to the side and make him turn to his back.

"Stop! Why are you doing this?" he cries, trying to stop the blood with his hand.

"You raped my brother." I stab him in his stomach.

"You took his joy, his happy years, his sense of self." I stab him in his chest. He cries and screams; his words don't make sense anymore when blood starts spilling from between his lips.

"You made him a victim. You took everything from him." Stab.

Stab . "Fabrizio Serra. Fabrizio Serra."

My hands almost slip with all the blood, and I throw the big knife away, reaching for the bone one between my breasts.

"Fabrizio Serra," I say one last time before sinking the bone knife under his chin.

He shakes under me and gives out his last miserable breath. Hot tears stream down my cheeks. I reach for the big knife again, leaving the bone knife where it is.

His flesh makes a disgusting noise as I put the knife in and out a hundred different times, I can't see where I'm hitting, not when there's so much blood and so many tears. I cough into my sorrow, wishing for something more but finding nothing but his flesh and blood.

A hand closes over mine, interrupting the course of my knife. "There you go, you're done now."

I release the knife, and someone takes it away. At the same time, someone lifts me under my arms, and I'm carried away from Kyle. My head hits a warm chest. I'm shaking, and I hear Enzo's humming Giselle into my ear.

It is my favorite ballet.

"Is she okay?" Lucciano's voice asks.

"She was reborn," Enzo replies.

MARCELLA

The water is piping hot when it hits my back, and I flinch away, but a big hand brings me back, forcing me to take it.

“Your muscles will thank us,” Lucciano says.

His big hands carve into my shoulders, trying to make me relax, but it’s not working as well as he wishes.

“I know. I am an athlete,” I reply.

They haven’t left me alone since they took me from Kyle, fussing over me and working on my last nerve. Lucciano more than Enzo. His eyes are too worried as if I’m about to snap at any moment. I’m not. I’m finally free.

Enzo is in high spirits. To him, blood was all that was needed to set the world right, and there’s no need to worry about anything else.

I like his perspective much more. Though I’m not sure things will be right again until all of the people who took part in my brother's death are gone and have suffered a worse fate than he did.

“You’re in shock,” Lucky says.

I snap out of my revenge thoughts and shake my head. “I’m not in shock. I’m angry.”

Why wouldn't I be? This is just the start. I tip my head under the shower, their words lost for a moment while I breathe in my new life. I feel Lucciano's hand massaging me, and I hear his grave tone, but I'm not paying attention. I wonder how long we need to find the next name.

Hands close around my shoulders, and I'm rudely taken from the stream. "It's against my religion, but I'm going to have to agree with my brother on this one. You're headed toward a drop."

Enzo surprises me by being too serious at this moment. Where's the blood-hungry lunatic I fell in love with?

Love? Oh god, this is another piece of the puzzle. I can't handle it right now, so I push it out of my mind. I need them, and that admission is enough for now.

"You don't know anything," I shoot back with confidence, but when I look down, I realize my hands are shaking.

I snort a laugh. I'm okay. I don't know why this is happening, but I'm okay. I have to be okay because Kyle Kelper is dead, so the world is a better place now. I'm obviously okay.

I lift my hands, and the shaking is so bad that they blur in front of my face.

"Shh, you're okay, you're okay," Lucciano murmurs in my ear, and for no reason at all, my tears fall. They are hot and catch me unaware.

I'm not sad. I'm the furthest I've been from sad in years, but the tears pour, and without a warning, a sob breaks free.

My trembling hand covers my mouth as if I can keep it to myself, hidden from them,

but it doesn't work.

A sob turns into another and then another.

I'm exorcising a demon from right in the middle of my chest. It hurts to do it.

It carves into my insides, and I feel claws ripping into my skin. Oh god .

"It will get easier each time, Marcella," Enzo whispers at my back. "Each time a piece of that grief will leave you, and killing gets easier."

Is this how he feels every time?

The sobs continue, and they both climb into the shower to hold me, right when my knees give out.

Lucciano takes my back, never letting me fall, and my head tips back to his chest. I can't stop crying.

It's impossible to contain it all inside.

Enzo comes in front, his eyes so tender as he grabs a sponge and starts cleaning me.

His touch is careful, tenderness I didn't expect from him.

I let them clean each inch of me, and I cry as they do.

Lucciano whispers in my ear. He promises me I'll be okay and reminds me I'm safe.

I'm always safe as long as I have them as my protectors.

By the time I'm clean, I don't know how much time has passed, but I'm gloriously calm and grateful for their attention.

My vision isn't blurry anymore now that the tears have dried up. I smile at Enzo, and he smiles back. I notice for the first time how naked he is. His cock is hard and begging for attention. I lick my lips, and I can't stop myself. He told me to follow my instincts and take what I want.

I don't have to explain my desires to them, so I drop to my knees and my lips slip over his cock, my tongue following.

"Whoa, fuck, Marcella." It feels so damn good to take him by surprise for once when he's always getting the drop on me.

Awareness prickles my skin when I feel Lucciano's eyes on me. He shifts and lowers down too, and his hand starts kneading my ass. His attention wasn't sexual a moment before, yet in no time his hands lower to my pussy, rubbing me as I blow his brother.

I moan around Enzo. He curses when I do.

I look up to him, obsessed with the way he watches me.

I'm caught in the moment when I feel Lucciano's tongue sliding over my sore pussy.

We've fucked so much and in so many ways since we've been here, and I'm not used to all this dick.

But that sting quickly fades away under his tongue.

Enzo moans in a glorious male symphony of pleasure. I would dance to the sound, but that would simply be fucking in front of a crowd because the natural answer to it

is a writhing of bodies.

“She’s even sweeter now,” Lucciano murmurs into my pussy as his tongue slides up and down, exploring my piercing and finding all my most sensitive spots. He already knows how to eat me exactly how I like, and my legs are shaking in no time.

“She let go of everything holding her back,” Enzo says, as if Lucciano’s revelation is obvious. “I can’t wait to taste her in her natural element.”

“She’s so good.” He sounds half possessed, and in the next move, he shoves his tongue deep inside me, the tip flicking against my G-spot.

I come fast and hard, my juices spilling out of me and over his face.

Enzo comes right after me, seeming to respond directly to my pleasure.

The ropes of cum splash the back of my throat, and I swallow everything, greedy as hell, not wanting to miss one drop from the man who helped me get my revenge.

Once I’m done, I look down at the man who has worried about my heart and innocence since day one, who wanted me, and went against his own moral judgment to have me. I turn around, putting my mouth to his cock, but before I can taste it, I look over my shoulder with a coy smile.

“Are you sure you want this?” I tease as I move to skim the head softly over my lips .

“Need it,” he grunts as I slide him into my mouth.

I expect to take him long and slow, but much to my surprise, he grabs me by the back of my hair and begins to fuck my throat. I can’t breathe and gag.

“Relax, Miss Marcella,” Enzo coos behind me. “Take all of him.”

I do, opening my throat and allowing Lucciano to use me however he sees fit. Soon enough, he comes too, and all three of us are spent on the bottom of the shower.

“So who’s next, Little Star?” Lucciano asks, and my heart rate jumps with excitement.

Hearing him ask means he understands this is just the beginning. He’s in, and we are doing this together. One by one, all of Fabrizio’s tormentors will be in the ground.

“It doesn’t matter,” I tell them. “They're all going to pay.”

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ONE YEAR LATER

Deadhawk Studio is the most cutting-edge performance art experience in the city.

A mixture of ballet and blood, beauty and violence.

A composition made of my heart, soul, and body.

A score built on Enzo's violence. Between the two of us, we create the profound, the macabre, something so intense that it's hard to look upon, but people pay for the right anyway.

And of course, my Lucciano keeps the lights on.

He stares at me from over the top of his desk in the office in the back.

Enzo keeps a studio by comparison, and I wouldn't call much of what he does in there official.

Lucciano shifts through papers, doing the math and making ends meet so we can continue our strange dance of murdering and performing for the masses.

We left the city behind and all of our histories and responsibilities with it. We can be new people here, but I suppose we're not that new, considering I'm still famous in my own way and so is Enzo. I suppose they don't have a boss here at least.

I'm pregnant with one of their babies, but I can't say which one.

I guess that is the downside to taking loads from brothers, if you care about that kind of thing.

We're not exactly normal, but the three of us might be the perfect combination as parents.

The most important thing is that our little ballerina will be so loved and protected by her dads.

Fabrizia is pure light. I can feel it in my belly, and our new mission will be to protect her.

"Go check on him, please," Lucciano says.

I give him a thorough kiss before granting his request. The theater is beautiful, and everything I want it to be.

I can't help but appreciate where my life has wound up as I move to check on our Enzo.

I don't bother to knock. I open the door, finding that he's already completed tonight's work.

I've found that Lucciano was right, and I'm not all darkness like Enzo would like me to be.

Sometimes I want to kill, and sometimes I want to leave it to him and simply enjoy my performance.

"Number Nine," he comments to me as I step inside and shut the door, finding him coated in blood.

I stand over top of the dead body. This was a guidance counselor of ours who ignored the signs of harassment all around us. He needed to pay, but my hands didn't need to be stained for it. Enzo moves to his back, cutting at the still bleeding flesh.

"I want you to do the fifth nocturne tonight," he says as he works.

"Can I see?" There's a hopeful lilt to my voice.

He rolls his eyes. "It's supposed to be a surprise. You're impatient as always."

"Please," I beg, knowing he'll give in to me.

"Fine, Miss Marcella," he teases me as I step around him, smelling the thick blood in the air.

My hand massages his shoulder as I stand at his side and look at the elaborate carving that will be on display tonight.

An angel adorns his back, beautiful and ethereal, and I don't need to ask to know she represents his mother, an angel of light dancing in the afterlife with his angel of darkness. It's beautiful, poetic, and perfect.

It's us.