



# The Heir I Was Hired to Save

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**Category:** Romance, Mafia, Martial

**Description:** Emily Fiat never thought that taking a high-paying work as a carer to get out of poverty and take care of her blind grandma and little brother would lead her into a dark, deadly world. Emily is hired under false pretences and taken to Florida, where she ends herself in the huge, hidden estate of Liam Carter, a blind martial artist and heir to the dangerous Eagle Wings organisation.

Liam lives in darkness, both literally and emotionally, because of a childhood tragedy that took his family and his sight. Emily realises that her work is more than simply taking care of people; it's staying alive as she walks through icy hallways, past guards with guns, and secret hierarchies.

The house has more secrets than windows, and Liam's suffering is worse than any weapon. Emily has to choose whether to heal, flee, or... or be eaten by the darkness she walked into?

"The Heir I Was Hired to Save" is a thrilling romantic suspense story about tragedy, recovery, devotion, and the fire of an uncommon friendship formed in the darkest of places.

**Total Pages (Source):** 40

## Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:15 am*

I eat my lunch at the table while I watch the news on TV. It's the main story in the news.

The bad guys shot the staff during a bank robbery, and the CCTV caught it all.

The sound of gunfire and people screaming makes me shudder. It feels real, even if it's coming from the TV. All of a sudden, I don't want breakfast anymore.

Sophie, my sister who just turned seven this month, says from across the table, "That sounds sickeningly cruel and barbaric."

We're enjoying breakfast together, but she chose the seat with her back to the TV, as usual, so she doesn't have to see whatever terrible news she can't stand to see. Sadly, Dad's friend always switches on the news at this time every morning.

When I hear footsteps, I look up and see Mom heading down the stairs with her phone in her hand.

"Sweetheart, we'll be there in no time." She smiles as she hears the voice on the other end of the queue. I know who she's talking to. It must be Ethan, my older brother. "Don't worry. Everyone is excited and can't wait to see your first karate championship. Just listen to your teacher and take a deep breath. We'll be there soon."

Before mum hangs up, they talk some more. I can tell she's excited when she sighs.

Ethan left earlier with his karate teacher to get ready for the championship. Mom,

Sophie, and I will go there to support him. I hope dad can make it too, although he is quite busy.

I'm excited and scared for Ethan because this is his first championship. Ethan has been one of the greatest karate students at his martial arts school since he was 13. It is thought that he will win a medal in this event.

As soon as Mom gets to the table, she kisses my cheek. Next, she goes up to Sophie and does the same thing. She is so happy, but as soon as she sees the TV, her smile goes away.

"Victor," she shouts, gazing at him. "Again? I told you not to show such violence in front of my kids. Can't you at least change the channel?"

Victor looks at mum instead. "Sorry. I got too into the case." He turns the station, which is now showing news concerning drug trafficking.

I can tell that Mom is still mad because she sighs. I don't understand why mum appears to detest him. Victor is a good person, though. People might think he appears scary at first because of his piercing dark eyes and the cut on his left cheek that makes him look like a mobster in movies, but he's really fun to be around.

He likes to play games with Ethan and me sometimes, like letting us shoot at his shooting target board with our water guns.

He once let me handle his real gun and showed it to me.

Victor and some of Dad's other close buddies come over to our house a lot. They generally stay here for a night every other day. There is always room for everyone in our house because it has a lot of rooms.

Because we have more than 20 rooms, some people even term our residence a mansion. Some of them have also said that it's like a "base."

I don't know exactly what my dad does for a living, but I do know that he makes a lot of money. He started a group.

Dad runs down the stairs, which gets Mom's attention. He looks good in his black jacket and casual clothes. He generally puts on his suit before going to a meeting, therefore that suggests he won't be going to work today.

Mom appears happy to see us, which means Dad will come with us to attend Ethan's karate match.

"Have you finished your breakfast?" Dad asks me and Sophie when he gets downstairs. Then his eyes flicker to the TV. "Look there," he says to us in a fatherly voice. "See those guys over there selling drugs? They're the bad guys. Our job is to not be like them and to put them in their place. Got it?"

Sophie and I both nod to show that we understand. Mom constantly tries to keep us away from bad things, but Dad likes to show us both sides of the story, the good and the bad, and help us make the right choice.

"Richard." Victor gets up from the couch and walks to Dad's office. He asks in a serious voice, "Can we talk for a minute?"

Dad stays where he is, but mum shakes her head to say no.

"Please, not now," Mom begs. "He's waiting."

Based on what Victor said, it sounds like he and Dad are going to talk about an important job. And they always take a long time to talk about work.

“Richard,” Victor calls, and the door to Dad’s office is wide open for him to follow. “It’s about the case you asked about yesterday.”

I heard that Richard isn’t his real name and that Victor isn’t either. I don’t understand why they use so many phoney names.

Dad sighs and looks at Mom with an apologetic face. “Please give me a minute. It won’t take long, I promise.”

Mom can’t believe it when Dad goes into his office and closes the door behind him. She groans in anger and sits down next to Sophie. She strokes Sophie’s hair and tells us to be patient while we wait for Dad to finish talking to Victor.

We can hear them yelling at each other just a minute after the door closes. I can’t make out the words, but it’s evident that they’re both really angry.

I can hear the furniture in the room falling over and crashing, so I suppose they’re going to kill each other. I really hope I don’t hear any gunshots.

Every time she hears a loud voice, Sophie jumps in her seat.

“Come on,” Mom replies, helping Sophie get up. Her eyes are telling me to do the same.

I do the same and walk towards the automobile that is already waiting for us in the driveway. Mom lets Sophie and me sit in the back. Logan, our driver, is already in the car, but Mom doesn’t get in.

Instead, she moves a few steps away and pulls out a cigarette with her shaky hand. When she’s nervous, she always backs away, like she doesn’t want us to see how weak she is.

I can tell when mum is terrified, no matter how hard she tries to hide it. I can tell when she's depressed or in pain.

I turn my attention to Sophie, who is shivering next to me. "Will dad be okay?" she stutters.

I put my hands on her shoulders to attempt to calm her down. She glances up at me with her huge green eyes. They are full of terror and sadness.

I detest it when Sophie cries. I don't like it when mum cries. I want to practice martial arts like Ethan does so that I can protect them too when someone attempts to hurt them.

"Of course he'll be fine," I say, and I believe what I say.

There isn't another man as strong as my dad. That's why he has been in charge of this group. Victor could be his advisor, but his dad is the destroyer. No one can stop him.

I can tell that Sophie is still scared, though, so I try to keep her mind busy.

I say, "Let's play Sticks," and I put one finger out on each hand.

Sophie looks at me, perhaps still thinking about whether or not she wants to play this finger-counting game with me.

"Come on," I say with a sneer, which makes her sigh.

She also rips one finger out of each hand.

## Page 2

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“Your turn first,” I say, giving her a head start.

She taps my hand, and we start to play. She wins the first round, but to my surprise, she pouts.

“You let me go first, so it was clear that I was going to win,” she explains in a matter-of-fact way. “Now, it’s your turn to go first.”

I can tell that her mind is already wandering, which is a good sign. This time, I get a head start, but she complains when she wins again.

“That’s not fair!” she yells. “You did that on purpose so I could win.”

I laugh, and so does she. It’s great to see her smile again.

The interesting part is that we always play this game like this, and she never grows weary of it. I believe she likes being pampered.

We are startled by movement in the house. When I see Dad storming towards us, I feel a big sense of relief.

“Come on,” he says.

Logan starts driving right away once mum and dad get in the car.

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“Put your seatbelt on,” Mom tells me and Sophie in an anxious voice.

She constantly takes extra care of us, but sometimes I wonder if there’s anything else that makes her paranoid all the time.

Sophie and I do what she says and buckle our seatbelts. Dad is in the front seat next to Logan, and the three of us are seated in the back with Sophie in the middle.

When Mom’s phone rings, I can see that Ethan wants to video call her. She picks up the phone, and we can see that Ethan is already in his karate gear. He seems really worried, but his face lights up when he sees us all in the car.

“Already on our way,” Mom says with a smile. Her words make him breathe a sigh of relief.

Mom moves her phone so that Ethan can see me and Sophie better.

“Are you going to win the contest?” I ask him in a lethargic voice.

Ethan smirks, as predicted. “You’ll see. I want you to see it for yourself. I can’t wait to knock them out.”

I laugh. He’s being cocky, but I admire how sure he is of himself.

“Hey, Sophie,” he says pleasantly to our sister. “What do you want me to buy you if I win the contest?”

Sophie looks at him with a blank look on her face. “Will I get a present?”

Ethan smiles a lot. “Of course. If I win this championship, I’ll make a lot of money and buy you anything you want.”



Sophie squints as she thinks hard. “Really?” Then she starts to laugh out loud. “I want a new headband if that’s the case.”

Ethan is the one who is staring at her with a dumb look this time. “What? Just that?”

Sophie nods with excitement.

Ethan asks, “Really?” with disbelief. “I can give you more.”

Sophie honestly states with a big smile on her face, “I just want a new pretty headband right now.”

Ethan massages his head. “Okay, if that’s what you want...”

I broke him off in an irritated voice and said, “What about me, huh?” “Will I not get anything?”

I know this sounds bad, but I can’t help but feel a little jealous. I always treat Sophie like a cool brother, but occasionally I act like a brat with Ethan.

Ethan shakes his head. “I knew you were going to ask me for that, so I didn’t. What do you want?”

“I want a horse,” I declare firmly, trying to make him mad.

“What the f—”

“Is that a problem for you?” I enquire. “I want a horse,” I say, “You said you would buy anything Sophie wants, so now it’s my turn.”

last line. “You better get that for me.”

Ethan shakes his head and laughs. “There’s no way I’m getting you a horse. That’s crazy. I can’t afford it. If your dad lets you, you can take any horse from his ranch. Why would I buy you a new horse?”

I laugh too, which makes it clear that he’s getting on my nerves.

He rolls his eyes. “Okay, I’ll get you a bike. How does that sound? But it shouldn’t cost a lot. I’ll get you a cheap one.”

“I don’t need a bike,” I shout.

“Geez, you’re impossible.” He hangs up after that. I want to break something.

Mom and Sophie laugh.

“That cocky bastard,” I say to myself. “He’s not going to win anyway.”

Ethan and I talked in a ridiculous way, but that’s how we chat sometimes. That tiny fight makes me remember that even when things were bad with Dad’s job or his pals, it’s not a big deal. The most important thing is that our family will always be there for each other.

When the car is quiet again, I remember that Dad hasn’t said anything since we got in. He generally hears what we’re talking about, but not today. He merely looks at his phone and scrolls through the texts as if to make sure something is true.

I also know that mum hasn’t asked him any questions about what occurred with Victor back home. They might not want to talk about it with Sophie and me still there.

Someone answers Dad’s call after the first ring. “Are you sure about that?” he asks in

a low, threatening voice that makes the automobile feel frigid.

Dad hangs up the phone once the person answers and hisses, “F\*\*\*\*\*g traitor.”

His rage makes me shiver. I’ve never seen Dad that angry before. Something terrible must be going on.

Mom asks quickly, “Why are we taking this road? We should go the other way.” The automobile suddenly makes an abrupt bend.

Dad says, “Someone is following us.”

The silence that comes after that makes my skin crawl.

Sophie and I look at each other. Her face becomes as white as paper. I grab her hand to console her as the automobile accelerates away. We had never been in a car that went this fast before. Sophie’s face tells me that she feels sick and is going to throw up.

There is no need for Dad and Logan to talk to one other. They both know what’s going on right now.

Dad seems to see something in the rearview mirror because he pulls out his rifle, which shocks us. My heart skips a beat, and I can hear Sophie crying softly next to me.

Dad is going to kill someone. If you have to, kill them.

“No,” Mom says. “Not in front of our kids.”

“I’m sorry,” Dad says. It’s a real apology because he won’t change his opinion. “I

have to.”

I see mum biting her bottom lip and appear quite pale. But now she doesn't say anything since she knows Dad has to keep us all safe.

I saw a van rushing towards us from the car window in that split second.

Watch out!

I can't even say those things because I feel a massive blow right after. I draw Sophie closer and cover her as the pain in my body is so bad that it hurts every nerve.

I'm afraid because even though I feel like I'm about to die, I'm still in pain.

Until everything becomes dark.

My whole body hurts. I can't move at all.

It aches. It aches a lot.

## Page 3

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It hurts to move my head, like I'm being hit with a hammer.

I can hear soft whispering.

"He's just a little boy. He's still very young," someone yells.

"How sad."

Sadness.

That one word makes me go crazy. I try to sit up, but it's too painful. I want to yell, but all I can do is whimper.

I can sense someone running towards me and putting me back on the bed. My head hurts a lot.

Why is it so painful, God?

"Liam." A man's voice echoes nearby.

That voice sounds familiar. It seems familiar.

It's hard for me to open my eyes. My eyelids flutter, and I try to open my eyes very slowly. I'm sure I've done it, but I keep failing. I can't see anything. It's completely dark.

"Hey, Liam," the man says again, and I finally remember his voice. "It's me, Victor."

“F-Victor?” My voice is shaking. It sounds so weak and scratchy. “Where are you?”

“I’m right here next to you.”

“Where?” My voice gets more and more scared. “Where are mum and dad? Where’s Sophie? I need to see them.”

He hasn’t answered, which makes my heart race. I hear someone crying again. It could be a nurse.

“Why aren’t you answering me?” I ask. “Where are they?”

Victor smells, which is horrible to me. He’s sobbing.

I can’t believe that Victor never tears. And I don’t like this.

“I’m sorry,” he adds in a mournful voice. “I’m so sorry about what happened to your family.”

I don’t know what to say. I feel something moist on my cheek, and I know I’m crying too.

I’ve always tried to be tough and not cry, but tonight it’s just too much. I can’t stop crying.

“What are you talking about?” I say angrily. “Where are they?”

“Liam.” Victor takes a big breath, like he’s trying to calm down too. “I did attempt to warn your dad, but he didn’t listen. I knew he wasn’t

They were meant to leave the house this morning. They had intended to kill him on

the way, but Victor stops and swears under his breath.

I stop.

They?

Who are they?

Are these the people dad wanted to shoot before?

I increase my voice and say, “What happened?” I’m getting even more impatient. “What happened to him? What happened to Mom and Sophie? Why aren’t you taking me to see them?”

“I—” It looks like it’s hard for him to talk. “I don’t think you’re in the right state of mind to know—”

“Victor!” I scream.

My chest is going up and down. I’ve never talked to him like this, with such authority. But I’ve run out of patience. I want to know it all. I want someone to make all this anguish go away.

Victor lets out a sigh. “A van coming from another road hit your father’s car on the right side, killing your mother and father right away. Sophie and the driver were not hurt as badly.”

I feel like everything around me is falling apart.

“They didn’t make it either. You’re the only one who lived. It’s a miracle—”

“No.” I shake my head and cry louder as tears flow down my face. “No, it can’t be true. You’re lying. You’re lying to me.”

“Liam—”

“I need to see them,” I scream.

Because of all these wounds, I can’t move my body. I just don’t want to sit here and shake with fear.

“Just tell the doctor to do something to my eyes. I can’t open them. Do something,” I yell.

“Liam.” Victor’s voice is full of sympathy. “You’ve already opened your eyes.”

His remarks shock me. It’s already dark here, but I feel like I’m sliding deeper into an infinite hole.

He whispers, “I’m sorry.” “It must be because of the crash. I can’t see you like this, Liam. I can’t—” His voice shakes as I feel him move from where he is.

“Where’s Ethan?” is the only thing I can think of to say as my heart breaks into a million pieces.

I cry again because Victor doesn’t answer.

“Where is he? I want to see my brother.”

I have to see Ethan. He’ll say that everything is OK. He’ll tell me what I need to know.



Victor finally says, “He’s here.” “But I don’t think you two can meet soon. He’s not in a good place either.”

That being stated, Victor goes.

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I wait and wait and wait. Ethan still hasn’t arrived, though.

The doctor came to see me, but I couldn’t understand what he said. He didn’t answer the question that had been on my mind for a while. He stated I needed treatment first, as if he were waiting for a therapist to talk to me about my eyes.

When I hear people yelling outside the room, I come to my senses again. It’s Ethan.

His loud, agitated scream echoes in the air, “I need to see Liam!” “I have to see my brother!”

I can hear the noise around him, like the nurses are attempting to move him to another room so he can’t see me.

One of them adds in a calm voice, “Ethan, please.” “Neither of you is doing well right now. Help is on the way. You can see your brother when you are both better. It’s for his own good and yours too.”

I understand what’s going on. They act like we’re helpless kids, but what can we do to change that?

Yes, we are kids.

“Ethan,” I say with a stutter. “Ethan!” I yell with all the strength I have left.

“Let me go,” he hisses at the people around him, and I can feel him move when he runs to the bed.

“Where are you?” I ask.

“I’m here.” He takes my hand and I can feel how warm his skin is. I’m holding on to him like my life relies on it.

“Why can’t I see you?” I cry.

I want to see. I really want to see. I can’t stand this gloom.

“Why can’t I see anything?”

I get even more restless when Ethan doesn’t say anything. I didn’t expect him to behave this way.

## Page 4

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“Why aren’t you talking?” I ask.

I hear him weep next, and it makes my heart plummet. My eyes are watering again. My throat hurts a lot.

“Am I blind?” I say softly.

Ethan cries. “I’m sorry,” he says as he breaks down and grips my hand tighter. He wants to hug me, but he can’t because I’m hurt. “I’m sorry, Liam.”

I don’t know what to do. Ethan’s hand shakes as he cries with me. It feels like my heart is no longer there.

Why didn’t I die in the vehicle accident?

Why do I still have breath?

Ethan is holding my hand so tightly that it feels like I am his life. What would have happened to him if I had died? He’ll be by himself. Will he take his own life because of the pain?

“Where are mum and dad?” I ask, even though I might already know the answer.

No. I want Ethan to tell me. Maybe he’ll inform me that Victor wasn’t telling the truth. Please do this for me. There must be another room in this hospital where Mom, Dad and Sophie are.

Ethan says, “They’re gone,” and that breaks my heart.

He breaks down again while I cry quietly. I can’t see anymore, but I can still cry. I don’t get this world at all.

I hope this is only a bad dream, but why does the pain feel so real?

I ask, “What about Sophie?”

Ethan’s cries break forth again. “She didn’t make it either.”

“No.” I want to blow up. “That can’t be true. She was right in my arms. I was there to protect her. Ethan, she’s still alive. I was sure she was still breathing.”

I can’t believe Sophie is gone too. The young sister I defended with my life when the crash happened is gone.

But Ethan’s pain shows that everything is real. He isn’t lying. He is telling me the truth while holding on to me as tightly as I am holding on to him. We held on to one other’s hands the whole time, as if the other would die if we let go.

Today is a nightmare that will stay with me for the rest of my life.

I lost my mum, dad, and Sophie.

And I can’t see.

While she rocks back and forth in her chair, I kiss her cheek. “I made you chicken soup for breakfast and put it on the table. I have to catch the bus.”

My grandma smiles. She stops me by holding my hands in hers before I can leave for

the front door. She tilts her chin up to gaze at me, even though she can't see me because she has lost her vision.

My grandma has diabetes and glaucoma, which is making her lose her vision because she is getting older. It has been going on for two years.

She lets out a sigh. "Where are you going? What about that college application? You haven't told me anything about it." She sounds curious.

I laugh and swallow anxiously. She would undoubtedly know I'm about to lie if she could see me right now. "Don't worry about it, Kate. Everything is ready."

I feel guilty right away because what I stated was not true at all. I should have already signed up for college by the time I was nineteen. I should have been a sophomore this year, I think. But it won't happen for a while.

I don't even sure if I'm going to college at all. I can't pay for it. We can't pay for it.

But Kate doesn't need to know. I don't want her to be hurt.

"I just have to go to the restaurant again this morning for an extra shift, but I'll be back for lunch," I say as I clasp her hands to reassure her.

Kate raises her eyebrows and says, "You're still working that part-time job?" "I know they pay well, but you work too hard. You need more time to study now that you're going to college soon."

"Shh." I kiss my grandma's cheek again, and she stops talking.

Every time mother talks about my future, my heart sinks even more since I know how hard she worked to raise me.

“I know, Kate.” My happy voice echoes, even though my heart is in turmoil. “I’m going to quit soon.”

What I said is what I mean. I’m going to leave this work, but not because I want to go to college. I’m going to look for a new career instead of going to college. We need more money, so this work will be much more gratifying.

But Kate seemed happy with what I said. She doesn’t know what’s going on.

“I’m going to be late. I have to go,” I say, letting go of her hands and running to the front door.

As I walk through the living room, my eyes widen when I see the bills still scattered on the coffee table. Kate can’t read it, but—

“What is that?”

I turn my head quickly to see who is speaking, and just as I was afraid, Tyler comes down the stairs.

I love Tyler, my 14-year-old younger brother. Kate and he are the only family I have left.

I quickly grab the papers and stuff them inside my sling bag. “Just some college stuff,” I say with a shy smile.

Tyler yawns. “Did you get in?” he says, still sounding tired.

“Of course,” I say, pretending to brag as I hold the door handle.

I want to get out of this debate as soon as I can. My brother is too young to have to

deal with this. He's been a great kid, helping me and Kate without getting into trouble as other boys his age would. He didn't always spend some of the money I gave him, which is a lot less than his peers would have, so we could buy more food. I'm quite thankful that Kate and he are in my life.

"Which college—" Before Tyler can finish his query about the college I'm going to, I shove through the door.

As soon as I step outside, the summer morning wind meets me. As I stroll on the pavement, I take a deep breath and let out a sigh.

I told Kate and Tyler a falsehood.

I'm not going to school. No, I can't. And now I'm not going to the restaurant to complete my job as a part-time worker. I have an interview for a new job today, and I hope luck is on my side.

I need extra cash. Right away. I haven't even paid a fraction of Kate's hospital bills yet. Kate's eye issue cost a lot more than what the insurance company could provide us, but Kate doesn't realise that. She stops the treatment, but she doesn't know that we owe her money.

Kate has been through enough pain from losing her sight and finding out that she can't take care of me and Tyler anymore. I don't have the heart to inform her that her illness made things worse than she believed.

It's my turn to give up things for her now since she's done so much for me and Tyler after our parents died. She done so much for us that putting off my college application for a year or two is nothing.

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I swallow and watch as the woman in her 50s behind the desk in front of me looks me over from head to toe.

Today, I did my best to appear good. Even though I'm wearing jeans and trainers, I hope the blazer makes me look a little more professional. I ran out of ideas for how to style my auburn hair, so I just put it in a ponytail like I always do.

The woman, who just told me her name was Karen, squints at me and says, "Interesting."

I raise my eyebrows in curiosity about what she's thinking. She turns her attention to her computer, adjusts her spectacles, and lets out a sigh that makes me think she's been conducting this interview for a million years.

"I don't know why this person wants to hire you," she says as she scans through her computer.

I don't think she's a bad person for saying that. She appears very, very interested.

My heart almost skips a beat because she said that a possible client wants to hire me.



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She leans back in her chair and looks at me again. “What made you want to use our home care services?”

I’m looking for cash. A lot of them. My present part-time employment doesn’t assist that much.

I felt like I almost blurted that out.

“Well, I’ve always been passionate about helping people.” I smile.

She returns her eyes to her computer. “It says here that you applied for a job in live-in care, respite care, companion care, homemaking care, hospice care support...”

That’s right. I really did apply for all of them. I need money that badly.

“That’s right,” I remark, maybe a little too excitedly. “I can help sick people. I can also make sure my client has someone to talk to. I can do the laundry, clean the house, cook meals, or do other chores.”

“Hm.” Karen’s eyes are still on the television. “But from what I found here, you haven’t had any similar experiences in your past jobs.”

That makes me feel bad, but I won’t give up just yet. “I’m a very hardworking person and a fast learner.”

While I’m attempting to see what information on my CV she’s reading, I catch a glance of my photo on the computer and instantly regret why I chose that picture.

I was smiling too much in that photo — I believed that a cheerful picture could be ideal for this application, but then other clients might think that I just appear plain stupid.

“It says here that you’re used to taking care of your grandmother, though. And it’s also stated here that she’s blind?”

“Yes, she is,” I answer frankly.

“Well, that might help.” She hums and turns her chair around so that it faces me again. “Ms. Fiat, your client is also blind.”

There is a short period of silence.

My mouth drops open. “Are you saying that I got the job?” My tone makes it clear that I don’t believe it.

I don’t think the other truth is a problem because I’m used to taking care of Kate. I don’t mind taking care of another blind person.

“Yes,” Karen says with a nod.

I want to run up to her and give her a big embrace. Instead, I calm down before I do something that makes me seem bad.

“Surprisingly, your profile met the requirements for this client.”

“Okay.” My hands are becoming moist because I’m so excited. “How old is she? My client.”

Karen corrects, “He.” “Your client is a man, and he’s a young one at that. He’s only a

year older than you.”

I’m still trying to understand this. “Does he expect personal care? I’m willing to help clients with disabilities, but I remember putting some conditions on my application for that.”

I feel uneasy. I might not feel comfortable helping a guy my age with personal activities like showering and dressing, and I might let him down.

Karen appears to know that I’m worried and shakes her head to show that she understands. “Don’t worry. He can do all of that on his own. In fact, he’s better than us in some ways.”

I furrow my brows in perplexity.

“He can’t see,” she says.

“What?”

“A fighter. A martial artist.”

She laughs when she sees how confused I am. “Yes, it’s amazing, isn’t it?”

I can only nod slowly. “Yes, it is.”

I have more and more respect for this possible client. He has done such things even though he is blind. It’s good for him.

But then I look at Karen with my eyes half-closed. “Can you tell me more about what kind of help he needs from me? And why did he choose me over the other applicants?”

Karen lets out a sigh. “I was also curious, especially about your last question. His assistant will go over the specifics of your tasks with you tomorrow. If you’re willing to take care of him, he will pay for your flight from Ohio to Florida and pick you up at the airport.”

My eyes open wide right away. One word in her speech catches me off surprise. “Tomorrow?”

“Yes,” Karen says. “This client needs your help right away. He said it was urgent.”

There are a lot of things on my mind. I can’t pass up this chance. I’ll do anything to help my family get out of this money problem. Kate is blind, and Tyler is too young to work.

I just can’t tell them I’m leaving them tomorrow yet. Is it okay for Tyler to look after Kate by himself while I’m gone?

“So, what do you think, Ms. Fiat?” Karen is waiting for me to answer. “We’ll talk about your payment first. Do you think you can handle this client?”

I take a deep breath and pray in my heart that I’m making the correct choice and that everything will be fine.

I pull my suitcase behind me as I leave the arrival gate. I look around the airport till I see the sign with my whole name on it in huge, strong characters. Then I walk towards it.

“Emily Fiat?” the man holding it says to me.

I nod and grin at him. “Yes. Are you Mr. White’s assistant?”

Someone told me that Jason, my client, would send his assistant to get me. I'm simply pleased I can find him because I don't know where to go.

I can't see the man's face because he is wearing sunglasses. But he looks youthful, maybe only a few years older than me. He has on trousers, a black jacket, and boots. He doesn't seem too formal.

"Welcome to Florida." He helps me carry my suitcase before I can say no, and I have to accompany him to the parking lot.

It would be an understatement to say that I'm worried.

I never thought I would fly all the way here to work, but I felt I couldn't pass up this chance because of how much the client would pay me.

Kate and Tyler were probably astonished when I informed them I had to go to Florida early to get my living situation in order before starting college at Florida Tech University. I had said that someone else would get the flat room I wanted to rent if I didn't arrive here today. They trusted me.

The sun is already going down when I leave the building and head to the parking lot. I wonder whether I can sleep well tonight, even though I still have to get used to this new place. I believe being sleepy will help. I didn't get enough sleep last night because I was in a hurry to pack my belongings.

A black limo pulls up in front of us, and I raise my eyebrows in surprise. The man carrying my bag opens the door for me, which surprises me.

As it turns out, Jason White is very wealthy. I didn't think I'd be picked up in a limo.

The man puts my suitcase in the trunk and then gets into the car behind me instead of

taking the seat next to the driver.

The driver, who is wearing a formal suit, starts driving. This is when Jason's helper presses a button on the armrest that lowers the partition down. He might want to chat to me about something private, but it doesn't make me less alert because everything that happens to me seems strange all of a sudden.

He pulls off his shades. "I'm sorry. I haven't introduced myself." He turns his head towards me, and now I can see his dark blue eyes, which are very different from his blonde hair. He smiles. "Zane is my name."

"Assistant to Mr. Jason White?" I ask again.

He didn't answer when I first met him, even though I knew the answer.

He lets out a sigh. "I am your client's assistant, but I'm afraid you'll need a lot more information."

My eyebrows are furrowed. "What do you mean?"

He doesn't answer my query and instead pulls out his phone from his jacket pocket. I see a tattoo on the inside of his wrist while he's looking at his phone.

It has red lines and the wings of an eagle. The wings of the tattoo have long, slotted feathers, and each one is incredibly intricate and well-made, even though the tattoo is little.

I've never seen a tattoo that was so mesmerising. It's alarming how much a tattoo can affect the person who sees it. I don't know why, but the hair on the back of my neck instantly stands up. I can't explain why Zane has a hazardous aura.

It looks like he is reading something that someone else wrote. “He just sent the money. You should check it.”

I pull out my phone from my sling bag and see a notification from my mobile banking. My curiosity grows. My eyes widen in shock as soon as I open it.

The amount of money that went into my bank account is more than what the care agency informed me. That’s definitely too many. I need to double-check the quantity of zeros. With this money, I can pay off all of Kate’s medical costs and even the tuition for the best university in the country, or possibly the world. I can even preserve it for Tyler’s future.

This is crazy. My hand is shaking while I grip my phone.

“Wh-what?” I can’t help but stutter.

It’s not that I don’t want the money; it’s the answer to all of my family’s troubles. There must be a mistake, though. A big one.

“The payment was made in full instead of every month,” the man next to me says in a nonchalant tone, as if it doesn’t matter. “He paid for your one-year contract in full.”

I turn my head quickly towards him. My chest is going up and down a lot, and my eyes are wide. “I’m sorry? There must be a mistake. I didn’t apply for a job that paid this much.”

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:15 am*

“I know this is a lot to take in, but I’m sorry, Emily, he chose you.”

“My client—

“Zane cuts in, saying, “You won’t be working for Jason White.” “You will be working for Liam Carter, who is a very important person in our family. When I say ‘family,’ I mean our organisation.”

This stuff makes my heart practically stop. Liam Carter? I don’t know who he is.

“Well, I think you should stop the car because this is definitely a big mistake,” I say firmly, even though my voice shakes a little at the end.

I can’t help it. I’m in a car with people I don’t know, and someone just gave me a lot of money for something I still don’t know what it was for.

“I will give the money back,” I respond, even if my heart falls at that.

I thought I could help Kate and Tyler, but then my hope was destroyed.

“You’ll have to accept it because this isn’t the job I signed up for. There must have been a misunderstanding with the agency.” I swallow. “Unless this is some sort of kidnapping.”

As soon as Zane hears the last word, his face goes serious. “We’re not kidnapping you, Emily. Like I said, there’s a lot to explain.”



“Please do.”

Zane responds, “This is the job you were hired for.” “You signed up for live-in care, and I think the agency told you that your client went blind.”

“Yes, I was told about that.”

Zane explains, “You will be working for Liam.” “He’s 20 and has been blind since he was 9. He needs help.”

It hurts to hear that the person lost his sight when he was just a child. He was too young to go through anything so terrible.

As I think about this information, I remember that the same thing was said about the client I’m supposed to work for. The agency did tell me that he was only a year older than me.

“But why did they say his name was Jason White?” I wonder. “Does the agency know who he really is?”

Zane shakes his head. “We couldn’t tell you because of our work environment. Information about Liam Carter being blind could be seen as a weakness that our competitor could use against us. We like to keep things private from outsiders, and we have a team that makes sure of that through the administrative process.”

Zane’s explanation simply makes me want to know more. I haven’t heard of Liam Carter or his group, but if they’re so essential that they can’t even let people see the private details regarding his condition, why not?

I feel like I’m working for a family member of a military general who isn’t getting enough security and might have enemies, but the family itself might not even exist.

Did they even have the right to do what they did to the agency?

Zane seems to know what's on my mind because he says, "You'll find out more about who we are and what we do when you get here." He clears his throat and looks to the front. "Very soon."

"Will I be doing something against the law?" I ask.

Zane shakes his head once more. "Nothing you do will be against the law."

"I was told that I'll be helping a blind person, but the agency said that I would only get more details from you."

Zane shakes his head. When he looks at me again, I can tell how serious he is about this. I swallow the nerves that are building up in my throat. I guess they paid me a lot since I'm going to do a really important job. I really wish they hadn't kept this a secret from the start because it makes me doubt a lot of things.

Zane adds, "First of all, Liam himself did not hire you."

His sentence shocks me.

"Then who?" I echo.

"Ethan Carter, Liam's older brother. He's the one who hired you."

I agree. "Okay, so he wants me to help his brother because he's blind. Did he have someone help him before?"

I can hear a trace of despair in Zane's voice when he sighs. "No. You're going to be his first helper, which is surprising."

Zane shuts his eyes and caresses the space between his eyebrows. All of a sudden, he seems like he's really thinking. "I guess Ethan finally figured out that Liam needed someone, especially since he was gone."

"Out?"

"Zane opens his eyes again and says, "Ethan is in France." He looks determined. "I have to go back there as soon as possible because I was told to work with him."

I'm ready to ask more questions when he starts talking again and looks at me again. "Look, you have two things to do." Zane is looking at me like he's trying to figure out if I'm the right person for the job. First, you have to help Liam all the time while you live in the house. Second, you have to go with him when he goes out. He can't go out without you, but he doesn't go out often, so you might not think about the second one as much. Liam likes to stay in the house most of the time, even if he feels trapped.

You have to help Liam all the time when he's in the house. And if he goes out, you have to go with him. He can't go out without you. He doesn't go out very often, so you might not think about the second one as much. Liam likes to stay in the house most of the time, even when he feels like he's suffocating.

"Can you tell me more about him?" I ask, as Zane's eyes start to sparkle with melancholy.

"Liam's past is painful, and I don't think he's gotten over it," Zane says. "His parents and little sister died in a car crash, and he lost his eyesight. He was the only one who lived through that crash, and he was still a little boy at the time."

My hand goes straight to my mouth. I can't even begin to imagine what Liam went through.

It was sad.

I don't know how a tiny boy could get past that horrible event in his mind. One would never get better from it.

Zane's jaw tightens, as if he's upset that this happened and there's nothing we can do about it. "Liam accepted what happened, but he can't let go of his grudge. Martial arts help him let out his anger, but it's not enough."

Every word that comes out of Zane's mouth makes my stomach turn. I'm beginning to wonder if I'm qualified for this position.

"I wish Ethan could look out for him all the time, but he can't right now because most of us have to finish our work in France," Zane says with a hint of regret in his voice. "Liam needs someone to look after him."

When I took the job, I understood I would have to be ready to help someone with a disability mentally, but I didn't expect this kind of story.

"But why me?" I murmur, my voice full with doubt. "Why did you give him to me? There are many other applicants who are professionals and may be better suited to be his helper."

I'm just a girl who has never worked with blind people before and is used to taking care of my grandmother. I'm not as good as professional carers.

"Not sure. Ethan picked you out of all the other applicants," Zane says as he relaxes back in his seat. "He told me that most of them are a lot older than Liam, and he wanted a friend who was about the same age as Liam."

I stop talking and look out the window, letting my mind drift to the possibilities of

what might happen.

As the trip goes on, I am more and more apprehensive. I've always been hopeful, but the car, the empty street, and Zane make me feel uneasy, like there's something more going on.

"Please don't change your mind after hearing what I said. I'm afraid it's too late to do that now," Zane's voice resonates next to me.

My heart starts to race in my chest. The rest of the ride is too quiet, and I can tell that Zane is looking at me like he's trying to figure out what type of person I am.

Even if no one changes the temperature, the air inside the car feels colder. I'm starting to wonder if I'm having a panic attack or a hallucination. The street outside looks strange, and the night gets darker.

We're travelling through a neighbourhood where the houses are excessively enormous and the yards appear to go on forever. The owners probably don't even know their neighbours. As we go on our journey, we pass less and fewer residences.

Until there aren't any.

The street lamps and the houses are both absent.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:15 am*

It's dark on the other side of the window. I can't see anything. I'm confident the driver won't make it if the headlights on the automobile don't light up the road in front of us. We'll be stuck in the dark.

My hands are sweaty since I'm holding them on my lap. My body and mind are prompting me to change my mind. My gut is telling me that this job isn't right for me and that I shouldn't be here.

But my heart can't help but think about the young man who is inside this house that I will soon enter, even though it's racing right now.

Alone.

Blind.

He only sees the darkness, like the one around us right now, when he opens his eyes. He doesn't even have a single light to help him find his way, like we do now.

I look up at the sky through the car window, and even though it makes me feel better to see the moon shining through the dark night for all kinds of creatures, my heart breaks because he doesn't even have it. Not even as dimmed as the moon when it's hidden by clouds.

I know how it feels to lose both of your parents. We will always miss them, even if the wound heals.

It was terrible for Liam since it happened so quickly. They were taken in a flash.

I know how sad Kate was when she went blind. When her world fell apart, it was very hard for Tyler and me to tell her that it wasn't the end. It was the hardest for our family during those times.

And Liam went through all of that, which was worse than what Tyler, Kate, and I did.

My heart says I should stay. It's possible that Liam and I can be buddies. I'd be happy to help him get at least one thing: a friend. Just like his brother wants me to be for him.

The automobile slows down as it turns. I catch my breath when I glance out the window again.

A gate that is so tall is right in front of me. It makes me think of the gate that was put up to keep enemy out of a fort during battle.

The car stops, and Zane rolls down the window next to him. He doesn't even have to turn his head to look at the guard outside. The guard only needs one second to bark certain commands loudly, which makes the gate open. There is a building behind it that makes it hard for me to breathe.

It's not a house for sure.

The only thing I can see is a mansion, and it's the biggest one I've ever seen.

Lights, so many of them, faded through the windows.

And automobiles were parked all over the driveway. There are twelve of them.

The automobile comes to a stop in the driveway. Zane gets out and opens the door for me as the driver retrieves my bag from the trunk.

I can't even move my legs to get out of this car, so I'm sure Zane can see how nervous I am. He just nods and gives me a look that makes me feel better.

I take a big breath and get ready to leave. I'm not going to back down from this job now.

The three-story Italian Renaissance-style mansion in front of me is huge. Now that I'm up close, it appears much scarier.

I move up behind Zane and follow him. A man is standing in front of the big double doors, stopping us from going in. He looks like a security guard, but his clothes make him look more like a vicious gangster I'd rather see in a movie than in real life. I can't help but halt when I notice the shotgun he's holding. The guy pushes Zane's chest with the tip of the shotgun, and I almost scream.

"Identity," the man says with authority as he looks Zane up and down. This guy wouldn't let us in even though we had already passed through security at the gate.

Zane laughs a little, but the voice that comes out of his mouth is so chilly that it gives me goosebumps. "You must be new, right?"

The man frowns at Zane's question. As soon as the guy sees the tattoo on Zane's right wrist, he gasps and raises his hands. He doesn't just put his gun down; he drops it, and it makes a loud noise when it hits the ground.

What shocks me even more is that the man kneels down and promptly says he's sorry. I see a little tattoo of Eagle Wings on the back of his neck when he does that. This guy has the same tattoo as Zane, however Zane's feathers have red streaks on them, whereas this guy's don't. It's merely a set of wings from an eagle.

Another guard runs over to pick up my bag. He looks through my things in front of



the door, and I can only watch. He goes through my clothes as if I had a real bomb with me.

“She’s a recruit,” Zane says the man who is looking over my suitcase. The man nods.

I turn away from them and put my arms about my waist. The air feels too cold for a July night, which is strange because it sends goosebumps down my spine. This location is driving me insane, and I haven’t even started my job yet.

Zane is reading a text on his phone when I turn around. He frowns and then puts his phone back in his jeans pocket.

He says to me, “I have to go. My flight to France was moved up, so I have to fly there sooner than I thought.”

I don’t know how to talk to him. It’s hard to say no because of the situation, but I also can’t say that I’m going to like this work.

Zane seems to see that I’m scared and unsure. He puts his hand on my shoulder to comfort me. “I know this job may not be easy for you, but please stay close to Liam. You two need each other here. It’s what keeps you both safe if something bad happens.”

Zane walks to the car before I can ask him what that means, and in a matter of seconds, he’s gone. I can only watch with my mouth open as the automobile drives through the gate and departs the property.

“Hey, new girl.”

The harsh tone shocks me, and I turn around right away. The man who just completed looking through my suitcase points with his finger for me to come closer.

I gulp. It feels like forever that I'm doing everything I can to close the gap between us. I don't like it when people carry firearms, especially when they aren't wearing security uniforms and can point them at me without thinking.

"Your phone." He almost rolls his eyes, like I'm an idiot.

And yes, I might be. I don't get him at all. I can only stare at him with a blank look on my face.

"My phone?"

He laughs. "Yes, your damn phone."

I instinctively hold on to the tiny sling bag I'm wearing that has my phone in it. I feel protective.

What would he want with my phone? What will he do with it?

He suddenly storms in my direction. "Do you want me to check your body, or do you want to do it yourself?"

I take a step back in terror. I hear my need to protect myself loud and clear, so I take out my phone. When I deliver it to him, my hand is shaking.

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*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:15 am*

He grabs my phone, turns it around, and breaks open the case to get the battery out. Then he looks over my phone very carefully, as if there is a tracker on it.

“Give it back.” I can’t believe I still have the guts to tell him what to do.

It seems like a horrible idea. The second guy, who had bowed to Zane earlier, presses my back with his rifle, which makes my body jerk forward. My heart stops almost.

“Just get inside and stop whining.” He puts the barrel against my back again to make me walk quicker. He doesn’t think twice about being mean to me now that Zane is out of sight. “Don’t even think about breaking the rules.”

What is he talking about? Are there any regulations I need to follow?

What should I do if I don’t have my phone with me to get in touch with Tyler and Kate?

“But my phone—” I don’t even have time to complete my complaint before the guy pulls me through the door and shuts it.

What is going on inside the mansion surprises me. I’m scared stiff, like a statue.

It’s really different here than it is outside.

It’s loud and crowded here, so it’s no surprise that they have a dozen automobiles parked outside.

I didn't think I would be stepping into a party, a party with people drinking and dancing and having a good time. I can hear deep, banging music in my ears while I look around the room.

I walk into a vast space with a high ceiling that makes me feel like I've just walked into a ballroom, but it's not like that in a fairytale. Everything inside is dark, and the furniture is too. It feels like I have walked into an old castle.

There are two spiral staircases on either side of the hall. When I glance up, it simply makes me think how grand this place is. There are hallways on the second story that lead to further rooms and more of the home.

When I look back at where I'm standing, all I can see are people. And even more people. They're having a conversation. Laughing. Kissing. Kissing. People are moving in time with the music.

The only thing that keeps coming to me is that I don't belong here. What the hell am I doing here?

I hear a loud chuckle from far away, and then someone hits me hard on the shoulder.

"Sorry," the person says to me.

I see a gorgeous female with dark complexion and black eyes as I turn. I couldn't respond to her apology since I'm still overwhelmed by my surroundings. All I can do is stare at her blankly.

She stands unsteadily and squints at me, a curl of hair falling across her face.

A man with light brown hair and fair skin stands next to her and puts his arm around her shoulder. He looks at me with interest. "I haven't seen you in a while."

I feel uneasy inside. “Yeah, I’m kind of new.”

The girl’s eyebrows knit together. “Who brought you here?”

I swallow. “A guy named Zane.”

She looks like she’s struggling to understand what I said, and then her eyes get big with shock. “Are you kidding me? Zane Maddox?”

I don’t know what she meant by that, but Zane seems to be rather well-known here. I remember that the guy at the door sank to his knees right away when he saw the tattoo on Zane’s wrist.

“Actually, I don’t know his last name,” I murmur.

The girl laughs. “There’s only one Zane in this family, and there’s no way he just hired you.”

Before I can say anything, the guy says to her in a funny voice, “Technically, he could,” which makes me want to tell her that Ethan Carter hired me to take care of his blind brother. “He’s a Knight.”

The girl rolls her eyes. “Of course. What I’m saying is that he wouldn’t hire just anyone. Zane wouldn’t.” She looks me up and down and almost laughs. “And she doesn’t look like she can fight. I’m pretty sure she’s not the kind of newbie Ethan would like.”

I really don’t know where I am. I don’t understand what they were talking about or what this is all about.

“You mean Ethan Carter?” I ask again.

The girl looks at me in shock. “Now you’re talking like you don’t even know our king.” Suddenly, her face changes to one of sympathy. “Did someone bully you in Truth or Dare? Or are you here to make a bet? This kind of thing never gets old.” She shakes her head and sighs.

“Seems like the first one,” the guy says, sounding like he’s trying not to laugh, and giving me the same expression of pity.

I truly want to leave this area because they make me feel even worse, yet a part of me wants to know what they mean.

“By the way, I’m Tasha, and this is my boyfriend, Nico.” She reaches out her hand to shake hands, and Nico starts to giggle, as if she just made up their names.

I don’t want to shake hands, yet I do.

“Who are you?” She raises her eyebrows in surprise.

“Emily,” I say.

Tasha takes my arm and pulls me farther into the house. We end up standing under the stairs, away from the people who are dancing and talking, even though the music and other sounds are still very loud in my ears.

“Well, Emily.” Tasha stares at me closely and lowers her voice. “Normally, we don’t do this. If you dared to step into this place, you’d expect to be buried six feet under. But...” Her eyes sparkled with mischief. “Think of this as our kindness. We won’t tell anyone that you snuck in.”

“You’re f\*\*\*\*\*g crazy,” Nico says to her, but he can’t disguise how much he loves her when he looks at her. He might like her because she is so brave.

“Come on, I was bullied too,” she says, leaning against him and gently touching his chest. “Truth or Dare is always my thing,” she says, looking back at me and smiling. “So...Emily.”

I hold my breath without meaning to while she sighs, getting ready for what she’s about to say. The more I stay here, the more nervous I get because of the things I find that I didn’t expect.

“You and your friends might think that using the names of our leaders, like Zane or even Ethan, would save you and make it less suspicious. But...” She tsks. “You’re f\*\*\*\*\*g wrong. If you don’t get how things work here, you’re going to be in big trouble.”

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“No, it won’t just be trouble. It will cost you your life. The people here won’t hesitate to shoot you in the head, and that will be the most merciful way to end your life here, besides the other things we can do to you.”

My mouth falls open. I don’t want to believe her, but the things I saw and heard today, especially my talk with Zane and what occurred with the guards outside, make me think she’s telling the truth.

“Tell me, how much will your friends pay you to get out of here alive?” She moves closer to me, making me feel trapped against the wall under the stairs. “How much will they pay you to break into the Eagle Wings’ house?”

I feel like I’m going to freeze like a statue. What did she just say? The Eagle Wings?

She squints because she still can’t hear me.

I can only tell the truth. “I’m not here because of a dare or a bet.”

She rolls her eyes.

“Are you saying that you’re one of us?” Nico says, but he doesn’t sound like he means it. It sounds like he’s putting me to the test.

“I don’t know if your leader will hire me,” I say. “I don’t care about that, to be honest. I just want to see Lia.”

“Show me your tattoo,” Tasha says.

I look at her blankly. “What do you mean?”

“Your tattoo,” Nico says again, sounding angry. “Your identity. It will show that you are one of us. The tattoo is proof that you are a part of Eagle Wings.”

Of course, I don’t have that. I don’t ever want to be a part of the Eagle Wings or whatever group it is.



## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:15 am*

“Like this.” Tasha shows me a tattoo on her upper arm. It’s a pair of Eagle Wings, but unlike Zane’s tattoo which has red streaks on the feathers, this one has none. “Show me yours.”

I’m at a loss for words. How can I show her if I don’t even have a tattoo?

When she finally gets the idea, she mutters, “You can’t be serious. You couldn’t just sneak here without even preparing your tattoo.”

Nico snorts. “Even if she did, we would notice that it’s fake, so it doesn’t matter.”

Tasha nods, agreeing with her boyfriend. “Right. Every Eagle Wings tattoo is specially made by our artists, with special inks. Only two people in this world can make our tattoos. It’s sickening how some people still think that they can fake it. At least, you’re not one of them.”

Nico chuckles. “Your lies have been caught, Emily.”

Their accusation makes me feel offended. “I’m not lying. I didn’t say that I was one of you. I’m not interested in joining your gang, the Eagle Wings, or whatever it is. I’m here because I was hired by Ethan Carter. Zane brought me here—”

“Whoa whoa whoa.” Tasha raises her hands, staring at me in utter disbelief. “You’re going too far right there.”

“I don’t have time to deal with people who don’t even want to believe me,” I say firmly. “Now, if you’ll excuse me—”

“Wait.” Nico grabs my arm before I can escape. Now, he looks slightly furious. “What you were trying to say didn’t make f\*\*\*\*\*g sense. We were about to let you slip without harm, but now you’re being feisty and thinking about leaving just like that?” The threat in his voice makes me shudder.

“Aw, easy, babe. You’re scaring her,” Tasha whispers to him, giving him a sweet smile. “She’s doing her best to survive. I like that spirit in her. Who knows? We might convince Victor to make her one of us. She might be useful.” She turns her head toward me. “Now, where were we? Ah, you said that you were hired by Ethan.”

The three of us turn silent. I’m waiting for her to say more, trying to block the noises from the party.

I hate parties.

But then, Tasha laughs boisterously. Nico chuckles again, shaking his head. “You can do better, little liar.”

“I’m not lying,” I say, raising my tone.

“That’s impossible,” Tasha says like it’s the most obvious thing in the world. “Ethan couldn’t have hired you. If he had, you would have had your Eagle Wings tattoo with red streaks on it. There are only three people in this f\*\*\*\*\*g world who have it. So far, you have none.” She pauses, raising her eyebrows. “Unless you can show me.”

“Dream on.” Nico smirks. “That’s why little liars like you never survive this place. They always come here with zero clues about how things work here.”

“I’m a caregiver—”

“Your lies have been exposed, Emily.” Tasha corners me again, and my back is

pushed against the wall. “Did you actually think that it would make sense to create that kind of story so that you could step into this place?” She then urges her boyfriend, “Show her yours, babe.”

Nico flips his left arm, showing me a tattoo of Eagle Wings on the inside of his upper arm.

“This is mine,” he says. “My identity. You can’t be here without it. The punishment is death. You can’t fake it either. Same punishment — death. I wonder how the f\*\*k you could pass the guards outside. I’ll make a note to tell Victor about that. The guys have been pretty lazy nowadays.”

I don’t have any idea about this man named Victor. It seems like he’s one of their leaders.

Now that I’m staring closely at Nico’s tattoo, it indeed has the same effect as the one I saw on Zane’s wrist. It’s hypnotizing. The tattoo is very detailed and well-crafted, it makes me feel like I’m seeing the real thing — a pair of Eagle Wings.

Panic starts to build up inside me. Zane didn’t tell me anything about the tattoo. He only warned me to stay close to Liam so that everything would be alright.

What am I supposed to do?

“The Eagle Wings tattoo is the identity for all the regular members,” Tasha says matter-of-factly. “You just stepped into our base. Not only you didn’t have your identity, but you were trying to fool us with some ridiculous made-up story.”

I’m about to open my mouth again, but Tasha drags me along the hidden wall under the staircase before I can utter another word. When she halts, my eyes land on the four polaroid photos attached to the wall.

“Fortunately, we have the photos of our leaders down here so you can have a better idea about how f\*\*\*\*d up your lies were,” she says.

“Fangirls,” Nico retorts while Tasha rolls her eyes at him.

The first photo is of Zane in a black leather jacket, smoking a cigarette. He’s not looking at the camera. It’s a candid picture. He looks good, just as he

does in real life, but the monochrome photo doesn’t do any justice to his captivating blue eyes.

“That’s Zane, and I doubt you’ve ever met him. He’s in France fighting our enemies,” Tasha says. “He’s one of the Knights, which means that he has a Eagle Wings tattoo with red streaks. Kings choose Knights, and Knights choose regular members. If you were recruited by a Knight, you would have a regular Eagle Wings tattoo like what I have. Unfortunately, Zane never recruits. He couldn’t have hired you.”

My fist curls into a fist. “I never said he did.” I’m itching to tell her that I did meet this man, but she’ll never believe me anyway.

“But you did say that he brought you here. That’s impossible too,” she hums. “Now the second picture. His name is Dante. One of the Knights as well. He’s our King’s most trusted right-hand man, other than Zane, of course.”

My gaze darts on the second photo. The man is sitting on his motorcycle, not looking at the camera. Again, another candid photo. He has dark hair, but I can’t see his eyes clearly because he’s looking at his phone. Nothing can hide how attractive he is, though.

“Dante rarely talks. He doesn’t do people,” Tasha blabbers. “The only things he’s

interested in are weapons and blood. He's not even interested in women, or men, if you know what I mean. He's a killing machine. If you told us that Dante ever talked to you, we would know in an instant that you were lying."

That's enough for me to learn how scary this guy is. "I don't know him." I shrug, telling the truth.

We move to the third photo, which shows a man dressed in all black walking from a limo. Although it's just a piece of photo, the way the man carries himself sends shivers down my spine. His expression can make any people cower. His aura speaks of danger.

"That's Ethan," Tasha says with pride and excitement. "He's our King, the heir of the Carter family who creates this place. His father was the founder of Eagle Wings."

I look closer, studying Ethan's face.

"Rumors spread," Tasha says. "People might have heard his name, but they never know his face. Only the members of Eagle Wings have seen him in person, and just a few of them. Personally, I haven't even met him."

"Now you know why we wouldn't believe you," Nico adds. "There's no way that Ethan suddenly recruited a girl like you. He only hired people like Zane and Dante."

"More like his personal bodyguards." Tasha chuckles and points at me. "Are we clear?"

I want to counter her argument, but curiosity makes me pop a question instead. "How old is Ethan?"

"24," Tasha says. "Same age as Zane. Dante is younger. He's 20, the same age as

Liam, Ethan's brother. He's next."

My heart thumps. Liam. I want to know more about this person I'm going to take care of.

I haven't met him, but now I can finally see his face in the picture.

My eyes land on the last picture attached to the wall, and my breath catches in my throat. The photo shows a man standing inside a boxing ring. He's shirtless, full of sweat and panting. I can see his toned abs and how well-built he is, but that's not the only thing catching my attention.

His expression is something that one wouldn't miss. He looks angry. Like, really angry. He's seething.

"What a beautiful sight, huh?" Tasha points out, and I know from her voice that she can't help the smile on her face. "This candid picture is a masterpiece. Some girls get off imagining that."

I wish she could keep that information to herself.

"Liam is our king too, but sadly, he's blind," Nico says, making me swallow.

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I've heard about the tragedy that made Liam lose his eyesight. My heart hurts for the little boy, who obviously has grown up. He's not a little boy anymore, but I can still see the pain in his eyes through this picture.

"Liam, just like Ethan, has a Eagle Wings tattoo with silver streaks," Nico says. "That kind of tattoo belongs to the heirs of Carter, and they are Kings here."

My pulse quickens. Their explanation makes me realize even more how powerful my client is. Doubts begin to cloud my mind again, I'm not sure that I can handle this job. Liam has already looked intimidating in my eyes even though I only saw his photo.

Something is not fitting, though. "You said that regular members are hired by Knights, and Knights are hired by the Kings," I say. "So who hired you?"

It's either Zane or Dante. But based on their explanation about those two people, it's highly unlikely.

"Victor," Tasha says. "He's the other Knight. Even though he's not our King, he's no less than God here. Ethan, Zane, and Dante have been in France for years, while Victor runs things here. Most of us were recruited by him."

"You wouldn't want to mess with Victor," Nico adds. "Even Ethan and Liam look up to him. He used to be their father's right-hand man."

After a moment of silence, Nico speaks again, "This is the kind of information you would take to the grave. Now that you've heard about our leaders, there's no way that

you will go back to wherever it is you belong.”

I turn toward Tasha, who gives me a knowing smile.

“I’m sorry.” She shrugs. “I wasn’t planning to spill you something that would cost your life, but your lies were terrible. Might as well shove the truth with all the consequences, right?”

Nico steps toward me, and his voice is filled with thrill and excitement when he says, “Now, the question is...” he pauses, eyeing me with interest. “What should we do with an intruder like you?”

I brace myself, straightening up. “Just bring me to Lia—”

Before I can finish my sentence, a loud voice echoes in the air.

“Boxing ring! Now!”

Then it all happens so fast. Someone shouts from upstairs. The music abruptly stops. Whispers of excitement fill the air. Footsteps pound on the ground. People are suddenly rushing in the same direction.

I can only watch what’s happening around me in shock.

Now what?

I snap my head around, and surprisingly, Tasha and Nico are already gone to follow the crowd.

While I’m trying to make my way out through the people, a guy bumps into me. I can’t help but ask, “What’s happening?”



“Liam is fighting, and you don’t want to miss it.” He glances back at me just for a second before rushing to the basement where everyone is heading.

I can’t help but bring my legs toward the basement. I push myself through the crowd, following the people who are way too excited to see what’s about to happen.

When I finally arrive, I manage to secure a nice spot, just a few steps away from the ring — thanks to my petite figure slipping easily between these bodies of strangers.

The moment my eyes are glued to the person standing on the ring, my heart skips a beat.

There, standing tall in the middle of it, is Liam Carter. His chest heaves up and down, as though he just finished running even though the fight hasn’t even begun.

He looks more masculine than the one I saw just now in the picture. His defined muscles look even more intimidating but also beautiful like a piece of art — does that even make sense?

He’s taller than I expected, so tall — the picture doesn’t do him any justice. His hair is dark and messy, almost close to jet black. And his eyes... My God, his eyes... they’re the most captivating eyes I’ve ever seen. They are grey — misty and mysterious and hold so much more.

He’s angry — I can see it from his expression — but there’s also something else. Sadness? Grief? Pain?

He’s very expressive, I almost can feel his emotions myself. Am I the only one who notice it? I don’t know, but I can’t take my eyes off him.

When Liam turns the other way, I see the massive Eagle Wings tattooed all over his

shoulders and back. The tattoo is nothing compared to the other Eagle Wings tattoo I saw today. His is enormous, magnificent. It even looks like he has actual wings, which makes him look like an angel — not like the stereotype angel, but more like a dark angel. A dark, lethal angel.

I don't know how long I've been staring at him, until our eyes suddenly meet. He frowns in my direction, and my heart thumps. It's impossible that he notices me — he's blind. But I swear, he does, somehow.

Those beautiful grey eyes can't see me — he doesn't meet my gaze— but he looks in my direction with such curiosity, that I wonder if my intense gaze has been affecting him.

His opponent steps onto the ring, catching his attention. The crowd cheers, but I notice some people shaking their heads, as though they're underestimating what's about to happen. Some of them even have pity written on their faces like they expect one of the fighters to be beaten into a pulp.

It seems that Liam's opponent is around the same age. His body is also well built with broad shoulders, but he doesn't look as intimidating as Liam. His nostrils flare while Liam's chest heaves up. Liam takes a deep breath, a sign that he's trying to calm his temper before the fight begins.

"I don't understand why they never learn from their mistakes," a girl watching beside me is talking to her friend. "How are they supposed to complete Victor's task if they can't even defeat a blind man?"

Her friend laughs. "I don't care. We get to enjoy their practice session. We're lucky Liam is the trainer for our fighters, and it seems that he always enjoys giving them a hard time."

When another guy in the ring gives the sign to start the fight with his hand, my heart starts to race. Liam is blind — I don't know how he's going to win this fight.

The other guy attacks first, and I almost gasp as Liam dodges his punch. When he tries to land a kick, Liam blocks it, whirls to lift his opponent's body, and then throws him harshly onto the ground.

Liam's opponent groans in pain as the back of his head smacks the hard cement. I wince. I'm not used to violence, and a part of me wants to leave immediately. Yet, my feet feel like being nailed onto the ground. I'm being hypnotized by the sight before me — Liam, especially.

How could a blind person move so fast and so easily? It's almost as if he can feel his opponent's movement before the guy launches the next attack.

Watching Liam fighting is like watching a beautiful piece of art slowly being unleashed before my eyes. He moves so quickly, and gracefully, like he was the wind and that nothing could stop him.

Ironically, Liam also looks more composed when he fights. He's now less angry and a lot calmer than he was before the fight, as though he finally gains control.

I read somewhere that losing one of your senses might strengthen the other senses, and I think it happens to Liam. He lost his eyesight, but his ability to feel and hear, as well as his reflexes, are better than normal people.

Liam lands a powerful kick on his opponent's ribs, tossing him against the rope across the ring. A loud 'Ouch' echoes from the crowd. The poor guy snaps his head toward Liam. He glares at the blind martial artist, spitting blood from his mouth.

Anyone can see how much the guy wants to defeat Liam, but just as he storms again

at Liam, Liam ducks and kicks him on the leg, making him fall. Before he can even get up, Liam aims another kick. The guy freezes as Liam's foot stops mere inches from the pulse on his neck. It's a dead end for him. Liam wins.

"If this happened in your mission, you would be f\*\*\*\*\*g dead," Liam's voice echoes. He then turns his head toward the other side of the ring and hisses, "Next fighters better not call me before you win a fight against him."

The crowd roars at the victory of their king, and only then do I realize that I've been panting. This is crazy. I never thought that watching a real fight would make my heart beat so rapidly.

Liam steps down from the ring. While he's making his way through the people who automatically step aside to let him walk, I rush toward him.

"Wait." My voice is muffled as the crowd roars again to welcome another fighter stepping onto the stage to challenge the guy who just got beaten by Liam.

"Liam," I shout, but my effort is to no avail because the voices around me are too loud.

Panic begins to consume me when I see him about to disappear into the crowd. He's the only one who will understand why I'm here, and I'm supposed to assist him at all times inside this house, just as Zane told me to.

I quicken my pace, and the moment I see his back, I impulsively stretch my arm to reach him. I'm about to touch him when he suddenly whirls around. He snaps my hand off, pushing me backward and making me stumble until I fall to the ground.

I wince in pain, looking up to see him, only to find him glaring in my direction. His jaw tightens, as though his body is sending him signals that I'm a threat.

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Liam is blind, but his reflexes are so damn good, resulting from his primal need to protect himself.

People abruptly stop what they are doing to watch us. I'm too shaken to stand up. They are staring down at me and forming a circle around me and Liam. I might be the only one here who dared touch their King — that fact is enough to divert their attention from the boxing ring, as though what's happening here is much more interesting.

Liam is still seething in front of me. I have to explain.

Slowly, I stand on my feet. "Sorry that I startled you."

He frowns. His anger is still very much visible, but I can see a bit of curiosity too from his face.

I swallow. "This might not be the best way to introduce myself." I scan the crowd around us, who seem to grow more quiet the more seconds pass. Then I return my gaze to Liam. "Do you mind if we talk somewhere else?"

Privately, I beg in my heart. Being the center of attention like this is too much for me.

"Speak now. Here," Liam says in a commanding tone, leaving me no room to argue.

I have no obligation to obey that kind of command, but I have a feeling that going against him now would lead to more trouble.

I straighten my spine, taking a deep breath. “I’m Emily, your new caregiver. Your brother, Ethan, hired me to take care of you and assist you.”

Ethan must have informed him about me, so he should be expecting me, shouldn’t he?

But then, Liam looks slightly taken aback. It’s not a good sight, especially since I notice the irritated look on his expression. I hear some people trying to muffle their laughter while the others scoff.

My brows furrow in confusion as I wait for Liam’s response. He closes his eyes and shakes his head in disbelief. When those grey eyes return to me, I see the same fury that greeted me a while ago.

“Do you think that I need a f\*\*\*\*\*g caregiver?” he bites out, making my heart sink. “Do you actually think that I do?”

No one makes any sound, anticipating what he’ll say next. I don’t even know if the fight inside the boxing ring is still happening — it probably isn’t — because the silence that follows after he speaks is excruciating.

“Get lost.” With that said unbearably coldly, Liam turns around and leaves.

F\*\*\*\*\*g ridiculous.

I never thought that such a liar existed among Eagle Wings members. How the hell did Victor recruit the newcomers?

I storm into my room with my fists clenched tightly on my sides. My chest rises and falls because of my anger.

The fight inside the boxing ring earlier might have calmed me down, but that girl just made me even angrier. She even mentioned Ethan, and that story she made up was insane.

There's no way that Ethan would hire a caregiver for me.

Emily, her name. Who does she think she is?

F\*\*\*\*\*g poser.

The sound of my phone ringing on my bed catches my attention, and I instantly scoff because I know who the caller is from the ringtone.

About time, Ethan is calling me. I usually don't answer his call, but maybe I should now.

I grab my phone, feeling that I might break it because of how hard I'm gripping it. This is f\*\*\*\*\*g irritating.

The second I answer Ethan's call, his voice echoes in my ear. "Finally." He lets out a long sigh. "About damn time you pick up my call."

I listen closely to any other sound from the other side of the line and only hear faintly Dante ordering food to someone.

No gunshot sound. I feel slightly relieved because no matter how much I hate what Ethan is doing over there in France with the guys, he's not in danger right now.

I hear a light chuckle. "Wait, have you already met her?" Amusement is now laced in his voice.

I clench my jaw, feeling like I'm going to explode. If it's actually true about the girl, I'll be f\*\*\*\*\*g mad at him.

"No wonder you picked up my call." Although his tone is joking, I can feel his disappointment. "I had to drag some girl into this for you to pick up your brother's call, huh?" he throws me a rhetorical question, which annoys me even more.

"I'll hang up—"

"Wait," Ethan immediately says, and I hear slight anger in his voice. "Oh My Gosh. Liam, calm the f\*\*k down."

"You know damn well why I never want to pick up your call," I say coldly. "If you want to hear my voice that badly, you can drag your a\*s back here."

Ethan lets out a heavy sigh. "Quit being a brat. You know perfectly well why I have to be in France and why you can't be here."

I scoff. "Yeah? Because I'm f\*\*\*\*\*g blind—"

"Liam," Ethan says to me in a warning tone. "You know why you can't be in France, and we're not doing this anymore."

I almost roll my eyes.

Yeah. Because it's f\*\*\*\*\*g dangerous there, and you're not letting me there because you don't want me to die. You're leaving me here with no choice other than to accept that you could die anytime.

"Why did you even hire her?" I ask, not even trying to hide my irritation.



“Because you need her,” Ethan says.

Silence falls.

“What the hell does that mean?” I holler.

Ethan sighs. “Listen, you’re always angry,” he pauses, as though he needs a few seconds to compose himself. “I know that you don’t think you need a caregiver, but I do think that you need one.”

Before I can even interrupt him, he continues, “It’s not that I think you are incapable, but I need someone to look after you while I’m gone.” His voice holds vulnerability, and for a second, I think that my brother is going to break.

I hate this. I f\*\*\*\*\*g hate a situation in which I can’t do anything to make it better.

“I have looked through some care agencies,” Ethan says. “I just want you to have a friend. Emily is around the same age as you, a bit younger, as I remember. She has a family member who is also blind, so she’s used to taking care of someone blind who is close to her. I know for a fact that she needs money, and I think she’s not the kind of girl that will cost you trouble.”

If Ethan didn’t sound that serious right now, I would laugh out loud because of how ridiculous it was.

I just can’t imagine my brother, Ethan Carter, digging into a care agency and trying to find a girl to take care of me.

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“Seriously?” I almost shout in frustration. “A girl?”

Ethan lets out a small chuckle. “What?” I can imagine him raising an eyebrow. “Would you prefer me to hire a dude to take care of you?” His sense of humor might kill me someday. “Are you still mad that I brought Zane and Dante here with me?”

My nostrils flare. Now, he’s reminding me that it wouldn’t only be him who could get his head shot there but also my best friends. I don’t like people, but strangely, Zane and Dante have no problem hanging around me.

“Zane will be ecstatic to hear that you miss him,” he says in amusement, “but Dante...you know him. He will shoot you if you say that you miss him.” Ethan tsks. “He’s one cold-hearted man.” It’s clear from Ethan’s voice that he’s trying to muffle his laughter.

“You’re enjoying this, huh?” I say sarcastically.

“Come on.” I can imagine him grinning smugly. “Let’s look at the bright side of this. I just hired her, and you already picked up my call. Judging from my experiences, it’s one in a million chance.”

My blood is boiling. “Rather than waiting for me to pick up your call, you could just drag your a\*s back here.”

Ethan sighs. I know that I’m being childish again, but I just don’t want to hear that my brother died on a mission. He’s the only family I still have.

I distinctly hear Dante reminding him to be quick from the other side of the line, and my heart sinks, knowing that he's about to be in danger again.

"I have to go," Ethan says, already lowering his voice down because of whatever happening there. "You may have a hard time warming up to her in the beginning, but give her a chance."

I grip the phone in my hand tightly, trying to hold my anger down and knowing that I can't escape this. If there's one thing that I will regret later, it's disappointing my brother.

I sense that he will hang up, so I quickly say, "Wait. Before you go, I need you to clarify it one more time."

Ethan doesn't say anything. All I can hear is the sound of a car door slamming shut and tires screeching, but I know that he's listening.

"That girl." I take a deep breath. "She's really not one of us?"

"She wasn't a part of Eagle Wings," Ethan says in a serious tone. "I didn't choose her among our members, but she is a part of us now. It's the only thing that will make her safe."

I curse silently.

Had I known that earlier, I wouldn't have thought that she was a poser or a Eagle Wings member who stupidly tried to upgrade her status by telling some f\*\*\*\*d up lies.

"You have to accept her," Ethan says. "You can't tell me that you're fine, Liam. Physically, yes. But you're always angry." He sounds like he's speaking through

gritted teeth, leaving me no room to argue. “I’m not dicing with death here just to hear that you’re f\*\*\*\*\*g destroying yourself over there. I’m not f\*\*\*\*\*g coming back from France anytime soon, no matter what you do to make me. I hired Emily, so I will contact her if I need to. You don’t want to pick up my call, anyway. I had to figure out a way to be assured that my brother wasn’t going insane.” With that said in full authority, Ethan ends the call.

I roar at the ceiling, throwing my phone somewhere across the room with such fury that my body is shaking all over. My breathing is hard and fast. My chest is heaving up and down.

I can’t believe what Ethan has decided for me. I can’t believe that I have to accept that girl, that I need to be friends with her. This is f\*\*\*\*\*g ridiculous.

He said that he wanted to make sure that I wasn’t going insane, but he just made it worse.

I lower myself to sit on my bed, my arms hanging on my thighs. While I’m still trying to breathe properly, my thoughts wander to the girl.

I remember the last thing I said to her.

“Get lost.”

I clench my shaking fist, knowing that saying those words in front of our members would only cause her one thing.

Death.

I can’t breathe. I’m going to die.

Air is being sucked out of my lungs. My face is being pushed forcefully into the water. The grip on the back of my head is so painful, it makes me nauseous.

I choke, my arms flailing wildly and helplessly. I'm struggling to breathe for dear life.

Just when I think that I can't make it, the hand pulls my hair so roughly, my scalp is burning. I breathe the oxygen again, opening my eyes, which only hold fear.

I make out the shape of the water fountain before me. A strangled sob escapes from my mouth while two other Eagle Wings members secure my arms with their grip so that I won't be able to escape.

"You're trying to kill yourself, huh?" the cold voice echoes again in my ears.

My vision is already blurred because I'm slowly losing consciousness. Yet, I'm still trying to stand on my feet because I don't want to die.

I'd never been so close to death as I am right now.

They've been trying to drown me in the fountain located in the middle of the backyard of this mansion.

I squint. The guy who claimed himself as one of the Knights' right-hand man laughs at me. Everyone else laughs too, watching me. They're standing near the fountain and forming a circle to get a better look at me — the joke.

I hear a girl scoff. "Told you. No one would believe your story."

I turn my head, only to find the girl named Tasha crossing her arms over her chest and watching me with pity.

“Do you know her, Lizzy?” someone asks out loud, and now I know that her real name is not Tasha.

Her boyfriend interrupts, “Not at all. We figured out that she lied, but she was stubborn and didn’t listen to our warning.” He looks at me in disgust.

“Is that true, Jude?” another person asks, and now I also know that the boyfriend’s real name is not Nico.

They weren’t stupid enough to expose their real names if I ever got out of this place after spilling to me about their leaders.

But now that it’s not possible for me to run away, there’s nothing to lose for them.

Tears spill from my eyes as I remember my family. What have I gotten myself into? Will I never see them again? Will I really die here soon?

Liam’s words are like a stab to me. It doesn’t just kill me inside, but it can actually kill me.

“Get lost.”

Such words uttered by the King of Eagle Wings are enough to make the members take it as a death sentence for me.

“You said your name was Emily, didn’t you?” the guy who has been ordering around asks me again, and nothing can describe how much I hate him.

He said his name was Kelvin and that he was Victor’s most trusted person.

I remember Lizzy telling me that Victor is one of the Knights, and apparently, Kelvin

here has been assigned by Victor to run the place while Victor himself is out for a search mission.

“So, Emily, you might be stupid for telling people that you’re Liam’s caregiver, but your face is surely better than your brain,” Kelvin says. “You’re quite pretty.”

My body shudders as he eyes me from head to toe like a hunter looking at his prey.

“Not pretty enough to fool any man,” a girl shouts in the background.

Kelvin steps forward to me while I’m struggling to break free from the two people holding me. My clothes — my cardigan and jeans — are soaked because of all the splashing that happened while I was trying to get my face away from the water.

I’m already shuddering, but the way Kelvin stares down at me makes me shiver even more.

“Our king might want you dead,” he says with the cockiest smirk. “But I’m sure that he won’t mind if we use you for a while before that.”

My heart jumps like a wild stag due to the fear consuming me.

“No,” I stutter, my mind already figuring out what he has in mind. “Please, let me go.”

Excitement becomes more obvious in his expression. “Not that easy, filthy little liar.”

He tips my chin up with his finger. My lips tremble as another tear drops from my eye.

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“I don’t know,” he whispers in a voice that makes me want to disappear from this world. “I’m thinking about turning you into a slave. What say you?”

That would be the worst way to live. My world crumbles.

“Say that again,” a cold, threatening voice echoes through the night, and everyone suddenly turns dead silent.

Chills run down my spine as my gaze lands on the person I’m supposed to take care of.

Liam Carter.

The younger king of Eagle Wings enters the site. Everyone is on alert.

“Liam,” Kelvin’s eyes widen as he watches Liam walking toward him.

Liam is blind, but he has excellent orientation of where he’s heading, just by using his hearing and his other senses.

“I said...” Liam clenches his jaw. “Say that again,” he repeats in a menacing tone.

“Well,” Kelvin begins nonchalantly, but I can hear the slight shake in his voice, a sign that he’s intimidated but trying to hide it. “Since you practically announced that you wanted her gone, we were discussing how to get rid of her.”

I can feel the air getting tense, like everyone is holding their breath. The silence that



follows after is so gripping, you would even hear it if a pin dropped.

“We figured out that it would be better if we could make her our slave.” As if he can sense that Liam is about to counter that, Kelvin quickly adds, “I mean, she could be useful. You don’t even have to feel her presence around. We will make sure that she won’t bother you.”

I never felt this low.

I feel so humiliated and degraded. Do they even see me as a person?

Liam opens his mouth and what comes out surprises us all, “And what made you think that you shouldn’t offer her to me first?” he asks in a cold voice.

Kelvin stares at him with a lost expression. “But you didn’t want her anywhere near you.”

Liam steps forward again, his aura giving off unmistakable authority. “Well, apparently I wouldn’t mind if she offered herself as my slave.”

“Come on, man. You told her to get lost,” a guy daringly shouts out loud, causing gasps and frantic whispers to fill the air.

Whoever just shouted doesn’t value his life because their king can punish him in an instant. Luckily, he’s hiding in the crowd.

Liam scoffs, facing the crowd. “Right. I wasn’t being completely fair to you. If you want her that much, we shall decide it in a fight. I’m your leader, and I’m now giving you equal opportunity.”

The crowd goes even louder, wondering what that means.

“Whoever wins the fight will get her,” Liam says.

My heart almost stops. It will be better if they bury me alive. They don’t even think of me as a human being. They’re stomping my dignity and feelings like I’m a piece of trash.

Does this always happen every time they find an intruder inside Eagle Wings?

Everyone goes silent after that challenge from Liam. No one moves. Kelvin doesn’t move either even though I can see him balling his fist.

“Anyone?” Liam asks.

Still, nobody dares fight him. Now, I see even more that everyone fears Liam when it comes to one-on-one fights with him. The blind man is their martial arts trainer, and until now, I don’t think that anyone here has ever beaten him.

“Well, it’s clear now,” Liam says. He turns his back to us to walk away. “Follow me, Emily.”

I freeze on the spot. I don’t know what to do. I might have escaped a devil, but I might just be walking right to another one.

I’m supposed to take care of Liam, but after what happened tonight, I don’t think that I can trust him anymore.

“Now,” he barks, making me jump in fear.

My mind is wondering if he’s going to hurt me. But maybe it’s better than staying here with these animals. Maybe I’ll still have a chance to escape Liam since he’s blind.

Whispers and murmurs are still echoing around me when I finally take a step. My legs are shaking, and I'm afraid that I'm going to collapse.

Yet, I'm trying my best to walk. I follow Liam back into the mansion that I will never be able to call home.

I feel her behind me when I step into my room.

"Close the door," I command, and she does as I say.

What happened in the backyard angers me, but I must admit that it was my fault.

I still haven't turned around. I expect her to talk first.

"What the hell is this?" her voice holds pain and anger, the tremor in it letting me know that she's trying to hide her fear too.

I turn around, which makes her immediately step back. It's bothering me that such a small movement from me causes her to draw back instantly. It's obvious that she sees me as a threat.

"What is happening?" she demands. Her choked sob makes me imagine the tears running down her face.

I can't blame her for crying. I heard the sound of water splashing when I found her in the backyard. They must have tried to drown her. Not to kill her, but to build the fear inside her.

"Your brother hired me as your caregiver," she says, "but then you told me to get lost. Why didn't you tell your brother about that, huh? And now you're expecting me to be your slave?" The frustration is evident in her voice.

I don't say anything yet. I know that she still has a lot to throw at me.

"This place is f\*\*\*\*d up." Her choice of words makes me off guard because it's so different from the way she spoke to me for the first time in the basement.

That time, she sounded tentative, innocent. Right now, she sounds like a mess, like she's falling apart.

Her ragged breathing lets me know that she is about to break down.

"This place—" Her voice is shaking uncontrollably. "What the hell is this place? I don't want to be here. I don't belong here. Please, just let me go."

If she thinks that it will be that easy to just step out of this damn place, she's mistaken.

"Unfortunately," I say, and I do feel that word. I want her to leave this place too. "It's not possible anymore."

I step forward, and she retreats again. Her movement leads her to my bed. I follow her, causing her to be cornered against my bed.

"Once you step into this place, you can't get out of it," I say. "Either you're a part of us or you're dead. The only way for Eagle Wings members to leave this house is if they're on a mission."

"I don't want to be a part of it," she cries. "You guys are crazy. You're all evil."

Again, I can't blame her either for feeling that way because of what they did to her in the fountain. But silently, I'm angry at my brother for choosing a girl like her to be here. She doesn't belong in our world. She's not suited to be with us. She's pure.

“What do you guys do for a living? Killing people?” she asks, and I don’t even know whether she asks that out of genuine curiosity or sarcastically. She sounds both.

I tower over her. “We might.”

I can hear her faint gasp, and I can feel her trying to crawl away from me on the bed.

“What are you doing?” she stutters.

My blood starts to boil again. I don’t know what’s happening to me, but feeling her shaking due to her fear of me makes me angry.

I never thought that feeling someone shaking could annoy me this much. I felt people’s fear of me when they fought me, but it never bothered me like this.

I draw my face closer to her, causing her to yelp. “Are you f\*\*\*\*\*g crazy?” I hiss. “I’m not going to f\*\*\*\*\*g touch you.”

My words stop her movement, but then she cries softly. “I don’t want to be anybody’s slave. I’m not yours. I’m not a tool for you to use as you please, whether it be non-sexually or s\*x.”

“Shut the f\*\*k up,” I bite out. “Let me tell you something.”

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*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:15 am*

She's silent, and I can hear her swallow.

"I have no interest in you," I say. "You just happened to be stuck here, and there's no way out. I'm actually doing you a favor here. I doubt that there will be a place for you to sleep soundly other than this room, my room, after what happened tonight."

I didn't mean to make her remember what happened back there near the fountain, but she had to hear it.

There's no other place safer in this house for her than my bedroom.

Back there in the yard, I could hear their whispers when they thought about ways of using her. I could hear Kelvin's excitement and sick thought in his voice when he talked to her.

I'm blind, not f\*\*\*\*\*g stupid.

No matter how much I don't want to admit it, the safest place for her here is where she is with me.

"So, we're going to do this," I say firmly. "You are here with me because you have no other choices. I am allowing it because my brother is being a pain in the a\*s. You're going to stay in this room, but you will do your best to make it feel like you don't even exist."

Silence falls.

She might be at a loss for words, but my idea is the only way for her to survive.

“This place is not for you, Emily,” I speak in a low voice. “Eagle Wings is not where you belong. It’s not your comfortable home where you can sleep soundly holding your unicorn. It’s the place where you will hear gunshots and witness bloodshot when it’s necessary.”

She lets out an audible gasp. I can even hear the slap of her palm covering her mouth, as though she can’t believe what I just said.

“I’m f\*\*\*\*\*g blind, and I’m not your f\*\*\*\*\*g hero,” I make my point clearly. “So, it’s up to you. You might want to try to escape and risk getting yourself killed. You might want to roam around the house where they will steal a chance to harass you, or you might want to stay here and be good, pretending like you don’t even exist.”

She doesn’t say a word for a while, but then she whispers brokenly, “Why do you have to be so mean?”

I scoff. “You’re welcome.” I can’t believe she forgot that I just saved her.

I walk away from my bed and head to the bathroom, leaving her to absorb everything that just happened to her.

It’s only day one with Emily, and she has already given me a f\*\*\*\*\*g headache.

I curl myself on the bed, leaning against the headboard as I hear the water running inside the bathroom. Liam is taking a shower, and I’m here like a helpless girl.

What should I do?

While I’m hugging my knees, another lone tear falls to my cheek. I miss my family

so much. I wonder what Kate and Tyler are doing right now.

My phone has been taken from me, and I can't even call them. Even though I can't tell them what happened to me, I just want to hear their voices.

While I'm pondering in my thoughts, Liam walks out of the bathroom with only a towel wrapped around his torso. The sight makes me let out a gasp, which causes Liam to snap his head toward me with a scowl on his face.

He glares in my direction, his wet hair hanging loosely on his forehead. I'm restless because he looks angry, again.

"Did I not tell you to make it like you didn't even exist?" he reminds me in irritation.

"You're walking half naked," I counter.

He rolls his eyes.

"It's not my fault that you startled me," I say.

"It's not like I'm going to do something to you—" he stops mid-sentence and growls. "Fine."

It seems that he remembers what almost happened to me tonight. Despite still fuming, he snatches his jogger from the wardrobe and walks back into the bathroom. When he comes back, he's already wearing his pants.

I'm grateful that he didn't get naked and change clothes in front of me because that might make me feel uncomfortable.

I watch as he searches for something inside his wardrobe again, looking like he's



trying to find a T-shirt to wear. His back is facing me, so I can see his massive Eagle Wings tattoo again. It indeed looks like actual wings, black with silver streaks, his identity as the king.

I find myself mesmerized by his tattoo again. It's beautiful.

"Stop staring," he snaps, making me taken aback. "I can't see it, but I can feel it."

I sigh, tearing my gaze away from him. I feel his movement toward the bed, and the next thing I know is that he dips into the bed, lying next to me, already wearing a black t-shirt.

He rolls on his side, facing the opposite direction. "Too bad that there's only one bed in this room, and that there's no f\*\*\*\*\*g couch. Be grateful that I don't kick you out of my bed."

Again, his words sting.

Now that I think about it, he's actually doing something nice, but his words ruin it.

I travel my gaze around his neat bedroom. There's a recliner sofa near the bookshelves and a chair behind the desk, but none of them is suitable for someone to sleep on.

While my eyes focus on the bookshelves, I find many books lining inside it. I wonder if he reads braille books.

"Do you read—"

"Just let me f\*\*\*\*\*g sleep," he interrupts before I can finish my question.

I stare down at myself, at the mess that I am. My clothes are damp because of what happened at the fountain, ruining the bedsheet where I'm sitting. But I don't care. I have no energy to move.

I feel drained, mentally and physically. My body no longer feels cold. Maybe it has been numb for a while.

But then, I can get sick if I stay like this, so after mustering all the energy left in me, I get off the bed and walk toward the bathroom to wash myself.

I could barely get enough f\*\*\*\*\*g sleep last night.

While I was lying in my bed, I couldn't stop thinking about Emily. I knew for sure that her clothes were soaked because of the incident at the fountain, and when she finally decided to take a shower, I did let out a sigh of relief.

She didn't have her suitcase with her yesterday, so I knew that she didn't have any clothes to change into. I purposely left the bathrobe hanging behind the bathroom door, and I guess she took that.

I just couldn't imagine her sleeping beside me without any clothes on. She didn't seem like a girl who would be comfortable doing that despite the fact that I was blind.

The night was getting worse when she started crying. She might think that I didn't notice it, but I could hear her sniffing, and it was f\*\*\*\*\*g annoying. I knew that she had just left her family and that she was now stuck in this place that felt like hell to her, but goddammit I hate it when girls or women cry.

Not that I cared.

Or was it annoying because I f\*\*\*\*\*g cared?

Now as the morning comes, I splash the water from the sink onto my face. My head is pounding. I brush my teeth, but I still can't stop thinking about the girl who is now sleeping in my bed.

My brain is trying to figure out what I will do today with her being around. Her existence is already annoying me this much, I wonder how I will survive the following weeks — or worse, months. Ethan better be f\*\*\*\*\*g coming back here as soon as possible so that we can talk. I have to persuade him to send Emily away, but with the way we always argue, we will only end up fighting.

Maybe he's right. I can't f\*\*\*\*\*g control my anger. But then again, he's not the one with disability.

I step out of my bathroom, ready to have my morning jog. The sooner I can escape Emily, the better.

Emily's voice surprises me when I'm about to open the door of my bedroom.

"Where are you going?" she asks.

I turn around, hoping that she will notice the irritation written on my face.

"Morning jog," I say.

I'm about to turn around when she interrupts, "Wait. Please, don't leave me just yet." Her voice holds so much vulnerability, and I can't help but feel bad. She's still trying to figure out how to adjust to this new situation.

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I give her my attention again, waiting for her to say more.

“How will I have my meal?” she asks, and I figure out that she’s hungry.

She didn’t ask about the place where she could have breakfast in this house, which means that she’s still afraid of getting out of this room.

“You’ll get it,” I say.

I’d already thought about it last night.

“Someone will bring it for you.”

She’s silent, but I can feel her uneasiness.

“Don’t worry,” I say. “It won’t be the guys from last night. You’ll get to know her soon.”

She sighs in relief, knowing that it will be a girl who will come to this room.

“What about you?” she asks with a hint of curiosity in her voice. She must have seen the confusion in my face, because the next thing she says is, “I mean, I know that you can have breakfast anywhere in this house, but I just want to know your usual routines. Do you eat in the kitchen or dining room? Or do you prefer to have your meal inside your room? What about your schedules? Do you have a martial arts practice during the day? When do you train the fighters? Do you go out—”

“I thought I made it clear that I didn’t need a goddamn caregiver,” I snap, not wanting to hear the rest of her questions.

She doesn’t respond to my harsh statement right away, but after seconds pass, she says fiercely, “Then what do you expect me to do?”

I can hear the frustration in her voice.

“Do you really want me to go crazy, being imprisoned in this room like a lost wounded animal? Why don’t you just tell everyone in here that I am indeed your caregiver hired by your brother? If you had done so, I wouldn’t have been picked by them and they wouldn’t see me as a slave that they could just use and trash once you’re bored with me.” Her sob suddenly breaks, letting me know how much that thought has been haunting her.

I can hear her fear all over again in her voice, and my fist instantly shakes with rage again. I hate how she is affecting me this much. I don’t know how to respond to her demand yet, so being the cruel man that I am, I turn my back to her.

“Liam.” Emily grabs my arm.

Her touch almost makes me explode. I don’t like being touched, literally, by anyone. One who knows me better will be smart enough to maintain distance from me.

But Emily’s touch is even worse. She’s shaking, begging for help. To me, she feels fragile as a glass. She makes me want to pull her into me, but at the same time, I want to push her away because I’m afraid that she will shatter.

What the f\*\*k is wrong with me? This girl is making me crazy.

While I’m trying my best to hold my anger, I turn my head again. I can’t see her

expression when she looks at my face, but whatever it is that she sees, it gives her hope because she says, “Please. I really need your help.”

“Make it quick.” I can only utter those harsh words.

I know that once again, I made her heart sink, contrary to my intention of helping her.

“My suitcase,” she stutters, “the guard outside didn’t give it back to me after inspecting it. I really need it. My clothes are in there. My stuff—”

Those words are enough for me, so without waiting for her to finish her sentence, I step out of my room and shut the door behind me, leaving her alone.

I hear the door being knocked, and once I open it, I am greeted with a girl.

She looks around the same age as me. She has shoulder-length hair — brown colored — and she has pretty green eyes.

She smiles at me, and I can already feel her kindness.

When I focus on the tray of food she’s holding, I quickly open the door wider to let her in. I watch as she places the tray on Liam’s desk.

“Thank you so much.” I approach her, grateful that she did come to bring me food.

I’m expecting her to say something back, but then she points at the door, as though she’s trying to tell me that she still has something else for me. A moment later, she drags my suitcase into the room, and huge relief washes over me, I feel like I can burst into tears.

I was worried that I had lost my belongings.

“Thank you. You don’t know how much this means to me.” I want to hug her, and since she doesn’t show any reluctance, I wrap my arms around her.

When I pull away, I see the same happiness skating on her face. This girl seems like a genuine person. I feel like I can be her friend.

“Did Liam tell you about this?” I ask.

The answer is clear, but I just want to hear it from her. She only nods, and I assume that she’s not a talkative person.

“I’m Emily, by the way.” I stretch my arm for a handshake, which she accepts. “And you are?” I raise my eyebrows.

To my surprise, instead of answering my question, she pulls out a pile of small note papers and a pen from her pants pocket. My curiosity kicks in as she starts writing something. When she shows me what it is, my heart sinks.

I’m Tera. Nice to meet you, Emily!

I’m a mute, by the way. I can’t talk. I hope you don’t mind talking to me like this.

I shake my head and smile. “Of course. I’m so happy to meet you, Tera. Thank you for helping me out.”

To answer your question, yes, Liam did tell me to do these things for you.

Honestly, it’s rare to see him do something like this.

“Is he a nice person?” I ask. “Please be honest.”

Tera shakes her head in amusement.

Sometimes he acts like a pain in the a\*s, but he's actually a good person. Don't worry.

I let out a sigh of relief. Talking to Tera is already making me much calmer. I need someone like her in a place like this.

"My job is to take care of him," I say. "But he doesn't let me."

A frown touches her lips.

Why?

"I don't know." I shrug. "I'm pretty sure that he found me annoying."

This time, Tera shakes her head in disagreement.

Don't let that get into your head. Please, don't give up. I think he needs someone like you. Just let me know if I can help you with anything.

There's so much more I want to hear from her about her sentence, but I decide to focus on one point first.

"I really appreciate your help," I say. "Can you tell me more about him and this place? He's blind. How does he usually get help around here?"

With enthusiasm, Tera writes me, and her answers are long.

Liam has been living here since he was born. He lost his eyesight when he was only 9 years old in a car crash that killed his parents and his sister. Since then, he kind of



changed into someone who was always angry. Many people saw him, and still see him, as a lost cause because none of them knows him better. He's traumatized, and not many people can understand that. Please, don't give up on him. Behind his harsh exterior is a kind and caring person.

As for his daily needs, he usually takes his meals in the kitchen unless he's not in the mood and wants to bring the food to his bedroom. All Eagle Wings members do their laundry by themselves, but it doesn't apply to Liam. My father does that for him.

I ponder in thought. Tera's father might not have to do that anymore because it's now my job.

Curiosity builds up inside me. "I'm sorry for asking this, but what does your father do? And what about you? In which part of the house do you two live in?"

It's very tempting for me to sleep in her place. It sounds better than here, on the same bed with Liam. But I don't want to barge into her privacy — I just met her.

My father is a tattoo artist. He does the tattoo for Eagle Wings leaders and members. Sometimes, I help him with that.

We live in the basement but not the one where the boxing ring is. It's another basement.

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I remember Lizzy telling me about the Eagle Wings tattoo that can only be crafted by two artists. Apparently, they're Tera's father and herself. They must be so talented that no other artists can copy what they do. It's because of them that Eagle Wings can maintain their tattoo exclusivity. Nobody can have a Eagle Wings identity unless it's made by them.

Tera and her father must be considered very important for Eagle Wings. It's no wonder that she seems close to Liam and that Liam trusts her.

I can't help but give her another hug. "Thank you for coming here. I hope we can be good friends."

She smiles sweetly, returning my hug. Then she writes again on another note.

Of course ?

Anyway, I have to go help my father again now. Before I go, there's something else I want to give you.

I frown, wondering what it is. Tera reaches for something from the other pocket of her pants. My eyes widen as she hands me a phone. It's not mine, but it looks brand new.

I read a note from her.

This is from Ethan. He'll call you.

I'm sorry that your phone was taken. Eagle Wings members are not supposed to have personal phones other than the ones given by their leaders, and not everyone in here can have them.

I take the phone from her. "Thank you."

I'm glad that I can finally talk to Ethan.

I never expected that I would be shoved into this kind of dangerous environment when I first accepted this job.

Hopefully, Ethan can give me an explanation.

My heart leaps with delight as I think that I can talk to Kate and Tyler again. I remember Tyler's number, so even though I don't have my phone with me anymore, I can still call them by using this phone from Ethan.

Tera writes to me again.

I'll see you again.

I nod as she gives me another reassuring smile. She excuses herself, and I watch as she steps out of the room and closes the door.

I plop myself on the bed, going through my new phone with excitement. I know that everything I do with this phone — all my calls and all my messages — may be tracked by Eagle Wings, but I don't care.

I proceed with setting up the phone first, including putting my fingerprint and passcode for security. I know that they can do anything, but this is just for precaution in case the horrible guys out there suddenly want to take it again. The thought of

them harassing me still makes me think twice before going out of this room. My heart sinks as I realize all over again that I am no more than a prisoner here.

Just as I'm about to dial Tyler's number, the phone rings. I stare blankly at the unknown number showing on the screen, wondering if it's Ethan.

I swallow, answering the call. "Hello?"

"Emily," a man's voice echoes in my ear.

It's Ethan.

I have so many questions in my head that I don't even know what I should say to him. Before I can make up my mind, Ethan is already speaking again.

"I may not have enough time because I'm in a hurry, but I have to talk to you about Liam." There are sounds of people speaking in the background, distinctly, so I'm guessing that he's in a public space but currently excusing himself to make this call. "How is he?" he asks, and I can hear concern in his voice. "How is my brother?"

I want to say that Liam is being a pain in the a\*s, but then, I decide to choose the words wisely. I'm talking to the first heir, the King of Eagle Wings.

"To be honest," I begin. "He's a difficult person. Did you even tell him that I was going to be his caregiver? Because it didn't seem like he agreed to it."

Ethan sighs and then curses. "I had no other choices. He's pulling away from me, and I just want to know that he's okay. He needs someone to take care of him, no matter how hard it is for him to admit that."

I remember very clearly that Liam hated to feel that he was incapable. That was why

he told me to get lost.

“I know that you paid me in full amount, but I don’t think that I can—”

“Listen to me,” he cuts me off. “I don’t care about the money. You don’t even have to return it should anything happen before the contract ends.”

Ethan sounds pissed, and it makes me think twice before crossing him again.

“My brother has been in agony since he lost his eyesight,” Ethan says, “and the environment around him — that f\*\*\*\*\*g house — is not good enough for him to heal. There are only a few people I can trust there, and they don’t have the capacity to give him the help that I want.”

I listen intently, sensing that what he’s about to say is going to be important.

“Liam is constantly angry with everything, but mostly with what happened to him. I don’t think that he’ll ever accept the fact that he’s blind,” Ethan says heartbreakingly, I can almost feel the pain myself. “He’s angry that he can’t be normal. He thinks that he’s incapable, which is far from the truth. I always knew that he had a protective nature since he was a kid, so I taught him martial arts. It helped him a lot. He learned so hard. I taught him, and I taught him, until he became even better than I was.”

Ethan sounds like he’s speaking through gritted teeth, like it hurts him to the core that his brother is suffering.

“Right now, he can fight better than me, and I can’t be more proud of that. But it’s not enough.”

I swallow, waiting for him to say more.

“He doesn’t let go of the grudge inside him, and he always thinks less of himself. Waiting for him to fall apart is like a ticking time bomb. I don’t want to lose my brother,” he emphasizes every word of the last sentence.

I hear the sound of a gunshot from the other side of the line, and my heart almost stops. Shouts are ringing, and someone tells Ethan to leave the place.

“Shit,” Ethan curses in a low voice.

It sounds like chaos over there. People are screaming. Someone is crying. More gunshot sounds are heard.

“I have to go,” Ethan says. “Please stay with Liam. Help him see that he’s not the person he thinks he is. You have a family who went through a similar experience, and you f\*\*\*\*\*g know how I feel. Just bring his light back. Bring my brother back.” Another curse, and just like, that the call abruptly ends.

My heart is racing, and I realize that I’ve been panting. I don’t know what is happening with Ethan right now, but I hope that he makes it out alive. He’s the only one who can help me out of this place.

While I’m trying to compose myself, I ball my fist tightly. I can’t back down now. I have a family that I have to return to, so I’m going to nail this job whatever happens. Because Ethan Carter doesn’t want me to give up on his brother.

\* \*\*\*\*

Thankfully, the call with Kate and Tyler went smoothly. I just wanted to let them know that I was doing okay and to make sure that they were doing all right without me. In their mind, I was studying at Florida Tech University, and luckily, I could answer their questions about my living apartment, my studies, and my roommate

without having to make it suspicious.

I transferred a portion of the money that I got from Ethan to them. I lied to them, telling them that it was excess money from the loan added to my salary from my previous part-time job. What they didn't know yet was that I was going to transfer more money.

Today, it's my third day inside this Eagle Wings mansion. As soon as I finish changing my clothes in the bathroom after taking my morning shower, I see Liam sitting on the recliner sofa beside the bookshelf.

Judging from the sight of him lying there with his eyes closed and earphones plugged in his ears, it seems that he fell asleep again while he was listening to music.

I sigh. I want to ask him about breakfast, but he looks so peaceful sleeping there that I don't dare wake him up.

Yesterday, Tera brought me meals three times a day. But today, I'm not sure if it's going to be the same.

I take my new phone from the nightstand to check if Ethan has replied to the text I sent him last night.

I need your help. I don't feel safe in this mansion because I'm not a member of Eagle Wings. They think I'm an intruder because I don't have any Eagle Wings tattoo. Can you clear that up?

My shoulders sag in disappointment because there's no reply yet. He hasn't even read it.

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My mind is telling me that something bad has indeed happened to him during his mission, but worrying will do nothing to help me. I just hope that he will respond as soon as possible so that my worry will be eased.

I glance at Liam again, thinking that I shouldn't be depending on other people that much. My job here is to take care of Liam, and I can't do that if I'm being a crybaby myself. Besides, if I go downstairs to get food for Liam, they can't possibly harm me.

With that in mind, I head to the door, preparing to get food for myself and Liam. We can just have our meals inside his room.

When my hand touches the door handle, I glance back one last time at Liam and find him still sleeping soundly on the sofa. I step out of the room and close the door behind me softly.

I hope that the hallway will be deserted, but that would be too good to be true.

While I'm trying to find my way to the kitchen, I pass some guys and girls who automatically snap their heads toward me as soon as I walk by. Their gazes make the hair on the back of my neck stand. The atmosphere here hasn't changed at all. It's still as horrible as the night they were trying to drown me.

The air around me feels like it's made of sin. No kindness. No empathy. Just evil.

I can hear their whispers.

"Look. That's Liam's slave."



“Do you think that he touched her? I don’t think he ever touched a girl.”

I can feel the girls’ jealousy all over the air. While I’m trying to ignore all their acquisitions about me, one comment makes my pulse quicken.

“Look. It’s the girl without the tattoo.”

Fear builds up inside me again. I want to run for my life. I don’t belong here. They’re supposed to kill me. I don’t know if Liam claiming me as his slave would save me anymore.

It’s not that difficult to find the kitchen because, at this hour, that’s where everyone practically comes and goes.

Many kinds of food are already prepared on the giant kitchen island, where everyone can just grab a plate. The sooner I can get out of the kitchen, the better. I take a tray and start to prepare the food for Liam and myself.

A whistle catches me off guard. I snap my head toward the source of the voice, and to my horror, Kelvin is staring at me.

Kelvin crosses his arms over his chest. “Look who we have here. Liam’s slave, who is apparently a girl without the tattoo.”

Everyone is paying much more attention to me now than before.

I attempt to ignore him and just pour mushroom soup into a bowl. My hand shakes a little as I reach for the toasts. I beg in my heart that he will simply leave, but sadly, he walks towards me instead.

I’m ready to get the beverages when I run into someone’s chest. I’m about to drop the

tray. When I glance up, I see Kelvin smiling down at me with a smug smile. Two men stand on either side of him.

“Well, then.” He raises an eyebrow in a teasing way. “Was he nicer to you than we were?”

I get chills when I think about what this man has done to me. They laugh.

His pal adds, “Come on.” “You need to let us know if he gets bored with you so we can start teaching you a lot of great things without bothering him.”

“Unless our king wants to share,” the other guy says with a sneer. “It’s risky,” he says. “But it might be worth a shot.”

“Be careful, guys,” someone says, and as I look over, I notice a tanned guy with curly hair giving the three of them a warning look. “From what I remember, Liam doesn’t like to share. Do you remember how he dared us to fight him over Emily? I would think a million times before going against him.”

I feel better in my chest. At last, someone is trying to make them think.

Kelvin’s face stiffens as he thinks about it further.

The guy who just stood up for me takes my arm and pulls me away before Kelvin can make a move towards me. “Come on, Emily. I’ll help you get the drinks.”

I look back to Kelvin and his buddies. He says something quietly to himself before the three of them leave the kitchen. I let out a sigh of relief.

“Thanks,” I say to the individual who just helped me.

He helps me place two bottles of water on the tray I'm holding. "You're welcome." He grins, and I'm glad to see that he's being nice to me. "I'm Arthur, by the way."

He takes me back into the corridor, and I follow him. I believed he would go upstairs with me, but then he gently pulls me towards a spot under the stairs, which surprises me. He pushes me against the wall, but he stays far enough away from me that I know he's not going to damage me.

"You need to be careful, Emily," he warns. "What are you doing here, girl?"

I huff. "Well, surprise. I am Liam's carer. He just doesn't want to admit it."

Arthur seems unhappy. "That's the truth?" His lips twitches in anger. "What a f\*\*\*\*\*g jerk."

"Do you really think everyone is going to believe me?" I ask.

Arthur looks down, as if he's really thinking. He looks back at me and says, "I don't know." His voice shows that he is disappointed. "I'm sorry, but I don't think they will, unless you have a tattoo."

"Is it possible for me to work as a carer for Eagle Wings leader without being a part of it?" I ask. "I don't even want to be a member," I said.

Arthur says, "Not a chance," and he means it. "The rules are very clear here. No one who isn't a member can come onto the property. There's no room for negotiation."

I swallow.

Arthur warns, "Don't go near Kelvin." "He's bad for you. He's dangerous."

I chuckle without any humour. “I know that very well. Do you know him well?”

Arthur shakes his head. “Not really, but I know enough about him to know what kind of person he is. My brother is the one who is close to him. I’m sorry he made fun of you just now.”

Arthur’s fury is obvious, and it’s nice that he cares for me when most others here don’t.

“If no one here will believe my story unless I have a tattoo, why do you believe me?” I ask. When he looks at me with a confused expression, I immediately add, “Not that I have a problem with that. I just want to know why because it means so much to me.”

Arthur’s grin is back. “Because I know what it felt like.”

I look at him with squinting eyes.

“Because I was once like you, Emily,” he continues. “I saw you when you first walked in. You looked so lost, like you didn’t want to be here. You’re not an intruder, and I knew it the moment I saw you.”

What he said almost makes me cry. He’s the only one here who trusts me so freely.

Liam couldn’t do that either.

“I was like that too,” he admits. “I came here because I was worried about my brother. He sent a lot of money, but my family never found out what he did. I did a lot of research and finally found out about Eagle Wings. I was worried that he was doing something dangerous, and it turned out that my fear was right. Now I’m stuck here too because I was looking for him.”

I feel bad for him since his tale is so awful.

“I’m so sorry,” I say in a whisper. “I’m sorry this happened to you.”

He shakes his head once again. “I’m fine now. I can make it. I’m worried about you, though. You shouldn’t be here. This place will ruin you. Liam is blind, but he’s a dangerous man. Did he touch you?”

There’s a sparkle in his eyes that makes me believe he could be possessive, but I don’t want to think about it too much.

“No, he didn’t,” I say.

Arthur grins. “Good. Just let me know if you need anything.” He abruptly kisses my cheek, which surprises me.

He just offers me a mischievous smile as I glance up at him.

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*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:15 am*

“Where the hell have you been?” Liam yells at me as soon as I walk back into his room.

I put the plate of food on the nightstand and shut the door behind me with my foot.

Liam is already standing up with his arms crossed over his chest and glaring at me.

His anger makes me dizzy, so I respond in the same annoyed way. “As far as I remember, you were sleeping on that chair, so forgive me if I didn’t want to wake you up,” I add in a mocking tone. “I remember someone telling me to act like I’m not even in this room.”

His lips come together in a narrow line. “I was going to ask you to come down for breakfast with me.”

My mouth is open. I feel a little guilty.

I didn’t think he would think about it.

“Well, you don’t have to do that anymore.” I say this in a quiet voice. “I brought breakfast here.”

He sniffs, and I don’t know why, but it’s funny to see.

“Yeah. It smells good,” he mumbles. “Is it—”

I conclude for him, “Mushroom soup,” figuring that the meal he’s asking for is the

one that smells so good.

I walk up to him with the bowl of mushroom soup in my hands. I put it on his desk, and he sits down right away.

I laugh a little when I hear, “Someone’s hungry.” “Is it your favourite food?”

I think it is because Liam doesn’t even try to deny it.

He gently feeds himself with the spoon, but then he abruptly splatters it, which makes me yell in astonishment.

“Be careful. It’s still hot—”

“Did you put f\*\*\*\*\*g corn in it?” he yells. It’s almost funny to see.

“What?” I say again.

He hisses, “Corn.”

A light bulb goes out in my mind. He really dislikes maize.

“I didn’t know you didn’t like it,” I said. “It wasn’t my fault because I didn’t cook it either.”

He drops the spoon on the tray, which makes a loud noise that echoes in the room. I can’t help but feel sorry for him since his expression shows how upset he is.

“You can still eat it, you know. I can help you with that.” I walk up to him, but his body language doesn’t say “welcome.”

He says, “What do you mean?” in a questioning voice.

“I can feed you and make sure the corn doesn’t get into the spoon,” I reply.

He doesn’t say anything straight immediately, but his enraged look would make anyone quiver. “Are you really going to feed me?”

“Come on,” I say. “Don’t be a baby. Now is not the time to fight. You’re hungry. You want your favourite food—”

With unyielding power, he adds, “I’m not letting you feed me.”

I want to roar in anger. “Then you can say goodbye to your mushroom soup. How are you going to eat it without my help? How would you separate the tiny corns? My God, everybody likes corns. How can you not like it?”

He yells, “Shut the f\*\*k up,” to make me stop talking. “Goddamn it, your voice is so annoying.”

I close my mouth to appear professional. Working with a handicapped person, especially one with a temper like his, takes a lot of tolerance.

We fought like we were still in kindergarten, and I can’t help but feel bad about it.

I ask, “Are you going to let me feed you or not?” and I can’t conceal how annoyed I am.

He thinks for a long time and then speaks so softly that I can hardly hear him. “Just this once.”

I struggle to hold back my laughing as I take the spoon in my hand. I don’t hear mafia



bosses acknowledge they lost all the time.

“Why didn’t you just tell me you were hungry when you woke up?” I say. “You could have eaten breakfast sooner.”

“Because I knew you would be hungry too and that you needed me to feel safe downstairs to get your breakfast,” he adds, startling me with how honest he is. “I was waiting for you, but you took a long shower. I fell asleep while I was waiting.”

I don’t know what to say. Liam Carter might not be as awful as he looks.

I smile, but he can’t see it.

“Here comes the food,” I hum.

He readily opens his mouth. He eats the soup and closes his eyes in pleasure.

I ask, “No maize, right?”

He sighs and opens his eyes. “Not maize,” he murmurs, which makes me grin again.

He appears happy now, but he still looks dangerous. I wonder whether he will ever smile again. That concept makes me want to work hard to get it.

I jokingly try the aeroplane gesture while I keep feeding him. It doesn’t work at all, and he just gives her a murderous look. I’m convinced that his enemy

would run away right away if they saw it, but it doesn’t bother me. I chuckle a lot. When I laugh, he stops, therefore I stop laughing right away.

I whisper, “What?”

“You’re laughing,” he says with a grimace on his face. “I think this is the first time I’ve heard you laugh since you got here.”

He was right when I thought about it.

I didn’t believe I would ever laugh here again, but I did.

I’m also surprised by the fact.

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“It’s annoying,” he says with a frown, and I can feel my head starting to hurt again. “Your laughter is so annoying.”

Why does he have to mess things up?

I laugh, and the remainder of my feeding him stops.

It’s been a few weeks since Emily moved in, and her presence is driving me insane.

I can’t stop thinking about how she cuddles up next to me in bed, how she sings in the shower, and how she talks every time she opens her lips.

I’ve heard a girl’s voice before, but there’s something about hers that I can’t stop thinking about. The sound of her sigh and yawn is still haunting me.

Why does she have to sound so alive and sometimes so angry? I can also hear how gentle and weak she is at the same time. It doesn’t add up.

I’d rather live with a bear on a mountain than with a female if this is how it feels.

Her smell is something else I can't fight. Damn it, her smell... I wish I didn't know it. She smells like flowers and candy that are soft. I really dislike it.

For me, there's just a small difference between loathing it and being fascinated with it. I dislike it because I can't choose how much it affects me. I don't want to confess that I'm a f\*\*\*\*\*g creep, but I would be lying if I claimed I didn't attempt to smell her aroma on the bed sheets when she was in the shower.

Today, I'm jogging around the house in the evening when I hear someone running up behind me. I don't need to see the individual to know who it is.

is. Emily is the one who made the footprints.

Her steps are too short compared to mine, so she's out of breath and struggling to keep up with me.

"Liam," she says again, and my heart almost skips a beat.

I have no idea what's wrong with me. Why does my heart not want to help her every time she tries to get close to me?

I close my eyes and breathe in the air as the wind sweeps across my skin. The fragrance of the grass is so strong that it makes me think it's going to rain soon. Even though it hasn't begun yet, I can smell the rain. I dislike being in the rain, so we need to go back inside as soon as we can.

Sadly, Emily is going to squander my time again.

I turn around to look at her. She suddenly stops moving, and I can feel her looking up at me.

She asks, still attempting to regain her breath, “You haven’t told me about your practice schedule tonight.” “Are you going to be in the boxing ring again tonight? What about dinner? When do you want to eat?”

“What the f\*\*k are you doing?” I yell, trying to keep my cool. “Why do you always have to follow me? I’m not a kid. I can take care of myself, and I was doing fine before you got here. How many times do I have to say that you’re annoying?”

Emily isn’t saying anything, and I see that what I said could have been too harsh.

“I’m sorry.” To my amazement, she says those words. She really does sound guilty. “I didn’t mean to barge into your personal space. I didn’t mean to disturb your privacy. I just—” She stumbles over her words, sounding like she’s in danger. “I have something to...”

I frown and wait for her to explain. For some reason, my heart starts to race, as if I’m scared that something horrible is really happening to her.

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When the rain starts to fall, she's still looking for the proper words. I swear. The rain gets heavier with each passing second.

I stomp away from Emily to look for a spot to stay dry. We're at the farthest part of the backyard, so it will be too far to get back inside. I would think about that alternative if I didn't dislike rain so much.

Before I know it, I'm rushing towards a gazebo that isn't too far from where we are. Even though I'm blind, I can find it without any trouble since I know exactly where it is. I know this property inside and out.

The heavy rain hitting my body is already making me angry. The sound of it hitting the ground hard is obstructing my hearing.

Rain, damn it. I really dislike it.

I halt under the gazebo and breathe hard. Emily comes over to me. She is also panting, but not as hard as I am.

"What's wrong?" she says, worried that this isn't a natural reaction to the weather.

I closed my eyes and held my hands tightly at my sides. "I hate it." My voice sounds rough. I open my eyes once more.

"What?"

"The rain."

We all stay quiet for a long time. The only thing we can hear is the rain dropping fiercely.

“Why?” Emily eventually asks again. She seems really worried, which makes me feel a little less tough.

“It makes me feel helpless,” I add, and I’m surprised that I’m saying it out loud.

This gal is progressively helping me let go of my feelings. I have no idea how she does it.

Emily doesn’t ask for further details, but I can already feel the words coming to mind.

“I hate how the rain hits my body,” I say. “It’s really harsh, like it’s trapping all my senses. I don’t like feeling it because I’m already blind.”

She doesn’t say anything, so I keep on. “The rain also washes away all the other smells and scents. I feel like all my clues have disappeared. It also makes it hard for me to hear because all I can hear is the sound of it pouring harshly all around me.”

I can only hear the sound of the rain now. I wouldn’t be able to hear Emily if she wasn’t next to me.

“That sounds so sad,” she continues, as my eyebrows wrinkle. “On the other hand,” she says in a happy voice, “I see a rain as something good. Happiness.”

I can see how happy she is when she says that.

“I like to dance and play in the rain,” she adds. “You’re right. All we can feel and hear is the rain itself, but it feels freeing, like we don’t have to think about anything else. We shut the whole world out and can do whatever we want.”

I can sense her going towards the rain, which makes me pay attention. What the heck is she going to do?

She lets the rain soak her and laughs out loud. She sounds like a small child who's really joyful.

"Oh God. It feels so good," she squeals between laughs.

She then moves while humming. I can tell she's spinning and dancing like the world doesn't matter by the sound of water hitting the ground.

"Are you crazy?" I hiss.

"Come on." She comes up to me and grabs my hands, attempting to pull me into the downpour. Her fingers are chilly, but she doesn't seem to mind.

My hands are trembling a little bit, and it's really awkward.

"It's okay," she said in a gentle voice that was so close to me that I could hear it. "I'll show you something so you don't have to be scared of the rain anymore."

The thought sounds so good. I somehow manage to put my ego aside. I move away from the gazebo slowly, letting the rain hit me.

I feel confined, as usual, especially since it's raining so hard right now.

"Easy," she murmurs softly, still gripping my hands securely.

I feel like a hurt and lost animal, and she is the only thing that keeps me grounded.

"You think too much," she says. "Don't think about anything else this time. You're

fine. You're safe."

I swallow and feel that her sweet voice is the only thing that can let me see in this dark place.

As drops of rain hit my face, I gaze up at the sky.

"Can you feel it?" she says, still in a soft voice. "Feel the rain. Breathe it in. It's not going to hurt you. It's not trying to trap you. It just wants to wash away all your pain."

I don't know why I'm letting someone talk to me about something so deep and emotional, but I want to trust what she says. I'm now working on getting over one of my major anxieties. If I didn't trust what she said, I know I would become worse.

I close my eyes and take a long breath, taking in as much oxygen as I need. I'm trying to experience what it actually is instead of inhaling dread.

New. Not too warm. But it feels good.

It doesn't smell as awful as it used to. It's the fragrance of nature, and it's not a bad thing. If it's really attempting to wipe away all my suffering, I'll let it do it entirely.

I need to let go of my anguish more than anything else. It's been hurting me since the day my life fell apart.

When I open my eyes again, I notice a single tear rolling down my face. I'm glad she can't see it. It would appear like another drop of rain falling on my face.

She says, "Dance with me," in a taunting way, and I can picture her smiling.



I now have a strong want to see how she appears when she grins. What does she look like when she smiles?

“Come on.” She giggles and rubs my shoulder with one hand while still holding my hand with the other.

She proceeds to show me how to do the moves, and then we dance in the rain.

She dances with such ease. This is the dumbest thing I’ve ever done, so I don’t believe she realises what she’s doing. But she doesn’t care at all. She dances as if nothing else matters.

She was right: the rain is helping us forget about everything else and allowing us do anything we want.

She laughs and twirls about while holding my hand. The sound of her laughing and the sound of the rain pouring are the most beautiful things I’ve ever heard. I never want this to stop.

My thinking takes me off guard, and I suddenly stop moving, which surprises her. The rain has slowly changed into a light drizzle. It’s not raining as heavily anymore, and my other sensations are starting to come back.

“Hey, Liam?” Emily asks. “What’s the matter?”

A thunderstorm suddenly hits, making her scream and fall onto my chest. I reflexively grab her in my arms, and right now I can feel how hard our hearts are racing against one other.

“Sorry,” she stutters and hastily pulls away from me.

There is an unpleasant quiet, so I remark to her, “You still haven’t told me why you’re following me today. You said there was something—”

I can’t finish my statement because I don’t know what to say. I can see she’s unsure, and I’m doing my best to keep my cool.

“Well,” she says, sounding like she’s ashamed of what she’s going to say. “I’ve been following you around because I still don’t feel safe walking around this house by myself.”

Anger creeps into me like a disease that makes me sick.

“Especially at mealtimes,” she goes on. “I know you saved me and that no one would want to mess with you, but those guys are such jerks. They’re still trying to scare me while they can—”

I can’t hear the rest. I move away from her in a fit of wrath and storm back towards the home.

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“Liam,” she yells as she runs up to me. “Wait.”

I can hear the sound of her shoes hitting the ground and making the water splash, but I don’t stop. I keep walking towards the home.

I’m not your f\*\*\*\*\*g hero.

I remember what I said to her, and I’ve been trying to remember it because I can’t be that to her.

“Please, Liam,” Emily begs, following me. “What’s wrong with you?” Her voice is about to break. Her tone shows that she is angry.

I’m not your f\*\*\*\*\*g hero.

Those remarks keep coming back to me, making fun of me and ridiculing me. But what my heart wants is far different from that. But the truth hurts me a lot. I can’t be.

I still have a lot of worry in my heart about failing someone or losing someone after attempting to protect them. I failed once, and it almost cost me my life.

I can’t see anything now. I’m not meant to be a hero. The person she looks up to. And that really gets me furious.

I’m so angry and out of control that I almost fall while walking down the little stairs from the backyard. Emily immediately gets up to me and grabs my arm, but the footing is so slick that she collapses.

I gasp and my eyes widen in disbelief. With my other hand, I'm holding on to the little railing. I'm OK, but Emily...

There was nothing I could do to stop her from falling. She was keeping me safe.

"Ouch," she hisses in anguish.

My heart feels like it's going to explode out of my chest, as blood rushes to every vein in my body. It's only a little step, so she can't get hurt seriously, but it doesn't make me feel better.

"I think I just sprained my ankle," she replies, attempting to disguise how much it hurts.

I blow up. "What the f\*\*k did you just do?" My voice is loud, and I can even hear her gasp in disbelief. "Did you even think before you did that? I told you a million times to leave me alone. Did you ever get what I said? For f\*\*k's sake, just go away."

Because I talk so viciously and without mercy, my chest rises and falls.

We can only hear the sound of rainfall and my hard breathing till she starts to cry.

"Why are you doing this?" The sadness in her voice tells me that my comments hurt her deeply.

When I hear her weeping, my fist shakes. It hurts my soul to see her sad.

I gritted my teeth and held back my messed-up feelings so I wouldn't hurt anyone else. I leave her alone and walk away.

Liam was already gone when I woke up this morning. We hadn't talked to one other

since what transpired the day before.

Liam asked Tera to bring me food last night, but he didn't come back until after his martial arts class. We went to bed without saying a word, and I was doing everything I could to prevent from crying.

I assumed he would slowly allow me in. I felt I could get closer to him and understand him better. But just when I believed he had let down his defences, he went back to the way he had been before.

It hurts me to know how much he's been through. The more I get to know him, the more I can sense his sorrow and the more I can see the guy behind the icy face.

His comments sting, but I know they're only a way for him to mask his misery. I told myself that I would help him see the beautiful things in life, that he can still be happy even though he is disabled, and that he is worth it.

I sit down on the bed after I dry my hair. Someone knocks on the door when I'm thinking about what to do today. When I open it, I see Tera standing there with a big smile on her face.

I wonder what her intention is because she doesn't have a plate of food with her. My heart is full with relief since I need to spend a day with her right now.

I say "Good morning" with a big smile on my face. "Are we going to eat breakfast together?"

I don't know whether Kelvin and his pals will come back to bother me, but it's better to have a buddy with me than to be alone. It breaks my heart to recall that Liam told me to keep away from him.

Tera nods, and we gladly link arms and stroll down the corridor.

But Tera doesn't take me to the kitchen; instead, she takes me to the basement. I raise my eyebrows in doubt, and she merely waves her hand to say that everything will be OK.

I suppose it's the basement where Tera and her dad reside, because it's not the same one where they have the boxing ring.

She opens the door, and I see a tattoo shop.

I move my eyes about in astonishment. The space is dark, but I can see how creative it is. There are dark paintings on the walls, and much of the furniture is made of dark wood. But somehow, it still feels like a good place to live. It even feels nice.

I can see two doors that go to separate bedrooms and another door that I think goes to the bathroom. Someone opens it from the other side just as I look at it.

A middle-aged man with a large smile on his face approaches up to us. He's tall and has broad shoulders.

"You must be Emily," he says as he shakes my hand firmly. "Welcome to our home. I'm Dustin, Tera's dad."

I grin back at him and thank him for being so kind. This modest man has given several tattoos to the leaders and members of Eagle Wings.

"You're finally going to get your first tattoo, right?" His comment shocks me, and he chuckles as soon as he sees the terror on my face. "Don't

Don't worry. It won't hurt that much. Do you want me to do it for you, or do you

want Tera to do it? It's up to you.

I turn my attention quickly to Tera, who is biting her lip nervously and scratching her temple. She pulls out a note from her pocket and writes me a letter.

I'm sorry. I know you might not want it, but this is the day you receive your tattoo. Liam stated that. It's a command.

My eyes go big in shock. I don't think I'll ever be ready for a tattoo. People say it will hurt, and I'm not going to get my skin tattooed.

Tera lets out a sigh.

This is how you can be absolutely safe here. Everyone else understands the rules, but you are the only one who doesn't.

Someone could hurt you because Liam is disabled one day. This is not a place for those who are not members. People from outside have died here.

I gasp at that news and put my palms over my lips.

Some individuals around here have grudges and wouldn't put up with this kind of mistreatment. I honestly don't want to put you in danger.

I have to accept that I lost. I'll do it if that's the only way I can stay alive here.

I never believed I would be part of a mafia or gang family.

Tera's eyes soften when she sees that I want to have the tattoo.

"All settled?" Dustin's voice interrupts the quiet.

I nearly forgot he was here.

He observes us with a smile before leaving. He quips, “I guess you trust Tera more. Go have your girls’ time. I’m leaving,” and pats me on the shoulder.

I see him push through the door and leave the tattoo shop.

I tell Tera, “Your dad seems fun and cool,” and she just shrugs.

She gives me another note.

Are you ready?

I nod and swallow. I think I don’t have any other options.



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*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:15 am*

Getting a tattoo is something I'll never forget, but it wasn't as bad as I feared it would be.

Of course there are tears and small screams, but it's not that horrible. Thank you, Tera, for making me feel like an angel is tattooing me. She is always attempting to calm me down with her hands. She treats me with kindness and care, and she even stops to embrace me a few times as she works.

Dustin comes back with a fresh set of tools by the time Tera is done with the tattoo. When he sees the tattoo on the back of my right shoulder, his eyes go big.

"Is that really the one he told you to do for her?" His voice is full of astonishment.

I feel uneasy within. I can't believe I have to go through this again if this is the wrong tattoo.

Yes.

Tera uses sign language to talk to her dad.

Before I applied to the care agency, I learnt some sign language so I could be ready for any requests that potential clients could have. However, I wasn't very good at it because I didn't have much time to study it.

Tera has been sending me notes since she doesn't know I can understand sign language. I can sort of infer what she's trying to communicate now that I see her doing it.

Yes. He told me to cook it for her when he came to visit me this morning. There was no way I could have heard him wrong.

“What?” I sound worried. “What’s going on? What’s wrong with my tattoo?”

I can’t see it yet since it’s on the back of my shoulder. They don’t talk for a while, and then Dustin eventually sighs.

“Well, Emily…” He seems like it’s hard for him to explain, and I don’t like how his voice shakes.

What might possibly make him a little nervous? He probably has done hundreds of tattoos, so what possibly be wrong with this one that he couldn’t even find the words to say?

He says, “I don’t think we can tell you about this tattoo.” “Only Liam knows why. You can ask him when you see him again.”

I am getting more worried. I look at Tera, and she gives me the same guilty face.

Dustin says again, “I’m sorry, Emily.” “We can’t tell you the answer because we don’t want to go over Liam’s head.”

I think I’m going to weep. The last time I saw Liam, he was really angry with me.

Maybe he gave me this tattoo to hurt me, not to keep me safe.

Dustin ruffles Tera’s hair and whispers, “You did the best you could.” He kisses her on the forehead. “I’m very proud of you.”

Tera grins with tears in her eyes, and I can’t tell if it’s a sad smile or a happy one.

“I think it’s better to wait for Liam to say it himself. I don’t think anyone would be ready for this.” Dustin stands up straight.

Tera soon agrees and helps me put my clothing back on so that my tattoo is covered.

“Go with her to breakfast,” Dustin tells his daughter.

My heart is thumping loudly in my chest.

“Don’t worry, Emily,” Dustin says as Tera and I walk to the door.

I turn back at him and see that he is staring at me with a serious face.

“Everything will be okay.”

That’s the last thing I hear as Tera pulls me out of their house.

Tera and I go to the kitchen. When I question her about the tattoo again, she just looks at me with an apologetic face and doesn’t say anything.

“Please, I need to know what will happen to me.” I stop as we get close to the kitchen.

She shakes her head, and I feel disappointed again. She puts her hand on my heart and smiles at me to let me know that everything will be okay. But that’s not enough for me.

I stumble into someone, and as I glance at them, I see Lizzy, the girl I met when I initially came into this home.

“Isn’t it the girl without the tattoo?” She sneers and then gives Tera a look that makes

her feel bad. “Emily, you’ve got a friend. A dumb mute.”

I’m so angry that my heart hurts after hearing how she talked about Tera.

“Just leave us alone,” I say angrily.

“Emily,” someone yells, and everyone in the room turns to look at me.

I get chills down my spine as I see Kelvin approaching towards me with his two companions. One of them really does look like Arthur, and I turn my head to find the other brother, hoping he will walk up and smack some sense into them again.

“I think it’s time for Liam to trash you.” Kelvin pauses in front of me, and everyone else gets quiet. “He hasn’t given any more warnings since the first one, and from what I can see, you’re the one who’s always on his tail.”

“Don’t you have anything better to do than bully someone?” I say through angry teeth. “Maybe an important mission?”

I know I hit the perfect area when Kelvin clenches his jaw. He feels bad about himself.

“Watch your tongue,” he snaps as he moves closer to me.

Tera steps in front of me to protect me from him.

Kelvin laughs and looks at her with sadness. “Get out of the way, you f\*\*\*\*\*g mute. Don’t get in the way of my business with her. It’s time she knew who’s in charge here.”

Tera shakes her head forcefully. Kelvin takes one more step closer, and she bravely

presses his chest, which makes the people around us gasp. We don't see an innocent, silent girl having a battle with one of the Knights' right-hand men every day.

Kelvin is so angry that he pushes her so hard that she smacks a table around the corner. I can't believe what I'm seeing as I watch her collapse to the floor.

I yell at Kelvin, "What the hell did you just do to her?" and then I run to aid her.

Tera winces in agony. When I help her up, she takes my hand.

"Are you okay?" I ask, with anxiety in every syllable.

She shakes her head. Seeing the bruise on her forehead makes me angrier.

"Are you crazy?" Arthur's brother yells in Kelvin's face, and his own face becomes white as a sheet. "Zane will be mad if he finds out about this."

"Shut up," Kelvin yells.

I frown because I'm confused. I have a feeling that there is something going on between Tera and Zane, but I can't be positive.

"You said it was an important mission?" Kelvin laughs at me.

As he gets closer to me and Tera, I reflexively move back.

"Do you even know where the men who went on such a mission are now?" He makes another step towards you, making you feel threatened. "Did they even succeed? That's bullshit. Victor told me he couldn't get in touch with them anymore. They've been gone for days."

Tera's face turns pale, and her eyes fill with tears. The girl who couldn't speak and just held her head up high is now about to cry.

"You're worried about Zane?" Kelvin hisses at Tera, his voice full of hate. "You should."

I can't stop thinking about the phone chat I had with Ethan that ended suddenly due of gunfire and explosions. I haven't heard from him again after then, not even a text back.

Something terrible has occurred to Ethan, Zane, and Dante, that's for sure. But I won't accept that they're dead.

"And you." Kelvin glares at me. "You might be Liam's slave, but a rule is a rule. If someone comes into our base without being a part of us, they die. Liam wouldn't know the truth because he's f\*\*\*\*\*g blind. He can't even see your tattoo."

I defiantly tilt my chin up, but he grabs it so hard that it aches.

"Don't tell me you've been using him all this time." His voice is as icy as ice. "Because if that's the case, I'm sure he won't mind if we kill you and use you."

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I'm attempting to get away, but his pal won't let me go. He has both of my wrists tied behind my back. I look towards Tera and see that Arthur's brother is holding her back. She is scared and her eyes get bigger. She is worried about what Kelvin will do to me.

Kelvin smirks and looks down at me with a grin that makes me sick. "Too bad, isn't it?" "Liam can't see this beauty. I'm sure he won't mind if we get you a new slave. It won't make any difference to him, right?" Then he laughs out loud.

Tears of anger are burning my eyes. "Let me go."

I scream as Kelvin grabs a knife from the kitchen table and pulls my shirt collar so tightly that it almost chokes me and makes my feet leave the ground.

He points the knife at my blouse, and the tip touches the soft fabric. "No. Let everyone see the lies you've been telling him."

The stinging blade against my skin makes my heart halt. He's going to tear my shirt off in front of everyone.

"You're just a girl without the tattoo. You filthy little liar. You're an intruder."

It's too late now. I can't stop it.

When Kelvin cuts my shirt with the knife, my body shakes with panic. The ripped cloth falls to the floor, leaving me standing here in my bra and nothing else.

People are gasping and whispering in a panic. The person who was holding my wrist suddenly lets go, and I lurch forward and almost hit Kelvin in the chest.

Kelvin steps back, which is strange. His eyes are not on me; they are on the friend behind me. When I turn around, I see him staring at my back with sheer dread.

“What the hell is that?” His voice is trembling all over the place.

I turn my head quickly, but everyone is still looking at me with the same terror in their eyes.

There’s a mirror on the wall across from me, so I look at it and hope to God that this won’t be the last of me. My heart is pounding hard against my ribs.

When I view my tattoo on the back of my shoulder, time appears to freeze.

I can see two Eagle Wings. It’s not enormous; it only covers the right half of my shoulder blade. Tera made it, and it’s amazing. I can hardly believe that such beauty is now permanently on my skin.

But that’s not all. I can see why they are all gaping at it in shock. This Eagle Wings tattoo isn’t normal since it has gold streaks on it.

I haven’t seen any Eagle Wings members with tattoos like this before. I also recall Lizzy telling me that the streaks are either silver or crimson.

“Impossible.” Kelvin’s voice is trembling too. He is staring at my tattoo, which is now facing him.

People are chatting and whispering more quickly. They’re attempting to figure out what it is.



Kelvin says again, “You can’t have that kind of tattoo.” “It’s not possible.”

“What do you think we’re seeing now?” a female he doesn’t know yells at him. “You’re going to die. You’re doomed.”

“Yeah,” another person yells. This time, it’s a man’s voice. “We shouldn’t be doing this to her. You just dug all of our graves.”

It feels like the room is spinning and my head hurts. I don’t get what’s going on.

People around me start to fight, yelling and getting angry.

The air is full with fear, and everything goes wrong. The phrases that are being thrown about me and the history of Eagle Wings that I already know are going through my brain.

Different kind of Eagle Wings tattoos show who the individual is.

Black = regular members.

The Knights, who were thought to be the commanders of Eagle Wings, wore black with crimson streaks. There are three of them right now: Zane, Dante, and Victor.

The Kings are black with silver stripes. This tattoo belongs to the owner of Eagle Wings and all of his blood relatives. It belongs to Ethan and Liam. If their sister were still alive, she would have the same tattoo.

Then there’s another one, the sort of tattoo that people don’t talk about much because they haven’t seen one.

Black with gold lines. This tattoo is on the body of someone who is important to the

family but not connected by blood. They are just as vital as the Kings and must be kept safe at all costs. Ethan and Liam's mum was the only other person to have this tattoo. Her spouse gave her the tattoo.

I hold on to the table on my side for support as the audience goes wild around me.

"Is that really true?" someone yells. "What's that tattoo supposed to mean?"

"Mine," a voice says firmly, and everyone stops talking right now.

My skin is crawling with goosebumps. My heart stops when I turn around to check who the voice belongs to.

Liam is now in the room. He looks like he just got back from his morning run because he's wearing a jacket. Anyone would be scared to death by the look on his face.

In a frightening manner, he continues, "It means she's f\*\*\*\*\*g mine."

I know he's doing this to keep me safe, but the way he said it and the look on his face make me doubt that he truly means it. No matter what it is, I feel a big sense of relief, and I can't help but cry.

He says, "No one touches Emily," which makes the stillness that follows much worse. People seem afraid to move a finger while he talks. "I say again," he hisses angrily. "No one. No one can f\*\*\*\*\*g touch her."

His wrath is taking over his whole body. I can see his body quivering with anger, and it makes me want to go to him.

He embraces me in his arms, and I bury my face in his chest right away, letting my

tears flow.

I don't care. I can't keep this relief within.

When he holds me tighter, a sweet grin comes to my lips.

It's been a few weeks since Liam gave me the tattoo, and a lot has changed within the house.

No one is brave enough to bully me anymore, but I can still feel their eyes on me. I can't see Kelvin and his pals anymore. People are saying that Victor has heard about what happened in the kitchen and that Kelvin and his buddies are now on a mission with just a 10% chance of making it out alive. I wonder whether they are being punished in any way.

People still talk about me behind my back. I know they can't believe it, but I got the tattoo coloured in black with gold streaks, and I'm the only one from Eagle Wings who did. A ordinary tattoo would be enough to keep me safe here, but I wonder why Liam had me get that tattoo.

After lunch with Tera at her house, I went back to Liam's room and saw him standing by the window with his back to the door. He turns around as soon as he hears me walking in, and he knocks down one of the picture frames on his desk.

I'm about to assist him get it when he grabs for it. I saw the picture of him as a tiny child sitting next to a little girl. She has a beautiful smile on her face, while he has a grin on his. I think it's his younger sister who perished in the vehicle tragedy.

"Is that..." I stop talking as he puts the frame back on the desk. I ask, "Your sister?" and my heart starts to race.

Things are going well between us right now, and I'm worried that my query may make him angry. Liam has been putting up barriers for years, so it's hard to get close to him. He could pull back again if I talk about his sister, but I'm just so curious. I want him to tell me more about himself and his family.

His lips quiver in annoyance as a sharp pang crosses his face.

"I'm sorry," I respond hastily. "I didn't mean to... I didn't mean to make you think about how much it hurt to lose her. I just wanted to know. She's beautiful."

Liam doesn't say anything. He comes up to the bed and sits down. Since I've been living with him, I've figured out how he acts when he wants to shut down. He's fidgeting now, which is one of the indicators. Then he becomes upset and lets everyone know about it. He gets angry quickly when he thinks of the anguish he went through.

But I know he can get better. We still fight, but it's more like arguing now. It's not as severe as it used to be, and it happens less often.

I sit next to him on the bed and say, "I'm sorry."

I know he can hear my suffering too.

"I'm so sorry you lost her."

He swallows.

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He doesn't say anything for a few seconds, but then he does. "At first, I couldn't believe she was gone." His voice is full of pain, and it hurts my heart. "I protected her with my life. I was sure that I engulfed her so that nothing could hurt her, not even when I felt extreme pain all over my body. The last thing I felt against my chest before I blacked out was her heartbeat. She couldn't be gone."

I don't even know whether I can hear their story now. It hurts too much.

"Liam," I say, not wanting him to keep telling the story if he can't. But another part of me wants him to let it out so that he doesn't become too angry.

"I don't f\*\*\*\*\*g know why, but a part of me says she's still alive, living somewhere, and breathing," he continues, as his dark grey eyes go even darker.

He sounds like he has a lot more to say, but suddenly his face drops. His face is full with sadness.

"Even if she were still alive, I might not be able to recognise her. My f\*\*\*\*\*g eyes..."

When I hear him say it, my heart practically stops. I instinctively reach out to soothe him by holding his hand, but as soon as our fingers meet, he jerks away as if my touch is fire.

He starts to pant and pull away from me soon.

I wish I hadn't done that right away. I went too far. Liam wasn't ready for it, even

though it was just a tiny bit of consolation.

I know that my reaction hurts her, even if I can't see her. After I break her hand, I can hear her weak gasp.

I want to turn off. I don't want her warmth right now. I don't like how she makes me feel weak. I despise how hard she's trying to tear my heart out and examine what's within.

I can feel her moving away from my bed, and it makes me want to punch her. Damn. I don't know how to fix things now that she's gone. I wait for her to leave my room, but when I hear her footsteps, I realise she's going the opposite way.

"Can I turn on the music player?" she asks.

I don't know what to say. I don't mind it, and I suppose she knows that since the next thing I hear is music coming from my record player.

The sound of old melodies fills my chamber, and my heart sinks. I haven't used this music player in a long time. When I have trouble falling asleep, I normally listen to music on my phone via my headset. So when this song plays on my vinyl record, it makes me think of the last time it played in my room.

It was a year after my parents died when I performed what my therapist told me to do. He urged me to let out my feelings about losing my parents so I could go on. My parents used to dance to this song all the time.

I cried so hard the last time I heard it in this place. At that time, I was 12.

It's incredible that the music player is still working.

Emily hums a little. “I think I know this song,” she says softly. “Yeah. I think this song was playing when I was learning how to slow dance at school.”

Dancing.

I think of the day Emily asked me to dance in the rain, and I really want her to feel that way again, especially after I just said no to her.

I don’t know if it’s just my guilt or if I really need to hear her laugh again.

“Do you want to do it?” I blurt out.

She doesn’t say anything in return.

Of course she doesn’t. If I don’t make it plain, she won’t get what I’m trying to express. I feel so dumb all of a sudden.

“To dance,” I say. “Do you want to dance to the music now?”

Emily laughs quietly after a time. “Only if you dance with me,” she offers with a hint of mocking. “Anyway, the dance is for two people.”

I don’t say anything, but I’m sure she can see that I’m not against it.

“Come here,” she adds in a happy voice.

I don’t want to, but I stand up. I have no idea what I just said. I can’t dance, and this is going to be so f\*\*\*\*\*g embarrassing.

“Come on. It’s okay. I won’t bite,” she teases again, and my frown just makes her giggle.

My heart races as she takes my hand. She puts her other hand on my shoulder.

“Have you ever done this?” she asks.

I ask in a threatening way, “You think?”

“I was just asking.”

I can feel her arms move when she shrugs.

“If that’s the case, I’m going to teach you a little,” she adds. “I’m not an expert, so I’ll just tell you the basics.”

My lips make a tiny line. I could seem calm in front of her, but I’m very worried.

I’ve never been this close to another female.

She’s too near. I can smell her aroma even better, and I can feel the warmth of her body on mine like it’s a part of me. Her hands are very little compared to mine. Either mine are too huge or hers are the size of a little girl’s.

“Okay, now I’m going to step to your right, and you just have to follow me.” She does as she says, and I follow her.

But I can’t concentrate since we are so near to one other. Her touch makes me feel like I’m on fire, and her lovely smell makes me feel like I’m inhaling heroin.

“Again,” she says.

I almost trip because I can’t focus.



“Easy,” she says. “We’re going to do this slowly. Now, to your left.” She goes over the steps again, but I still can’t keep up.

After a few more minutes, we eventually get into a groove, but I still make a few mistakes now and again.

It’s funny that I can practice martial arts like a pro yet couldn’t even execute these easy steps. She’s making it hard for me to focus.

Emily eventually stops as the music changes. “Okay. You’re not so bad.”

I squint at her.

“Okay, you’re really bad.”

She laughs, and her wonderful laughter fills my spirit like a narcotic I have to consume.

I don’t even know if she’s a medication or a poison, but I don’t mind taking her.

What the hell am I thinking?

“Read,” I say out of the blue.

She must be bewildered since she doesn’t say anything else.

“Excuse me?” she says again.

“Read,” I say again. “You once asked me if I read anything. I read books. I want to do that now.”

“Oh, sure,” she responds hastily, sounding ashamed that she just found it out.

She draws away, and my heart already misses her warmth.

I stroll over to the reclining sofa and seat down. Emily follows me and pauses next to the bookshelves.

“Which books do you want to read?” she asks.

“Not the braille books. I’ve read them all,” I say. “I want to read something else.”

She stops talking, which makes me think she’s a bit lost.

“Can you read it for me?” I ask, shocked that I can talk so well. I generally tell people what to do and make them cower in front of me.

This gal is making me different. I don’t believe she understands how much she affects me.

“Sure,” Emily responds.

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I breathed out a sigh of relief. It's weird that I feel nervous just because I need someone to do something easy like this.

I requested her to read to me because I need to hear her voice again and again, but she doesn't have to know that.

At first, I thought her voice was irritating, but that was only because it bothered me.

Emily asks, "What book do you want me to read to you?"

I feel dumb since I don't even think about it. I just want her to read to me.

Sophie, my little sister, used to let me borrow her favourite books. I haven't read them again in a long time since they're not braille books.

"I put it on the shelf next to my desk," I say. "These are just regular books. Choose the one you like best. They're the best ones."

They are, because I don't want to hurt Sophie's feelings. I clearly recall how happy Sophie was and how she would talk about her new favourite things with such passion.

She always had me read it too, and I was happy to do so.

"How about this?" Emily says again, as if she's reading the title of the book she just took from the shelf. "Milk and honey?"

It's a volume of poems from Sophie's favourite Korean-Canadian poet. The final

book Sophie lent me before she died is funny.

“I guess it’s a yes,” Emily adds, and I can picture her lifting her eyebrows. “You’re not frowning or scowling. It’s a yes,” she says with a smile.

I roll my eyes, but for some reason, I’m not mad. She slides the chair behind the desk closer to me so she can sit in front of me. I can hear her turning the pages.

“Should we start?” she asks.

I nod.

She reads it to me slowly: “The night after you left, I woke up so broken. The only place to put the pieces were the bags under my eyes.”

I breathe in and out while listening to her calm words. It’s soft, which makes me feel better. The sentence’s weight doesn’t worry me.

More words come out of her mouth: “I am hopelessly a lover and a dreamer, and that will be the death of me.”

I think I could listen to her forever. I know that I like every sound she makes, not just her laughing. I don’t know how she does it, but even the sound of her whisper at the end of the phrase does something to me.

I hate hearing her scream. At first, I thought it was simply annoying. But today, the prospect of hearing her screams makes me so angry.

Emily reads the book so effortlessly, like river flowing. I don’t even notice how much time has passed while I’m listening to her. I don’t know how long we’ve been like this, with me sitting here listening to her voice and her reading to me with such care.

“Fall in love...” she starts again, and I open my mouth too.

“We say together, “With your loneliness.”

I remember those words because I think about them a lot, especially when I’m sad.

“The way—”

“What colour?” I cut her off in the middle of her sentence. The words come out of my mouth.

“Sorry?” she asks, seeming confused.

“Your hair.”

There is silence, and I bet she has no idea why I’m asking this question.

“Um, auburn,” she says.

I nod, even though my mind is racing. For everyone else, it’s a straightforward response, but it’s not for me.

I hear her turn the pages again, but before she can read me more of the text, I ask her again, “What about your eyes?”

She stops talking again, and I ask, “What colour are they?”

“She adds, “They’re blue.” “Why are you suddenly asking me these things?”

A frown comes to my lips. “Just curious.”

I can't hear what she says anymore as she starts reading the words again. These questions are still stuck in my brain, and I can't stop thinking about them.

My heart is racing, and soon I'll be so angry that I can't stand it. I can already feel my body shaking.

Damn it.

I suddenly rise up, and she gasps softly.

"What's wrong?" she asks with worry.

But I have to leave. I have to go because I need to get the answers. I'm mad, and all I'll do is hurt her feelings.

"Liam," she says, and I can hear her voice as I leave my room. I slammed the door shut so hard that I thought I damaged the hinge.

While I'm sprinting down the stairs, I miss a few steps. I placed my weight on the railing so I can leap. I really don't care whether I fall.

I push through the back door and head straight towards the backyard. I go along the path that leads to a tiny woodland at the back of the property like I'm crazy. I think I'm going to lose my mind.

The noise my foot makes when it steps on a twig in the grass is so loud that it hurts my ears. The three branches hurt my skin as I push my way through the forest, and I'm pretty sure they make me bleed.

I can't stand being touched. I can even feel the sun's rays in the afternoon searing my face.

I almost hit a tree with my fist, which made my knuckles crack. The birds above me fly about like crazy, producing sounds that are like the noise in my brain.

The scent of the leaves hits my nose, and I can nearly taste it in my tongue.

I can feel everything.

I can hear it all.

I can even hear the wind talking to me.

But I can't see for shit.

My knees hit the ground. I dig in the dirt with my bare hands and clench my teeth. The dirt... This is the closest thing I can locate that is the same colour as her hair. I don't know whether it's even the same thing.

When I try to hold it, the dirt slips out of my hand. I can smell it. I can feel every drop of it tickling my skin, and I may even be able to taste it if I had to, but I can't recall what colour it was.

I breathe heavily and lower my back to the ground, looking up at the sky with my arms out to the sides. I know the sky is blue, but I can't recall what blue looks like anymore.

What colour is blue?

What colour are her eyes?

"F\*\*k," I groan as I try to calm down my hard breathing.

I really didn't want to watch this again.

I want to look into her eyes.

Her grin.

Her hair.

I want to know everything about her.



## Page 25

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:15 am*

I close my eyes and roll over on my side. The wind seems like it wants to take my misery away with it. But it can't.

Damn it, it hurts. It aches like hell.

I want to see Emily, the girl who is brave enough to go inside my heart.

When she talks to me, I want to look into her eyes.

When I make her laugh, I want to see her lovely grin curve on her lips.

I want to see her angry face too.

But my eyes can only see one thing.

Darkness.

As I head to the kitchen to fill up Liam's water jug, I think about what occurred with him yesterday. I felt like I nearly got to him. He's slowly allowing me in, and all I want is to see the true, kind, altruistic man within him.

I also kept thinking about how intense it was while we danced.

I might have attempted to disguise it by being happy, but every time I was near him, my pulse raced.

I can see the real him behind that frigid exterior.

The man who cares so much about the people he loves.

The man who was ready to give up his life to save his young sister, even if he lost his sight while attempting to save her.

The man who is always upset because he can't do anything to aid his sibling.

I fill the jug with water in the kitchen, then turn the corner and run into a guy's chest.

He puts his hand over my mouth, and I almost scream. The jug of water slips out of my hands and shatters on the ground. He pulls me into another corridor, which is empty, and pushes me against the wall.

Arthur is looking down at me, and my eyes go big. He puts his finger over his mouth to tell me to be quiet. I don't know what he's going to do, but I can only nod so he can let me go. His eyes soften, and he gently lets go of his hand.

I ask, "What are you doing?"

After seeing my tattoo, no one would do that to me again, but I also know that Arthur is a kind person. I don't think he's going to hurt me.

"I left for weeks because they gave me a very lame job, and now that I'm back, all I can hear is everyone talking about you and Liam," he adds, looking angry. "Is that real?"

"Do you know about my tattoo?" I ask him again.

He agrees. "I know. That's crazy."

I frown. I didn't expect it to happen. The other members are scared of it.

“Did he think he could just claim you with a tattoo? With that kind of bullshit?” he shouts, and his face shows that he is getting angrier.

“I don’t think he did,” I respond. “He was just trying to keep me safe.”

Arthur’s expression shows disbelief. His eyes go big with surprise. “What did he do to you? Did you even hear yourself? Don’t you remember what kind of person he is? He’s a terrible person.”

I can’t believe how angry I feel after hearing Arthur say that.

“I’ve been living with him, and I think I know him better now,” I say. “We can’t judge how he feels unless we’ve been through something like it. I’m trying to help him get better.”

Arthur screams, “What the f\*\*k does that mean?” I’m shocked that he’s so angry. He really looks like he’s about to blow up.

“Look, Emily.” He holds my shoulders and scares me. “I know you. I see myself when I see you. You’re not supposed to be here, Emily. And we’re not supposed to be like those people. We’re better than them.”

Arthur told me that he was stranded in this world because he was looking for his sibling. I still admire him since he didn’t allow his brother and Kelvin pick on me.

“Liam is a king here.” When he talks about Liam, it’s clear that he hates him. “But his heart is rotten. He doesn’t have one at all.”

“You don’t know his heart,” I respond firmly. “Nobody here is trying to understand him because he built walls around himself. He’s blind. He can’t see. How do you expect him to know everything and control everything around here? And his brother

might be dying on a mission. Give him a break, Arthur.”

His expression shows even greater disbelief now. “I can’t believe I just heard that. The way you talked about him, it was like…” He’s speechless. “You can’t get too close to him. He’ll ruin you.”

My lips make a tiny line. Arthur talks about Liam in a way that I don’t like. Why does he dislike Liam so much?

Arthur hisses in anger, “I thought we were the same.” “I thought we both didn’t want to be a part of Eagle Wings, but then you got that tattoo—”

“It’s not about my tattoo,” I eventually yell at him.

He holds on to my shoulders tighter, and it aches.

“Arthur,” I hiss in anguish.

Arthur says between clenched teeth, “So the rumour is true.” “Are you really with him? You can’t be with a guy like him. He can’t see you, Emily. He can’t even see how beautiful you are. He won’t appreciate you or make you happy.”

I ask, “What do you mean by that?” since his comments upset me.

He rapidly swallows when he realises he made a mistake. “That’s not what I meant. Please listen to me, Emily.”

I can already feel him pulling me back as I see something move out of the corner of my eye. I turn my head quickly and see that Tera is gazing at us with wide eyes. Her face quickly goes from calm to worried and panicked.

Arthur looks at her and swears. “Shit.” He looks at me again and says firmly, “We’re not done. We’ll talk again later.” With that, he finally lets me go and walks down the hall.

I put my hand over my heart to attempt to calm it down. I guess I can only be friends with Arthur, the only other Eagle Wings member except Tera and her dad. But now that everything has happened, I don’t know if I can look at him without feeling something. I feel so bad since I could have just lost a friend.

Tera runs to me to see how I’m doing. Her face shows just worry.

I answer softly, “I’m okay.”

Tera hugs me to soothe me, and I sigh.

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Days go by.

I haven’t seen Liam all evening, so I go down to the basement. Liam should have dinner by now. I wonder whether he’s lost track of time.

I push the door open and see him in the boxing ring. He’s working on it by himself. No one else is here. If it weren’t for us, the whole place would be empty.

I move closer to the ring and observe Liam. He moves so quickly and accurately in his martial arts. It seems like I’m seeing a magnificent piece of art being played in front of me, exactly like the first time I saw him.

He is as gorgeous as his lonely soul. If only he could see it for himself. If only he could be happy again.

Liam Carter is better than he believes he is and better than most of the people who live here.

He abruptly stops, which makes me think he can feel me moving.

He rotates his body to face me. “Why didn’t you stay in my room?”

I let out a sigh. I grin. Instead of answering him, I walk closer.

He takes hold of the rope on the side of the ring and jumps out. I grab his towel, which is in the corner of the ring, and meet him halfway.

I enquire in a puzzled tone, “How did you know it was me?”

He lets out a sigh. “I can tell by your footsteps that I know how you walk. I can’t be wrong.”

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I laugh a little. Instead of giving him the towel, I assist him dry off by rubbing his face and then cleaning his upper body gently.

He is very handsome, even if he is covered in perspiration. When the towel touches his abs, I feel my cheeks flush.

He must have seen that I was nervous because the next thing he does is help me put the towel around his shoulders. My fingertips touch his naked flesh, and I get shivers down my spine. I'm ready to pull away and release grip of the towel, but he stops me from doing so. Instead, he grabs my wrists with both hands and wraps my arms around his shoulders.

I don't sure what to do in this uncomfortable situation, so I softly stroke him on the back of the shoulders. I hope he doesn't see that my hands are trembling a little bit because we're so close.

"Something I've been wanting to do," he replies, his voice scratchy.

I wrinkle my brows in perplexity. I whisper, "What is it?"

He swallows, and I can see that he's frightened too. His neck muscles move.

He touches my chin with two fingers, which scares me. He squints, as if he's really thinking. My heart races as his fingertip touches my bottom lip.

"Hey, lips," he murmurs.

My heart is racing even faster. He's looking at me and trying to remember me in his head.

"Lips," I say again, and my lips tremble a little because I'm feeling so many things.

I take a deep breath and close my eyes. When I blow air on his thumb, I can hear his breath shaking.

I can feel his fingers moving up and caressing my nose.

"Nose," he adds, and I can't help but smile.

"Whisper," I say.

I open my eyes to see how he feels. He is looking at me quite closely.

He says "Eyes" again as his fingers touch the region under my tear ducts.

I can hear the sadness in his voice. He sounds like he's in a lot of pain.

His grey eyes become hazy. I'm looking at their, and he's looking at mine, but only I can see.

His grey eyes are the most beautiful and interesting. I could look at them forever and become lost in them. Now, grey is my favourite colour. I have no question about that.

Tears make my eyesight fuzzy. "Eyes." I nod, and that's when a tear falls on his finger.

It scares him. "Don't cry," he adds, brushing away my tear.



I hold on to his shoulders more tightly to calm down, which brings his face closer to mine. We know how close we are to each other, but none of us can draw back.

“Emily, may I...” He stops in the middle of his sentence, and it seems like it hurts him to say the following words.

My heart is beating in my chest. What may he do?

“Can I kiss your lips?” he says quietly.

The butterflies in my stomach are going crazy. I take a bite. “Yes.” My voice is so soft, but I’m sure he can hear it.

I can’t believe I just said that.

He coughs. “I might not be good at it. I’ve never done it before.”

“I haven’t done it either,” I respond honestly.

I never anticipated that Liam Carter would be my first kiss.

I don’t know how he feels about what I told him. I’m going crazy trying to figure out what he’s thinking.

Liam also seems really apprehensive. I close my eyes and his face tightens. I can feel his nose meet mine next.

I open my eyes wide and shout, “Wait.”

He stops right away.

“Don’t worry about what the girl you’re going to kiss for the first time looks like.” I’m so scared that I’m talking like a mess. “Just think that you’re about to kiss the most beautiful girl in the world.”

What the heck am I saying? I wish I hadn’t said what I did, but it’s too late.

Liam laughs quietly, which surprises me. My eyes get bigger. I’ve never seen him grin before, and nothing could make me feel better than I do right now.

“Oh my God.” I take a breath. “You just smiled,” I say it like I can’t believe what I saw.

This is the first time I’ve seen it.

Liam too appears shocked, but then his eyes light up. I want to remember the sparkle in his eyes and how happy he was for the rest of my life.

“That’s a good thing, isn’t it?” He smiles in a way that shows he finds it funny. “I don’t think I ever did it in the last nine years.”

When he leans in and brushes his lips against mine, I can’t help but close my eyes.

Our first kiss is a little awkward. Looking around. Like the first taste of being free.

“Your lips are so soft.” He murmurs against my mouth, and his voice shakes.

Liam is talking like the sensation is too much for him, but he should know that I feel the same way.

I kiss him back with all my heart. We kiss each other back and forth for a long minute till he pulls away. My stomach hurts. I’m worried that he doesn’t like it enough.

But as I open my eyes, I know why he stopped all of a sudden.

“I’m so sorry for denying you.” He grits his teeth.

My heart races as he kisses me again and again.

Emily Fiat is the end of me.

The concept keeps coming back to me. It doesn’t leave my head, even when I have to train my warriors the day after Emily and I kissed for the first time.

I’m back in the boxing ring, but this time the basement is full with people. The masses scream, yell, and chat like crazy.

People are watching me battle with the Eagle Wings members I choose. I can hear some of them putting money on somebody they think will beat me. The people who made that dumb bet must be new since anybody else should have known that no one has ever beaten me in a one-on-one combat.

My heart beats faster and slower as I wait for the next person to challenge me. As I sense the guy ascending up the ring, the audience gets louder. I drink a lot of water from my water bottle and look him in the eye.

I can hear him breathing and feel the weight of his feet hitting the earth. This one doesn’t seem big or heavy, but it doesn’t feel little either. He’s not very good, but he is certainly angry since he’s panting.

His nostrils flare like a bull’s, and I don’t know why. When we quarrel, it’s generally the other way around. Most of the time, I’m the one who’s mad.

But after kissing Emily yesterday, I don’t think anything can make me feel bad.

Damn god, I can still taste her lips on mine.

I still have a strong sensation of heaven in my head.

I hadn't felt so happy in a long time.

But it also seems so big that I can't help but be afraid that when I wake up, it will simply be a dream.

A gentleman yells to start the fight, and exactly like I thought, my opponent runs towards me like a crazy person. He moves quickly, but I'm quicker since I've been practicing all the time for years. My other senses are five times greater than a regular person's, and martial arts is my therapy. Anyone who picked a battle with me would be a fool to think they could beat me.

Just as his punch is about to hit the side of my head, I duck. I take advantage of that single second of his unbalance to go low and kick his feet, which makes him fall to the ground with a loud thud.

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The audience is going wild, and I hear a person cursing my opponent. When people watch the fight, they often act like animals. They like the brutality, and occasionally their feelings get the best of them.

I'm glad Emily isn't here to see the fight. I don't like the notion of her being in the crowd. Not only is the battle violent, but so is the crowd.

I really don't like the notion of her being here at Eagle Wings, even if I want her so badly that it makes me feel like an addict. Emily and danger shouldn't be in the same location.

After I kick him down, the man gets up. I can tell he's becoming furious by the way he breathes. He yells at me again, and this time the tips of his fingers almost touch my neck. My heart starts racing right away, and my eyes widen in disbelief. This guy wants to kill me by choking me while forcing me against the rope at the edge of the ring.

I move behind him and slide under his arm before he can grab my neck. I kick him in the back so hard that he falls forward against the ring's rope.

As I gasp in disbelief, the audience cheers again. This isn't right. This man seems a little strange.

He hit me like he wanted to kill me, like he really wanted to kill me.

I should have knocked him out with the force I used to kick him into the rope, but now I'm face to face with his anger again. When his body turns to me again, I can

feel his penetrating stare on me, but I'm not going to give him a chance. I'm going to finish this battle right now.

It's really excellent for their practice that one of them is so determined to beat me, but I have a feeling that something is wrong with this person.

I do it first so he can get his equilibrium back and storm at me again. We meet in the middle of the ring because we're both moving quickly, but he's not fast enough to get out of the path of my punch to his face since he's still shaken from my attack.

I hear a loud crack when his jaw fractures. The audience cheers so loudly that it almost makes me deaf. My opponent falls to the ground again.

My jaw feels tight, and I'm breathing hard and fast.

Everyone is horrified that he is still attempting to get up. I can hear loud gasps in the basement, and I can even feel my heart rate go up.

He wants me that much, and I want to know who the hell he is.

I bend down to hit him one last time, but suddenly I feel pain in my upper arm. I moan loudly, and the audience gasps and swears back.

He stabbed me with a knife, for f\*\*k's sake.

I hiss in anguish. No one has ever stabbed me. I don't know what gave him the courage to do it. I never let anyone bring weapons to a battle with me.

He could have stabbed me in the heart, but when I was ready to deliver him the ultimate blow, my thighs were holding the sides of his stomach and my arms were holding him in place. He could only aim the dagger at the flesh of my arm.

He hisses, “You deserve to die.” His whole body is shaking with wrath, not just his voice. “You should die, you bastard.”

He still maintains a firm hold on the knife that is stuck in my skin. I took a hesitant breath as my hand hovered over his to take the knife. When I finally wrap my fingers around the handle, I feel like I’m going to shatter his fingers.

I clenched my teeth and my body shook with anguish. I carefully draw the knife out of my body, using all the strength I can find to stop him from putting it back in. I look up at the ceiling and yell. After I take the knife out, it makes a noise on the bottom of the ring.

People are running into the ring to break us up. I hear him yell in rage as they pull him away from me.

“Stay away from her,” he yells.

I can feel my heart stop because I know who he’s talking about.

“Stay the f\*\*k away from her,” he keeps yelling at me. “She’s too good for you. You can’t even protect her, and you never will be able to, you f\*\*\*\*\*g motherfucker.”

He is furious, and things are going crazy around us. I can hear his voice right now. I know what you mean.

“Come on, man.” You told her to go.

He was the one who yelled at me when I told my members beside the fountain that night that they were going to make Emily their slave.

“I beat you,” he yells. “I won. I got her. You promised me that. Now give her to me,

you f\*\*\*\*\*g jerk.”

I pant and touch the cut on my arm as I hear my own heavy breathing.

“Are you okay, Liam?” people I don’t know keep asking me as they rush to me.

This is the first time a member has attacked a leader. I can see how shocked they would be.

“Please, wait,” someone pleads. “We’ll take you to the doctor as soon as we can.”

I close my eyes tightly, but not because I’m in agony.

Emily.

Why is this happening to her?

I can’t quit thinking about what he said.

You are not good enough for her.

You can’t even keep her safe.

A scared, frantic voice from my opponent’s side fills the air and says, “What the f\*\*k did you just do?” A man is talking to my opponent. “F\*\*k. Did you even know what you just did? Why did you hit Liam?”

“Because he deserved it—”

“Arthur,” the man says in a scared voice, “Stop.” They were afraid of the wrath and repercussions that would ensue if they attacked me, their monarch.



Arthur. I don't know this name. I don't think I've ever talked to him, so I have no idea why he would do anything like that.

My gut tells me that he and Emily are friends. Based on how he talked about her and the fact that he was already interested in her the night they were bothering her, there is more to the tale.

"Don't worry about it, Liam." Someone crouches down next to me and brings me back to reality. "We'll make sure he gets the punishment he deserves."

There is only one penalty for treason, and it will be much harsher because he just assaulted me, their monarch.

Death. A death that hurts.

"No. Let him live." I gritted my teeth.

I can picture the shock on the faces of the people around me when I say that.

"Put him in our jail, and don't touch him until I talk to him."

It is now morning.

While I'm sitting in the bathtub, I let Emily wipe my upper body with a wet towel. The water comes up to my hipbone, yet I'm not completely n\*\*e. I'm still in my shorts.

She is helping me take a bath, and I really appreciate how carefully she massages the region around the wound. Her presence relaxes me.

At first, I thought she was really annoying. It was the denial that was talking to me.

The doctor told me not to worry about my arm. The stab wasn't very deep, perhaps because Arthur was so tired from battling me, and it would heal well.

I turn my head towards my upper arm and feel Emily softly massaging my shoulder blade. She tucks a piece of my wet hair that is in my eye behind my ear, and I let out a trembling breath when her flesh touches my face.

She says, "I can't believe someone did this to you."

She has stated that a million times since yesterday night, and I still haven't questioned her about Arthur.

I know I'm scared of what the response will be. What if Arthur is telling the truth?

I always knew I couldn't keep her safe and that she would be too lovely to be true. That's why I kept saying no to her at first. But then, saying no to an offer like that from paradise was too hard for someone like me who had gone through so much suffering, so I couldn't resist Emily.

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She says, “I wonder who did it,” in a voice that sounds furious. “That jerk cheated in the fight. He wasn’t supposed to use a weapon.” She talks like she can’t stand the notion of someone injuring me.

I stay quiet for a while before I eventually say something. “Arthur. That’s his name.”

She gasps, which confirms what I thought: she knows him. I can feel my anger rising, but I’m doing my best to stay calm.

She murmurs, “What?” in amazement. She shakes her hand when it touches my shoulder and jerks away.

I can feel her falling to the floor of the restroom. She rests her head on the side of the tub, and I softly run my fingers through her hair.

I murmur, “What happened?” since I don’t want to make her any more unhappy. “Talk to me.”

Emily’s breathing is unsteady. I can’t stand it when she gets injured. I can tell she’s straightened up and is paying attention to me again.

“I don’t know.” “It’s just—” She chokes, her voice full of perplexity. “I never thought he would act that way.” I should have helped him comprehend better. I may have made my point better if I had spoken up. I should have talked to him again after I said no.

“What do you mean?” “Urgency is clear in my voice. I get anxious because I’m

afraid he did something terrible to her. “Did he make you do something you didn’t want to do? Did he injure you?” “I hiss with anger.

“No, it’s not like that,” Emily responds hastily. “It’s just...” She takes a long breath, and the seconds that follow are so painful for me. “He really cares about me.” Liam, he’s a decent person. Unlike the other members, he didn’t bother or bully me. He was pushed into Eagle Wings when he was only seeking for his brother. I think he’s one of the few individuals here who really gets how I feel. But recently, especially after his last assignment, he become quite brave about achieving what he desired. I just—

She takes another shaky breath, and it sounds like she’s going to weep. “I don’t know why he attacked you like that.” He shouldn’t have acted that way. I feel awful for him because I know what sort of guy he used to be, and I would be lying if I claimed I didn’t care about him. But I’m also really angry that he hurt you. “Oh, God.” Her voice is shaking, and it sounds like she’s covering her mouth with her hands. “If something even worse happened to you, I don’t think,” she stutters. “I don’t think I’ll forgive—” She can’t even finish her sentence.

I make a tight fist.

It would be an understatement to say that I’m jealous. She was right; she can’t hide how much she cares about him. But I understand where she’s coming from; at that time, he was the only man who could make her feel better. I might have protected her in my own way, but I have to admit that my mouth sometimes ruined everything I did for her.

I was a coward when it came to saying I cared about her, but this guy didn’t have that problem.

I pull Emily into my chest, and she arches her back and wraps her arm around my neck. I close my eyes because I’m still not over the fact that Emily could be happy

with a guy like that. A normal guy who didn't lose his eyesight, didn't have attachment issues, and didn't worry about failing to protect her.

But I have to keep my impatience in check since her sentiments are what matters right now. I know for sure that she would be upset if Arthur is punished.

"You don't have to tell him anything else," I say.

She turns her head, and I can picture her staring up at me in awe.

"I'll talk to him, and you don't have to worry about anything," I offer. "He'll be fine."

\*\*\*\*\*

I walk down to Eagle Wings jail with Emily still on my mind. The jail is in the basement, which is lower than the boxing ring.

The guards at the entrances of the prisoner cells are already waiting for me. One of them shows me the way.

I'm glad Emily isn't here with me to go to the cell. It's not just because I'm scared that Arthur isn't in the right frame of mind to talk to her; it's also because this jail isn't a good place for her. There aren't many prisoners down here—most of our traitors were killed as soon as possible—but even though there are only a few of them here, their states aren't good for Emily to see.

As I walk down the hall between the cells, I can hear one prisoner scream in pain from the t\*\*\*\*\*e and the other beg for forgiveness over and over. The prisoners who are still in our jail are the ones who die slowly and painfully. The way they die depends on how bad their sins were and how much they betrayed us.

Victor told us to take those two captives. Ethan, Zane, Dante, and I didn't place anybody in our jail. The three of them were occupied with far more important assignments, and I didn't care about our members until Emily came and changed everything.

Now I'm headed inside our jail to talk to the prisoner I placed there yesterday. I told everyone not to touch him until I talked to him, so Arthur should be good.

When I eventually halt in front of Arthur's cell, the response should welcome me.

The guard says, "He's doing fine." I know I can't see if it's dark or not. "His ankle is chained, but I can see that he's doing fine even in this darkness."

I nod, but then the guard abruptly moves towards the cage, and my brain goes off like an alarm.

"Wait." His voice is full with anxiety. "He can't be... Oh my God.

My heart is racing as he rapidly opens the cage and runs towards Arthur.

"F\*\*k," he says. "F\*\*k."

"What the hell is going on? "I ask impatiently."

"I thought he was okay until I saw the drool coming out of his mouth."

I get closer to the cell, and I feel terrible inside.

The guard moves and sounds like he's attempting to discover Arthur's pulse. "Shit." He's not here anymore.

For a second, I think the world has stopped moving.

“What the hell happened?” ” I blast so loudly that I’m sure the whole prison can hear me.

“I don’t know,” he says, breathing heavily and sounding as scared as I am. “Maybe he thought he would be punished for betraying us.” I promise that the last time I checked on him, he was still alive. “Oh, shit,” he swears again, sounding like he just recalled something crucial. “He must have gotten the poison from his friends when they came to see him.”

My heart is very low.

Arthur must have felt that ingesting poison would be a better way to die than being tormented slowly and brutally. He didn’t realise that I wasn’t going to do that to him.

My rage is so strong that I feel like I’m about to burst.

The guard stutters, “I’m sorry. I didn’t know he was going to kill himself.” I should have informed him that you didn’t intend any harm, but I didn’t even know what you were going to do to him when you saw him again. He stabbed you. You are our king—

“Enough.” I gritted my teeth.

“I should definitely call the doctor,” he stutters again. “I mean, I examined him, but I’m not sure. I’m going to fetch the doctor now.

I hear him racing back towards the exit while I’m trying to figure out what to do. I don’t want Arthur to die, but I know that he will. I can’t even think how Emily would feel if she knew this.

“F\*\*k.” I hit the ground of the cell with my fist, without caring that my knuckles are bleeding.

I get up and leave the jail. I trip a few times since I’m not used to the hallway. When I get close to the end, I hear a lot of noise.

“What do you mean when you say he’s dead? “Someone snaps, their voice full with terror. “My brother is still alive.”

I remember hearing this voice before, in the boxing ring, when Arthur stabbed me with a knife. Apparently, it’s his brother. He seems much more scared now than he did then.

“That’s suicide,” the guard replies, seeming guilty. “He poisoned himself.”

“What?” “His voice cracks, and I can almost feel his agony.

“What’s he doing?” “Another voice echoes, and I can’t breathe.

I know whose voice this is.

“Emily,” I say in shock.

I warned her not to come with me, but she must have since she was worried.

Arthur’s brother hisses, “You filthy bitch,” before I can let everyone know I’m there. You are the reason he died.



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I walk with rage blazing in my blood.

“No.” Emily sounds like she’s about to cry.

“You f\*\*\*\*\*g manipulator,” Arthur’s brother says. It sounds like he wants to murder her. “You’ll f\*\*\*\*\*g pay for this one, you–”

Before he can finish what he’s saying, I grab him and wrap my fingers around his throat, squeezing it tightly. “Watch your mouth,” I hiss. “Don’t talk to her like that.” You better say you’re sorry to her.

I want to choke him so badly. The only thing keeping me from doing it is that his brother recently died. I can understand his rage since I have a brother too. I don’t know what I will do if the same thing happens to Jackson.

I let go of him and lessen my grasp. He breathes deeply, but he doesn’t say anything.

I turn around quickly as I hear Emily’s footsteps outside. Following the sound of her shoes stamping on the ground fills me with worry.

“Emily,” I yell. “Hold on.”

But she doesn’t listen to me. She keeps running, and I keep after her like my life depends on it. The way she runs tells me know that we’re going down to the ground level.

I know we’re in the backyard when I feel the afternoon wind on my skin and the sun

on my face. I follow Emily until I hear the fountain water.

I can tell she's sobbing in front of the fountain because her knees hit the ground and her head is on the edge of it.

I stop in my tracks. Hearing her screams again terrifies me. Her tears stop, and my heart breaks even more. My hands are trembling at my sides because I feel like I'm coming apart too.

"I'm to blame," she murmurs, her heart breaking. "He died because of me."

"No," I answer firmly, almost furiously.

My voice is shaking too because I'm hurting for her. I wrap my arms around her tightly from behind and beg, "Please don't say that."

When our cheeks contact, I can feel her tears on my skin. I can taste her tears, and it's not just on my lips; it's also in my heart. It tastes like a harsh punishment.

"I never meant for it to happen," I explain, trying to get the knot in my throat to go away.

It's my fault if it is anyone's fault.

She wouldn't have looked for comfort in anybody else if I hadn't been a jerk at first.

He wouldn't have doubted me or felt I was a terrible person if I had been a wonderful guy and commander who could keep my warriors safe.

He may have thought I could defend her if I hadn't been blind.

While I embrace Emily from behind, she keeps weeping. The sound of her crying and

the water from the fountain make the quiet day feel peaceful.

I'm not saying anything, but I can hear Arthur's voice quite clearly in my thoughts, like if the dead guy is watching us and trying to warn me.

You can't keep her safe.

You don't deserve her.

You can't make her smile.

Emily wraps her arms around my waist and holds my hands like I'm everything to her.

"Let it go," I say. "It's okay. Emily, you can cry as much as you want. "I'm here."

When I say it, she cries even more. I hug her even more.

I'm sorry.

I'm very sorry.

I keep saying those things to myself over and over again. I can't say them out loud because it won't help. My apologies can't compare to the tears on her face.

A new day has begun.

As I wash my face, a tear slips from my eye. I whimper and think of how Arthur died. When I pat my face dry with a towel, I look in the mirror and see that my eyes are swollen from sobbing.

Liam held me all night long, but it didn't make the anguish in my heart go away.

It's bad enough to find out that someone I knew killed themselves; it's even worse that I had something to do with it.

I didn't intend to make Arthur feel like he lost the only person who understood what it was like to be in a place where everyone else wanted to be but us.

I attempt to divert myself by brushing my teeth, but it doesn't work.

As soon as I'm done with my morning ritual, I leave the bathroom. My legs stop short as I see Liam waiting for me. He is standing in front of the bathroom, facing me.

The serious look on his rugged face catches me off guard. He appears like he has something very important to tell me.

My heart is racing. I don't believe I can handle any more terrible news.

"Boxing ring," he says.

I don't know what to say.

"Let's go there." The way he says it makes it clear that I can't say no, and he will take me there if I don't want to go.

"The ring?" "Why do I have to ask?"

Liam turns around and expects me to do the same, which I do.

"Why?" "I'm asking again, trying to keep up with his long strides."

I can only see his back, but I can picture the deadly look on his face as we walk down the hallway. It's still very early in the morning, so there aren't many people around. Most people in this part of the house party until late at night and then sleep for a few hours because they drank too much.

"Do you think I will just forget about it after hearing what his brother said to you last night?" "He talks through his teeth."

I become scared when I think of what Arthur's brother said to me when he threatened me. He said I should pay for his brother's death.

But talking to him and telling him I cared about his brother seems like a horrible idea. He must detest me so much that he wants me dead.

We go to the basement where Liam typically trains martial arts in no time. I look at the boxing ring and wonder what Liam would do.

Why is he bringing me here?

Liam pulls off his shirt and throws it down before he even stops walking. Then he turns back to look at me, his mouth tight.

I'm still out of breath from getting here so quickly.

He steps into the arena and says in a strong voice, "Follow me."

He reaches out his arm to help me climb up, and I allow him pull me up.

I can see where this is heading, but I don't think I'm ready. Liam, on the other hand, appears to be in a hurry, as if bringing me here is the most essential thing right now. But I still believe he's rushing it. I'm not ready for it.

“I’m going to teach you,” he says.

I swallow.

“You heard him. I can’t stop thinking about it. “He’s going to hurt you, Emily.”

“Liam—”

He cuts me off before I can even say what I want to say. “I can’t always protect you,” he says. “He knows he will be dead if he ever touches you, but he’s still going to do it.”

It’s clear that he’s angry. I can tell that this is making him feel bad. His hands are tightly clenched at his sides, and his chest is rising and falling.

“I’ll hunt him down if he ever comes near you, but I’m not going to take that chance,” he adds firmly. “You need to learn how to protect yourself.” I can’t see, Emily.

I take a step forward and say, “Liam—”

“Start now,” he says. “Fight me like I’m him, and I’ll show you how to protect yourself.”

Liam walks to the centre of the ring without waiting for me to say anything. The scary look on his face makes me want to go to him, so I do.

Today I’m wearing my joggers and T-shirt. Maybe that’s enough to let me move around, but I’m not a pro. I can’t even say I’m athletic; I only work out regularly for my health. If someone asked how well I exercise or play sports, I would say I’m below average. That’s something I still need to work on.

I take a long breath and choke. I want to tell him not to worry and that Arthur's brother could have simply made an empty threat, but it feels too late now.

Liam shows me how to warm up, and when it's time to practise, I can't help but get more scared.

Liam says, "Let's get started now. I'm going to show you how to punch, block, and kick."

I watch Liam give me the examples. He does it so perfectly that I worry whether I'll ever be able to do it correctly. He's just too skilled. His adversaries die from the way he moves, yet he makes it appear so effortless.

He stays near by and shows me how to do it when it's my turn.

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“You’re doing it wrong,” he hisses, as if my blunders are making him very mad. “Make sure your elbow isn’t locked.” Pull the fist that isn’t hitting back. You won’t have a strong punch if you don’t do it correctly. “Again.”

I pant and do my best. It seems impossible to do it correctly. I wish he would let me go because this is my first time learning how to fight. But Liam won’t let up until I get it right.

I don’t even know how long it’s been since we went down to the basement.

“Again,” he says.

We are now on to the next level because I couldn’t hit my punch.

He’s teaching me how to block my enemy’s strike, and once again, I’m failing terribly.

How could I win if he was the one who assaulted me? He’s a friggin champion.

He puts me down again and then instructs me to get up again, this time for the thousandth time. I don’t even know how many times it’s been.

“Again, Emily,” he snaps and turns his back to me, getting ready for another round.

The way he talks to me makes my heart hurt.

“I can’t,” I eventually exclaim, throwing my hands in the air and standing up. “I can’t do this.” You’re being too pushy. How can I beat someone like you? ”



My chest goes up and down, and then my voice gets softer. “Just, please.” “Turn it down a little.” I sound like I’m begging him to do anything.

“No,” he shouts. His body shakes with rage. “Are you crazy? Someone who assaults you could intend to murder you. His eyes are filled with rage as he yells, “He’s not going to back down.”

I’ve seen Liam furious a lot, but I’ve never seen him this angry. We need to stop this. It’s not good for him, and it could even be worse for me.

I respond, “I haven’t even mastered my stance.” “This is crazy, Liam.” I can’t do it this way. How about we take it easy? ”

“Because we don’t have any f\*\*\*\*\*g time,” he yells, as his voice echoes throughout the basement.

I can’t believe what I’m seeing. His eyes are red, and the way he’s breathing scares me. He may have a heart attack at any moment.

He isn’t panting because he’s been working out. He’s panting because he’s scared and angry.

“Again, Emily,” he replies in a short tone.

I feel like I’m going to pass out at any moment. My head hurts so much and the room is spinning.

Is it already night outside?

I keep falling to the ground, unable to protect myself from Liam’s onslaught. This time, I can’t get up again. I can’t even move my cheek off the cold cement.

I'm tired, both physically and psychologically.

"Get up." Liam's voice is trembling.

I can hear how scared he is. I can even feel it all over my damaged body.

"Get up, Emily!" he screams.

I close my eyes and let my tears flow. I can taste it in my lips as I'm laying here on the ground. My body might ache, but it hurts more to watch him like this.

Liam...

You stated you weren't my idol.

Why are you working so hard to keep me safe that it's hurting both of us like this?

"Emily." His voice breaks. "Get up." Try it again. "One more time," he says in a painful whisper. "Try not to die."

But I'm already dead.

"It aches," I say gently. "I can't even move my body. Liam—" I finally let my sob burst.

Liam runs over to me and kneels down. He moves my body so that I can lie down with my back on his lap and puts his arms around me.

"Shit. 'I'm sorry,'" he says, his eyes hazy. I swallow a knot in my throat. "I'm sorry, Emily," he says.

“I—”

“Shh,” he says, cutting me off. “No need to talk.”

I can’t take my eyes off of him. I want to see the brightness in them again.

“Just rest,” he adds. “I’ll take care of you.”

I let out a moan as he tightened his grip on me.

I’m falling asleep before I realise it.

I sit on my bed and stroke Emily’s hair. She hasn’t woken up yet, but she moves when I touch her.

I’m not going to wake her up yet since it’s still too early in the morning. She needs to sleep.

I pounded her too hard in the boxing ring yesterday. I knew I was being too harsh on her, but I was afraid as hell. All I could think about was losing her.

I knew from the start that this area may be dangerous for her, and after what occurred recently, my anxiety became even more.

If I can’t keep her safe...

As soon as I think about it, my eyes clench shut. It’s my biggest dread right now, and it’s eating me up inside because I know it may happen.

I get up to go for my morning jog. I want to be with her every second since that’s the only way I can be sure she’s safe, but I need to think straight after what I did to her

yesterday.

I don't want today to end like yesterday did. I don't want to push her too hard and injure her again. I need to go for a jog this morning to clear my head and get rid of all this unrest in my body.

I kiss Emily's hair and sigh. I recall how much she appreciated it when I attempted to make her feel better yesterday.

I let her sleep on the bed last night and gave her a little massage on her arms and legs. I knew she was in pain, so I tried to make it better.

The aromatherapy oil still smells good in the room, and I'm delighted it may let her relax for a little while longer. I'll just wake her up when it's time for breakfast.

LAY LA

As the sun's rays tickle my cheeks, my eyelids flutter. I gently open my eyes and extend my arms.

God, my body hurts since I practiced so much yesterday.

I turn over to my side, hoping to see Liam still resting next to me. But he's not there anymore, which makes me sad.

I sit up in bed and hug my knees as I think about what we're going to do today. A smile spreads across my face as I look at the aromatherapy candles on the nightstand. I appreciate the little things he did to make me feel better. It's funny to see someone who can be so grumpy and scary suddenly do something nice like that.

I lie back against the headboard and pick up my phone from the other nightstand.

When I read the name of the person who sent me a voice message, I smile again. It's Liam.

I tap the message to hear his voice and wonder what he intended to say when I was still asleep.

“Hey, I'm going for a jog for a little. I didn't mean to wake you awake. I shut the door behind me as I left the room so you would be secure. Please wait for me till

I return. I put the extra keys on the desk in case of an emergency.”

I know why he's doing all this, but I can tell that he's being extra careful.

I get out of bed and head to the bathroom to brush my teeth and wash my face. I hum and sing while I do this, as I always do. I wonder whether Liam has ever been bothered by this.

I stop moving as soon as I realise it and stare into the mirror. But then I shrug and keep brushing my teeth. He previously told me I was unpleasant.

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I hear a tap on the door when I leave the restroom. A smile spreads over my face. I'm delighted Liam is done with his morning run since I'm already hungry. I can't wait to eat breakfast with him.

"Coming." I pick up the keys and walk towards the door, wobbling.

I don't see anyone when I open it.

I wrinkle my brows in uncertainty. But then I remember what I just accomplished, and my heart skips a beat.

Why would Liam knock? He had the keys. He said he locked me in from the outside so I would be protected.

You should only use the extra keys in an emergency.

I abruptly turn my body and run back into the room. But before I can lock the door, someone wraps their arm around my waist and covers my lips to stifle my scream.

The guy closes the door behind me, and I start to worry. I try to scream, but my attacker covers my lips to keep me silent.

A chilly voice hisses in my ear, "Shut the f\*\*k up," and I realise who it is.

Arthur's sibling.

I kick his foot, elbow his stomach, and grab his wrists to try to get away, but he's

more stronger than I am. His grasp on me makes it hard for me to move.

I can't recall anything Liam taught me about self-defence. All I can feel right now is dread, which makes it hard for me to think.

Arthur's brother turns me over and throws me onto the bed. I lay on my back as he stands over me. To my terror, his hands rush to my throat, encircling it tightly and choking me.

My eyes get bigger. All I can see is the anger on his face.

"I don't care what you mean to Liam." His nostrils flare, and his eyes are crimson with anger. "Did you think you could simply go on with your life after what happened to my brother? "

I feel like crying. It's not just the anguish in my heart; it's also the fact that I'm slowly losing my breath. I hold his hands tightly to get him to let go of my throat, and my nails dig into his flesh.

He yells, "If you hadn't put him in jail, he wouldn't have taken the poison from Kelvin."

I can't believe what I'm seeing.

Kelvin?

Was it Kelvin who gave Arthur the poison?

I am angry, and my need to survive makes me use all the energy I have left to kick him hard in the chest. He lets me go for a time, but then he grabs me again.

He takes my collar as I'm still struggling to breathe. He throws me to the side, and I hit the nightstand. It falls to the ground, and I drop hard on the floor while the aromatherapy candles hit the bookshelf.

The candles and oil touch the papers and start to catch fire right in front of my eyes.

I feel like the world has stopped moving, but before I can do anything, Arthur's brother is instantly on top of me again, straddling me. He locks my wrists on my sides with his hands.

He grits his teeth and says, "I don't f\*\*\*\*\*g understand what you did to him." Because of you, he assaulted Liam. He killed himself. Why? Before you showed up, he was OK.

I feel pain in my heart again when I realise that he doesn't even know how hard his sibling is trying.

"I gave him money." His comments are full with anger. "I gave him a f\*\*\*\*\*g good job." He was picked for a task that would make him very proud. Why? Why? "

"Because he was in pain," I shout, unable to stop myself.

He needs to know how Arthur actually felt, even if it hurts him.

"He hated living here," I explain. "He didn't want to be here." He thought he didn't fit in.

He abruptly freezes, as if my words have hit him in the heart. The fury is still very clear in his eyes.

I swallow. "He never wanted to join Eagle Wings." He didn't like the folks here. "He



hated the mission,” I scream, remembering what Arthur said to me the last time I saw him. “He didn’t want to kill—”

“Shut up,” he shouts. “You don’t know anything about my brother.” Don’t talk like he had a problem before you came around.

My cheeks are wet with tears.

But that was the truth.

I actually made things worse because I made him feel even more alone. He felt I was the only one who would understand him, and he thought we could fight the darkness together.

I close my eyes tightly and hear Arthur’s words again.

“We’re alike, Emily. When I look at you, I see myself. We shouldn’t become like them. “We’re better than them.”

When I open my eyes, I see his brother’s anger again. Before I know it, he hits me hard in the face. The agony is so bad that I can’t help but curl up on the floor.

He bends his back and sits on his knees with his eyes closed. He takes a long breath, as if to ignore what I said.

Not only do my tears make my eyesight hazy, but the smoke that is starting to fill the room does too. The fire is spreading, and my heart starts to race.

I have a hard time standing up and dragging my legs to the balcony. As soon as I touch the railing, he pushes me against it. He takes a handful of my hair with his fist and makes me turn around to face him. He then grabs my throat again with his other

hand.

I choke because I can't take the pain. I haven't even gotten over his first attempt to kill me by choking me.

My feet are off the ground, and my back is bent so far that if he pushes me just a little bit, I may go over the balcony.

I don't know whether way to die will hurt more: falling over the balcony or choking to death.

I hope that someone, anybody, will see us from down below and aid me.

My mind is racing. The fact that I may die today makes my heart race.

No. I can't die right now.

How about Liam?

How about my family?

I fight for my life, kicking and hitting in every direction. I hit him in the right location with my knee, which makes him groan and let go of me. I seize that precious second to get away from him and run back into the room, even though it's almost on fire.

I can hear him cursing behind me. Just as I look back, the second bookcase that is on fire falls on him. His cry of anguish fills my ears as I stagger forward. I fall to the floor and crawl with my elbows.

I look back again, and my eyes widen as I see the flames eat him up.

“No,” I say in a scared voice.

It’s still terrible to see someone die right in front of me, even though he can’t hurt me anymore.

I’m dying from the heat. The smoke is becoming worse, and my eyes hurt.

The more I stay in the room, the harder it is to breathe. I don’t know what to do or where to go. The fire has spread to the door, and when I look up at the ceiling, it looks like it may fall down at any moment.

I had never been so close to death.

After my morning exercise, I go back to the home and think about my plans with Emily for the day. I have to train her again. I know we have to do it every day until she gets good at her defence. It might not keep her completely safe, but it’s the best I can do.

As I approach closer to the home, I halt. The air I breathe is odd. It smells like smoke and tastes bad.

The wind blows harder, which makes things much more clear. My mind is on high alert right away.

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A fire is going on, and the wind is blowing from the home, so it must be coming from there.

As I pick up speed, my heart beats like a drum in my chest. I'm now sprinting, and my breath is short and quick because I'm starting to panic.

"There's a fire on the third floor," someone yells.

People standing around the side of the estate are already blocking my way before I can go inside. Their gasps and whispers tell me that they are attempting to figure out what's going on.

"Oh no." That room belongs to Liam, right? "Someone asks, and my heart almost stops."

"I saw it," a female shouts. "I saw them on the balcony." He was trying to strangle her.

"Are you sure about that?" "Someone else asks in disbelief.

"What the hell is going on? "I snap."

The sounds around me stop right away. The air is full of terror.

"Liam," another person stutters, as if he can't believe I made it this far.

"Answer me," I yell, my whole body trembling.

I'm breathing so hard that it's not even good for me. I can't breathe. It feels like the air in my lungs is being pulled out.

I don't know what I will do if something horrible really happened to Emily. From what I just heard, it wasn't just bad. It's enough to make me want to destroy the whole world.

Someone starts, "Liam," sounding quite scared. "It's your room—" They can't even continue their statement.

I'm still breathing heavily, and I'm sure they can all hear it. I don't even beg him to keep talking since I can't even say a word right now because I'm breathing so quickly.

Someone else concludes the statement with, "It's on fire."

"Emily." My voice shakes so much that I almost cough. "Where is she?" "

I can't hear anyone answer me. All I can hear is quiet, and it's like a knife cutting my heart very slowly.

"Where the hell is she?" "I yell.

My hands are shaking with anxiety, right down to the tips of my fingers.

I just heard that someone broke into my room and was about to strangle her to death.

I can predict who it is, and I'll murder him with my hands.

I clench my teeth and charge towards the home, but someone stops me at the door.

“Dustin,” he says. “Liam.” He pulls me back with his big frame and holds my upper arms. “You can’t go in there.”

I push him away and say, “Get off me.” I feel like I’m going to burst.

“Goddammit,” Dustin says through gritted teeth as he tries to keep me from moving. “Everyone, come over here right now,” he yells to the people surrounding us. “Help me hold him back.” “Keep him safe.”

“Get the f\*\*k off,” I yell as more people hold me back. They grab my arms and lock my waist.

Can you keep me safe?

As their monarch, they are protecting me, but I can’t do anything to defend her.

“Get off me, you f\*\*\*\*\*g people,” I yell, my voice full of wrath. “If you don’t let me go inside, I’ll kill you all.”

Dustin screams, “And Ethan will punish us all if we let you.” I stop in my tracks. “Your brother wouldn’t want you to go inside, Liam.” What will you do there? I’m really sorry I have to tell this to you, but—

He takes a deep breath and gets ready to speak the next thing that will harm me.

“You can’t see. You can’t just think that you’ll be able to save her from the fire. Are you really going to push your way through the fire without thinking and let us risk both of you dying? ”

I can feel the tears in my eyes before Dustin even finishes his words.

I know it, damn it.

I know I'm blind as hell.

But I have to save her.

The awful truth has just hit me. What if I can't save her even if I don't mind dying, even if I die in the process?

The agony is so bad that my body gets stiff.

I can hear Tera crying in the background as Dustin sighs.

"Don't worry," Dustin says as he touches my shoulder. "You are our king, Liam." We are here to assist you get what you need. Stay here. "I'm going to look for her, and I promise you that I will do everything I can to save her."

I hear his footsteps rushing towards the house, and before I can say anything, he's gone to save Emily.

My teeth are chattering because I'm scared, angry, and sad. The people are still holding me back, but I'm not trying to get away anymore. I can only look forward and hope that Emily will come back to me.

I didn't mean to, but I let my tear fall, then another, then another.

People are shouting around me, trying to figure out how to put out the fire. Some of them have already phoned for help to put it out. The rest are talking loudly and urgently.

Things are crazy around me, but my heart is even more crazy.

I can't do anything but stand here. I can't move.

Waiting.

Waiting.

And still, I'm waiting.

I don't believe I'll ever forget the sound of the fire blazing.

This is yet another bad dream.

Again, I'm being kept in the dark.

Without seeing.

No options.

No chances.

I can't safeguard the person I care about.

I can only accept whatever suffering comes my way.

I can only naively look for a miracle on the day when Emily Fiat could die.

My eyelids are so heavy that I can't open them. I try again slowly, and when I finally do, I see a white ceiling.

I squint because the light is too bright for my eyes to handle. My vision becomes improved with time.



I glance around and see that I'm laying on a bed in a room with white walls. There is just a tiny cabinet, a desk with a chair, and an IV pole next to me.

This is a room for treating a patient, but it doesn't look like a hospital room. It appears more like a doctor's office.

As memories of what happened in Liam's room come back to me, I instantly sit up. My heart starts to race, and I grab my chest through the thin fabric of the robe.

The last thing I remember is passing out in the restroom when the fire became more worse. Did I just make it through?

What about Arthur's brother? Is he dead?

The door opens and I jump. Tera is there in the doorway with her eyes wide open in astonishment. She quickly walks up to me and hugs me tightly. When she lets go, I see the tears of relief in her eyes. She smiles at me and grips my hands.

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“You’re awake.” A man’s voice makes me look back at the door.

Dustin walks up to me, and I can see that he feels the same way.

“How...” I don’t even know how to ask. My heart isn’t ready to tell them how close I came to dying yet.

Dustin sighs, “You worried us all. But it’s all over now.” When I came inside the room, I saw you lying on the bathroom floor, not moving. Fortunately, the fire hadn’t spread as much in that portion of the room as it had in the others. I was able to get you out just in time, before the ceiling fell.

I shudder after hearing him. It seems like a dream that I just got out of that type of nightmare.

Dustin squeezes Tera’s shoulder to soothe her and looks at her with love. Tera sighs, which means she was probably really worried about her father.

I say, “Thank you for saving me.”

I can’t help but cry because I’m so thankful. I owe Dustin my life.

Dustin smiles and says, “Anytime, Emily.”

I’m really happy that I have these two here at Eagle Wings. They’re so nice and friendly, which is different from the other members.

Liam informed me that they were like family since Dustin had worked at the house for a long time. He and Tera came before Liam's parents died.

"Emily," a different voice calls from the door, and my pulse skips a beat. Liam stands by the door.

He must have heard me.

"Are you awake? His face shows both shock and optimism.

But his eyes make me catch my breath. They are so sorrowful. I want to cry when I look at him like this.

Dustin and Tera stare at one other and agree. "Okay, we're going to leave now," he says.

I sit up straight. Before I can express the question that's been on my mind, Dustin replies, "This is Doctor Max's clinic." You're still in the Eagle Wings house. He'll check on you in a few minutes. I don't think you need to worry about your situation, but he'll explain it to you better."

I nod and watch as he and Tera leave and walk for the door.

Liam goes up to me and sits down next to the bed. I immediately grab for his hand, and he grips mine.

"How are you doing?" "he asks, worry written all over his face.

"I feel fine." I clear my throat so he doesn't worry.

I rub my neck with the back of my other hand. It still aches, and I suppose there are

bruises from how hard I was choked. But I'm sure it will get better.

Liam doesn't question me about the person who attacked me, so I think he already knew who it was.

"Is he—"

Liam lets go of my hand right away when he hears what I'm going to ask. Instead, he makes a fist till his knuckles become white and his jaw tightens.

"Dead," he adds in a chilly voice. "Burned to death."

I gasp and put my palm over my lips. "Oh, God."

Liam's voice is low, and the way he says it makes me tremble. "It's still nothing compared to what he has done to you." "He was lucky he was dead."

I would have tormented him to death if he hadn't been.

"Liam," I say, stopping him and taking his hand again.

His eyes relax, and the stress on his shoulders goes away.

"It's done," I say. "I don't want to think about it any more."

He sighs and squeezes my hand. I put my other hand on his cheek, and he turned his face towards me. He sighs again and kisses my palm softly, which makes my stomach flutter.

"I feel better now," I say. "Are you?"

He gulps. His response makes me frown. I see the muscles in his neck move. I need to know that he's okay too, but he doesn't tell me that.

I know he's still upset that I was assaulted while he was abroad, but I made it through.

Liam, please. Speak up. Tell me how you feel and what you're worried about. Be honest with me, and don't stop.

He stops me by holding my hand and rubbing my thumb on his face.

He suddenly says, "Do you want to go somewhere?"

I don't know what to say. It seems like he still has more to say.

"You said you didn't want to think about it anymore. Should we go on vacation?" He furrows his brow.

My mouth is open.

I never would have thought that Liam Carter would invite me to go on vacation with him.

"What?" I say softly. "But I thought we couldn't go outside unless we were on a mission."

Liam shakes his head, and I'm astonished to see that he's amused. "It doesn't apply to the leaders. You can't possibly think that."

I feel dumb all of a sudden. I still don't know what to say. The thought of leaving this location that makes me feel trapped, even for a little time, is too good.

I can't help but wonder, "Where do you want us to go?"

Liam comments, "A place my family used to go."

I can tell he cares about it by the way he expressed it. It must be a special spot for him and his family.

"I haven't been there in a long time," he says. "I believe it's time for me to go back there."

I grin softly. If travelling to that spot will make Liam happy, I'll go there right away.

It's also a fantastic time for me, given what just occurred to me. This trip with Liam sounds like a great way to relax.

Liam squeezes my hand on his face and says, "What do you think, Emily?" "Do you want to come with me?"

I laugh and feel warm within. A second smile appears on my lips. "Of course. I would love to."

I look out the window as the vehicle takes us to our destination. Tera is in the front passenger seat and Dustin is driving. Liam and I are at the back.

It's nice to be back in town after being stuck in the mansion. I watch the folks on the sidewalk and the building we pass with my gaze. After a long period, it's great to see life go back to normal.

Our trip takes hours, and as time goes on, the places we pass through become empty again. I'm becoming more and more excited now that we've left town. I think we're going to get to our destination soon.

As the automobile slows down, I see a magnificent lake surrounded by trees and hills. I gasp and turn my head quickly to Liam.

“Liam.” I say his name with eagerness, and he merely nods in response.

When I see a cottage near to the lake, a grin creeps over my lips. It would be an understatement to say that this site is magnificent. The water is as pure as glass. The wooden cottage is near to the outside area, which has a lawn with big plants and a fire pit. The backyard has a lovely lake.

The four of us get out of the car after Dustin parks it. Dustin and Tera help us get our bags out of the car and into the cottage.

“Okay, just call us if you need anything,” Dustin says to us as he gets ready to go.

I frown. “Why so soon? Aren’t you guys going to stay with us for a while? We can have a barbecue by the lake,” I add, thinking that this could be the best idea for all of us. I’m sure Dustin and Tera are fatigued from the trip.

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Tera shakes her head and smiles.

Dustin pats my shoulder and says, “Nah, that’s okay.” “We have work to do. Victor just got some new members today, and they need us.”

My shoulders are drooping. I can’t stop thinking about Victor. I haven’t met him, but it’s evident that he hired most of the people that live in the mansion.

“I’ll be back next week to get you,” he says, patting Liam on the shoulder.

Liam merely nods, and I watch as they get in the car.

Liam and I go into the cabin after they depart. I can’t help but look around in astonishment.

There is nice furniture and a fireplace in the living room. I can see why Liam’s family loves to rest there. The deck includes an outside area with a view of the lake, so the whole family may eat there if they want to. Even if it’s not very big, it has enough room for everyone to sit.

There’s also a well-stocked kitchen. I can see Liam’s mum using it to make everyone memorable meals and snacks.

“This place is so pretty,” I whisper.

I look at Liam and think about how he feels about this. He can’t see what’s around him anymore, but I wonder whether he can recall how it felt to be here.



He takes a deep breath and closes his eyes. “It still smells the same. The air, the trees, and the lake,” he stops in the middle of his statement, as if he’s remembering everything, “the feel of the hardwood floor beneath my feet. I still remember that Ethan, Sophie, and I used to run about here. I recall

Ethan and I were mean to one other, Sophie laughed, and our mother yelled at us. My father isn’t very loving, but he would listen to all of us.

When he opens his eyes, they are sorrowful. I can’t help but take his hand.

“It’s all a memory, but it feels good,” Liam adds, and I feel better right away. “It feels good to be back here.”

“This place doesn’t feel empty,” I say quietly.

Even though it hasn’t been used in years, the cabin is quite tidy.

Liam lets out a sigh. “Ethan always makes sure this place is clean. He paid someone to do it.”

Liam walks towards the terrace. I follow him and help him get there since he still has to get used to his surroundings after all these years.

The wind hits us as soon as we step outside the cabin and onto the back porch. The terrace that looks out over the lake has a path that lets us get closer to the water, and the view is so lovely that it makes me want to cry.

I look at Liam and wish he could see this again.

“Will you help me walk to the end of the deck?” he says.

“Of course,” I answer, and I do as he says.

He asks, “It’s about time for sunset, isn’t it?” as we stroll down the wooden concrete.

I look up at the sky, and indeed, it’s time for the sun to set.

As we get near to the end of the deck, I clutch Liam’s hand tightly. The water is already on our sides, so I have to be careful not to let him fall.

At the conclusion, we stop and sit down to savour the moment. I put my toe in the water. It’s not too chilly; it’s exactly right.

I rested my head on Liam’s shoulder and looked out at the scenery in front of us. I wished again that a miracle would happen so that he could see again. I didn’t want to, but I let a tear fall from my eye since I felt so strongly about it. I’m frightened he’ll see it because it falls on his shoulder.

“Tell me about it,” he asks as I covertly wipe my eye and sit up straight. “Tell me about the sunset. What do you see? Is it still as pretty as I remember it?”

Liam had never spoken the word “beautiful” before; it sounds too flowery for someone like him who is frigid on the outside. So this sunset must be truly special for him. Of course, he used to watch it with his family, the people he loved.

“It still is,” I say as I look at the sunset.

I’m doing my best to explain it to him since he can’t see it.

I remark, “The sky is changing colours, and the sun is getting closer to the horizon.”  
“The golden disc is almost touching the water. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and bright pink. It’s bright but not too bright. Just looking at it makes me feel warm.”

I breathe in the air surrounding me, and my chest gets constricted. Liam looks up at the sky in the same direction as me, but I don't know what he's thinking. He doesn't seem sad. Instead, he appears happy. I think he'll smile any second now, but he doesn't.

"I've been seeing black for a long time," he adds. "I can't remember the colours anymore."

It seems like my heart is plunging into a hole. Tears start to fill my eyes again.

Liam puts his hand on my cheek and shakes his head, as if he knows how sad I feel after hearing that.

"Don't feel sorry for me," he says in a gruff voice as he glances at me. "I brought you here so you could see how beautiful it is. I want you to see it, Emily. I want you to see it for me."

I put his hand on my cheek. "Do you miss it?" I murmur in a weak voice.

He gives a nod. "Yes, I miss the sunset that I can't see anymore. But I don't need it anymore, especially now."

His lips curl up at the corners, and I wonder if I'm seeing things.

But Liam does appear happy. He doesn't look as sad as I do.

He looks at the water. "I always wanted to come back here, but Ethan was always busy. I didn't want to come alone. But now I'm here with you."

I look at him and think about how lonely he must have been during those years he waited for Ethan.

“Emily,” he murmurs.

“Hm?”

He turns to face me again. “Will my brother ever come back home?”

I can feel the heaviness of his inquiry pushing me down. I know I only have one response, even though it’s hard to say what it is. I still have hope. I still believe that Ethan is alive.

“Yes. I’m sure he’ll come back home,” I respond.

Liam looks to the sky again, even though he can’t see anything. We sit quiet for a long time, enjoying the soothing wind on our skin. I sigh and let myself enjoy every second we have here before we head back inside.

“You know,” Liam says, hesitantly, making me worry what he’s going to say. “I would kill to see it again if I could only remember one colour.”

He turns his head towards me, and for some reason, I can feel the grief in his eyes.

“It’s blue.”

Liam grumbles, “I’m f\*\*\*\*\*g hungry,” while he waits for his supper to be brought.

He is seated at the table, and the smell of the truffle I’m creating for him is making him even hungrier.

As I cook his food in the kitchen, I laugh at how cranky he is. “Just a little bit more. I told you to wait in the bedroom or somewhere else. You don’t have to sit there and hurt yourself.”

“I can still smell it from any room in this house,” he says.

I shake my head in disbelief.

“God, I’m f\*\*\*\*\*g leaving.” He gets up from the chair and rushes out to the terrace.

I turn my attention back to the mushroom soup I’m making. The other dishes are already on the kitchen counter, so this one will be ready very soon.

I look at the honey-glazed chicken and potato gnocchi I cooked before. A smile of pride spreads over my lips.

I switch off the stove after I’m done cooking. It’s best if we have supper on the terrace since Liam has already relocated there.

When I deliver the meal to the back patio eating area, Liam straightens up in his seat right away.

He growls, “I’m literally drooling.” “Why did it take you so long?”

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I want to roll my eyes, yet I can't help but smile a little. He may be the head of the mafia, but he acts like a baby sometimes.

I feel a little awful for having him wait so long, but as he eats my food like it's the finest meal he's ever had, I remember that it's worth it.

"F\*\*k. You made all of my favourite food."

I watch him eat with such excitement. Even if what we're doing right now is basic, it makes my heart feel something. Just seeing him pleased makes my heart race with joy.

Now I know that seeing Liam happy makes me more happier. I don't know why it's so essential to me. Maybe it's because he's been through a lot and I always think he deserves better in life.

I haven't even touched my food since I've been so focused on watching him eat. I clear my throat because I'm embarrassed of myself. My cheeks go hot, and I'm glad he can't see it.

He remarks, "You know, you didn't have to do that," as I'm eating quietly.

I look up from my plate and notice him looking at me.

He adds, "You can cook whatever you want, and I'll eat it anyway." "Whatever you cook, I love it."

His words break my heart.

Liam has been quite pleasant lately, and sometimes it still surprises me because of how he used to be when we first met.

“I wanted to,” I respond honestly, and his eyes soften.

Liam relaxes back in his chair since he is done eating. He seems like he wants something, and I can almost feel the inquiry on my mouth.

“Did you and your family spend a lot of time on this patio?” I enquire.

I used to be afraid to enquire about his family because of the scar that never went away in his heart. Now, though, we can talk about it without any problems. It helps me believe that Liam is getting better. He doesn’t get mad all the time anymore. He still is sometimes, but not all the time.

I hope he understands that not all of the weak sentiments he gets are unpleasant, like when I invite him to dance in the rain. He still hurts from losing his family, but he should hold on to the memories of them instead of trying to forget them.

Liam eventually adds, “Yes, we did spend a lot of time on this patio.” “During the day, we would have an afternoon tea together. My parents would ask us what we had learnt that day. Sometimes, Ethan liked to show off the new martial arts move he had just learnt, and I would challenge him because I couldn’t help being a cocky bastard. My parents would watch us with amusement, sitting together exactly where we are now, while Sophie was busy making a necklace of flowers on the ground.”

I pay close attention to everything he says, and I can see that his grey eyes light up as he talks about the wonderful moments.

He explains, “My dad was busy, but when we were here, he always made sure to pay attention to us.” “Later that night, when it was time for us to go to bed, he would ask my mum to dance on this patio. I saw them dance a few times, but they were so into it that they didn’t even notice me coming.”

I grin because I like his narrative.

He says, “When I was a kid, I always thought I would never ask a girl to dance because it looked too personal.” “I didn’t think it was cool. It’s too girly.”

I lift my eyebrows in disbelief. “Wasn’t it cool?”

He shakes his head. “No, it wasn’t.”

“It’s too girly?”

“It was,” he says, raising an eyebrow. “I would have felt less manly.”

I fake to gasp and say, “Emasculated?”

“Yes.” His eyes sparkle with amusement. “Do you want me to spell it out for you?”

I laugh out loud, which surprises me, because I like the fighting.

“Oh my God,” I say. “You asked me to dance in your room once. Did you forget?”

He squints at me and seems like he doesn’t understand. “I’m not sure about that. I think you were the one who asked me to dance with you.”

Oh, God. At this time, we’re not doing this.



I'm going to disagree with what he said, but then I remember that I'm not sure what we spoke about back then.

I say, "It doesn't matter now," but then I bend over the table and rest my face on my palms as I stare at him playfully. "Please dance with me."

Liam licks his lips. His face shows greater amusement. His eyes are happy.

"What now?" he wonders.

"Yeah."

"Without music?" he asks.

I huff and throw my phone on the table. I look for the same song that was playing in his room when we slow danced earlier. The music fills the air soon, and I wait for him.

Liam gets up from his chair and holds out his hand to me. "May I?" he says nicely.

I can't stop laughing. "You're welcome," I mumble as he pulls me up to my feet.

We get into the basic position, and I taunt, "What were you saying?"

He laughs. "Come on. I was a kid then."

I lift my eyebrows. "And now?"

He pulls me closer by the waist, and I hit his chest. "I'm a man."

We start to dance with one hand on his shoulder and the other in his hand.

“You’ve learnt that I’m a terrible dancer,” Liam says near to my ear, making me shudder. “I’m not going to give you a heads up.”

I chuckle again and fling my head back. “Don’t worry. I won’t let you fall.”

We move slowly while we dance. Just like last time, I show him how to do the steps, and Liam is already better than he was last time.

My lips curl into a happy smile. I lay my head on his chest and breathe in his manly aroma, which makes me feel relaxed.

We keep moving back and forth. I close my eyes and wonder whether I can stay in this bubble of happiness forever. That’s when I hear him whisper.

“But I already did.”

Liam adds in an annoyed voice, “It’s supposed to be around here somewhere.”

We’re planning to spend some time on the hammock in the woods today. We’ve been walking for a long time, but we still can’t find it.

“I think it’s not that far,” he says, and I can only sigh.

It’s been a long time since he went to that hammock, and the last time he did, he could still see, so I get why he can’t find his way back right away. But, as always, Liam is being too hard on himself.

“It’s okay,” I mutter. “I’m really enjoying walking in these woods.”

I move my gaze throughout the forest, looking at the lovely redwoods and trunks that are the colour of rust. The leaves make a rustling sound when the afternoon air blows

gently.

We could spend our time in the hammock with Liam until supper time at the cottage later that night.

I immediately see it as my eyes move around the room. I shout, “Over there!” as I see the green hammock hanging from the trees. “We found it, Liam. We did it.”

Liam lets out a breath of relief, and I automatically tighten my hold on the straps of my rucksack with eagerness. I’ve gotten our beverages and other things ready.

so we could rest in the hammock. This does seem like the perfect place to go away.

When we go to the hammock, I set my backpack down and kneel down to check our things. But when I can’t find the books we’re going to read together, my heart drops.

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“Oh, God.”

“What?” Liam frowns and seems worried.

“I forgot to bring the new books I bought for us. I think I left them in the cabin.” I hit my forehead with my hand and closed my eyes.

I’m really dumb.

How could I not remember? I was in such a rush.

He lets out a sigh. “Wait here.” He is going to turn back when I grab his arm.

“No. Where are you going?”

He says, “Getting the books,” as if it’s the most simple thing in the world.

I shake my head quickly to show that I don’t agree. It’s dumb since he can’t see me.

“I’ll get it,” I say. “Just wait here for me.”

Liam seems unsure, but I know I should be the one doing it. He was in charge here, but not being able to see will be hard for him again, especially since he hasn’t really adjusted to the new place yet.

“Trust me,” I say. “I know the way. I’ll be back soon.”

I flee across the woods to the cabin before he can complain. The ground we walked on looks like it's been trod on a lot, so it's not hard to follow the trail. Even though it hasn't been used in a long time, the hammock I just saw is still in relatively excellent shape. I believe the cleaner Jackson paid for takes care of it frequently.

When I get to the cabin, I go to the bedroom and see that the books I was going to bring are still on the bed. I despise myself for being so dumb. When I grab them, I hear water hitting the ceiling.

I turn my head quickly to the window and see that it's starting to rain.

Oh, God. Liam.

My heart races because I know he is afraid of being in the rain.

Unfortunately, the rain has gotten considerably worse since I stepped outside.

No, please. Not right now.

When I walk back to the hammock, my boots stamp on the ground. My heart races. As the rain pours down hard, I breathe heavily.

I'm saturated from head to toe, and I have to stop because the rain is so heavy that I can't see anything. The water quickly streams down my face, and I blink a few times to see again.

When thunder strikes, I jump. My teeth start to chatter because it's so cold, and my chest rises and falls. I'm doing my hardest to go to the hammock, but it's really hard because everything around me appears the same all of a sudden.

"Liam!" I yell as loud as I can, but the rain is so loud that it drowns out my voice.

This. This is exactly what Liam is afraid of.

And now he's all by himself. I need to locate him. Quick.

I'm getting more and more worried about him. I run faster, without seeing. I can sense what he's experiencing, like our souls are the same.

I feel like a scared deer in the woods while I keep looking for him.

"Liam." My throat aches from yelling his name.

I discover him just when I feel like crying.

Standing alone in the woods while it rains heavily.

He stops moving as if he can't even move an inch.

My knees are shaking as I get closer to him. When I touch his arms, I can feel his whole body shaking.

I grab him tightly and wail, "Oh, God. I found you, Liam. I'm here."

I grab on to him even tighter because I feel like my life depends on him.

I had never been so anxious about someone before.

The rain just won't stop falling on us. It's freezing, so I hold him even tighter. I want to make him warm, but it seems like an impossible effort. I wish I could give him all the warmth in my body to save him. I don't mind being the only one left in the cold.

Liam's arms start to move slowly. He puts his arms around me, even though he's still

shivering all over. I feel better, and my tears mix with the rain that is falling on my cheeks.

“It’s okay. It’s okay. I’m right here,” I say in a hoarse voice.

He holds me tighter, and I put my face in his chest.

\*\*\*\*

The sound of the fire burning wood fills the room. We are both covered under a blanket. We are seated in front of the fire.

The heat has stopped us from shivering, and my heart is starting to settle down. We threw away our wet garments, yet we’re not n\*\*e. Liam is wearing shorts, and I have changed into pyjamas.

Liam is looking at the fire, and I look up at him. The light from the burning in this dark room hits his side view perfectly. I marvel how someone could have such exquisite looks.

I can see the fire’s reflection dancing in his gorgeous grey eyes, and I wish I could take a picture of this magnificent sight.

I murmur, “What are you thinking about?”

He doesn’t answer for a while, but then he adds, “I don’t know. Everything.”

My eyebrows furrow. I pull my knees closer to my chest and cuddle closer to him under the blanket. “Tell me,” I say softly.

He still doesn’t look at me. “I want you to be happy, Emily.”

I frown more and more as I think about what he's thinking. I shake my head and smile a little. "I am," I say without a doubt. "Especially now. I'm glad to be here with you."

I don't hear anything from him, so I touch his cheek and make him tilt his head towards me.

"Are you?" I ask, looking into his eyes and expecting to see the spark in them again. I think I see it now, but I'm not sure because Liam doesn't grin very often.

"Here with you?" he asks.

I wait for him to speak more. I can't wait to hear what he says.

"You have no idea," he says between gritted teeth.

His words are making me confused, so I wish he could just say yes or no. But I know the answer deep within.

"Kiss me," I say, hoping he will get rid of whatever doubts I have.

The way he loves me will help me discover the solution again. I discovered it previously.

Liam's face moves closer to mine, and I close my eyes. When his lips touch mine, my heart skips a beat.

He brushes his lips over mine slowly and cautiously, as if I'm something delicate that he may shatter at any moment. But suddenly his chest starts to move up and down. He breathes faster, as if he can't keep back the feelings that are growing up inside him.



He kisses me with increased urgency and intensity. I can't help but touch his chest. I need to touch him more. I need him.

He shudders as my fingertips touch his naked chest. He puts his hand on the back of my neck and kisses me more deeply. Then he licks my bottom lip and asks if he may. He touches my tongue with his when I give it to him. I groan, and it sounds so weak in the quiet room.

It seems like the temperature is going up a lot, and I know it's not due of the fire next to us.

Liam moves his fingers up to my hair. He lightly runs his fingers through hair, then abruptly takes a handful of it. He tilts my head to the side, and then I feel his butterfly kisses on my neck.

My groans are now mingled with gasps. His touch makes me feel like I'm on fire. I close my eyes and my lips open. I want to feel him more and more.

"F\*\*k," he says under his breath before kissing me again.

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I bend over and put my arms around his neck, then sit on his lap. His hands caress my back and waist — I can even feel his fingers creeping beneath my pajama top to feel the flesh on my back.

“Emily,” he cautions.

But I’m having trouble thinking.

We kiss and kiss and kiss like we need each other to live.

Liam gasps as I unwittingly press my hips into his. The next thing I feel is being shoved backward till my back rests on the hardwood floor with a thump.

My eyes jolt open, only to find Liam towering over me with hunger in his gaze. He ties my wrists with one hand and places them over my head.

I liked stroking him with my hands, but I would be lying if I claimed that his domination didn’t thrill me on.

He’s panting, and I am too.

“I’m sorry. I can’t,” he adds in a sad whisper.

I can only look at him with a blank look on my face.

“I really can’t. I’m not ready to take it further.” He shuts his eyes in anger. “It f\*\*\*\*\*g hurts.”

I can hear his raspy breathing. I wonder what's happening since he really does appear like he's in pain. Worry stirs my insides. I wait quietly as he attempts to get himself together.

Liam opens his eyes again, and the expression he gives me is so intense. He carefully moves my hand to touch his chest, and as my palm is put over his heart, I can feel how hard it's throbbing. It's insane. It feels like it's going to explode out of his chest.

He swallows, retaining his hand on my wrist to make me feel his heartbeat longer.

"This is why I can't do it," he adds in a raspy voice. "I'm blind, but my other senses are overwhelming when it comes to you. My heart is about to explode every time we touch, every time I feel your skin on mine, your lips on mine, your breath against my skin, your moans in my ear. F\*\*k. Emily, I can't f\*\*\*\*\*g control my heart if you do that to me."

He's genuinely trembling, and tears puddle in my eyes.

I never believed that our proximity might be too overpowering to him because of his heightened senses. I felt like my heart was about to burst, but I didn't realise that his was even worse.

"I'm sorry." I swallow. "I shouldn't have..." I falter, tripping upon my words.

I feel both flattered and ashamed at the same time.

"I should have known that you were not ready," I say.

Liam sighs. I sit up, seeing him gaze down at the floor. There's a blush growing on his cheeks, and I just can't resist the temptation to hug him.

I loop my arms around his neck and bury my face in his nape. “Just a hug. I promise.”

A few seconds pass in stillness until he says, “Okay.”

Today, we finally get to spend time in the hammock after we didn’t make it the other day because of the rain.

The hammock is pretty large. It can hold four people, so Liam and I can lie on it comfortably with still enough space to spread our legs. I’m resting on my back and looking up at the lovely sky. Liam is right next to me, holding my shoulder.

I smile warmly and put my head on his shoulder blade. It feels so serene here. The birds are chattering above us, enjoying this wonderful woodland as well.

“Can you tell me what you feel about this woods?” I ask.

“Hm?”

“I know that you can feel everything,” I add, “and you can know what’s happening around you by using your other senses. I want to know.”

“Birds,” he adds with enjoyment since it’s simply so clear.

“How many?” I grin.

“Three. At least, they’re the ones who are not shy to stop at the branches just above us,” he quips.

I glance at the birds. He’s right. There are three of them, and I don’t know how he accomplishes it. Maybe he can even feel them moving.

“Wait.” Liam abruptly stands up.

I become interested. I also sit up.

“I think one of them is flirting with the other,” he adds all of a sudden.

I can’t help but laugh. “You’re impossible.” I nudge his chest playfully.

“No, listen.” He puts his finger over his mouth, and my laughing stops short. “Can’t you hear that?” he asks as I observe the birds again. “One of them keeps fluttering their wings to attract their mate.”

My eyes widen when I find out that he’s right.

“See?” he replies, still with the same enjoyment glinting in his eyes. “I think it’s a male, fluffing out his feathers. Usually, the male ones will dance to begin the courtship. F\*\*k. He’s going to do it.”

I watch as the third bird suddenly flies away. “That one doesn’t want to be the third wheel.” A blast of laughter exits my mouth again.

I glance up at them as one of them is definitely doing excellent dance to entice the other. I can’t help but chuckle since it’s such a fun and engaging thing to see.

When the dance is ended, I wonder, “Now what?”

Liam seems like he’s in serious thought. “I don’t know. Judging from the sound of his legs starting to get restless against the branch, I think that he can’t wait to fly away.”

To my astonishment, the bird performs precisely as Liam anticipates. He flies away

but is then chased by the female one.

“Where are they going?” I enquire curiously.

Liam shrugs. “Some birds build their nests for their mates. Maybe he’s showing her the nests to let her choose.”

My mouth stands wide in wonder. “I hope they get their happily ever after,” I add giddily.

It’s only a basic narrative of what happens to the wild life around us, but experiencing it provides me so much delight. To be able to enjoy the little things in life is a blessing.

Liam tilts his chin up to the woods above us. He stares up at the sky, crossing his legs and resting his elbows on each of his knees. The corner of his lips bends into a little smile while the wind ruffles his hair softly. There’s just contentment in his gaze, and this gorgeous sight makes my breath catch in my throat.

I pull out my phone and covertly snap a photo of him. I assume that he can sense it since he then diverts his attention to me.

“Did you just secretly take a picture of me?”

I laugh. “Maybe I will.”

If this had happened the first time I saw him, I would have believed I was in a lot of trouble for covertly snapping images of the heir to Eagle Wings.

But now the man who used to give me a scary look just shakes his head in bewilderment.

Liam rests down in the hammock. I pull out my book from my backpack and lie next to him, cuddling close to him.

“Should we read the book again?” I ask.

“Yeah,” he murmurs. “I like it when you read to me.”

I begin to read the poetry book. My voice echoes, mingled with the sound of the rustling leaves blown by the wind and the birds chattering again above us.

I keep reading, unconscious that the environment progressively lulls me to sleep. My voice is growing quieter and softer the more time passes.

“They should feel like home...” I falter. My eyes feel so thick. “A place that...” I can’t even finish the statement because I’m falling asleep.

Liam’s kiss on my forehead is the last thing I remember.

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Liam and I are lying on the bed, facing one other. I throw my arms around his waist while he draws me closer to him. His hand is on my back, over the fabric of my sleep shirt. The other hand massages my head while I hide my face in his chest.

I absorb his aroma, feeling comfortable and secure in his embrace. These past several days in the cabin have been like a dream that I don't want to wake up to.

I hope that we could remain like this forever.

He abruptly says, "What is your dream, Emily?" "What do you want to do with your life?"

You are my fantasy come true. I want to answer that, but the second question makes me think that he's really asking about something else.

"I don't know," I answer. "I haven't applied to any college because I thought that I wouldn't be able to afford it."

I recall exactly why I took the position Ethan provided me.

I never expected that it would turn into something like this.

With the money Ethan already put to my account, I will have no trouble assisting my family financially and applying for college. But I don't want to go just yet. In fact, I don't think that I'll ever want to leave Liam.

"What do you enjoy the most?" He tucks a strand of my hair behind my ear.



I look into his lovely grey eyes, sinking in them.

“Maybe it can help you choose your major,” he suggests.

I sigh, closing my eyes as I shake my head. I lean against his chest even closer, my fingers grabbing the back of his t-shirt.

“I don’t know,” I answer. “I like giving help to people, though. I honestly thought of becoming a nurse or being involved in a volunteer program for kids somewhere in the world,” I stop. “Why are you suddenly asking me about that?”

I tip my chin up and find Liam giving me a serious look.

“Don’t you have a plan for your future?” he says quietly.

Now that he asks me, I honestly haven’t thought about it in detail.

I shake my head again. “I haven’t thought about it in detail. What I do know is that I want to help Kate and my brother Tyler with money—”

I wrinkle my brows as I ponder hard about what I want to achieve in the future. Liam is asking me these things, but I don’t think I’ll be able to live like a normal person now that I’m a part of Eagle Wings.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” he murmurs.

I can see that he is worried when I glance at him again.

“Never mind,” I say with a smile.

He pushes my chin up again with his finger and kisses me softly on the lips. I moan

with pleasure and lean against him.

This time, I start the kiss by putting my arm around his neck. I s\*\*k on his lower lip and press my mouth against his, which makes him moan. He quickly tightens his grasp on me, throwing his arms around me possessively and starts to kiss me hungrily.

I kiss him back with all my heart, and before I know it, we are blazing with passion and want. Our tongues flirt with one other as I put my leg around his waist. He grunts, and the next thing I know is that he turns me onto my back.

He clamps my hands on my sides, his jaw taut. “Emily,” he growls, warning me.

“I’m sorry.” I gasp. “Sorry.”

His eyes soften, and suddenly he releases me. I laid on my side, facing the opposite direction.

Again, I pushed him too far.

I admonish myself for how foolish I am. Liam is not ready yet for that level of closeness.

I feel him going behind me and spooning me. He leans his chin on my shoulder, and I grin.

“Cuddling time?” I tease. “Okay. Cuddling only.”

“You’re going to be the death of me,” he mutters under his breath and plants a delicate kiss on my neck.

I sigh dreamily, feeling him laying more lips on the back of my neck.

“Liam.” I chuckle. “It tickles.”

But he doesn’t stop, and more chuckles explode from me.

I clench my eyes, feeling the ray of early sun touching my face. When I open eyes, I’m met by the same cabin I’ve been staying in with Liam for these past several days.

I tilt my head to my side and see that his side of the bed is vacant. When I skim my fingertips on the sheet, it feels chilly. I frown.

Liam must have been out of bed for a long time.

I shout out, “Liam?” My voice is still sluggish from sleep.

I sit up, stretch, and get out of bed. I move cautiously toward the living room and find that it’s empty. The curtain shifts, blown by the mild morning air, but other than that, there’s no evidence of any other activity.

I wonder where Liam is, but suddenly a lovely grin touches my lips. He normally sits at the back patio in the morning if he gets up earlier than I do. I shake my head in bewilderment owing to my own cluelessness.

Maybe it’s because he was holding me close all night that I anticipated him to remain by my side when I opened my eyes — he acted like he didn’t even want to let me go for a second while we slept together last night.

I stroll onto the patio, only to find that it’s abandoned as well. My brows furrow in perplexity.

Is it feasible that he's taking a morning jog?

But he never did that throughout our stay here — he was still traumatized by what Arthur's brother did to me.

"Liam?" I call again, hurrying back into the living room.

I push through the front door and find the grass empty.

My concern grows. Where could he go?

He hasn't gotten to know the area outside the cabin very well yet.

Unless he went to the hammock.

My mind takes me there, and my legs move me closer to the trees before I even remember moving them. I go along the way to the hammock. My heart is racing.

When I eventually approach the place, I'm already panting.

He's not here.

My pulse quickens even more. I race back toward the cabin, anxious about Liam.

Is he in the toilet? But it's been so quiet that I don't even think he's here with me.

I hurry into the cabin and knock on the door to the bathroom. "Liam, are you there?"

No response.

I open the door with my heart pounding against my ribs. It's not locked, and when I

look inside, no one is there.

My lips start to shake because of the awful feeling that suddenly comes over my heart.

I walk back into the bedroom and see my phone on the nightstand.

He couldn't have left without telling me, therefore he must have called me.

I take my phone from the nightstand with a sad heart, and there it is on the screen.

A communication from him by voice.

It feels like everything around me has stopped. I want to know what's in that message, but a part of me shouts not to open it because I don't want to hear what it says.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:15 am*

I push the button with my shaky fingers to hear what he had to say to me. I can almost feel the tears coming before I even hear him begin. His voice fills the air.

“Hey, Emily. I’m sorry. I had to go. I told Dustin to pick me up before dawn so I wouldn’t wake you up. I knew I couldn’t do it if you saw me leave.”

He takes a deep breath, and it shakes.

“I just wanted to say that I really liked what we had. The time we spent in the cabin was the best time of my life, and I will never forget it. Thank you for being there for me when I needed it. Uh... I don’t know where to start because there are so many things I want to say to you, and I don’t think my words will be enough to tell you how much I care about you.

You came into my life, and I wasn’t ready to let someone like you in. You remained, and you drove me crazy because being around you made me feel a lot of things I didn’t think I would. I tried so hard to reject you, and I’m so sorry.

His voice breaks, and he takes another long breath.

“You taught me a lot. You talked to me like I could see all the beautiful things you saw. And goddammit, Emily, I could see them when I was with you. I could enjoy all the little things in life, and I’m addicted to you. I can hear your beauty and feel everything about you—your happiness, your fear, and your sadness.”

He stops talking and sniffs.

“I told you I wasn’t your hero, but I wanted to be more than anything else in the world. So please let me be. Let me protect you. Let me keep you safe. Let me help you follow your dreams and have a happy life. I want you to be happy, Emily, and I have to let you go.”

He can’t get the words out.

“Eagle Wings isn’t for you. It’s only for me. It’s in my blood, where I belong. But it’s not for you. You’re not going to be there anymore because you deserve so much more. Live your life, Emily. See more of its beauty. For yourself. And for me.”

I cry as the message finishes. Difficult.

It hurts so much that I hold my chest. The phone slips out of my hand and hits the ground with a loud bang.

“You can’t—” I choke on my tears. “You can’t do this, Liam.”

He won’t allow us be with each other. He’s doing this for me, but my heart is already so broken that I don’t think it can ever heal without him.

My emotions fill the room, and I immediately miss the man with the kindest heart and the most beautiful eyes I’ve ever seen.

The man who would do anything to keep me safe.

I promptly call his phone. I need to talk to him again and hear his voice again to be sure he didn’t intend any of this.

“The number you called is no longer in service.”

My crying gets worse. “No.” My lips shake as I taste my own tears. “Please, Liam. I have to see you again.”

I swallow a knot in my throat. It hurts so terribly that I can hardly breathe.

Liam has let me go.

His last request for me to satisfy is to let him be my hero in his own noble manner.

A year later

“Over here, Emily,” my friend’s voice greets me as soon as I walk into the coffee shop.

My eyes go to her as she waves her hand with excitement. She’s with two of our other classmates right now.

As I stroll towards their table with my rucksack on my shoulder, I grin. I sit down and get out my laptop.

Lola, who just waved at me, squints at me and rests her chin on her fist. “Are you not going to order something first?” She looks at the counter and tilts her head.

I shake my head. “I’m good.” I generally drink my coffee outside.

Rick, who is seated next to me, mumbles and slurps her iced coffee, “I’m sure we can finish our assignment quickly today.” “Of course, now that Emily is here. Wow, Emily, you’re our life saver.”

I nearly roll my eyes. I let out a tiny laugh. She’s exaggerating.



Sofie says, “No, really.” “You’re always one step ahead when it comes to studying. How the hell did you get a good grade on our last quiz? Our teacher is a pain in the a\*s.”

“That’s what happens when you really care about what you’re learning,” Lola says with a raised eyebrow. “Isn’t that right, Emily?”

I shake my head and bite my lip as I try to focus on our work instead. I really love learning about nutrition. A lot of youngsters throughout the world, especially those who live in poor nations, are having trouble getting enough food. I’m excited to be a part of a volunteer program that will help them.

I grin when I think of how I was advised to enjoy life and be happy.

We complete our homework and talk about things that aren’t really significant. I must say that I like being here with them. I like when Sofie and Rick argue and when Lola talks too much.

As a college student working towards my dream degree, I spend my days hanging out with pals after class. Ethan’s money is more than enough to pay off all of Kate’s insurance debt, Tyler’s school tuition, and the costs I need to go to college.

I can’t be more grateful while there’s still a great hole in my chest that I doubt can ever be satisfied.

Rick was right: we were able to accomplish the group project really fast. I’m pretty happy about it because I have to leave early to go to Tyler’s birthday party.

While they are still packing their stuff, I go to the counter to place my order. I grab my favourite coffee, throw my rucksack over my shoulder, and wave goodbye. “I have to go. It’s my brother’s birthday party today.”

“Have a safe trip.”

“Let me know when you get there.”

“Have a great long weekend, Emily.”

They repeat it almost at the same time, and I grin at them before going through the door.

As soon as I leave the coffee shop, the fall air welcomes me. I stop for a bit and close my eyes, relishing how it feels on my skin.

I start walking again and continue towards the tunnel, but not before I walk by the park where I typically sit and watch the sunset while listening to the kids play.

A football almost hits my drink, but I sidestep it just in time with a tiny yelp.

The youngster who just kicked the ball races towards me. “Sorry,” he yells from a distance as he rushes here.

I smile and pick up the ball that is rolling next to my foot. I toss it at him, and he catches it with a big smile on his face.

“Thanks,” he says.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:15 am*

The child is lovely and still quite young, maybe not more than five years old.

I groan and stroll closer to the playground. I watch the youngsters play while I sip my coffee and rest against the railing. I groan as the alcohol warms me up. The cup's warmth on my palm is so lovely and calming.

I saw a tiny kid swinging with her dad. I can hear the kids laughing, and I don't even realise it, but another smile comes to my lips. It's always nice to see them perform. I don't think I'll ever get tired of it.

I turn around, and just as I'm about to sit down, I notice Mr Derby, the elderly guy who cleans the park, using his broom to sweep the leaves off the grass and the sidewalks. He sees me too.

I wave my hand at him and say, "Hi Mr Derby!" in a happy voice.

"Are you enjoying the sunset again?" he says in his usual grandfather voice.

"As usual," I say with a smile.

He nods and goes back to work. Everyone here likes Mr Derby.

I sit down in my favourite location, still holding the cup of coffee with both hands. I close my eyes and breathe in the calming smell. This usually helps me relax.

I look up at the sky again. It's becoming dark. The buildings block the view of the setting sun, but it's still a stunning picture. Red, orange, and purple.

I wish I could show him this vista. The one I miss the most. The man who couldn't see, but who stated I could give him his sight every time he was with me.

My throat hurts because I want something so badly. I slowly pull my phone out of my jeans and look for his photo. It's a photo of him sitting in a hammock, looking up at the world around him with a happy look on his face and a grin that rarely crossed his lips.

I want to keep the happiness in his eyes forever, and my eyes are watering as I look at the brightness in his eyes. That look makes me sad.

I miss him.

A much.

I wipe my eye after my tear drips on the screen. I think about him all the time.

Is he all right?

Does he still have that spark in him?

I sniffle and look at my watch. I need to get on the train soon. I'm late for Kate and Tyler.

I placed my phone back in my pocket and finished my drink while staring at the gorgeous twilight sky.

LIAM

I go along the sidewalk with a hoodie on my sweater to conceal my hair and face.

If my opponent knew I was out and about, it would be awful. If that happened when

Emily was here, it would be even worse.

As soon as I get into the park, I know Mr Derby is waiting for me. The sound of his broom sweeping stops as soon as I get to the place. I can hear his boots getting closer to me.

“She has left,” he adds as I stop. “She had to get on the train.”

I nod.

You could assume he’s simply an old man who cleans the park, but he’s actually a member of Eagle Wings. He is really close to my family. We have faith that he will look after the cabin beside the lake. My family has a lot of memories there, and now it’s even more precious because I spent time there with Emily.

Mr Derby says, “She’s doing well.” “Safe. No stalker. Except for you, of course.”

I listen as he tells me more about Emily, such how she spent her day, if she sounded happy, who her friends are, and if there’s anything I should be worried about.

I feel much better knowing that she’s okay.

He warns me, “She still cries because of you.”

I have a knot in my throat that I have to swallow. I don’t want her to forget about me, but I also don’t want her to cry. I keep telling myself to wait for the day when she goes on and stops thinking about me.

Mr Derby pats me on the shoulder, and I start walking again towards the coffee shop.

When I push through the door, the fragrance of coffee hits me. I adore the fragrance because it makes me feel close to her.

When I open the door, I can feel the customers turning their heads to look at me. I swear under my breath. I don't know if it's because I'm taller than other people or because my face doesn't show any expression, but people definitely notice me as I walk. This hoodie is not doing what it's supposed to, and that makes me mad.

I can still hear Mr Derby's remarks in my brain, and the next thing I know, I'm following her shadow.

"One cappuccino," I tell the barista what I want.

I heard that Emily went to this coffee shop after class and had a nice cappuccino.

I heard that she had a nice time talking to her pals here.

I close my eyes and wait for my coffee to brew. I can hear people conversing inside the café, glasses clattering, drinks being mixed on the counter, and college students coming and departing all the time.

What she heard.

When the barista gives me the drink, I open my eyes and smell the drink she likes most for a second.

I could practically hear her sigh of happiness, the way she chatted to her friends, and the way she laughed when she heard anything humorous.

As I go back to the door, the warm liquid within the cup touches my palm. It's something that makes me feel better.

I go outside and feel the wind on my skin. This strong emotion inside me makes my chest feel constricted. It's the air she breathes that makes me feel her. All over.

She's with me, sharing her happiness, till I can't feel my wrath anymore.

I hear kids playing, the swing, and a ball being kicked when I go back to the park.  
The notion of her smiling while she watched them makes my heart feel good.

I sit down on the bench and drink my coffee. I let out a sigh. It has a sweet and bitter flavour like us.

I miss the girl who offered me a new view when I lost one. This sight she provided me made me feel whole.

The wind brushes across my skin again, as if it's attempting to ease the ache of missing her.

I let out a weak breath and a tear falls from my eye.

I love her. I can feel her all over.

I adore Emily Fiat, and I don't need to see her to know it.