



# Traithorn

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**Category:** Romance

**Description:** A LOVE STITCHED FROM DEADLY SINS

Isolde Duskvik thought she'd escaped them. With her parents' killers behind bars, a quiet life in the snow-laced town of Vexglade, and a deputy boyfriend at her side, she finally believed she was safe.

But it was only an illusion.

When a string of gruesome murders shakes the town, and hauntingly familiar gifts begin appearing around her, Isolde realizes the past has caught up to her.

They've found her.

And this time, they won't stop until she belongs to them again. Irrevocably.

A dark and delicious tale about what fuels obsession, TRAITHORN is a twisted why-choose romance novella about two fugitives, the girl they can't forget, and a burning need for vengeance.

**Total Pages (Source):** 21

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 6:37 am*

## LITTLE TRAITOR

### The Dagger

Razor-sharp thorns prick my veins, slithering their way into every blood vessel as I tug at the handcuffs around my wrists. Pain laces everywhere, the cuffs digging deeper. Harder. More painful with each passing second—one second closer to our ultimate doom.

Fucking bastard! I inwardly curse as I keep fighting the handcuffs biting into my wrists. Blood trickles from the torn skin, making them slick as I twist and wrench. There's a chuckle ringing out in the cell beside mine. Annoyance filters through me like a vice as I grumble.

“How's it going?” The cocky voice asks.

“Fucking humor me,” I mutter, trying to get out of the goddamn handcuffs.

“I got out of mine minutes ago.”

“And you didn't fucking think to tell me?” My voice carries through the walls and into his cell beside me, only a concrete wall separating us.

It's not enough to prevent me from fucking strangling him the first chance I get.

“Oh my dear, what's the fun in that?”

I curse him under my breath, skin ripping off as I finally slide out of the handcuffs. They clatter to the ground with a loud shatter, hiding the soft whimper escaping me at the burning sensation.

“I’m out,” I hiss, sweat beading my forehead.

Now, that was intense.

Dragging my hands through my hair, I stare at the small window on the wall.

It’s barely the size of a paperback, but it lets in just enough light to paint the cell in silver.

Cold and sterile, the kind that’s not cozy in the slightest. My dagger pendant glitters in the moonlight as if it’s alive, and as I inspect it closer, I notice something dark smeared across the tiny, model blade.

Blood. Fuck knows how it got there.

The Dagger. That’s what they call me. A cold, frigid bitch. The only woman in this rotting cage they call prison. Three years sealed in and forgotten. You could almost believe it’s a men-only ward.

Women can be criminals too, so fuck that.

I hear the familiar clinking of metal as the cell door next to mine opens, and out steps a man in an orange suit pushing against his chest and broad shoulders.

His physique is a striking blend of rugged strength and control from years spent locked up.

The only thing to keep his thoughts off of everything horrible happening was to work out.

Broad shoulders taper down to a narrow, well-trained waist, and as he notices me staring, his piercing gaze strips away all the defenses I've managed to keep up for years.

I huff out a breath, finally meeting those eyes I've only seen through the bars of our cells for the past three years. An incident with two other inmates led them to lock down the place long ago, forbidding us from hanging around each other.

A smirk litters his cracked and bloodied lips, his eye swollen from the right hook the guard gave him, and I can't help but stare at him. A pair of keys dangles from his tattooed hands, clinking against each other as he lifts them in the air, his brown and lethal eyes meeting mine.

“What if I'd just leave you here? Let aaaall the other inmates wake up and realize you had something to do with this,” he taunts, eyes glinting in the dim light.

I clutch my fists, broken and battered nails pressing into my dirtied palms. “Let me the fuck out, Vernon,” I grit my teeth.

Tapping the keys against his knee while leaning forward, each tap echoes like a countdown to when everyone will wake up from their deep sleep. His smirk isn't friendly—it's the look of someone who knows he holds the power. I don't doubt he would leave me here if he got the chance.

“You won't find her without me,” I threaten, knowing goddamn well that he needs my intelligence and sharpness to find our beautiful little prey.

When he runs a hand through his slightly grown-out buzzed hair, nerves settle inside

my stomach, sinking to the bottom. He isn't truly thinking about leaving me here, is he?

"Open the fucking cell, Vernon," I growl.

"I'll think about it," the smirk split his lips, teasingly and taunting, as it had always done during our upbringing.

I clench my jaw, nervously glancing outside the bars of the cells. The other inmates are still miraculously asleep. The pills we slipped into their food at dinner proved to be useful—as did our source on the outside.

Finally, Vernon leans forward to unlock the prison cell, and it slides open with a loud creak that could wake the dead.

I grumble, incoherently as I step out, the feeling of being enclosed disappearing.

Rising on my tiptoes—I'm not exactly short at 5'11", but he's a goddamn giant at 6'4"—I smack the top of his buzzed head.

I didn't let them touch my hair when I was admitted, and as I'm the first woman they've had, the guards didn't quite know what to do with me, as if they had never seen a woman before. Pathetic.

"Ouch, what the fuck was that for?"

I only roll my eyes at him, glancing around the desolate corridor.

Blood spills on the floor before us, gathering around the corpse of a guard, his uniform soaked. Well, fuck. Now we won't be able to use his clothes.

“Nice job,” I mutter, staring back up at Vernon, the vein in his neck popping as he stares at me.

“Thanks, sis,” he teases. “Now, let’s get the fuck out of here.”

That’s right—this goddamn infuriating beast of a man is my brother. Worse, my twin.

We slip into the dimly lit corridor, the stench of blood and sweat clinging to the air and making me scrunch my nose as it assaults my senses.

Vernon’s gaze flicks down the hallway as we keep to the shadows, knowing full well we’ll be able to escape this way.

Many escape attempts have been made during the years we’ve been locked up, and this is the time when we’ll succeed.

Fucking finally.

That little birdie put us in jail, and it’s time we finally claim our revenge.

Footsteps echo before us, and Vernon shakes his head at me, his sign of telling me to stay quiet. I peek around the corner, seeing the guard approaching us with determined steps in his gait.

“I got this,” I say, voice barely a whisper.

The moment the guard comes around the corner, I’m there, my hands clasp at his throat from behind, forearms pressing against his Adam’s apple.

He stumbles for a second and drops his flashlight, which Vernon quickly reaches down to give to me.

The guard struggles under my hold, but I have years of rage and venom toward guys like him in my arsenal.

It doesn't take much to get him to the floor, where I grab the flashlight and smash it into his face.

"Fucking bitch," he groans, and I press my knee into his crotch until he's screeching, using the flashlight to smash his face over and over again, until blood spurts and he's lying motionless on the floor.

"Never call a woman a 'fucking bitch'," I spit at his face, wiping sweat from my forehead.

Vernon whistles behind me, and I give him the finger.

"Now let's get out of here," I declare as we hurry down the corridor.

A blaring sound echoes throughout the space, and I'm suddenly lost for what to do, my heart plummeting inside my chest.

"That's our cue," Vernon mutters as he grabs my hand in his cold one. "It's now or never."

It's been now or never for months— years . Yet we've never been as close to escape as now, and it's all thanks to the help of our source on the outside.

I push my leg forward until I physically can't run anymore, fighting my way forward through the dissonant sound of the screeching alarm that makes my ears hurt. Guards can be heard shouting in the distance, and Vernon pushes his feet faster, pulling me along with him.

We weave through the shadows of the prison, through the doors that have finally been unlocked. As we pass, the inmates in the other passage bang on their cell doors, shouting with desperation to be let free as well.

The exit looms all the closer as we round another corridor, and Vernon pulls the final key he stole from the guard he killed from his pocket. His hands tremble slightly as he holds it tightly, running on pure adrenaline.

Then, we reach the back door exit—a door looming over us like a silent sentinel. It's heavily armed, made of metal with deadbolts, and Vernon scrambles to get the door to open. Footsteps resonate behind us, making our escape attempt even more frantic.

“Come on. Come on,” I whisper, hearing the footsteps echoing inside my ears.

I know if we get caught now, our chance of ever escaping again will be blown away as if by the wind. They'll send us out of the town into maximum high security, reducing our chances of ever seeing each other again. Then, our source won't be able to help us anymore.

In another life, we'd be burned for the things we've committed.

With a final click, the door swings open, sending a rush of wind to wash over us.

We tumble out into the night air, cold and sharp against my sweaty skin.

I turn around just in time to see the guards round the corner, flooding the hallway as they spot us.

Their screams are muffled by the heavy door slamming shut behind us.

The snow instantly falls around us, making me savor the taste of freedom.



God , how long has it been since we last were outside?

We don't have time to delve into anything, so we rush through the snow with our bare feet, sweatpants, and T-shirts, hoping to get as far away as possible. The alarm is blaring behind us, screeching ever louder, an automatic voice announcing that a lockdown will commence.

I stumble in the snow, the coldness suffocating my feet and legs, the snow too deep.

I fight to breathe properly, adrenaline fueling my insides like lava that'll erupt at any moment.

Vernon is still holding my hand, dragging me along with him.

I'm embarrassed to admit that I wouldn't have been able to make it without him—he's always been the one to push me forward rather than drag me down, and support me rather than hate me.

The only man with whom I can put my trust.

"Come on, sis. Almost there," he encourages, and I fight to keep running through the snow, but it's just so damn fucking cold.

The sound of an engine rumbles as it approaches, and we rush through the gates just for them to close behind us.

We're outside the perimeters of the prison, the high walls surrounding the desolate building this far from society.

The car rolls through the road, coming all the closer, its headlights blinking at us and letting us know it is who we expected.

I breathe a sigh of relief, my lungs stinging from the cold that seeps through and makes it hard to breathe.

Vernon opens the car door and rushes me inside it before getting in himself, then closes the door behind him.

“Just in time,” our contact smirks from the front seat, his wicked eyes glinting in the rearview mirror.

Oh, if only he knew the plans we’ve made. What his ending will be when we’re done.

The car takes off, quicker than the guards and cops manage to get out of the building with the lockdown. They probably thought we’d be locked in by now.

Then we take off to our freedom as our contact hands us our new identities—passports and ID cards. Well and meticulous, looking as real as anything. With his help in more ways than one, we’ll be free.

And now on to the next mission—get our little traitor back.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 6:37 am*

### DEATH PREVAILED

Isolde

People always try to outrun death. As if it's something they can escape.

But death isn't a chase; it's a whisper of a shadow, lingering beneath the veil of silvery skies, cloaked in shrouded harmony until it strikes without warning. It's in the wind, threading through hollow forests. In the arms full of sorrow.

Death is a lover draped in ghostly white.

And still, they were taken from me too fast.

I glance over my shoulder, noticing that no one is hiding in the mist, even when my skin prickles with the awareness of being watched. The graveyard is empty and vacant, except for the spirits lingering on the sacred soil.

No one should be there.

They're all locked away now. They can't hurt me anymore; I made sure of that.

Yet, under the low-hanging moon, clouds pressing down like a shroud, something is watching. Tombstones form masses of rows around me, headstones buried under the thickness of the rapidly falling snow.

A heartbreaking shudder runs rampant through my veins as the memories resurface,

morphing into something lethal and unstoppable—a force so fierce, it could obliterate anyone who dares lay a finger on me.

If only that would stop the horrors thrumming through me, or the memories plaguing my every waking second.

A piercing scream rattles the surroundings, spearing into my heart as if it might stop beating entirely. Steps faltering, echoes of the past filter through my mind. It sounds too fucking real.

Suddenly, it's as if that's all I can see: the blood soaking the snow before me, tainting the purity of winter with something violent. Irreversible.

With a blink, it disappears as quickly as it came.

Only my imagination. It's all in the past.

The old, weathered sign is barely visible through the weight of snow, the words welcoming me deeper into the graveyard. Snow crunches underneath my boots as I pull my black coat tighter, clutching a single black rose.

It's the end of February, and our small town of Vexglade has transformed into a Winter Wonderland, but not the kind you'd wish for. Streets are choked with frost, and the air is frozen in a time where only eerie stillness exists outside the fires of homes.

It's a far cry from the winters of the past. Centuries ago, they told tales around the bonfire of the witches who once called this place home, and the curses they wove into the land—vexes that clung to the town like a second skin.

It'd explain the cold that never truly leaves, or the darkness creeping across the

horizon as early as four p.m., even in the summer.

It's just folklore, they say, but sometimes, it feels far too real.

Especially with the snow that came as early as October, with the sense of foreboding lurking right under the surface like a bad omen about to happen, unleashing its hell across the earth.

Ice litters the path forward, hiding under the thick layers of snow like a mischievous kitten seeking havoc.

Skies crying their ugly tears from the darkening clouds, I clutch the rose even tighter, the thorns pricking my finger. A quiet hiss escapes me before I eventually reach the one single headstone I haven't dared visit since their passing three years ago.

I settle onto the snow-dusted ground, not caring about the cold that forces its way into my woolen tights and skirt.

"Hello, Mom and Dad," I say into the silence, my voice barely a whisper against the increasing wind.

I close my eyes, fighting for that breath of air I need. It's too much, seeing their gravestone right in front of me. Their death is a heavy burden on my consciousness, filtering and rooting inside my soul like thorns and veins that'll never let go.

Clenching my teeth, I finally leave the rose on their headstone.

Here lies Ann after the involvement I had in their deaths.

My fists clench until my nails press into my palms, crescent forms in a way that feels euphoric. It distracts me from my mental exhaustion.

And then, as if by an unknown force, I feel that prickling sensation at the nape of my neck.

I look around the graveyard, but I'm the only one among the corpses. A faint whisper can be heard between the graves, sending an icy chill through my body that makes my breath hitch.

The wind howls around me, fierce and cold, but it's the stiffness in my joints and the crunch of footsteps in the snow that truly chills me.

A sudden ding from my phone startles me. I retrieve the device from my pocket but almost drop it onto the ground because the cold has made my fingers stiff and red.

The organ inside my chest feels as if it's shredded into pieces, sinking so low it could be buried under the soil, as I read the six-word sentence from my boyfriend, Casper.

CASPER

They found a body this morning.'

I stare at the screen, gradually blurring with the relentless snowflakes. Blood rushes in my ears, pounding with an incoming headache. Another message comes through.

CASPER

You'd better get here.

Gripping the phone tightly, I realize I have no choice. I can't say no to him, the deputy chief.

Why does he want me there?

Pushing to my feet, finally escaping the damp ground that ultimately numbed my body, the graveyard feels more alive than before.

My footsteps crunch in the snow, but there's something else there—a sound, faint and distant, like an echo of a movement. But no one's there.

Hastily hurrying back to my car and the warmth beckoning me closer, something catches my eye, and I freeze mid-step. The unease clings to me like a shadow out to hurt me, heavier than the lingering fog.

An object lies half-buried under drifts of snow, glinting faintly in the moonlight, aligning with what looks to be a silver stamp on a dark envelope. I should keep moving to my car, but something pulls me in—be it my curiosity or whatnot—but I physically can't ignore it.

It's an invisible tug on my heart.

The envelope is dry, not wet as it would've been if it had been here for a while, meaning that someone must have recently placed it there.

There's no sender or receiver, but there's a symbol of something forgotten glinting back at me.

A silvery crow.

My heart lodges in my throat like a sore lump about to make me sick as I carefully open the envelope, not sure who it's intended for.

Mortem

It's time for Death

My breath hitches, a pulse of panic flooding me, like a flutter of something deep and dark stirring within. The snow falls heavier, and the world grows dimmer. The wind whispers a message that sends shivers down my spine, and I nearly jump again as my phone dings in my hand.

CASPER

Get here. Now.

The command is clear, and I cast one last glance at the surroundings before hurrying out of the graveyard.

“Darling...” the wind whispers, sounding all too feminine and real for my heart to be able to handle, and I want to scream at my mind to stop playing fucking tricks on me.

A memory pushes to the forefront of my mind.

“Oh, my darling, you should have seen the look on your face!” the red-haired girl cackles, her hips swinging sexily as she approaches me where I’m lying on the floor, covered in crimson and the corpses before me.

A sight so horrific, it looks like a bloodbath.

“Such a beautiful thing, don’t you think?”

” She turns to the man beside her, sizing me up like a predator would a prey.

“So beautiful, indeed.”

My heart aches at the memory, and I quickly stand to my feet, hurrying toward the safety of my car. I have to remind myself multiple times that they’re not here. They



can't fucking hurt me or anyone else anymore, yet they haunt my mind as much as they wanted my soul when they were out in the world.

I spot my car with the help of moonlight and settle into it, immediately locking the doors. The headlights cast the front of the car in an ominous hue, with the trees casting shadows, and I almost expect to see someone standing there.

I turn the key in the ignition and rev the engine, hurrying away from the damned graveyard I never should have visited. Especially not after my parents were brutally murdered by the two people I put in jail.

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“WHAT’S THE MATTER?” I ask, entering the police station while dragging the jacket closer around my body. The brutal cold from the outside leaves my body rigid, my cheeks stinging from the wind’s icy slap, and a sharp ache spreads through my frozen ears.

Pushing through crowds of worried civilians and all-too-curious journalists, I’m left panting by the time I’m inside the building. Casper’s searing eyes meet mine at the door, quickly locking it to prevent the swarm of people.

“Why did this happen? Vexglade hasn’t had a single murder in years!”

The voice of a journalist filters through the door, loud and jarring. Casper pushes me aside, away from all the commotion.

My fists are clenched, my heart aching from those words.

“Hasn’t had a single murder in years...”

The last time was my parents.

I swallow the lump in my throat, attempting to appear unaffected. Casper cannot know what happened all those years ago. Not the truth, at least.

Casper's jaw tightens with palpable annoyance. "What took you so fucking long?"

A snap of irritation surges through me, but I take a deep breath, not wanting to lash out at him. It would only give him more ammunition to start a fight with me, one I don't have the energy for right now.

"Those journalists. I'm sorry," I apologize, swallowing the words down after uttering them.

He huffs like an immature little child before leading me to his office at the rear of the station. His green eyes are overshadowed by the circles underlining his skin, exhaustion wearing heavy on him, and I feel bad for feeling so mad at his attitude.

Of course, he's mad.

This is the first murder in years.

It's shocked the entire town.

"What is it, baby?" I ask in a kinder tone, one I know he appreciates.

His lips roll back, a glint in his eyes telling me something is wrong. I can't quite make out what it is.

"I'm not supposed to divulge details with you," he murmurs. "But this is something I think you should know. It has to do with your parents' murder."

My heart picks up its pace, blood rushing in my ears. He knows my parents were murdered—he has no idea I was involved in the murders...not with the real culprits behind bars.

“This new body was found with their eyes gouged out and their tongues nailed to the ground beside them. A single letter was carved into its chest, fresh and deep enough to puncture flesh.”

My own blood runs cold, dread seeping deep into my marrow. I wait with bated breath for him to continue.

“ ‘I’ was the letter. The body was found in an alley, the same one your parents died in. Left in the same pose as them, using the same techniques. Same initial. We’re to believe it’s a copycat killer.

” He scratches his small scuff. “There’s something else, too; the letter 7 was carved into the wall. ”

A chill suddenly grips my spine, spreading through my veins like frost rapidly evolving. It’s a nightmare I can’t escape. A copycat . I swallow harshly, but my throat is as dry as sandpaper.

It can only mean one thing—it’s a message for me. Someone, somehow, knows about my involvement in their death.

They can’t be back...can they?

I shake away the thought as soon as it comes, knowing they’re locked in and will be for a very long time.

“However, that’s not all,” Casper continues, looking at me with a gaze that would

terrify anyone. “A photo of you was found at the crime scene.”

“What?”

“It’s bad. The chief of police thinks it’s connected to you, if not even your doing.”

“But I didn’t have anything to do with that,” I protest. When he merely looks at me with that suspicious glint, I stare at him in disbelief. “You know that, right?”

He stays silent, swallowing, his Adam’s apple bobbing.

“Right, Casper?” I grumble, disbelief evident in my tone.

“Yes, of course, I know that. But there’s no way we can rule it out.”

“What the fuck? I was at the damn cemetery!” I growl.

“Do you have an alibi?”

“You’re un-fucking-believable,” I rise, staring down at him. Adrenaline fuels my insides, turning into anger.

He stands up just as quickly, grabbing my wrist so tightly pain spreads through my bones, and I’m afraid it’ll bruise.

“I’m sorry. You know there’s nothing I can do to rule it out,” he grits out, manipulation swirling in his irises like black charcoal.

I wrench my hand free, the stinging discomfort making me hiss, before hastily exiting the police station as quickly as I came. The swarm of journalists instantly meets me, but I push through them, ignoring any of their stupid questions.

My heart is racing, fear a vivid thing living inside me.

The death is too similar...

The prickling sensation of being watched overwhelms me once again, and I know it's not from the crowd that's pushing me for an answer. I look around, but I see no one who could be the reason for my unease. As I'm finally about to settle down in my car, my heart nearly stops.

There, between my windshields, lay the envelope I left back at the cemetery.

Mortem

It's time for Death

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 6:37 am*

### BLEEDING HEART

Isolde

The street is dark as I venture down the empty, abandoned sidewalk, as if not even the souls of the dead want to linger any longer. Boots crunch in the snow underneath me, the cold night air is a heart-aching balm against my frozen skin, wrapping around me suffocatingly.

Skin tingling with unease, I hurry to my apartment a few blocks from the main square of Vexglade.

Yet, that eerie sensation of being watched still lingers, even hours later. It seeps deep into my marrow like a feverish anxiety stealing my breath.

The very walls of the alleyway are pressing into me, coming ever closer.

The nape of my neck prickles with awareness, but there's no one in the alleyway.

I know I'm just paranoid because of how late and dark it is—a woman alone at night is never a good idea.

The deaths Casper told me about send shivers wracking over my body, how the victim was killed in a place much like this.

Just like my parents.

Bile travels up my throat until I'm forced to swallow it back, blinking away the tears pushing behind my eyelids. Memories wanting to resurface. Corpses filtering through. Lifeless eyes staring up at me. Cruel laughter.

I sigh in relief when I spot my apartment building ahead. The night is eerie, with not even the moonlight daring to reveal itself. There's a sense of something long forgotten lingering in the air—a darkness that only seems to fester with every step I take.

Then, I hear it. Light footsteps behind me.

The snow crunches beneath my feet. Only, the sound doesn't match my own pace. I dare stop for a second, but the sound instantly vanishes.

No one is there .

A look around my shoulder shows the truth—I'm all alone in an empty alleyway, in the middle of the night. No one would hear my cries or my screams for help.

I continue walking, clutching the grocery bag harder. The sounds of footsteps behind me resume, and I take a shuddering breath. Someone is behind me, but I can't see anyone.

I never was a fan of the modern world; this apartment was the oldest one I could find once I moved after my parents' deaths. The money they left behind was enough to last me a while, and I'm still merely making a living doing tarot reading online.

Reaching the apartment port, I enter the passcode just as I catch a glance over my shoulder.

A shadow lingers behind the corner, staring at me with its eerie eyes.

It's gone in the next second, and I don't know what to believe.

Quickly entering and closing the door behind me, I'm met with the hallway of my apartment house.

Stairs to the left reach the floors above, holding two apartments each, whereas mine is the only one on the first floor.

Hurrying inside my apartment and quickly locking the door behind me, the safety of my home does nothing to ease my nerves.

I flick on the light in my apartment, and the dim light fills the two-room space. One bedroom and one kitchen.

The sudden ding of my phone has my heart flying out of my chest, a gasp escaping me. I grab the phone with trembling fingers, reading the message on there.

CASPER

I'm sorry for earlier. I'm just so wound up from work and this murder...

Annoyance seeps through me as I read his message, knowing he doesn't truly feel empathy. There's nothing inside me as I think of him and me anymore—no butterflies that were there before. Nothing to indicate I still love him in the same way I did at first.

Did I ever truly love him?

He entered my life a few months after my parents' deaths with his charming smiles and protective nature, after their demise—the people who I thought would stay with me forever.



The day they left, they took my heart with them.

I do not think it has ever been fully restored, and therefore, I cannot give it to Casper.

I'm not his to love. I never was.

And somehow, that doesn't hurt at all. We're both using each other for our own benefit, even when he claims to love me. That manipulative bastard.

I turn off my phone, not bothering to reply, holding it tight in my grip before I enter the kitchen that is big enough to host the living room as well; a small velvet couch pressed up against the wall with a small coffee table before it, where I usually eat my meals.

Loading off the grocery bag from the gas station on the counter—the only place open this late—I heave out a breath. Exhaustion wears heavy on me, and I'm so tired. Both emotionally and physically.

Something in the corner of my eyes flickers, and a frown mars my brows as I stare at the flickering candle on my kitchen counter, sure I blew them all out when I left earlier.

With tentative steps, I instantly approach the candle to blow it out. It has burned for a while, evident in the way stearine has gathered on the wooden surface. The clock on the wall reveals it is way past midnight, and I initially groan right the moment my eyes catch something else.

I almost missed it at first—a small black box right inside my door, as if it had slipped through the letterbox unnoticed. A ribbon of silk wraps around it, feeling like a bad omen, making me not want to open it. The number '6' is painted on the box.

Curiosity gets the better of me as I approach it, lifting it up with trembling hands, nearly dropping it in the process. Carefully, I unwrap the silk, letting the top fall to the floor.

The inside has me dropping the entire box onto the floor. An item slips out onto the floor.

A dark-blue hair bow.

In the color of blue, with dried spots of blood.

No, no, no. This cannot be happening.

I cry out, stumbling backwards as I hit my tailbone on the kitchen counter, wincing.

I recognize that hair bow, I remember how that blood got there. Swallowing harshly, I'm suddenly plunged back into my past.

A calm lullaby fills my eardrum as she sings to me gently, huskily, her voice a soothing balm caressing my skin. Her hands are brushing through the tangles in my hair, right the moment the door opens, and he comes barging in.

"My god! You startled me," she giggles, turning around to face he who entered.

I take a moment to meet his gaze in the mirror's reflection, only realizing too late that there are specks of blood across his face.

"What did you do?" she asks, and I stare at them both, unable to comprehend anything.

He ignores her, enters the room, and walks up to me, his hands grabbing my hair bow

and tying it to my hair. He doesn't utter a word, but his eyes speak the words of a thousand anguished souls.

"Klaus! Call an ambulance," the voice of my mother filters through to my room, causing my eyebrows to raise. Her voice sounds panicked.

I glance down at his knuckles, bruised and bloodied. "What did you do?" I whisper this time, and he sears my gaze in the reflection, specks of blood now dusting my blue hair bow.

"He got what he deserved," was his only reply before leaving the room.

Later, I learned he had hurt one of my father's friends for speaking about me inappropriately. The memory shudders through me now, my heart pounding so violently it feels like it might break free from my ribcage.

Terror mounts inside me as I stare at the hair bow again, forcing myself to pick it up.

Its texture, soft and smooth like silk on one side, cold and metallic on the other, is all too familiar.

The same smudged blood stares back at me, and the past crashes into the present with a force I can't withstand.

This isn't possible.

My breath comes in shallow gulps. The room tilts with it as my knees buckle, and I grab onto the counter for support. The memory of that night is too vivid, clinging to me like a ghost haunting its long-forgotten house.

How did this find its way back to me?

More importantly, why?

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 6:37 am*

### SEASON OF DECAY

Isolde

The past is daunting, triggering memories in humans that they'd rather forget. It's evident in how most of them want to leave their pasts behind.

Me?

I can never allow myself to stoop that low. Not with how it ended—a chapter in my life I desperately need to keep under lock and key, buried deep underground where no one will ever be able to dig up that box.

Yet, if I allow myself to forget, my mind will associate that with safety.

A calming breath here, less adrenaline fueling my veins like an addiction there—shoulders sagging in relief, mind shutting off, if just for a second.

I can never allow the season of decay to bleed out of me, constantly needing that steadily, silently, disturbingly heavy pulse to keep me tethered to this heartache.

I can never be safe.

Not as long as they are alive.

Forgetting is a part of life. A gradual process in which old memories are silently replaced by new ones, the past left behind like storage boxes gathering dust in the

attic. It's natural, even when what we forget is a kind of inherited trauma.

Trauma doesn't forget us. It clings, jarring and relentless, never once letting its grip go.

I'm the epitome of that truth; my past haunts me even when I'm wide awake.

A ding comes through on my phone, startling me out of my reverie as the crisp morning air bites my cheeks. Fresh wooden scent filters through my nostrils, the bitter cold blowing frighteningly in my house, whistling and howling as if sending a warning.

CASPER:

Good morning, beautiful.

I pocket my phone again, not in the mood to talk to him. I haven't been since he basically accused me capable of murder thirty hours ago. My phone has been blowing up with messages from him since. Each one coaxing me to him, as if what occurred at the police station never happened.

Ignoring another message coming through, I keep my pace, running my usual route.

There's something in the way my soul connects to the forest, the scent of pine trees, and the coldness that just heals something inside me.

My thoughts are bustling in the chaos of my mind, not fully understanding what it is I'm doing with my life.

I've lived on autopilot for so very long, it's as if I don't know who I am anymore.

My life ended before it had even begun when my parents died, and since then, I've become a shell of who I used to be.

I used to be so alive .

Not anymore.

Breathing heavily, I pick up my pace as I run, the trees rushing past me in a breeze as I work my way forward. I'm panting, sweat beading on my forehead, muscles screaming for rest, but I can't get myself to stop—I need this to feel something.

Otherwise, I might just go under.

Listening to the gothic-like instruments in my ears, the music blends seamlessly with the barren branches rustling, sounding almost comfortingly eerie.

I come to a sudden halt...pause the music.

The branches keep swishing, and it's not the wind this time. Then, that prickling sense of awareness fills me, as if someone is looking straight at me—their eyes boring into mine with an intensity that makes me shudder, and my breath stutters.

Looking around, I see no one. The woods are silent, uncannily so. That sensation of being watched filters through my body with a harshness that makes it hard to focus.

What is going on?

Gripping my phone tightly, I allow it to ground me to the present. Casper is still my emergency number. He'll have my back if anything happens.

Right at that moment, the vibration comes from an incoming call. It should make me

annoyed with his incessant attempts at reaching me, but only a whoosh of relief escapes me.

I pick up. “Hello?”

“You need to get home.”

A frown mars my eyebrows. “What are you doing at my apartment?”

“It doesn’t matter. You need to get here.”

There’s something urgent in his tone; I notice it in the way his voice becomes just a little higher.

“Why, Casper?” I ask, knowing he hates it when I use his real name, preferring I call him ‘baby’ or some other nickname.

A moment of silence in which I can hear his heavy sigh, almost sounding worried. It’s so far unlike his usual stance that it gives me pause.

“T-there’s something wedged into your door. An envelope of some kind.”

Thoughts instantly start racing in my mind, wondering what it could be.

“It’s wrapped in silk,” he finishes.

I nearly drop my phone to the snowy ground, remembering the gift I received yesterday. One I never told him about.

“With the number ‘5’ on it. What is this, Isolde?” he asks.



“I truly don’t know,” I whisper. “I’ll be there as soon as I finish my run.”

Movement in my peripheral view catches my sight, and a gasp escapes me, which Casper seems to catch onto.

“What is it, Isa?”

I don’t answer, merely lean closer to catch a better sight of what’s there. When I can’t get a proper look, I take a few steps forward. My heart is a wild drumbeat within my chest, a bird fluttering frantically in desperate need to get free. Panic in its natural habitat.

“Wait a sec,” I murmur into the phone, ignoring Casper.

Something red litters the white, grey snow, like droplets leading into a track. I follow it, tentatively, silent as a mouse while looking around.

That feeling of being watched doesn’t disappear, and I don’t know what to make of it.

Then, I see a shoe draped in blood. Like an unstitched wound, it leads up to a foot that’s separated from the rest of the body.

A startled scream leaves my lips, my breath hitching.

What the fuck is going on?

The scream echoes through the woods in a symphony that showcases my horror, echoing through the trees. I stumble back, nearly falling into the snow.

“Isa?! Isolde!” Casper’s voice shouts through the phone. “What’s going on?”

If I didn't know better, I would think he was worried about me—he never truly cared for me. Not really.

“Isolde, what's going on?”

Drawing back, my eyes are glued to the bloodstained snow. Horror-filled memories pile up in my mind, and I fight to breathe properly, feeling how fucking impossible it is.

My parents' lifeless bodies right before my eyes.

That feminine giggle.

That dark, masculine chuckle.

“Y-you need to get here,” I whisper into the voice, that feeling of being watched returning tenfold. I look over my shoulder, not seeing anything. But I know something is there. I just don't know what. “T-there's a body.”

“What?” When I don't give him any more of an explanation, he talks again. “Okay, I will be there.”

“And Casper? Bring the envelope.”

Something is going on. My entire body is trembling as I try to make sense of the scene before me: the blood and the severed foot, the trail of crimson leading deeper into the woods, until the body is finally visible, hiding underneath the foliage.

What's worse? The number ‘ 5 ’ is drawn into the snow.

My stomach tightens as I scan the woods, every muscle in my body on high alert as I

await Casper. I can feel the lingering sensation prickling my nerves, a cold shiver crawling over my skin until the hair on my arms stands with unease.

The wind howls in the trees, almost sounding like a dangerous whisper I had long forgotten. ‘Little traitor...’

The past two days have been a blur of dread, turning my almost peaceful life around. The box wrapped in silk, the bloodied hair bow from my past—it’s an unmistakable reminder of all that I tried to leave behind. The second murder in this quiet, small town since my parents’ death.

The realization hits me like a jet plane crashing onto solid ground—this isn’t a coincidence.

It’s not a nightmare I can wake up from. This is real—the kind of reality that forces me to face what I’ve been running from for so long. It’s a true fucking reality where pieces of my past are being dragged back into the light, meant to haunt me for all eternity.

Much like I deserve.

After all, I was the reason my parents died.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 6:37 am*

### HAUNTED REVENGE

#### The Hunter

Watching the little traitor as she discovers the body is the highlight of my day, I think, as I stand on the edge of the forest, hidden behind a thick tree trunk.

My gaze is primarily focused on that little thing, a woolen jacket wrapped around her smaller, petite frame, hiding those soft curves and the delicate dip between her collarbones down to her perky breasts beneath the fabric.

I miss owning her immensely.

But the sweetest moment is when fear takes hold of her, rendering her immobile. She stands frozen in place, unable to move a muscle, eyes fixed straight ahead. It's as if she's slipping into shock, her body trembling—both from the cold and not.

Oh, how I wish I could taste that fear. Lick it away from her very pores. Seeing her like this, while intoxicating, is everything I longed for and craved in all our time apart.

Soon, there is no turning back. There never will be again.

Her agonized scream echoes through the trees, bouncing between the trunks, but the heavier wind swallows it whole. I glance at the woman beside me, who stands equally as mesmerized while watching the traitor.

This is what we missed out on for all these years. The wind now kisses our skin like a lover's warm embrace, along with the brisk air filling our lungs in a way so liberating, it would move me to tears if I had any emotions left within my black soul.

She did this to us.

That trembling little traitor—caught like a deer in the headlights, finally realizing her ultimate doom.

Her phone slips out of her palm, quickly buried underneath the snow settling heavily over the landscape.

Feeling snow again after so long is liberating.

I bask in the cold. Flakes cling to my skin like silk spun from ice, each one a reminder of our childhood.

Innocent children building snowmen and makeshift igloos, until it was all ruined by the people who claimed to love us.

It's a peaceful night with the darkness settling in, and the brisk scent of pine and soil. Along with that hidden odor of blood. After all, there is a corpse before the traitor, and her reaction is oh so fucking delicious .

She's received many gifts, but we decided it was finally time to reveal ourselves. A smirk splits my lips as I stare at the traitor. Her naturally blonde hair falls in loose waves around her shoulders, having a mind of its own from the heavy wind that picks up its breeze.

There is another gift on its way, with the traitor's so-called piece of shit boyfriend.

I overheard their call. Rage fuels my insides, my fists clenching and nostrils flaring, as the Dagger beside me puts an arm over my shoulder, squeezing it lightly.

She knows how to stem the fire inside my chaos.

After all, we were born from the same flesh and blood.

Torn from the same womb moments before our life-giver died in childbirth, ultimately leaving us with our sperm donor until he, too, died.

As the traitor begins scanning the forest, searching for something, I know it's time to leave before the boyfriend comes.

My heart pounds heavily in my chest as I watch her disappear beyond the treeline, her figure swallowed by the darkness.

The silent woman beside me moves in perfect step, her hair—a deep red-burgundy, rich in color—frames her face like a halo set on fire.

My twin is lithe, cunning, and fox-like in every motion.

She's shorter than me, a result of our different genes, but no less deadly.

Together, we move away stealthily as ghosts in the night. We'll all be reunited with our little traitor again.

Too soon—it's too soon, and yet the time cannot come fast enough.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 6:37 am*

### MEANT FOR SACRIFICE

Isolde

“I came as soon as I could,” Casper’s voice fills the air with its authority, coming closer from behind all the police investigation commotion.

They’ve taped off a larger section of the woodland, yellow lines marked Do Not Cross flapping in the heavier wind that drives snow into my face, so much so that I have to hide behind the blanket the paramedic offered me.

I snuggle deeper into it as she checks me over, making sure I have no physical injuries.

I’ve been distant since finding the body—a state of shock born from pure terror.

Everything feels colder, more sinister, than before. As if a perpetual shadow has settled over the town, sweeping through it with a wave of helplessness. This is the second murder to shake our quiet streets since my parents died, and it’s no wonder people are curious.

A cluster of onlookers gathers beyond the perimeters in a bustle of excited activity, journalists joining them while scribbling in notepads and snapping photos in bursts of flashes to try to capture whatever happens inside the taped-off area.

One camera flash nearly blinds me for a second when I realize it’s aimed directly at me. I turn my back on them sharply.

I'm in the back of an ambulance, my legs dangling back and forth above ground as the paramedic finishes checking me over. Once she's satisfied I'm unharmed, she steps away, leaving me alone with Casper.

Heavy tension lingers in the air, turning into something acidic the more seconds that pass. I stay silent, not knowing what to say. Does he suspect it's me this time, too?

"Is this the same motive as the Duskvik family?" a reporter shouts through the crowd of people, trying to get the attention of a police officer who swiftly ignores their question.

The question, in turn, makes me blanch. A thick cloud of poison that's destroying everything in its path, making the air harder to draw into my lungs, much like tar.

I still recall the commotion around my parents.

How the reporters used to stand outside my house day after day, shouting their intrusive questions and trying to peek inside my house when the curtains were the slightest bit open, all the while ultimately harassing me.

It was as if some mediocre respect never was on their radar.

I couldn't even leave my house without being swarmed by them.

Eventually, I was forced to move. A few months later, I met Casper in a local pub while drowning my sorrows in a drink or two. He was the town's new police deputy, having moved to our small town after being offered a promotion.

I've been with him ever since.

"Isolde?" Casper asks, catching my attention and making me realize I zoned out.



I lift my gaze to meet his stoic eyes, his cheeks flushed red from the frigid air, and his hands buried deep in his coat pockets.

One might assume he's uncomfortable standing like that—rigid in the cold while trying to keep his hands warm—but he's the opposite; completely at ease, without a care in the world.

And I'm the sole focus of his attention.

Somehow, that plants a sour feeling deep in my stomach.

He's not on duty, but he acts like he is with the way he assesses the grounds, silent and on guard, as if the murderer can jump out at any second and strike again.

I open my mouth to reply, but no words escape. I'm all empty—a sheer shell.

“Sir?” One of the forensics walks up to Casper briskly. Casper turns to look at them, and the loss of his gaze on me makes me slightly relax. “The tests came back negative.”

My boyfriend offers the forensic a curt nod, watching the man walk away before turning to look at me. “The DNA for the first murder,” he supplies.

My shoulders stiffen, taking in his gaze that doesn't look remotely guilty. Everything suddenly makes sense—why he was at my apartment, why he came here late when I called him over an hour ago. I tighten the grip around the blanket, the only shield protecting me from him.

“What do you mean?”

I know what he means, but he needs to confirm it using his own words.

“I tested your DNA. Negative. You’re safe. For now.”

Fists clenching around the blanket, I’m on the verge of tearing the fabric apart with my bare nails while tar radiates through me like a tide. Sick and ugly. My eyes flare. “What the actual fuck, Casper?”

Those broad shoulders merely shrug, as if this is no big deal. Only a minor misconception that will be forgotten within the next minute. He’s pouring gasoline on an already raging fire, erupting inside me until it’s inextinguishable.

“A relationship comes with trust!”

Scoffing, he casts me a meticulous look I cannot even begin to comprehend. “You’re one to talk,” he fires back.

I stop what I’m doing, freezing in place. I’m sure my face drains of all color as I stare at him, trying to figure out what he’s talking about. His expression doesn’t give anything away, nor does the flat line of his lips. “We’ll take this later,” he curtly says.

I’m about to protest, wanting to spit out every hurtful comment I can come up with, when he suddenly stops me. He grabs something from his pocket.

It’s a black envelope.

The one he was talking about on the phone earlier.

Swallowing the lump forming in my throat, I stare at it for a beat before daring to reach out for it.

My hands shake worse than an aspen leaf, and it feels as if the forest spins around me.

Uncontrollable in its force, about to sweep me off my feet and suffocate me in the cold snow.

“Open it,” Casper demands.

At his words, I think about how much I, despite everything, truly hate him.

How I never truly loved him. He only entered my life when all I needed was someone by my side, seducing me into a one-night stand, and finally giving me the attention I had sought for so long.

Lonely and desperate, he became the sole reason for my existence when my entire life was shredded to the tiniest of pieces.

Ripping open the envelope, the sound of tearing paper amplifying the anxiety inside me, I let the paper pieces fall into the snow. They disappear out of sight, blending in with the blinding color of nature.

And then it hits me, like a punch to the gut. My eyes stay fixed on the letters, but the world around me seems to tilt as if I’ve stepped off solid ground. A cold wave washes over me, and I forget to breathe.

The words are written in delicate, feminine handwriting, so neat it makes me nauseous. Utterly fucking nauseous. Like I might puke right here, and with it, drag my intestines out onto the ground. As if the nightmares have finally torn their way out of me, cutting me open from the inside out.

“What does it say?” Casper demands, but I block out his voice. I’m so tired of him. I just want to get away from him.

My eyes stay glued to the piece of paper, reading and rereading the words engraved

there.

Five days until your birthday. Counting down until we get to taste your blood again.

Xoxo.

Casper becomes impatient, and instead of waiting for me, he rips the paper from my hands, frowning. I try to grab it to prevent him, but he's too quick. When I stand up to retrieve it, he merely pushes me down so I land on my ass in the back of the ambulance again. I stare, shocked, at him.

"What is this?" he growls, reading the words written. He stares at me, seeing my face drained of color, but he doesn't give a shit. He takes one step closer to me, grabs the collar of my shirt, and nearly spits in my face. "What the fuck is this, Isa?"

I sputter and breathe heavily, feeling the world spinning around me. It's not him I'm worried about. I'm worried about those fucking words on the paper.

"What is it?!" he shouts, making a few officers turn our way before they look away again when Casper smiles calmly at them. He's still the deputy, after all.

"I don't know," I whisper.

"Someone clearly knows your birthday," he growls. "I thought you didn't have any friends, hmm?"

His voice is condescending, taunting. I flinch, watching his lips twitch.

Fuck him.

I don't know why he's mad at me. It's not like I have done something wrong. Staring

into his eyes, I tell him again that I don't know, ignoring his attempts at starting an argument.

Sighing heavily, he gives me that cold gaze that could freeze water. "I'm going to need to claim this as evidence," he tells me, as if I'd somehow rage about that.

"Burn it for all I care."

"Watch your tone with me," he warns, a tick in his jaw letting me know he's agitated.

Narrowing my eyes, I clench my fists. I can't cause a scene now. Not here.

Relief sags my shoulders as another officer shouts for his attention.

"Go home, Isolde," he mutters, turning to leave with that tick in his jaw still visible.

I stand up, letting the blanket drop from where I sat as I turn my back to the vehicle, not looking back at him or the body now covered in a black bag. It's only the soft crunch of my boots hitting the snowy forest floor as I make my way from the smell of death and engine oil.

The crowd is thicker now, more people having caught up to the news. Curious onlookers, desperate to get a glimpse of the tragedy. A journalist pushes past me to get a clearer view. His hand snakes back, intentionally, and grabs a full handful of my ass.

I startle, my body flinching before my mind can catch up. He's already disappeared in the throes of people before I can even see his face. No apology or hesitation.

Don't cause a scene.

With a deep breath to steady my mood, my fists involuntarily clench as I force myself to keep walking away.

I leave the crime scene and the corpse behind, nauseous, tired, and feeling empty in a way that sleep won't fix.

But most of all; scared out of my fucking mind.

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DAYS PASS AGONIZINGLY SLOW as I try to maintain a modicum of normalcy when my life has been turned upside down. Again.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 6:37 am*

Casper told me they've written me off as a suspect in the murders. Not enough evidence, they said. As if I already didn't know about it. As if that makes it better. It hurts that Casper ever thought I was capable of something so horrific.

As if the trauma of my parents' death hadn't already fucked me up enough.

The more days that pass, the more I try to ignore Casper, feeling hurt by his distrust, yet at the same time, not. But what's worse is that each day, a new gift arrives at my doorstep.

Be it another envelope engraved with a number, or a personal item I long thought lost, showing up out of nowhere. Reminders of a past I left behind. It seems it cannot stay buried for long.

Each day, my heart sinks a little lower.

Breaks a little more.

The fear and sheer paranoia intensify with each gift I open, counting down to my birthday in three days, on February 20th. Yet another cruel and taunting reminder of what I've lost.

I haven't celebrated my birthday since the last time I saw my parents alive. What's the point when no one really cares? Not even Casper cares enough to make something of the day, always busy with work or other plans.

These gifts are the most I've received since my parents' deaths, and with them comes

a strange sense of being special.

Even if it's twisted. They remind me I'm always watched, guarded, stalked.

No longer can I attempt to leave the safety of my apartment, terrified of what will happen if I do, or if I let my guard down.

Will they come for me? Why haven't they already?

Now, I know who they are. The third gift, the black envelope Casper found, revealed my most haunting nightmare come to life. Transforming into a horrifying reality right before my eyes. They want their revenge for what I did.

I know they're biding their time. For what, I'm not really sure.

But I do know that I'm not fucking ready to meet the past I've fled the past three years.

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“THIS IS VEXGLADE RADIO, and we have breaking news coming from the Bay. Police have confirmed that a body was found earlier today. An investigation is now underway, though no further details have been released at this time. What we do know is that the victim's right hand has been sawed off...”

I tune off the radio, the static fading into the room's silence. My mind lingers on the words, the grim details splitting my skin like a splinter from a wooden bench.

The crimson liquid on my hands isn't real, yet as I stare at them, the memory clings to my retinas without a second of hesitation.



After all, I'm a sinner. A fallen angel dragged straight from hell, and this world I'm living in is my purgatory.

A violent shiver wreaks havoc through me as I jolt awake in my bed, an unforgiving headache pounding against my temple that makes it impossible to focus on anything else.

Staring at the crackling fire in the stone hearth, I try to stitch together the memories of the past few hours, but all I find is a void.

Sitting up, I groan, the ache in my skull thudding in my temples and making it hard to focus. Something feels wrong—off, but there's nothing tangible to grasp onto. My eyes drift back to the fire, its heat oppressive and stifling. Did I even light it?

Sweat glistens on my skin as I throw off the blanket, the intensity of the flames far too much for what should be a dying ember by now. But it's not; it's a full-on raging fire, meant to devour the logs and papers within like a starving beast.

My heart leaps in my throat as I glance down at the sheets, dread coiling tight in my chest as I see stains of blood. Suddenly, it's as if I'm back there— blood everywhere, blinding and suffocating.

With trembling hands, I feel the phantom sensation of blood pooling in my palms. Corpses everywhere. My scream echoing through the walls. Blood pooling in a pond before me.

It can't be real.

My breaths are shallow and uneven as I stare at the crimson stains, hoping they'll just disappear. The longer I look at them, the more real they become, and the whisper in the back of my mind becomes louder with each passing second.

I did this.

The heat from the fire presses against my skin as I draw in ragged breaths, trying to stem the trembling in my hands. The red digits on my bedside table show it's seven a.m. and time to get ready for the day ahead.

I swing my legs over the bed, in desperate need to change the sheets, and get out of the bedroom as soon as I can. The moment my feet hit the cool floor, a sharp pain stabs through my heel. I hiss, freezing in place.

A shard of glass has embedded itself in my heel, dropping in rivulets on the white wooden floor.

Then, I see it. Faint smears of red leading from the bed to the hearth.

My stomach twists as I scramble to it, flames roaring like a wild beast out to hunt its victims. As if trying to give off a warning. Swallowing my unease, I follow the trail to the other side of my room.

White floors adorn the room along with grey walls, a stone hearth before my queen-sized bed with its plush pillows, and a wardrobe pushed up against the far wall. Everything looks the same, yet everything is somehow different. Be it a feeling or a lingering knowing.

The heat from the fire hits me like a blast as I crouch down, staring into the flames that only make the sweat cling to my body. It's way too hot here. Almost suffocating, making it impossible to breathe steadily.

Something is buried underneath the embers, but I cannot quite see what it is. A frown mars my eyebrows, but it doesn't matter how much I lean into the glass gate; my view is restricted at best.

A shrill ringing resonates through the room until I realize it's my alarm, indicating I have to get going. It startles me enough that a gasp escapes me as I quickly whip around to face the clock.

There's something wedged between the books on my nightstand, almost invisible and blending in like a chameleon.

The hair on the back of my neck rises as I spot what appears to be a card, my trembling hands growing worse while panic coils around my throat like a snake squeezing the oxygen from my lungs.

The number ' 3 ' is written on the front of the card, and lead drops in my gut. Every instinct inside me screams to drop the card. Not read it. Yet I'm already turning the card, eyes scanning the ink.

A little gift.

For you.

Five words. That's all it takes for the world to feel like it's once again ending. I'm forced to grip the thick paper with both hands to stop it from curling back together or crumpling in my hands.

My vision blurs at the edges as the words burn into my mind, dragging forth shadows. The handwriting feels so familiar, but it's been too long.

There's no name. No signature.

I'm certain I know who left it for me because it's the same handwriting as the last letter I received. They were never supposed to get out again, sent miles away from here.

Something with the sprawled words urges me to turn to the stone hearth again. The fire resembles an inferno, flames twisting and swirling like the devil's breath. Devouring with an insatiable hunger that cannot easily be tamed.

Once more, I crouch before the fire, staring into what's hiding underneath the embers and the logs.

Fear ignites in me. Dark and primal, like a presence on my irises, a stain in the corner of my eyes, seeping blackness everywhere.

I'm left staring at something lumpy and hard, unmoving.

Carefully opening the hearth door, I grab the prod standing to the side to get a better view of what's inside. A wave of nausea rolls over me until I scramble backwards, the flames roaring, an odd odor instantly spreading through my room.

Lightheadedness makes me feel fuzzy as I stare at what's lying there, and the voice on the radio comes back to my mind.

Because there, burning up into embers, is a sawed-off right hand. The wrist has been severed, jagged flesh exposing the tissues of the muscles. Bile rises in my throat, twisted and raw. The faint smell of charred meat filters through my room. I fight the urge not to vomit right then and there.

Unease lingers inside me as a loud bang comes from my hallway.

I hurry my way there with legs feeling as if they might collapse at any second, and my mind a little lost without being able to comprehend anything.

The front door stands wide open, when it was closed, even locked, when I slept.

A single black rose—the one I left on my parents' grave—is on the doorstep, blood draping it in rivulets.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 6:37 am*

### ONE DAMNED ESSENCE

Isolde

Darkness meets the empty hallway as I make my way through the counseling center. Muscles tight with the nervousness pounding in my ears, the symphony of doom is all too clear, greeting me with damnation.

I can't stop pacing back and forth.

After the events of the past week, I've realized I can't skip my group therapy anymore, and I absolutely could not stay inside my apartment after what I found this morning.

Ever since my parents were murdered, I've been going to therapy, trying to process it all.

Trauma is funny like that—it sometimes hits you out of nowhere, making you lose a part of yourself, and a part of your mind.

I haven't been able to tell them the whole truth—the part where I was involved. But it has helped.

A little.

Nausea rises in my esophagus at the mere thought of what I left behind in my apartment this morning. The gift they left. Her handwriting.

I swallow hard. I'm going to fucking vomit.

"Come on, Isa. You can do this," I mutter to myself, shaking my body as if I can jolt the emotions loose.

Force them back down to the pit where they belong.

I've never been comfortable around other people, so why the hospital suggested group therapy is beyond me.

Days after the murder and the trial, they admitted me into care. They feared for my life, they said. As if I would kill myself after witnessing the worst moment in my life.

Might as well have.

Then, I wouldn't be living this hell on earth now.

I enter the vast space, noticing people milling about while minding their own business. Some seem more nervous than others, while some are completely unaffected.

Anxiety claws at my throat like a swarm of butterflies armed with razors.

Deep breaths. Focus. I can do this.

I find the nearest empty chair and settle in quietly, avoiding eye contact with anyone. I've been here multiple times before. More often right after everything happened, less now that there's no 'risk to my life,' as they put it.

Still, I don't know anyone here. I recognize some, but most are unfamiliar.

“Hello, group. I’m Ada, and I will be your counselor for this session.”

She goes on, letting everyone introduce themselves one by one until it’s my turn.

My throat tightens at the same time as my mouth dries up, causing my tongue to feel like sandpaper.

Sweat beads along my hairline. But I manage to get the words out, and the session continues smoothly, talking about grief and trauma and different exercises to cope.

“Alright,” she says, calm and steady, while clasping her hands together. “I’m going to show you a breathing technique you can use when things get overwhelming. I need all of you to try this with me.”

But she’s quickly interrupted by the hall door barging open with a bang that resonates through the room, startling some. Everyone turns to the newcomer, who approaches with heavy, determined footsteps.

“I’m so sorry to interrupt.”

The voice is soft yet tinged with a hint of darkness. Oh fuck no. This can’t be happening.

I turn to look at the newcomer and am met with the officer’s uniform clinging to my boyfriend. A Kevlar vest and utility belt are completed with a sidearm, handcuffs, and a radio; his eyes turned directly at me.

The attention shifts to me in the room, embarrassment flushing my cheeks with the need to just sink underground and disappear. It’s so silent in the room, you would be able to hear a needle drop.



“Isolde. You need to come with me,” Casper says with an authoritative voice, eyes entirely too brooding as he stares down at me with accusations directed at me.

This cannot be good.

---

I FOLLOW HIM OUT of the counseling center, settling into the police car standing in the parking lot.

As soon as I do, the car door locks. The sound echoes in the small, crumpled space of the car, making my heart pound a little harder as I turn to stare at Casper.

His eyes...they're like two dark orbs I've never seen before, and it's as if I'm suddenly afraid of my own boyfriend.

Swallowing harshly, I wait for him to speak.

He rakes a hand through his hair, unkempt, so he must have been asleep before he got here. And the fact that he's here, during my therapy session, tells me a lot.

It only makes the lead in my stomach weigh even heavier.

“What?” I ask, referring to his interrupting. “Why did you have to disturb my session? I texted you I'd be here.”

His jaw clenches, dragging a hand through his hair once more. Staring back at me. Swallowing the lump in my throat, my impatience dwindles.

“We got a witness. A threat of some kind. The police are on their way to your apartment as we speak.”

The color drains from my face, but I control my breathing, keeping my face neutral.  
“What the fuck? Why?”

Anger—that’s what’s expected of me. Not the fear, the sheer panic, I feel filtering inside me. Because I know what’s in my fucking apartment. I should have called the cops when I saw the evidence of their twisted fucking games, but I couldn’t bring myself to. I just wanted to forget.

I still do.

“Evidence points to you having a part in these murders in town. It’s best if you come with me to your apartment and talk to the chief.”

“Do I have a fucking choice?” I retort, anger turning my face red. He locked the car, making me unable to leave even if I wanted to.

Then, he does something that surprises me, which really shouldn’t considering who I’m with.

His hand clamps around my throat, squeezing until my lungs burn with the need for oxygen.

His eyes are two angry holes taking me in, breathing heavily through his teeth as if he’s acting on pure emotions, not thinking clearly.

But he doesn’t let go of the grip, and despite knowing I can’t ward him off, my fingers try to claw through his skin so he can let me go.

“Watch your fucking tone with me, Isolde,” he spits in my face. “You’re on very thin ice, and one wrong move can send you to jail for a very long time.”

I think I'm losing my mind because that smirk on his lips shouldn't be there. It's gone in the next second, and as the oxygen disappears from my lungs and my body fights for air, I start hitting his arms with the last bit of energy I have left.

After what feels like forever, he finally lets me go, leaving me sputtering for breath. Unable to do anything. Tears gather in my eyes, but I refuse to let them fall as he puts the key in the ignition and starts the car, swerving his way out of the parking lot.

My chest is heaving as I catch my reflection in the rearview mirror, blue bruises already forming with the hard grip in which he held me.

He's just a conniving, manipulative bastard that I can't find myself letting go of.

Because being with a cop gives me some semblance of protection if my past comes knocking at my door.

Coughing, I stare at myself, not recognizing who I am anymore. They fucked up so much for me when they left. When I made them leave.

"Stop fucking sulking," Casper snaps as we drive up the driveway to my apartment building.

I only glare at him, feeling my hatred for him fueling .

He unlocks the car, and the first thought that hits me is how much I want to escape from him. Run away. But that would make me seem even more like a suspect.

I had no part in these twisted murders, but I think I know who does.

And the hand in my fireplace? The cops won't listen to my reasoning about it magically appearing there.

Heart hammering hard in my chest, it feels as if I might faint as Casper grasps my shoulder and leads me inside. He's more forceful than he has to be, and it only makes that weird feeling in my stomach settle deeper.

Why am I even with him?

I don't fucking know anymore.

It seems I can't be protected from them any longer.

As we arrive at my apartment door, I see that it's already wide open with at least five police officers inside my apartment. Shoes on, dirtying my floor.

"What the fuck is going on, Casper?" I seethe, barely keeping the panic from cracking my voice.

It's clawing at my chest like some rabid monster, desperate to cut me open and force out the truth with the spilling of blood. Like a snare, ready to break my neck the second I slip.

I watch them tear through my apartment, creating chaos as they turn over drawers and scatter everything I own like it's worthless. There's not a single thing I can do about it.

Act normal. Breathe.

But I fucking can't. A bead of sweat trails down my temple, and my hands are slick with fear, bracing for the looming threat. Will they arrest me, right here, right now? Or will they let me explain myself?

"There's nothing here," the police officer tells Casper.

For a moment, relief washes over me. Like a tsunami wave that's finally retreating after its destruction. Then, I watch Casper's jaw harden, clench, his fingers digging deeper into my shoulder. I try not to flinch.

Try, and fail.

"Something needs to be!" he shouts, and the officer stares at him with an odd look.

I turn to Casper. If nothing is there, that means they haven't found the blood or the hand in my fireplace. That means I'm safe, for now.

Until they decide to play these twisted games with me again.

What I don't understand is how the police couldn't find anything.

Minutes seem to pass in which Casper stares angrily at his men searching my apartment, violating my space, and causing chaos that will take hours to sort through.

"Do you even have permission to do this?" I growl at Casper.

He ignores me at first, sighing as if I'm an annoying little child he can't wait to get rid of. Then he enters my hallway with his shoes on, leaving muddy footsteps on the wooden floor, before he shows me a piece of paper with their warrant order.

I roll my eyes, still feeling angry.

"We have secured the apartment. Nothing," another officer states, his badge letting me know he's in a higher order than Casper. So this is the chief of police, Casper's boss. "I suggest you have concrete proof the next time you make any accusation. I'm sorry for the inconvenience, miss," he nods.

It's not long before they all have left the apartment. I stare at Casper with an open mouth. "You fucking accused me?"

"It's not like that, baby. We received a witness. I needed to be sure you didn't have anything to do with this," he steps closer to me as if about to embrace me. I take a step back. "Please, baby."

I glance at him, then at my apartment. "You're going to help me clean this shit up," I mutter.

"I will. I'm sorry. At least now I know you didn't have anything to do with this. Now, we can focus on getting the culprit behind bars."

"Should've just trusted me from the beginning," I mutter, entering my bedroom only to notice that the fire in the stone hearth has been put down.

No evidence of there ever having been a dissected body part there. The note is gone from my bedside table as well. Confusion hits me like a bomb, making the room spin in a vortex of endless questions. I couldn't have imagined it, could I?

No. I know it was there. Which begs the question, who cleaned up?

A feeling settles in my stomach, sour and raw, like acid traveling up my throat.

Casper looks at me, seeing the exhausted expression on my face. I grip hold of the doorframe, staring back at him with resignation. All I want to do is lash out at him, but it won't lead to anything. And I'm too fucking exhausted. These past few days have left me fucking drained.

"Just...forget it. I don't have the energy for this," I mutter, grabbing a box lying on the floor and looking around at the mess, overwhelmed.

This whole place is a goddamn mess. I'm a mess, staring at the stone hearth and knowing what was there.

Casper lifts a hand, as if about to stroke my cheek, before stopping himself. I'm glad for it. I don't think I could have handled his touch right now. Not with the twisted knot in my stomach lodging itself there.

"I'm really sorry, baby. I shouldn't have—" he starts, but I shake my head, bending down to retrieve a few books from the floor to put in the box.

"Just stop. I don't want to talk about it," I mutter.

He nods. Licks his lips. "Okay. Let me at least help? I can cook dinner and stay the night?"

Even if I don't want him to, even when all I want to be is alone, I still feel that sense of protection around him. Even when he bruised my throat.

God, this is so fucking messed up.

But I nod, agreeing.

Because having him here means a small semblance of protection against the bigger threats that loom ahead. And what they will do to me, if my suspicions are correct, will be far fucking worse than anything Casper has ever done to me.

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*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 6:37 am*

### SCARLET HUNGER

#### The Dagger

A giggle escapes me when I giddily enter the apartment, skipping to where I know she's sleeping. The man behind me enters too, more quietly and stealthily than I, but I just can't help my excitement.

Most of all, I need to feel her under me. Her soft skin. Plump lips. Sweet like an angel. Beautiful wavy hair, unlike my naturally straight hair.

Whereas I'm the devil in disguise, she's an angel hiding behind deprivation.

"You gotta be quieter!" Vernon hisses under his breath, eyes the shade of mine narrowing into slits as he looks at me.

I only cast him a wink, continuing down the empty hallway. It's not like she will hear me. She always slept so deeply, just like the Sleeping Beauty.

I can practically hear Vernon roll his eyes at me, arms crossing over his broad chest, but I couldn't care less. I haven't felt this free in a long time, as if I have the world at my fingertips, able to do exactly everything I want.

Including breaking into her apartment at night when she's sound asleep.

Taking in the sight of her space through the little light provided by a burning candelabra, a smile ghosts my lips.



An unusual feeling after so long. There's a small velvet couch against the wall, along with a wooden table before it, a bowl of unfinished cereals ruining the clean atmosphere.

I tsk at the fact that she had cereal for dinner, and make my way to the bowl to pick it up.

I feel Vernon's gaze silently judging me as I start handwashing the bowl in the kitchen, putting it up to dry.

When I turn around, he cocks an eyebrow, but I only shrug my shoulders.

"Gotta take care of the little traitor, even when she doesn't deserve it," I tell him in a normal volume.

He doesn't reply, and we make our way through the kitchen, posing as a living room as well, onto the only other room in the apartment, except for the smaller bathroom. The bedroom door is closed shut, and I push it open, careful not to make a noise.

Excitement bubbles up inside me, producing endorphins like an addiction as I slip into the room, sticking to the shadows. Blending in is my forte, after all this time.

I tiptoe over to the smaller form lying huddled in bed, her blonde hair sprawled over the pillow beside her, sleeping peacefully.

A sliver of moonlight comes through the curtains, and I lean down, inhaling the scent of her hair.

Something fruity tinged with lavender that takes over the tones of the fragrance.

A deep flutter settles in my stomach at the scent of her.

She smells just the same. I trail her arm using my fingertips, feeling the goosebumps littering her skin even in sleep.

Gliding over to her bra, I unclip it. Her beautiful breasts bounce as I pull them free, and the sudden urge to tug on her nipples sends a searing heat between my legs.

I know I'm fucking wet for her.

Breathing harshly, I attempt to keep my composure. I can't wake her. It's not time for us to reunite yet.

I stare at her perky nipples, unable to help myself, and squeeze them lightly. A soft moan escapes her as she moves in her sleep, and the triumph spreads through me. Arousal washes over me, and I want to take her right fucking now. No distractions.

I want her to be mine, all the while punishing her for betraying us.

It's so dark in the room, I'm barely able to see anything.

I feel my way forward, fingers hooking into her panties while casually spreading her legs.

A shaky breath escapes me when I reach the apex of her thigh, fingers right there .

My thumb slowly circles her clit, and I feel her thrusting her hips forward. Softly. Craving more.

A smirk takes over my lips as I continue, short puffs of air escaping her lips.

Fuck, I wish I could take her right here, right now, claiming her before my twin brother has the chance to. Marking her as mine first.

If only she were awake, I'd tell her how beautiful she is. Made for me until the end of days. Her death is mine, her soul is mine. Everything of hers belongs to me.

I feel my twin closing in on me from behind, his breath ragged as he stares at the little traitor. It's obvious he's affected by her in the same way I am.

She has us wrapped around her finger, even after all these years.

He makes his way to us, and I hear him leaning closer. From the way soft moans continue to escape her, I know he's doing something to her.

But then, something else moves beside her in the darkness. Sheets rustling, snores beginning. He pulls away, silence descending.

Using the flashlight on his phone, he shines it on the bed, where I expect to see only her .

Anger twists my features as I spot another form, lying half-naked, back turned to her.

Jaw clenching, nails pressing into my palms, a murderous rage overwhelms me.

Fucking Casper.

The obsessive anger takes over like rot beneath the skin. My brother catches my eye. He's just as mad.

Then, Vernon's light catches something else. Blue and purple bruises litter her throat, ringed like fingertips. Rage seethes through me, thick as spilled ink.

I can't wait to end that bastard, so-called boyfriend of hers.

How dare he claim he wants her dead and then sleep right beside her?

No, she's ours to claim. Ours to hate, kill, and make bleed. Ours to fucking possess.

Just like we've ended everyone who's touched her, like that fucking journalist at the crime scene, we will kill him.

And once again, she's with him when she belongs to us.

A traitor, through and through.

We swiftly exit the apartment, and I make sure to leave our next final gift.

Another letter, for her.

### LOST LITTLE LAMB

Isolde

Something rattles my bones when I wake up at midnight, a sound startling me from my dreamless sleep. A nameless dread engulfs me as I try to figure out what woke me up. Casper's lying beside me, his light snores filling the space, bringing a sense of comfort.

Eyebrows furrowed, I stare at him. He's on his back, mouth open, arms slumped to his side while he sleeps peacefully. It's in moments like these that I remember why I'm still with him—the peace, the safety. Despite all he's done, I still care about him.

The room is unexpectedly cold, bringing with it a sharp shiver of discomfort as I realize my bedroom window is wide open, and my bra is unclasped. Scowling down at my chest, I quickly fix it and stare at Casper. Did he unclip it while I was asleep?

Snow trickles in through the window sill, the sound of trees whistling in the wind resonating through the room.

A gut feeling tells me that's not what woke me up.

Casper's snores quieten, and the sudden silence feels oppressive. Any sound would startle me, like watching a horror movie, knowing there will be a jump scare, and still getting frightened.

Something catches my attention in my peripheral vision.

A flicker of white fluttering by the glass pane, tucked between the windowsill and the open frame, by what looks to be a small stone.

On silent feet, I get up from bed, the cold instantly traveling up my heels to the top of my head and casting a violent shiver over me.

Casper turns in bed, noticing my absence even in his sleep, and mumbles before opening his eyes.

“Get back to bed, baby.”

I ignore him and continue toward the windowsill, noticing the piece of paper there.

It’s only when I reach out a hand to grab it that I realize my entire body is overtaken by tremors.

As soon as I have a hold of it, I slam the window shut and twist the lock into place, the click far too loud in the silent night.

Then, I just stand there, staring out into the stillness, at the world outside with not a single soul awake at this ungodly hour.

Steeling myself, I glance down at the envelope in my hand. The number ‘2’ is written in black ink on the front page. Adrenaline pumps through my veins as I glance at the clock, noticing it’s ten minutes after midnight. Meaning it’s only forty-eight hours left until my twenty-fourth birthday.

The mere thought of that leaves me physically ill.

Noticing something is amiss, Casper instantly sits up in bed and rubs the sleep off his eyes. “What is it?”

I rip open the envelope, only hearing blood rushing endlessly in my ears, counting down to my doom.

And drop the letter as soon as I read it.

You're invited to a masquerade party at Mayhem Castle.

February 20th, 8 p.m. sharp.

Arrive in your finest dress.

Xo,

Red

No, no, no. This cannot be happening.

It fucking't can't!

My knees grow weak, and I rush outside the bedroom into my small bathroom, falling onto the floor right before the toilet.

I push open the lid, expelling the bile rising in my stomach, poised as vomit.

I'm lucky I haven't had much to eat, because I'd be throwing it all up.

Falling back, leaning my back against the wall, my body is weak, cold sweat wracking over me.

Mayhem Castle.

The castle in the middle of Vexglade's forest, where no civilization resides. I'd forgotten about that place, only visited once, and it was enough to give me the chilling creeps to avoid it altogether.

That castle was the only thing left in their will, their only property before I sent them to jail.

I fall over the toilet again and vomit my guts up. All weak and so fucking exhausted of this entire mess. Terrified out of my goddamn mind.

"I think you should go," Casper says from outside the bathroom while leaning against the doorframe, voice deep and husky with sleep. He holds the envelope in his hands, scanning it over. "It could be fun. Who knows?"

"What's wrong with you?" I ask, feeling the sour sensation in my stomach again. He notices my state of mind, and yet he has the audacity to say that.

Wasn't he the one who literally got mad at me for receiving an envelope much like this? What is he playing at?

"I'm just saying. You don't know who you're up against. I will be a phone call away if you need me."

That's it, he must be insane. "I'm not fucking going."

He merely shrugs his shoulders, staring me over with a hint of distinct disgust. My face is pale, my lips dry as I wipe away the vomit with a towel that I throw in the laundry basket as soon as I'm done. Well, fuck him.

I slump against the cold floor, because this invitation? It only means one thing.



It confirms my worst fears.

The twins are back, and they're definitely out to get me.

### THE FIRST RUIN

Mommy and Daddy have brought back two other children.

I knew they would come because they told me two school semesters ago, but that doesn't stop the nervous fluttering in my tummy.

They're from an orphanage, Mommy said. I'm not sure exactly what that means, but I know they're supposed to stay with us now.

"Go say hi to your new brother and sister," Mommy urges softly, her hand against my back where she usually puts it when I'm closer to her, out of comfort, I think.

I almost stumble over the hem of my red, long dress, but catch myself just in time.

Sand slips into my ballerina shoes as I glance around the playground.

At least my parents picked a place I love for our first meeting.

That makes me feel safe and not so scared anymore, especially as I pass the slide Daddy always takes me on.

Still, my legs are a little unsteady as I walk toward the girl and the boy standing by the swings with an older lady who has gray hair and wrinkles on her face. At least her smile is kind and careful.

The wind sends a burst of sand across my cheeks, and I squeeze my eyes shut. When

I open them, I can feel their gazes on me.

My heart feels like a butterfly is fluttering inside me as I look back at Mommy and Daddy. They both give me a nod of encouragement. Taking a deep breath that makes me feel braver, I take the remaining steps up to my new siblings.

Chewing on my lips, I nervously glance at them both. “Hi, I’m Isolde! I’m your new sister.”

The girl smiles so wide her gums show, giving a small wave with her hand.

I notice her hair is the same color as my dress, and I point at the fabric to show her.

She’s practically bouncing on her toes, looking around the playground with excitement that makes me frown.

I like it here too, but I’ve never been that happy.

“Have you never been to a playground before?” I ask out of curiosity.

She tilts her head, then shakes it. That makes me frown even more.

“But...everyone has been to one at least once!”

“Not us,” she replies sadly.

“Well, where did you come from then?”

She takes a step closer, with her brother following close behind. I have to crane my neck to look up at them since they’re much taller than me.

“A bad, bad place,” she says.

“Like the evil castle in Snow White?”

She tilts her head that way again. “Sure.”

Her hair whips in the wind, lashing across the boy’s face, who has been silently staring at me all this time.

“I told you to tie it up,” he mutters, brushing it off with a bitter expression. Her smile reappears at his comment.

I don’t know why, but something about them makes my stomach tighten.

The boy is still staring at me. He lifts a hand to the back of his neck, messing up his curly brown hair. Aren’t they supposed to be twins? His gaze makes me shift on my feet, a little uncertain.

I feel Mommy and Daddy’s eyes on me from behind. That helps a little.

Then the boy speaks his first words to me since he got here. “You’re our new plaything,” he says, smiling.

I blink, not understanding. Was that a joke?

I look back at my parents, but their brows furrow, too.

“He’s kidding,” the red-haired girl says quickly, looping her arm through mine. “I’m Celine. This is Vernon. We’re ten years old!”

That makes them two years older than me.

Vernon sighs and crosses his arms, still watching me with that unreadable look that makes me squirm. I instantly want to run back to my parents and hide behind them.

Mommy and Daddy glance at the gray-haired lady, their smiles unsure and tight. I turn back to the twins, something sneaky in the air, while they look at me like I'm a toy. Their smiles are weird too, strange and obsessive smiles.

Yeah. These two mean trouble.

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## PRESENT DAY

STANDING OUTSIDE WHAT USED to be a church, I stare at the remnants of decay and debris.

Some of the facade has been left, but the roof has caved in, leaving it abandoned for the past few years.

I'm back at the perimeters of the graveyard, masses of graves stretching as far as my eye can see.

And yet, I cannot bring myself to visit my parents' grave.

I still feel guilty about what happened. My heart aching, splintering apart like old wood inside my ribcage, ultimately stabbing my heart.

The memories of the past push to the forefront of my mind, causing a headache to take root in my temples. It's throbbing, as if someone is banging on it with a hammer.

The cold from the late midnight winter air washes over my face, and I bask in the

sensation of freedom it offers. How it digs deeper into my skin, seeping into every crevice of my body and freezing me from head to toe.

My hair is a tangled mess in the wind, and I already dread the battle it'll be to brush through these stubborn waves.

Staring at the church's facade, I remember how it was just across the street where I met them for the first time fifteen years ago in the playground. And it was here, at this church, I saw them for the last time—here where the cops caught them, leading to their arrest.

Oh, the rage fueling their expressions when they realized I had called the cops after stumbling upon my parents' murdered bodies.

I still remember their tongues nailed to the asphalt outside our house, the utter horror that made everything around me too palpable with the thoughts that refused to stop racing.

"It's almost poetic, isn't it? Silencing them like they silenced us," she states, calm as ever. "Don't you see? We killed them for you. Now, we can be together forever. There's no one to prevent us from taking you."

Then, they heard the sirens. And their expressions morphed into one of horror, anger, something fueled with a need for vengeance, before they left me with my parents' bodies.

I helped the cops find them, arresting them here by the church.

That was three years ago, and I've lived in fear ever since. Knowing they would want their revenge.

Our relationship was never something socially accepted. Deemed taboo, even. Something our parents never approved of, but they couldn't do much about it after we all turned eighteen years old and the twins moved out to their castle. Even when Mom and Dad tried as best as they could.

Some part, deep inside me, craved them like I crave oxygen. In desperate need of their attention and affection, after feeling so lonely for so long. They were always there, causing mischief, but they were mine .

Fuck, there's a hidden depth inside me that still misses them, even when I'm terrified of my goddamned mind.

Moans echo in my bedroom, Celine's body clamped close around mine, slick with delicious sweat. Vernon is giving me attention, licking me. This is wrong, but it feels so fucking right.

"Now that we're all over nineteen...there's nothing to stop us from having you," she whispers in my ear, sending a shiver of something twisted inside me.

Dark and deliciously sinful, that's what she is. What she always has been.

"You're our plaything, forever," he growls, suddenly thrusting his cock inside my mouth until I'm forced to swallow it.

I lap up their attention, legs clamping together to get some friction of release.

"Oh, she likes that," Celine smirks as her tongue dances over my clit.

I moan, the sound sending vibrations to Vernon's cock, prompting him to push deeper into my mouth, tugging at my hair.

“Such a dirty little girl. Ours forever. You know that right?” he looks down at me as I swirl my tongue over his cock. “There will be hell to pay if you ever leave us.”

I nod, understanding. I don’t want them to leave me either.

No matter what our parents think, they’re not my real siblings. Is it so bad to crave the thing I shouldn’t want? When they make me feel so safe and cared for?

“You’re our obsession,” Celine says as she flicks her tongue over my clit again, sending me reeling on the edge of the precipice. Pleasure, unlike anything else, overwhelms me. “You’re our poison and our antidote. And we? We’re your devils.”

Sucking in a sharp breath against the cold, my fingers frozen, I stare at the church, feeling the first trails of tears trailing down my cheeks.

Fuck this.

All of a sudden, a faint whisper travels through the air, and I instantly realize it’s my own goddamn mind playing tricks on me.

Little traitor...

The words are feminine, chilling, causing a violent shiver to run down my spine.

I look around the empty graveyard, not seeing anyone.

Looking down at my phone, I realize it’s almost midnight, knowing I should probably get home.

I stayed in bed all day until Casper went home, ignoring their invitation and Casper’s attempts at coaxing me to go. What the fuck was his deal?



Now, my birthday is in an hour, and it felt fitting to visit this church.

I don't know why that sends a shiver of something both terrifying and thrilling inside me. A secret excitement that laces through my veins, sparking like a live wire, sending electric shocks throughout my body.

As I turn to head toward the parking lot, there's a silhouette hiding behind the trees. My heart instantly starts racing a little harder. The moon casts a sliver of light toward the silhouette, revealing red highlights.

I swallow harshly. Clench my fists tightly until my nails dig crescents into my palms.

I hate this. God do I fucking hate this.

The silhouette moves, and I swear I see more of that red hair, and that chilling caress of a voice that sends goosebumps skittering over my skin.

Why do I want it to be her? Why do I ache for her? For them?

I shouldn't. It's wrong, twisted, fucked.

I'm fucked.

The next second, she's gone, as if she was never there to begin with.

I don't even think she was.

Stepping through the snow tentatively, I make my way to my car and drive home, done with the church and the odd atmosphere for now. It takes longer to get home with how much more snow has fallen, but I eventually make it.

As I enter my apartment thirty minutes later, I make sure to lock all doors and windows before heading to bed.

I ignored their invitation, but that doesn't mean they won't come for me.

### UNDER THEIR SPELL

Isolde

Something is wrong.

Very fucking wrong.

One second, I'm wistfully asleep in dreamland, but not for long. There's this aching cold seeping into my bones, tugging and gnawing at my wrists and ankles. It's rendering me immobile.

I try to move, but it's futile against whatever is keeping me captive.

It feels like I'm hurtling over the edge of a lethal cliff, wind slamming against my face—only to be swallowed by something thicker than air, a blindness that weighs down on me like fog turned to stone.

My eyes won't open at first. The cold clamps them shut, but it's not just the cold. Something is holding me in that limbo, a suffocating and angry grip that tugs at the skin on my wrists with each breath I take.

I realize my hands are bound behind my back.

What the hell is going on?

Eyes opening as the grogginess of sleep seeps away, I manage to squint through a

darkness that has succumbed over my surroundings.

Panic fills my chest, like someone struck a flare right into my ribs. I stare at an unknown wall made of black concrete, elegant and sleek yet weathered by decades, signifying a dignity in time. This isn't my room. It's not even my apartment.

I jerk forward instinctively, but I can't move. I shift just enough to catch a glimpse of what it is.

Silk.

Fucking silk is wrapped around my legs, intricately woven from my feet up to my knees, then thighs, covering my high-laced boots.

I don't remember going to sleep with my shoes on.

The silk is tangled with the threaded laces running up the front, crisscrossing their way up, which only adds the feeling of being suffocated, walls closing in on me until I feel claustrophobic. Where am I?

My arms are tied behind my back, with what I presume is the same silk.

Fear slowly creeps in as the pressure of the ribbons is snug against my skin. The terror gives way to panic, leaving my heart hammering and my limbs trying to twitch with the rush of adrenaline, and the desperate need to fight my way out of here.

But it's as if the silk is unbreakable. Unstoppable.

There's no getting out of them.

Trying to pry away the silken ribbons from my wrists only seems to make everything

worse as the bindings pull tighter against my skin. Cutting into me with their sharp edge. If I'm not careful, they might tear into my flesh.

Like the devil from hell stepping through my front door, I hear the faint click of heels against marble. Measured and calm, coming all the closer.

It's too dark to make out much, but I can see a flickering stone hearth behind me, its flames lapping up the cold. It's enough to make the cold a little more bearable. I need my head clear.

Slivers of moonlight sneak in through a high window, but the rays only amplify the dread mounting within me.

I'm not prepared to see what's before me; who's coming.

I don't think I ever will be.

Each of the clicking footsteps sends a violent shiver down my spine, a tick to my doom.

Yet, the silence that ensues between each step is even worse. She's drawing this out; this twisted game. It's her time to hurt me like I've hurt her.

The fire crackles behind me, radiating a heat that only makes sweat trickle down the nape of my neck. Other than that, it's entirely silent between her slowed steps.

Way too quickly, the footsteps stop right as they reach me.

I catch a glimpse of those high heels delicately wrapped around bare feet, red painted toenails giving her an even more feminine aura.

At first, I don't even dare lift my gaze—not prepared to meet it after so long—but then, I force myself.

I rake my eyes over her naked feet, to her bare thighs.

To the black satin dress fit snugly against her curves, and up to her eyes flaring with something unknown and intense.

Fuck, she's gorgeous.

I stare up at her for the first time in years. Dark, twisted, and sinfully her—the way she stands there, looming above my lying form. I can't sit up, not with how I'm delicately wrapped in ribbons.

A smirk splits her red-painted lips, and I tense.

My fingers curl into fists behind my back, nails pressing hard into my palms with an unnatural force. Teeth grinding together, fear wraps around me, spreading like a seed from a flower inside of me.

The sharp line of her frame is both elegant and feminine, at the same time as it's dark and menacing.

Fuck, she's even more beautiful than she used to be.

A deep chuckle escapes her as she notices my expression. Then, she leans down on her haunches in such an elegant way that it seems almost royal. She's far from it, if you don't count perhaps the devil's spawn.

The faint scent of her perfume hits my nostrils in an instant, and it's then that I know she's definitely toying with me. That goddamn perfume; it's been in my nightmares

more times than I'd like to admit. Something floral and sweet, a poison that lures you in.

A devil that tricks you into her den.

She speaks for the first time, her voice wrapping around me like a siren.

“Good. You’re awake.”

A red-painted fingernail trails over my temple, brushing away a hair strand from my face. I lean away from her, trying to escape her intoxicating grip.

It's impossible with the ribbons tied securely around me.

“We have waited a very long time to finally claim you again, angel.”

“Don’t touch me,” I whisper, the fight leaving my body. “Where am I?”

I knew it would come to this, and yet I couldn’t properly prepare my mind for the feelings that would be invoked inside me at seeing her again after so long.

“At Mayhem Castle.”

My stomach drops.

She smiles deviantly at my reaction, her finger continuing to trail over my face, staring deep into my eyes, as if she can see the demons hiding there, slowly stealing my soul away. A shiver runs down my spine at her sinful touch.

“Did you like the gifts we left you? More specifically, the hand ?” She taunts, just confirming what I feared—they left the hand in my stone hearth.

“W-why?”

“He touched you. At the crime scene the other day,” she breathes into my ear.

Everything falls into place, and I don’t know if I should be moved or not. I’m mad at the fact that I nearly got caught for it, the day Casper called me home. How did he even know about it?

“We gifted you the hand to prove our devotion. We’ll protect you, no matter what. No matter if you betray us.” She sniffs my hair, as if dragging in my essence. “Heads up: don’t do it again.”

Her hand trails lower, reaching my neck, and I involuntarily tilt it to give her better access.

Stupid, traitorous body.

A shiver wracks my body when she’s right above my breasts, my chest heaving. I can’t help but stare at her, taking in that deep, rich color of her burgundy hair, wondering if this is real, or if I’m hallucinating her.

Weeks of stress, years of worry, must have made me lose my goddamned mind.

She hums, a sound that feels almost like a purr. “So obedient,” she whispers. “Even after all this time, your body still craves my touch.”

I grit my teeth, hating the fact that she always notices. She always was the best at reading my reaction.

“Don’t touch me,” I grit out again, but it comes out as a plea.



Her hand comes down to my breast, trailing gently over my nipple through the T-shirt I wore to bed. A shiver crawls down my spine, and I bite my tongue to keep from making the slightest sound.

“You act as if you don’t want this, when I know you’ve missed us as much as we’ve missed you,” she muses. “But you understand we need to punish you, right? You’ve been a very bad girl.”

“Leave me alone,” I growl, tugging on the restraints keeping me captive.

The sound she lets out is dark and seductive, like a cackle, yet somehow mesmerizing. My body shouldn’t react like this around her, yet it does. A tingling sensation trails down my spine.

Her finger trails over my body, then switches to my thighs, and my body cannot help but react.

I hate myself in this moment, for this stupid awakening that’s spreading through me like a blooming seed.

Her lips brush against the shell of my ear, not saying anything, but so there . Fingertips lightly brushing against my skin have my body twitching, and her lips tilt up in a knowing smile.

“So responsive,” she muses, and I squirm.

My legs are grinding against each other, trying to stem the rising sensations within me. She slaps my thigh, causing me to hiss out until my legs spread. She hums in approval, and I glare at her.

Looking at her fucking hurts; it tears my heart apart until it feels as if I cannot breathe

anymore.

I'm forced to break eye contact when looking becomes too much, but she tsks.

"Give me those eyes, angel," she murmurs against my ear, the sound of rustling fabric echoing loudly in the room.

I don't give in at first, until her red-painted nails squeeze my cheeks, ultimately forcing me to look at her when the sharp bite of pain takes over.

What I see in them makes my heart clench, as her hand slowly releases my cheeks and gently pries my legs apart.

She removes the ribbons tightly secured around my legs and thighs, allowing me the freedom to move again, but the silk keeps my arms captive behind my back.

Unwillingly, she tugs my shorts and panties down, leaving me naked down there for her eyes to behold.

A blush creeps over my cheeks as embarrassment seeps into my bones, and I flinch away. The disapproving glare she gives me makes me instantly look back up at her.

Fuck, why am I obeying her?

Her fingers gently trail over to my clit, now throbbing with unwanted need. If she spreads my legs wider, she will see the wetness pooling between my legs. Desire for her.

Surely, only an automatic bodily reaction, right? It's not as if I actually want her.

She hums as she stares down at me, drinking me in like one would a cocktail;

steadily, securely, enjoying every sip of the poison slithering down your throat.

“You’re trembling. Tell me, is it because you’re afraid or because you’re craving more of me?”

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*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 6:37 am*

“Fuck you,” I spit out, trying to contain the fucking shivering in my body.

I honestly couldn’t tell her the answer—the truth is far too complicated.

“Oh, darling. I’m about to,” her smile is razor-sharp, and it’s at that moment I see what she’s been hiding behind her back.

A strap.

A fucking strap-on.

“Do you want me in your mouth or sweet cunt?”

I scoff. “Neither.”

Without forewarning, something prods my lips, causing them to involuntarily open. I can’t see what it is because of the dim light, but when the flames flicker, it reveals the object.

A gasp escapes me, and she seizes the moment to push a fucking dildo into my mouth, silencing any protests.

“Sorry, couldn’t hear you,” she smirks.

I’m forced to take the dildo, sliding against my tongue and soon hitting my throat. All the while, she teases my sensitive nub with her fingers, pinching it until I can’t resist the light cry.

I don't have a moment to even recover before she pinches it again, then rubs lightly, gliding lower.

My back arches, even when I desperately try to get it to not do that. The dildo slides out of my mouth, slides in again to hit the back of my throat, saliva drooling out of the corners of my mouth.

Tears sting my eyes, hoping she won't see them because of the darkness. I can't take this—this relentless pain in my chest, the overwhelming sensations she's causing me.

When I gag and am forced to cough, she finally pulls it out of my mouth, only to trail it against the lines of my lips, coating them in my saliva.

I try to squirm away, my arms hurting behind my back—I'm lying on my back, with my hands pushed against the floor in the most uncomfortable position ever.

This feels like a fever dream. One that I will awaken from, safe and sound in my own bed.

The dildo disappears, and I heave out a breath of relief. That's until I hear the sound of something shifting, fabric rustling, along with the flames roaring behind me. This castle is eerie in the night, even more so now with her by my side.

My eyes are like two saucers when I watch her expression in the flickering light—that twisted smile, mischievous eyes roving over me.

My gaze lowers until I'm staring at the fucking strap on around her waist, and she gives a good show.

Leaning down, she unties the restraints and pushes my thighs apart. Careless.

She always was that; never once careful or soft. Always demanding, dominating, and cunning.

And once upon a time, I loved that. Perhaps I still do.

“You’re going to take me like the good girl you are,” she says, positioning the dildo against my wet heat.

I’m pulsing with the need to have her, and yet I want to get free. There’s a raging war inside my fragile mind.

I can’t fall down this trap again. I’m no longer Alice; vulnerable, falling down the rabbit hole out of pure curiosity.

I cry out when she pushes inside me, entering me in brutal, slowed motions that make my spine arch.

“No!” I protest, swallowing the cries that want to escape.

“No?” she imitates in mock amusement. “Then why are you soaked for me?”

Just at that moment, she pushes so far into me, my eyes roll back, hitting that sensitive spot inside me. Her fingers find my clit again, rubbing in precise strokes, making my stomach tighten with pleasure.

Shame coils tight inside me, knowing I shouldn’t give in to this.

Whatever sorcery this is.

Keeping me pinned beneath her, it’s as if she can read my complicated thoughts.

She knows I want this.

I wish she had never returned.

My thighs tremble and my body aches with the coil snapping of pleasure, biting my lip until I feel the taste of my own blood. Coppery and salty on my tongue. She watches in sheer fascination, before suddenly leaning down and catching a trickle of blood in her own mouth.

“So sweet and pure. Too bad we’re going to corrupt you,” she says on a hard plunge.

I cry out, moaning, tears leaking down my face, with the different emotions raging like war within me. I’m nearing the edge, but she slaps my clit hard, all the while thrusting inside me.

The smile she wears is cruel, and I instantly know what she’s going to do.

She was always so cruel .

Bringing me close to the edge, she suddenly pulls back, leaving me feeling empty and desperate for more. Chest heaving. Mascara ruined under my eyes, and sweat coating my forehead in beads. I whimper, hating myself for even missing her touch. God , I should want to flee far away from her.

I want to fucking flee, but I’m still trapped in her orbit. Both physically and metaphorically.

She leans closer, her breath tickling my sensitive part, leaking from my own arousal.

Then, she licks her lips before diving right in.

Licking and sucking, taking me to the fucking pearly gates.

Just as I near the edge once more, every muscle in my body coiling with the need for a release, making me light-headed, she stops.

Her chuckle is like ice erupting over my body.

“Cruelty is a game you can’t win. And you? You’ve been fucking cruel to us. Now, it’s our time to get our revenge.”

I’m suddenly brought back to reality, my senses coming back. That’s when the fear cripples back in, like a boa snake squeezing their victim to death.

How could I have let my defenses slip?

But that’s the thing; I’ve always done that around her. Both of them.

They slipped through my defenses as a child, bringing with them their abnormal attitudes and becoming my only friends.

They stayed rooted in my soul, like thorns creeping up the walls of a house, winding into my bloodstream as I got old enough.

And then they pounced. And I loved every second of it. Craved it. Felt safe in their arms.

Until they did the unthinkable.

Until they ruined my life.

“I’m going to give you a head start,” she purrs, her voice causing goosebumps to



spread across my skin like a velvet threat. “If you manage to escape, you’re free. But if we catch you...we’ll keep you. Forever.”

Her words are haunting—a promise and the lure of freedom.

But I know, whatever is about to come, they will never let me go.

Not even if death came knocking on their door.

### SCARS OF SHADOWS

Isolde

Darkness slithers into my soul until I don't know what's real and what isn't anymore. Fear is a palpable thing twisting inside my veins, like fire that only grows until it's inextinguishable.

Soon, it will claim my heart, and I will fall apart.

Right in the house of the two devils that have haunted me for an eternity.

Endless halls stretch before me, the ceilings higher than anyone could reach, with chandeliers hanging from them in a move of utter elegance. Vintage, medieval, gothic—those words describe this endless castle that's been in their family for centuries.

They might have lost their parents and been thrown into the foster system at an early age, and then been adopted by my family, but they never once lost their right to this place.

This haunted, dark castle, with spirits surely roaming around the halls right this moment, as I rush past the gazillions of paintings depicting their not-so-noble heritage.

I arrive at a grand staircase, my heart pounding harder than ever in my throat with the reality that I know she's behind me. Somewhere, somehow, she's behind me.

Ready to pounce on her prey.

The grand staircase is made of marble, covering two halves of the hall below, with the chandeliers casting an eerie glow over the surroundings. The light flickers, wavering like the flames of a dying candle, and I begin my descent down the stairs, careful not to slip on the marble.

One misstep and I would be dead, head cracked open on the floor below.

Hearing the sound of footsteps behind me causes something to take root deep in my stomach, an unsettling sensation that's far from welcoming. Making it to the last step of the staircase, I finally dare to look behind me, even when I know I shouldn't.

It feels as if my heart has been ripped out of my chest with the sensations that overwhelm me when I stare at Celine in all her dark glory, an eerie smile stretching her lips. Her eyes flicker behind me, and confusion washes over me for a second.

She looks so deceiving, and the way she stares at me makes a tingling sensation take over between my legs. I'm wet, I know it, and I fucking despise it.

But it's not me, her sole focus is on—it's something behind me.

Gulping, I barely dare turn around in fear of what I will see, but I force myself to take a steady breath.

Steel my spine.

Turn around, slowly.

And this time, it's as if my limbs have been ripped into thousands of pieces, not only my heart. There in the shadows, hiding behind the pillars, is another more menacing

shadow.

No, not hiding . He's stalking, waiting for me to make the move.

The past comes pushing back at me, and no matter how hard I've tried to keep it buried, it simply isn't enough.

The shadow is unmoving, but I feel his gaze on me.

Heavy, heady, with an undertone of something possessive that makes my palms clammy.

I can't breathe anymore—he has sucked all the oxygen out of the room, like a vampire feeding on blood.

At the top of the staircase, Celine chuckles to herself, but I don't dare look up at her. My gaze is locked onto the shadow waiting in the darkness, never once letting my gaze move from him in fear that he will pounce.

This is too much. Entirely too fucking much, and it feels as if my limbs will turn to jelly, breaking apart. I will remain this fragile, pathetic little human being.

“Are you scared?” he muses, and I watch as the shadow moves, arms crossing over each other. His muscles are bulging, even more so now than when I last saw him three years ago.

When I sent him to prison, along with his twin.

Hearing his voice makes something flutter inside me—something I long thought dead.

He steps out into the light, a violent force of nature, ready to drag me underneath the storm he embodies.

It takes a while for me to gather my voice, heart in my throat and utterly terrified of what this entire encounter means. “You think I’m scared?” A step closer to him. “No, I’m fucking terrified of having you in my vicinity again.”

I hear Celine’s footsteps as they descend the stairs, her high heels clacking and the sound reverberating through the abandoned castle. They’re slow, deliberate, just as her entire being is.

Vernon steps out of the shadows, staring at me with those intense eyes. And it’s at that moment I see them—bright and clear. Like thunder in a storm. Brown, dark, molten, all him .

Fuck, I didn’t think about how it would feel to fall into the depths of those eyes again.

The tension is so fucking palpable in the space, I don’t know what to do—how to breathe, act, even exist.

He is still partly hidden by the shadows, yet it’s his eyes that are the most visible.

They sear over me, steadily strangling me.

A suit stretches over his muscles, and the heady scent of musk washes over me when he shifts closer.

I hold my ground, even when my instincts tell me to run as far away from here as possible.

“You should be scared, my traitor,” he whispers, and his finger reaches up to trail my

cheek with a predatory smile curving his lips.

I notice the intricate tattoos that span his hand and extend to his fingers—sharp and flowing lines like thorns, creating a black, abstract design that feels almost gothic.

He probably got it from his time in prison.

Strangely, it stirs a feminine appreciation within me.

“We will corrupt you and claim your soul for an eternity this time. Never again will you be freed from us: we will embed ourselves in your blood as you have ours.”

“You’re batshit crazy,” I exclaim, a breath wooshing out of me right as I feel a presence at my back.

It’s her—so close to me once again that I can feel the warmth of her body seeping into mine. Her hand rises, fingers reaching toward my face like Vernon’s. Hand coming closer to my throat, goosebumps spread over my spine as her breath is hot against my ear.

“You made us like this.”

Then her hand clamps around my throat. It’s a vice around my neck, cutting off my air as the oxygen is completely knocked out of me, restricting me from uttering a syllable. My vision swims as I stare at Vernon, his gaze intensely on mine with an insatiable hunger that will never be quelled.

My world crashes around me, desperately trying to breathe properly with both of their presences haunting me. The air is charged, electric, suffocating me as Celine’s unrelenting grip continues, and Vernon’s fingers trail my cheek, slow, deliberate, studying me, as if waiting for something.

What is he waiting for?

“Now, this is how it’s going to go,” he murmurs, eyes staring deep into mine. “I’m sure my dear sister already told you that you’re going to run from us,” he smirks. “But not here.”

“Where?” I rasp, when all I really want to do is escape.

Leave this shitty town and everything behind. Heck, even leave Casper behind. I don’t need his toxic abusiveness.

All I need is to start over.

I make a silent promise to myself—when this is over, when I get out of here, I will leave. And I will never fucking return.

“Outside,” Celine whispers.

That’s the moment Vernon grabs something from the inner pocket of his suit, and I can’t see what it is because of the darkness. Soon, I can’t see at all as something is tied over my eyes.

A kiss on my neck causes my legs to squeeze together, and the feminine chuckle has my chest heaving with the need I want to ignore. Silk wraps around me once more, tying together my wrists behind my arms, leaving only my legs free.

A ghost of a touch lingers on my thighs, rough and masculine, pushing my legs apart. A sharp breath escapes me, the sensation unexpected. The kisses land on my thighs, pushing them more apart until I’m fighting to hold my balance. Celine’s touch on my back is the only thing keeping me standing.

I feel Vernon's fingers trailing closer to my folds, causing heat to thrum low in my stomach. Celine's touch on my back can only be seen as either grounding or trapping me.

Like a spider weaving me into her web, preparing to keep me forever.

Warm lips press to my inner thigh, the scrape of teeth making my muscles twitch as they touch my clit.

Grazing, leaving a shudder running rampant through me.

His grip is firm, forcing me to stay open for him.

Celine's hand releases my throat, sliding lower, her touch like a feather as it reaches my waist, keeping me trapped for her brother.

"You deny us, yet your body is begging for us. How is that working for you?"

I'm about to snap back with something sharp when molten heat presses against my clit, stealing the words from my tongue. A whimper claws its way up my throat, but I bite it down, refusing to give them the satisfaction.

He's right there with his lips, licking and sucking, all the while I can't breathe even when Celine's hand is gone. I'm fighting to stay afloat with the current taking over me.

He flicks his tongue over my clit. "So quiet," he muses. "That won't last very long."

As he dives in, I'm falling over that cliff. My breath comes out in short, ragged spurts, as Celine holds me trapped while Vernon feasts on me. My body betrays me as I arch into the touch I know I should resist, and when my legs start trembling, I



can't hold it back anymore.

The whimper does escape me this time, which causes him to graze his teeth against my clit again in approval. Celine's fingers tweak my nipples, and the need builds inside me.

Along with the desperate hatred I feel fueling my insides.

I shouldn't want this, yet I do.

It's a forbidden touch made from the deepest levels of hell, a poison masked as sweetness.

"Such a good traitor," he muses. That nickname makes my stomach clench with unease, knowing how they both perceive me.

It shouldn't matter, but it does.

Fingers preaching my insides as I near the edge. An orgasm is close.

"Her legs are trembling," Celine muses as she sucks on my neck, biting lightly. All the while keeping me trapped for her brother.

Celine gathers my hair in one hand, her touch ghosting over my skin until it feels too much.

Strong fingers caress my ass, until I'm suddenly forced to my knees, ass in the air with my head against the cold marble floor.

Celine's hand strokes my cheek soothingly, as I feel Vernon's hand on my ass.

Celine tugs at my hair until a gasp breaks free.

A gust of air brushes against my bottom along with the erupting goosebumps. He strokes his hand across my ass, causing my heart to plummet—I know this torturous game. I have endured it before.

“Count to ten or we’ll be forced to start over,” he commands.

A slap echoes in the air, reverberating through the halls. I’m stunned when his hand meets my flesh once more, and hiss when Celine tugs at my hair until my scalp screams from the invasion.

“I don’t hear you counting.” His words are dark, more ominous inside this castle.

Wetness pools in my lower stomach as I desperately need to look at him, but a goddamn blindfold restricts my vision.

His hand hits my butt cheek much harder this time, and I shouldn’t enjoy it as much as I do.

“Count, little traitor,” Celine whispers in my ears, and I whimper.

There’s no way out of this—they will get what they want no matter what.

“One.”

Another smack, and Celine’s touch squeezes one of my breasts, her other hand still tugging at my hair into a makeshift ponytail. “Two.”

“We’re going to have so much fun playing with you.” Smack. “You will be begging for death by the end of the night.” Smack. “But we won’t give it to you.” Another

slap marks his words.

Tears gather at the corner of my eyes, the emotions overwhelming me. “T-three. Four. F-five,” I bite out, Celine’s hand twisting my nipple.

“We decide when it’s time death claims you.” Slap. “And it’s not tonight,” I hear the smirk in his voice right before the seventh slap lands on my sensitive cheek.

His strong palm strokes my ass, soothing the ache while waiting for my words. “Six, seven. Fuck, I can’t do this.”

“Too late now, darling,” Celine’s voice washes over me like a bucket of cold water.

Another smack hits my ass, causing me to cry out. Then another, and another, until my legs are trembling and I’m sure I will pass out from the intense emotions wreaking havoc inside me.

Pleasure and pain—an intoxicating blend that will surely kill me.

“Count,” Vernon states in his eerily calm tone. “Or we will start over.”

Forcing away the last pieces of my dignity, I pretend to be somewhere else. Another girl in another life, who isn’t haunted by her painful past and stalked by the people she tried to escape.

“Eight, nine...ten,” I struggle.

“You created such a little mess,” he coos, his fingers twirling along my folds, teasing me.

My toes are curling, my spine is arching, and my heart is soaring at this entire

situation. I fight an inner battle with myself that I'm losing.

He continues to pinch my clit until it feels as if the threads holding my sanity together will snap, and there is no turning back.

Until...the sensation disappears entirely.

No touch, nothing keeping me grounded. That fall toward ecstasy disappears entirely. A whine escapes me as my hands reach for Celine, holding onto whatever piece of her I can. I feel her kneeling before me and Vernon behind me, yet I've never felt as vulnerable.

"You don't quite deserve the treat to come, now do you?"

I want to protest, but the words are trapped in an endless echo inside my throat, clawing to get free. Both of them shift away from me, their absence leaving me utterly cold and empty. One of them helps me to my feet, holding me steady as they start leading me somewhere. Where, I do not know.

To my fate in hell, I'm sure.

### MORBID DEATH

#### The Hunter

Psychopathy is characterized by a lack of empathy, conscience, guilt, or refusal to accept responsibility for one's actions. I've long been told that word fits me, but I don't believe that is the case.

I do feel empathy, just not the kind that a normal human would expect.

I was empathic when we killed our parents, slit their throats right in front of Isolde.

It was the only choice we had. They neglected and abused us all, not physically but rather emotionally.

Our foster dad never cared enough for us, always staying distant.

As if we were a burden to them. Didn't they know?

Celine and I are not forces to be reckoned with. We are not meant to be controlled to the point of suffocation, and neither is Isolde.

Yes. Killing them was our only chance to finally claim her as ours when they forbade us from seeing each other again.

They had her, and they wasted her by not complying with her every need.

They never helped her when she had no friends, so we became her only friends.

They gave her food and a roof to sleep under, like they did us, but they were both so busy with their work that they never paid much more attention than that.

Our parents weren't the picture-perfect humans they pretended to be.

They attended charity events in town, but beneath their polished reputation, they were corrupt. Something Isolde refused to see.

One day, she will thank us for saving her life, even if she cannot see it that way right now.

I still remember the blood oozing from our parents' throats, bodies slumped to the floor while slipping in the crimson liquid. I remember the blood coating our clothes, splattered on our faces. That triumph was the most of all—the relief at seeing their deaths.

Knowing nothing could ever prevent us from being with Isolde again.

Yet, the empathy I felt came from seeing her heartbroken face, the tears trailing down her cheeks, something irreparable. The scream of horror is etched on my mind. I tried to reach her, to hold her and make her feel better, but she stared at me as if I were something evil.

A goddamn monster.

That empathy hit me hard in the chest, almost like a shotgun.

The word psychopathy doesn't fit me: I do feel responsibility for my actions, particularly for our foster parents' deaths.

Never once did I regret killing them. They were an obstacle that needed to get out of the way; her love for them was a weakness that blinded her to all their faults, and we had to break it out of her somehow.

I didn't expect that she would call the fucking cops though. Oh, the pure rage when she sent us to jail.

Didn't she know? We killed them for her . Even today, I know she blames herself for their death. Well, yeah. We wouldn't have killed them if it weren't for her stupid love for them.

The warehouse behind us looms like a corpse with its rusted beams, shattered windows, and facade cracking here and there. Apparently, it used to be Vexglade's pride and joy back in the day, until the owner died. No one took over it, believing it to be haunted or something like that.

"Here he comes," Celine muses, pushing away from the wall she leaned on. Her eyes are like knives as she watches the figure approaching.

Casper. Isolde's 'boyfriend.' The man who stole her when we were locked away. He who dared touch what was never his.

He's clad in a casual outfit of dark jeans and a hoodie, with the hood covering half his face, hands in pockets. Taking discretion to a new level. The way he looks around, shoulders tense, reveals he's afraid we'll disappear before the deal is gone.

He doesn't truly trust us after all. And he shouldn't.

"You're late," I say, crossing my arms as I let my arms roam over him.

For being a cop, he sure as hell ain't brave.

“You’ve made quite the fucking mess,” he says, turning to me with a voice that tries to sound authoritative. “Do you know how hard it was to cover for your asses? Bodies are piling up again. Same signature kill. You think no one is going to connect the dots to you?”

“Well, they won’t,” I say, not bothered. “You’re handling it.”

His lips press into a thin line, clearly not happy. “You’re lucky I’ve redirected their attention from you. I pinned it all on her.”

I instantly understand who he’s talking about. “You blamed Isolde?”

“It was her or you! I want her to go down either way, and I need you free so you can take care of her,” he snaps, poison littering his words.

“After everything I’ve done for her, saving her depressed little ass after her parents’ were murdered, she still tried to leave me.

Said our relationship was too toxic. She wasn’t allowed to leave, and since then, we’ve fallen into a monochromic relationship where there’s no joy anymore. She doesn’t even trust me any longer!”

Celine’s smile grows, like a predator seizing up her prey. “So you decided you wanted her dead?”

“She left me no choice,” he hisses. “She pulled away. Started looking at me like I was a stranger. Like I wasn’t enough!” He clenches his fists. “But I was. I was the only one she had left, and she still turned on me.”

He’s panting by the end of his tirade, and I only stare at him.



The more seconds that pass, the more I start to realize that there's something wrong with him.

Obsessive, cold, dangerous. A means to an end that needs to be obliterated, precisely like I thought when he visited us in jail one year ago.

"You're violent. You already have blood on your hands. You killed your parents. I'm only giving you what you want. You can obliterate the entire Duskvik family and take over the wealth."

He's so out of it, he thinks we killed them to take over the family. I play along. "And what do you get out of it?"

"Like I said when I visited you, I will be free. I will move on. Rise in ranks, earn promotions without having to care about her stupid ass. The number of times she hasn't even had food in her refrigerator!

Coming to me, whining about food." He nods to himself, as if it's all making sense in his head. "Yes. I will be free."

Rage filters deep in my veins, uncontrolled and lethal. The way he's talking about Isolde makes me want to beat his fucking ass up. Daring to disrespect her like that.

"Well, everything is set in stone now, isn't it?" Celine drawls, staring at her manicure like it's more important than Casper. "You've freed us from suspicions. No one is coming after us."

"Yes. And I managed to get her to the castle for you. Convinced her it'd be fun."

I doubt he managed to do that, but I let him gloat. He won't be doing much of that soon, anyway.

“Well played.”

I know he’s mad at us for taking matters into our own hands.

We hunted down every bastard who ever wronged Isolde, one of them touching her the wrong way on the day when she found that dead body in the forest. One—the first victim when we got out whose tongue we nailed to the ground—called me a ‘bitch’ so I killed him.

It wasn’t part of his plan, but it was always what we had planned.

We’re the king and queen over this gameboard.

“So it’s all set? You’ll kill her tonight?” Casper says.

I bite down the urge to laugh.

“Yes. She’s currently unconscious at the castle,” Celine says, barely containing the smirk twisting her lips.

After Isolde ignored our invitation to the castle for her birthday, we decided to pick her up instead.

As soon as we had left off her sleeping form on the upper floor of the castle, by the fireplace so that she wouldn’t freeze to death before we returned, we went to the warehouse to meet with Casper.

Casper gives a curt nod, about to leave the warehouse, when Celine’s voice stops him.

“Casper, one more thing.” She makes a pause for added effect. “Do you really believe

you're some master puppeteer? Deciding who we can and can't kill?"

He freezes in his spot, turning around to stare at us. Terrified out of his goddamn mind, evident in the way his eyes widen like saucers. "W-what?"

"Are you truly that pathetic?"

He blanches, a thin sheen of sweat clinging to his hairline. Legs pressed tightly together and shoulders hunched in defense, he looks as if he might piss himself. Gross.

Without Casper knowing, as he's too nervous to look anywhere but at me, Celine grabs something from around the corner of the warehouse and approaches him. I see his Adam's apple as he swallows harshly, fingers fidgeting while attempting to keep his calm.

Celine swings the baseball bat hard into Casper's temple before he can react, knocking him out cold on the cement ground.

"Fucker," she spits at his limp, bloodied body.

"Good job, sis," I drawl, and she gives me a leisurely smile.

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THAT CONSCIENCE THAT FITS into the term of psychopathy? Nah. It doesn't fit me either.

Conscience tugs at my edges, which is precisely why we have a living, breathing human in the back of our trunk.

“Wanna play?” Celine asks as she opens the trunk to reveal the imbecile who has been with our little traitor for the past three years.

She sent us to jail and directly went to get a new pretty little boyfriend. Though he’s not very pretty. It makes my blood fucking boil.

Duct tape covers his mouth, his hands and legs tied behind his back with real rope in a special double knot that he won’t easily get out of.

“You know I want to,” I answer my twin, staring at her with mischief, a slow and crooked smirk tugs at the corner of my lips in anticipation.

Our gazes turn to Casper in the trunk simultaneously, and the terror shines through in his tear-streaked eyes. Fucking pathetic, if you ask me.

He shakes his head as I lean closer, trying to scoot deeper into the trunk of our car, but it’s futile. I tut.

It’s time to let our demons out to play, before finally claiming our little traitor once and for fucking all.

Celine approaches the car, forcing Casper out of it. He stumbles, falling to his knees, and cannot get up again, with the ropes keeping his legs tied together.

Celine groans. “Pathetic.”

The moon glints its silvery glow over the forest opening where we have parked our car.

Celine bends down and picks Casper up again, tears streaming down his cheeks like two waterfalls while he stares at us in shock, desperation, and fear. Good, he should

be fucking scared.

Celine walks around him, her long nails trailing over his bare arms in the winter cold, which only makes his spine stiffen.

We were born from the same womb, both equally as ruthless in our nature.

She removes the duct tape covering his mouth.

Even if he screams, this forest is far from civilization.

“No one will hear you if you scream,” I tell him precisely that, watching his eyes bulge.

“My colleagues will notice if I’m gone! Isolde will,” he spews out.

A dark chuckle rumbles through my chest as I cross my arms over my chest, tilting my head while observing him. It only seems to unnerve him. “Did you really think we would leave any loose ends?”

He sputters on his words.

“It was easy enough to fake a letter from you, writing goodbye and admitting that you were the one to kill all those people we left behind. That you are done with your shitty life. Everyone thinks you left—no one will come looking for you.”

“I-Isolde will!” he scrambles to stay, his body trembling.

“Who says we don’t have her as well?” Celine asks, those fingers trailing over Casper’s collarbone.

He winces.

“You can’t kill me! You’re supposed to kill her,” he spits out the words.

“Aww, didn’t you get the memo already? It’s you we will fucking kill,” Celine says.

“Did you really think you could trust us? Two convicted murderers?” I ask in mock amusement.

Casper is speechless, his lips parting, but no words come out. The pathetic waste of space should have thought twice before deciding to turn on Isolde. Even if she apparently turned on him first, which makes satisfaction bloom in my chest.

Good girl.

“B-but! You said you would help me take her down—just like you did her parents!” This time, his voice cracks, his entire body trembling like a leaf in the heavy wind. The biting chill makes his bare arms turn a deeper shade of red. Pure fear is palpable in his eyes.

“Run,” she whispers in his ear, that twisted smile stretching her lips again while inspecting her baseball bat.

He looks at me as if I will save him. When he sees the same dark intentions in my gaze, he scrambles backwards, fleeing for his pathetic life.

“Things are finally going our way,” I mutter.

Celine sashays her way forward, holding the bat she knocked him out with. “Let us play,” she says with a smirk.

### THE GRIM REAPER

Isolde

Something rumbles underneath me, and it's impossible to tell what it is. I can't see anything with the blindfold still on, and my hands are still tied behind my back.

Nervosity starts creeping into my pores, spilling inside me until it grows and turns into paranoia. The rumbling stops, and I'm pushed against something hard and solid, bumping my head. Straining my ears, I attempt to hear anything out of the usual around me, but I can't make out anything.

It only heightens my unease.

I lay still, waiting for something to happen, while listening intently to a sound erupting from far away. Something closing with a loud thud. A car door, maybe.

Gravel crunching underneath shoes fills my eardrums as it comes all the closer, and my pulse quickens with the suspicion of what it might be.

A gust of cold air washes over my half-naked frame, chilling me to my very core when the trunk lid opens. My body is rigid, waiting, unable to move.

The ghost of a touch on my bare thigh causes me to flinch, panic taking root inside me.

“Such a beautiful sight,” a feminine voice whispers. Celine.

I hear her shifting closer to me, fingers trailing against my cheek, pushing my hair behind my ear. It's not until then that I realize I've been crying. Tears soak my cheeks with the terror that takes over my insides, leaving me paralyzed.

"Shh, no need to cry. We're just going to play a little game of chase with you," Vernon muses.

Suddenly, I'm roughly forced out of what I assume is the trunk of a car. Coming to my feet, my body sways with the discomfort of not having stood up for quite some time. Nature's raw scent, earthy leaves, wet soil, and bark all rush into my nose, sharp and jarring. Along with the icy sharpness.

Someone removes my blindfold, and yet it's as if I still can't see. I realize it's too dark—the only thing illuminating the surroundings is the car's headlights, casting eerie shadows behind us.

Vernon and Celine are two shadows haunting me, their smiles equally as twisted as they stare at me—tear-stained cheeks, ruffled hair, hands tied behind my back, half-naked, with only my legs free.

Only my high-laced boots and an oversized T-shirt—not even mine—cover me, stealing the very body warmth from me.

I don't remember anything after being led out of the castle.

Celine takes a step forward, her feminine perfume washing over me until I feel light-headed. She then pushes me away from her, into the other direction.

"Run along now, my little traitor."

"You know the rules," Vernon adds.



I don't wait to see the grin I know is stretching across his face—I don't dare.

Instead, I bolt deep into the merciless forest. Gnarled branches reach for me, clawing at my bare skin as I run with no clear goal in sight.

The damp snow clings to my feet, sucking me deeper with every step forward, as darkness devours the landscape.

If I trip now, I'm done for.

The forest swallows me whole as I hear a crack of a branch behind me, followed by the slow footsteps crunching against snow. Not even the nightly creatures are awake to save me.

They're both toying with me.

With my pulse slamming against my ribcage, I fight to breathe properly as I push harder. Muscles burning in protest won't stop me from escaping them, for good this time.

What will Casper think when I don't come home? Will he be worried? Or will he be mad?

Every shadow in the forest shifts, twisting into something alien and alive, watching and waiting for me to fall.

I don't even register the cold because of the adrenaline fueling me.

I'm so preoccupied with not falling to my death on a root or running into some icicles hanging from the branches that I don't notice the huge obstacle covering the small path until it's too late.

I stumble, something sharp jabbing into my foot with the pain of needles splitting through me.

I fall right to the forest floor as I'm unable to catch myself with my hands still tied.

Coldness instantly invades my senses as snow and mud envelop me, panic glazing over me like rapid frost.

The footsteps behind me halt, and the silence drapes over the forest. I know they're behind me, but I can't see them. The only thing illuminating the path is the moon desperately trying to make itself visible through the treetops.

Ignoring the sharp pain in my ankle and the sting of snow-packed mud against my palms from the brunt of the fall, I attempt to stand as best as I can when my leg meets something soft.

My eyebrows furrow as I try to make out what it is, but it's hard with the moon and the moving treetops from the heavy wind.

Making a final attempt to stand on trembling legs, something slippery meets my skin.

At first, I can't make out what it is. Then, suspicion begins to creep in just as the wind ruffles the trees, allowing the moon to filter its light on the ground.

The color of red—the stickiness of it.

There's no doubt about what it is.

Blood.

My stomach starts twisting and turning until I don't know where to go, the silvery

light casting a glow over the patches of blood on the forest floor, mostly covered by the foliage.

Struggling, I pull myself up and am left staring down at the blood pooling there.

But what sends my heart reeling, pounding ever harder inside my ribcage, is the body part lying right in front of me.

I almost think it's the severed hand that was in my stone hearth before it mysteriously disappeared, until I catch a glimpse of the distinct birthmark between the thumb and forefinger. It instantly identifies who it is.

Nausea bubbles up inside me, almost corrosive as it rises up my esophagus .

A step back takes me nowhere, because something else is there, blocking my path.

With utter terror, I slowly turn around, waiting with bated breath for the wind to move the branches just the right direction again so that the moon can cast its gleam on the ground.

Thunder erupts inside me with the force of a thousand lightning strikes. A concoction of dullness and pain that sucks the oxygen from my lungs like a vacuum cleaner.

The scream builds deep inside me until it tears free, echoing through the trees. Revealing where I am, but I don't care anymore.

Let them find me.

This reality is far worse than they could ever put me through.

I fall right back on my knees, legs unable to carry my weight any longer. For there,

right in front of me, lies a severed head. Empty and lifeless eyes staring straight at me, blood dripping from skin that's been slicked and cracked.

This was no ordinary death—this was torture of the highest order.

“Liking what you see?”

I flinch, backing into a sharp object meeting my back, but unable to look away from the mutilated head spread over the forest floor, or from the red liquid staining the icy grass.

Gasping for breath, the smell of death locks me in a whirlwind, lingering with dirt and snow. Right on cue, snow starts falling. Slowly but surely covering the speckles of blood surrounding the gruesome scene.

A pointed finger distracts me, and my gaze shifts to a new direction.

To where the rest of his mutilated body is. This time, the nausea turns into vomit, and I expel everything I have inside of me.

No, no, no. This cannot be happening.

A cry rips through my throat as Vernon kneels behind me, his arm wrapping around me possessively, a knife in his other hand.

“Please, don't touch me,” I beg, trying to push him away.

He doesn't move an inch, his grip only tightening. The knife gently trails my arm until he presses down, causing skin to rip underneath his touch. I hiss, blood trickling down, blending with the morbid scene. Vernon watches in fascination.

“What the fuck have you done?” I cry out, staring at the body, vomiting again. Vernon only rubs my back in soothing circles, that knife teasing my skin.

I won’t lie—it offers the perfect distraction from the overwhelming nausea.

“We did this for you, darling,” Celine’s voice slithers through me.

This is all wrong—some sick and twisted nightmare that must have projected itself into my reality.

It cannot be real. I refuse to accept it.

“We killed him so we could finally be together again,” Vernon replies. “This little fantasy you had built up would only last that long.”

A sob tears its way from my throat with the knowledge that this is truly it.

The end of my new life.

“You were supposed to stay in jail!” I scream, tears streaming down my face.

“Shh, you’re okay,” Celine whispers, her head leaning against my shoulder.

I try to shove her away from me, but it’s hard with my hands behind my back.

“Okay? This is not fucking okay. You ruined my life! You...you killed my parents, and now you killed my boyfriend?” My breath comes out in short pants as I sit there, on my knees in the middle of the cold night.

The knife glides against the blood on my upper arm, smearing it out. “Are you going to kill me?”

There's terror in my eyes.

Vernon's eyes darken. "No, but I'd rather see your blood on my hands than your love for someone else's. The blood keeps you distracted from him," he spits out.

"You didn't love him anyway," Celine mutters.

"And that gives you the right to kill him?" I shriek, though ultimately confirming I never loved him.

They know that now. They can see it in my confession.

"You're murderers! You should have stayed locked behind bars for an eternity—that was the plan.

How the fuck did you even get out?" The tears that fall from my eyes dry up and are replaced by anger instead.

My hands clench into fists behind my back.

If only I could stand back up.

"I prefer the term 'savior,'" Vernon rebuts, and I stare at him in disbelief.

Celine's touch is seductive as it brushes away my hair from my neck. "He helped us escape."

Oh, how I wish I could get away from them right now. Instead, I'm stuck on my knees.

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*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 6:37 am*

Anger brims inside me. “How? He didn’t even know about you,” I scoff.

I kept that part of me buried. Terrified how he would react if he found out about my part in my parents’ murder—that I was the reason they were killed.

“I don’t fucking know how, but when he found out about us, he contacted us directly. You wanna know what his deal was?”

I hold my breath, not wanting to hear another word spewing from their mouths, but knowing the curiosity gets the better of me.

“He promised to free us if we killed you. And oh, how easy it was to manipulate him.”

There’s amusement littering her voice. It only sends a shiver down my spine, shoulders tensing at the revelation.

None of them offers me the space I need, both of their bodies pushed tight against me, touching me in one way or another until it feels as if I might suffocate.

Yet, somehow, their touches ground me at the same time.

“You ruined my life. I wish you had never been adopted into my family.” An unwilling tear trails down my cheek.

Celine leans closer and licks it away.

“I hate you both so fucking much,” I whisper.

“I know, darling. That’s okay, as long as you’re ours.”

Her gentle touch is replaced by Vernon’s violent one, choking me until my eyes water. I’m deprived of oxygen, my body so full of emotions I can’t make out as Vernon’s hand comes to glide over my bare thighs. I whimper, losing oxygen by the minute. Soon, I’m sure I will black out.

“Fuck. You really are trying to kill me,” I choke out, more tears slipping from the corner of my eyes involuntarily.

“Only if you ask nicely,” he smirks. His voice is a threat caressing my skin, eyes glinting with darkness only I can perceive.

When he finally lets go of my neck, I’m embarrassingly wet.

“The chase has only begun,” Celine muses as she helps her twin lift me to my feet.

The T-shirt is crumpled, mascara running down my cheeks, my knees dirtied from the mud mixed with snow of the forest, hands tied behind my back by silk—I’m their gift once again.

Celine spans my ass, making me yelp, before she shoves me forward in the indication that I should start running. And running I fucking do.

I run as fast and as far as my legs physically carry me, all as the thoughts of what I’m leaving behind tear at my throat and my heart.

Casper...dead.



My heart breaks because despite how much he fucking hurt me with his toxic ass, I never wanted him to die.

He will never hurt you again.

A voice in my head tries to resonate, and I push my legs faster in the hope of outrunning my destructive thoughts. I don't have time to stop, and my lungs are begging for breath.

They promised to let me go if I managed to escape them, and freedom is so close. Adrenaline floods my veins as the branches start tearing at me again, leaving small scratches that sting with the promise of blood.

Snow falls in heavy drifts, restricting my view as I flee for my life. An opening offers me a semblance of hope, but the seed withers when powerful arms curl around my waist and force me into the snow-covered foliage, drowning me in its coldness once more.

Burning fingers wrap around the column of my throat as I struggle to get free, but it's impossible.

I see Celine walking toward us, a winter jacket wrapped tightly around her that I failed to notice earlier.

There's a metal baseball bat in her hands, its end narrower than the top, the surface speckled with what looks like blood.

"Plot twist: we're keeping you anyway," she says, smirking.

My heart instantly drops when she refers to her words back at the castle, about being free if I managed to escape them.

“I’m a bit disappointed. I thought it would be harder catching you,” Vernon whispers in my ear.

“Fuck you! Let me go,” I sneer.

Celine only chuckles, the sound grating on my nerves. “Oh, little traitor.”

Burying his head in the crook of my neck, Vernon stays there, breathing me in. “Don’t run from predators. We love the hunt.”

“It was you who told me to fucking run!”

“And you obeyed. Such a good little girl.”

Suddenly, Vernon throws himself down on the ground, with me on top of him, Celine coming up behind him. The snow surrounds him, clinging to his hair with the falling flakes. Despite the darkness and menace oozing out of him, he protects me from the unforgiving cold by keeping me above him.

I go stiff when I notice Celine having picked up the baseball bat, the smaller piece flat against my thighs, tickling me.

Her grip, along with her nails pressing hard into my skin, causes little beads of blood to trickle down.

My breath hitches, before she spreads my legs, Vernon helping her by locking them with his.

The baseball bat comes closer, and I start trembling as the tip of it reaches the outside of my panties.

Teasing my opening, I whimper. Too aroused mixed with embarrassment.

“Celine,” I moan, not prepared for what she’s about to do next.

I cry out, lunging in Vernon’s hold, when the tip of the baseball bat pushes my panties to the side before brushing against my opening.

“I want to make you sob both with pleasure and pain,” she whispers, pushing the bat deeper, carefully.

She moves the object in and out of me, wet sounds escaping, tears sliding down my cheek.

“Such a beautiful fucking traitor,” Vernon whispers in my ear, half-sitting up so I’m still laying with my back against his chest.

I’m humiliated, yet I’ve never felt as fucking turned out.

It’s made worse by the blood on the other side of the handle, where Celine has her hands.

“Oh, this?” she asks, noticing me staring. She chuckles. “This is the bat I used to knock out Casper.”

That’s even more morbid, and a sob of horror tears from my throat.

Vernon’s fingers slip inside my mouth. “Suck,” he orders, and I’m left no choice.

His fingers reach the back of my throat, saliva dripping down my chin from his fingers.

He reaches the back of my throat again, and I gag, convulsing.

It makes the tip of the baseball bat plunge in deeper, Celine smirking down at me.

I can't help but rock my hips against it, wetness pooling in my gut.

Vernon grabs my throat, teeth scraping against the soft skin of my neck, when I feel his hard bulge pressing into my ass.

Suddenly, Celine pulls out the baseball bat, its polished surface glinting with my arousal in a way that sends a rush of desire through me.

In one swift motion, she tears away my panties, the fabric giving way with a sharp rip.

A gust of cool air brushes over my sensitive opening, making me tremble in Vernon's hold.

The sensation only heightens when I feel him line his cock against me from behind until I lose all the ability to function properly, my body overtaken by the raw sensations.

We're right in the open, where anyone could stumble upon us.

God, this is so wrong, and yet it feels so right. The unbridled desire ignites deep inside my soul—a mere shell of who I used to be, but that person is blooming back into her natural habitat. I don't know what to make of it.

I can't do anything when I feel him press against me, the top of his cock impaling me inch by inch as Celine grabs my hips, guiding my body over his length.

She touches every inch of me, her fingers reaching into my soul to steal what once belonged to her.

Soon, she lets go of my hips, her fingers lifting up my T-shirt and leaning down to take my breast into her mouth, sucking hard until I let out the deepest sigh of pleasure.

It's all too much, and yet it's not enough.

I still believe this is all a twisted dream.

The coldness seeps into my very marrow as I ride his cock, guiding the pace. I've never watched him give up this much control before, and it's a sensation that overwhelms me.

"It's my turn now," Celine's voice wraps around me seductively.

"Fuck off," her twin brother states, but she has already removed her pants and panties, letting the cold wash over her, too.

She comes behind me, coaxing me to stand on unsteady legs as she settles down on a spot where the snow hasn't entirely covered the grassy landscape.

She unties the silk around my wrists, and I rub them.

She doesn't even seem bothered by the coldness.

Grabbing hold of my hair in a makeshift ponytail, she coaxes me closer to her, until my face is by her pussy.

She challenges me with her gaze, and a surge of adrenaline rushes through me as I

stare at her, leaning down to lick her folds. She closes her eyes, moaning through the sensation, empowering me.

I have never felt as vulnerable yet as powerful as I do now.

I'm on my knees in the snow, the chill seeping through my skin, and I know it will probably make me sick. I know this is wrong, and I also know that once this is over, I will leave them.

No matter how much they try to make me stay, they ruined my life.

I can't be with two murderers.

A heavy sensation settles in my core when I feel someone behind me, grabbing hold of my hips. That's until I feel Vernon's cock sliding right inside me, hitting that spot inside me that makes my eyes roll to the back of my head as I lick Celine.

"Oh, she likes that," she purrs, holding my hair in her grip and guiding my head.

To add a little extra to it, I push a finger inside her, and the moan she lets out rattles the trees, carried away by the wind.

What the fuck am I even doing? I should run the other way, but I'm depraved.

Vernon pushes into me from behind, hard and fast, until I'm moaning. The vibrations cause Celine to push her clit closer to my face, and I lick and fuck her with my fingers at the same time as her brother fucks me.

"I've fucking missed you," Vernon curses as he slides in and out of me, eliciting such pleasure.

I know they're unbothered by each other's nakedness—they only care about me. Only ever has. I don't know why that makes me feel so heady.

The crescendo builds inside me, and I know I will combust at any moment, especially with how they edged me before.

"You're so breakable like this," Vernon grits as he fucks me, the heat at my back the only thing keeping me warm on this cold and twisted night.

"So fucking perfect," Celine muses, her fingers twisting her own nipples while chasing her orgasm as I finger fuck her.

Vernon's fingers circle my clit, pinching it between his fingers and causing me to cry out.

"I hate both of you," I moan.

Yet my heart aches at the half-lie, and I despise myself for how much I actually love this, even when I would never admit it out loud. That deep longing filters through my chest, remembering the warmth I felt at being close to them, the years before they did the unthinkable—killing my parents.

"You don't mean that, and even if you do, it's okay. As long as you don't leave us," Celine says.

"And even if you do that, we will always find you. There's nowhere to hide."

"Try me," I breathe.

"I'll sacrifice you on an altar, baby. If only to make your soul immortal and belong to us. So no, there's nowhere you can hide."

Vernon's words are punctuated by his hips slamming against mine, and I scream out. I don't see the climax before it hits me—deep, like a punch to the stomach. My body arches into his muscular chest, my fingers still inside Celine.

“Come for us, darling,” Celine whispers, right at the moment she comes with me.

The moment I feel Vernon spilling inside me, I know I'm done for it. They've once again ruined and corrupted my soul.

Coming harder than I've ever done before, I fall apart from both of them until I'm too limp to do anything else but let them do what they want to me. I feel them lifting me, wrapping me in a warm winter jacket, and carrying me somewhere—back to the gothic castle and its haunting warmth.

There's no escaping these two devils who have come and knocked down my world once more.

But I will damn sure try.

Because even if I don't truly hate them, I need to leave. Or I'm going to lose myself in this madness.



### FRAGILE HEARTS

#### The Hunter

The fire from the stone hearth casts a warmth in the otherwise cold room, heating all of our frozen bodies. It's well-needed.

Celine is downstairs, cooking something up for us all to eat.

It was such a long time ago we had a normal, tasty meal.

We were deprived of it all because of the little traitor currently lying before the stone hearth, once again wrapped in silk, but at least a winter jacket functions as a mattress for her.

But I wouldn't really go back in time and change it.

For years, she was the only light at the end of a tunnel.

When our parents cast us aside, not giving us the attention two lonely children needed, Isolde was always there.

Her presence was a balm against my burning soul.

Her smile healed something within me I didn't know needed to be healed.

She saved me and Celine from our inner demons, and I will spend the rest of my life

making sure she is saved.

Protected. Loved. We may not deserve her, but I will do anything to make sure we are worthy of her again.

It's been two hours since we got back from the forest, and I'm fucking bored waiting for Celine to be done, and for Isolde to wake up.

Sweat trickles down her temple, and I decide she's warm enough. There's no time in the world where we will be able to get back the time we lost with her, but I will sure as fuck fight for it for the rest of my life.

Thanks to 'Casper's' letter, we'll be able to stay in Vexglade with our new identities that hide who we truly are. Him helping us remove all charges as the police deputy has made it possible as well. We're finally free.

Walking up to Isolde, I crouch down, tugging at the silk wrapped around her. I make it trail over her clit, causing her to shiver gently in her sleep. But she still doesn't wake.

Deciding I've had enough of being bored, I spot the baseball bat leaning against the wall and go up to grab it. Gently spreading her legs with my feet, I gently ease the baseball into her. She stirs in her sleep, eyes flying open.

"F-fuck," she exclaims.

She tries to move away, but the silk prevents her from moving. "You tied me up again?" she exclaims.

"I'm sorry. We can't trust you. Yet," I smirk.

I lean in, tugging on her nipples, watching the arousal escape her. She loves the pain as much as I love causing it.

The flames crackle, adding to the heightened warmth in her. Isolde's cheeks are flushed red from the heat when I lean closer, removing her shirt.

I take her in. So gorgeous and so mine.

She won't get away from us now.

I lost her once. I won't lose her again.

As I lean in to tug her nipple into my mouth, I catch her writhing beneath me. A soft and delicate moan escapes her, fragile and breakable.

Her expressions morph into one of horror as her arousal grows, and I use it as lube on the bat. Then, I take it out and line it against her ass. Her entire body instantly tenses.

"No—Vernon, what are you doing?" She leans up on her elbows as good as she can with the silk ribbons restricting her movements.

"Making you scream," I reply with a curled smirk, gently pushing the bat inside her ass, not waiting for her complaints.

She loves this—I know it in the way she moans out, arching her back. The way she squirms, cries out, and screams from the intrusion, panting, but I can't tell if it's from her emotions or the heat. Probably both.

"Fuck, Vernon," she moans, trying to get away.

I tug on her nipple harder, making her moan louder, giving her the ecstasy she

doesn't really deserve.

"I love the way you scream my name. Scream louder for me," I command, thrusting the baseball bat in and out of her in a rapid pace that leaves wetness gushing out of her.

Her chest is heaving with each moan, eyes rolling to the back of her head.

I don't like it at all, the loss of contact with her. She's mine. Her attention is supposed to be on me!

"Don't you dare look away from me. Give me those sinful eyes, Isolde," I order. She instantly obeys.

Such a good fucking girl.

I continue fucking her with the bat, adding a finger in her sweet pussy that makes her moan even louder.

There's a loud clatter of porcelain being laid upon stone, and I look back to find Celine staring at Isolde, coming closer.

As soon as Isolde hears Celine's heels clicking against the floor, she stiffens.

"Don't stop on my account," Celine smirks.

"But—"

"Come on now. Show my brother how beautiful you look when you fall apart."

"I've already seen her," I snap back.

Celine's right before us now. "I've made her come more times than you ever will."

Isolde's breath catches, and she goes very still, as if she has turned to stone. I watch her eyes flicker to Celine, then back to me, until her gaze settles on the baseball bat between her legs. Her cheeks flush a deep, tender shade of red as she tries to shift away.

"Can you not right now?" she breathes, more embarrassed than anything.

I nod, but the tension inside me snaps and I plunge the bat inside her one final time, pinching her clit with my other hand. Those sensations, along with Celine staring at Isolde like she were a meal to be devoured, throw her right over the edge, and she comes crashing down.

"You come so beautifully," I lean up, claiming her lips for the first time since she left us three years ago.

She's reluctant at first, but quickly gives in, allowing my tongue to prod her lips. Biting her lip, satisfaction fills me as beads of blood escape, and I lap every single one of them up.

"I-I..." she tries to get out, and I can practically see the war raging inside her head. Her thoughts take over her mind, until that's the only thing she can think of. I know she's trying to make sense of this entire situation, but there's no making sense of it.

It just is. Like it was always supposed to be.

"We're back together, that's all that matters," I whisper against her swollen lips.

Isolde's chest still rises and falls in uneven bursts, but her gaze is slowly turning distant. Unfocused. I stroke her cheek, but she doesn't even unconsciously lean into it

like she used to. Something is wrong.

Celine seems to notice the change in the atmosphere, too, as she crouches down beside us.

Her hand lands on Isolde's thigh, but Isolde flinches away, crawling as far away as she can with the ribbons still tied around her.

"I can't stay like this," Isolde finally whispers, her voice raw. Exhausted.

My eyebrows furrow, heart sinking. "What?"

Isolde sits up slowly, the flames flickering around her and casting a fiery glow on her damp skin.

"What do you mean, baby?" Celine prompts.

"I can't be with you. Not after everything you've done. Do you have any idea of how terrified I've been the past three years? And now, with you back, killing even more. I can't be with a murderer. I refuse to."

"Is this some post-climax guilt talking?" Celine asks, yet concern laces her words. She reaches behind her to grab a blanket, offering it to Isolde.

Isolde grabs it, wrapping herself in it as if it could physically shield her from us.

My heart plummets to the fucking floor at the devastated look on her face. A tortured soul. "But we killed them all for your sake."

"No," she says, finally meeting my eyes. "You killed them for your sake. For your own twisted obsession with me. You killed Casper to prove a point. To make me

yours. I can't stand you. You need to let me go."

"We can't do that," Celine says, but it sounds as if she's on the verge of crying.

My strong, cunning sister who has never shed a single tear in her entire life.

"I could never forgive you for everything you have done. I could never love you the way you think you love me. I need you to let me go."

There's so much conviction in her voice. She's completely serious.

Emotions rage a war inside me, winding from anger at her words and turning into a palpable panic that forces its way through my blood system. Staring wide-eyed, I realize there's only one way out of this predicament.

Because yes, while we could force her to stay with us forever—lock her up in this castle and never let her out—what good would it be if she hated our guts? If she couldn't even bear the sight of us? Flinching away every time we would touch her?

Lead settles in my stomach as I come to the conclusion; all I want is for her to be happy with me . Us. But that is not possible if she doesn't choose to stay with us on her own accord. We will never own her heart if she doesn't give it away freely.

Despite the restraints, Isolde manages to stand up on her trembling feet, staring down at us with an odd look on her face I can't quite decipher. "Please...forget about me."

"Do you remember when we used to sneak out of our rooms at night so our parents wouldn't hear?" I scramble to say, my voice quiet. "We'd sit together under the porch just to hear the rain pouring down, huddled up in that too-small blanket only really fitting one person."

There's a melancholy expression on her face as a small, sad smile twitches her lips. She nods.

"You said the rain sounded like a wall of protection," Isolde murmurs.

A light chuckle escapes me at the memory.

"I remember that one time you hit your head on the low stairs and started crying. Your tears were so beautiful yet broke my heart all the same. You ran into Celine's arms just so she could hold you, and I got you another blanket and a pack of ice because you refused to go inside. "

"I did love the sound of rain."

Celine shifts closer, a haunted look on her face.

Something small and fragile. "You then said it would be us forever. That the rain would protect us all and wash away the evil in the world," she takes a shuddering breath.

"I still think about that. I know we haven't been good for you.

I know that. But you promised it would be us. Always."

A kind of silence follows Celine's words, thick and insufferable.

"Some things aren't forgivable," Isolde replies with a hard expression, but there's a broken edge to her tone.

Celine's gaze drops. "That time, you also said that rain was the tears of one's soul. That beneath the sky, under the downpour, everything could be forgiven."



Isolde looks out the window—the snow lying heavy, like a thick blanket of ice draped over the world. “It’s not raining now, is it?”

The room feels colder after her words, as if the temperature has suddenly dropped, and my heart is crushing underneath the suffocating weight.

Both Celine and I are too stunned at the turn of events, the flames flickering and the wind raging outside being the only sound filling the tension. Isolde turns around, seemingly stiff with her shoulders haunched and unsure if she even can leave us.

“Please, don’t leave,” Celine scrambles to say, her voice pleading and almost breaking at the last word. I’ve never heard her so emotional before, and it causes a lump in my throat. “We’re sorry for everything—”

“A sorry won’t fix anything.”

She glances at the food Celine made for us, then turns her back on it, too. The shadows pull her into their hidden depths. “I need air,” she says at last.

I know she will be back. She just needs a few minutes to clear her head before we go looking for her again.

But when we do, she’s gone.

As if she had disappeared like a ghost.

### SWEET SORROWS

#### Isolde, One Year Later

The snow falling in drifts outside clings to my hair as I open the door to the best café in town, the door dingling with my entrance. The sun is just making its appearance on the morning after a pitch-black night, with a brutal cold that made me huddle closer to the fireplace.

“Good morning!” the older lady behind the counter chirps, her golden smile reaching her brown eyes as she notices me entering. “Oh, Isa! Do you want your usual?”

I offer her a small smile, nodding absent-mindedly, still hovering in that in-between space of being asleep and awake. It’s too early at seven in the morning, but I have an early client I need to get to. This is my usual morning routine in the new town I’ve moved to.

Janet is already moving behind the coffee machine with her usual practiced ease. The café’s light catches the rich tone of her dark skin as she works, and her curls bounce with each familiar step behind the counter.

“Cold day outside, isn’t it?” she asks with a soft smile, noticing the snowflakes tangled in my hair.

“Yeah, I don’t think I’ve ever seen a winter as brutal as the one here.”

“That’s just us. You’ll get used to it,” she says with a knowing gaze.

Janet's been running this café long before I moved to Silver Creek a year ago.

She's the kind of woman who remembers your face, your name, and your usual order.

Someone who genuinely cares for everyone who walks through that door.

She took me under her wing the day I first came here, lost and unsure after leaving my old life behind.

The thought of that leaves a twinge in my stomach, but I ignore it.

Sliding a drink that smells as amazing as ever, Janet gives me a wink. "There you go, honey. Made it extra strong today. You look like you need it. Enjoy your drink."

This is why I love her. "Thank you."

I grab the coffee in one hand, grasping my computer in the other, as I turn around to the otherwise deserted café. No one is up at this time, but it always gets busy at lunchtime.

The deep aromas of the drink filter through my nostrils, bringing me back to the present and heating my already cold body. My fingers flex around the mug, savoring the warmth. There's a kind of nostalgia in the scent as it fills the small café. Comforting and familiar. A balm to my broken soul.

Settling down in my usual spot by the fogged-up window, I set up my computer and enter the meeting.

I'm still able to make a living by doing tarot card readings online.

This spot is the perfect one. At the back of the café, there's no one around me to

sneak a peek at my screen, and it allows me to have an overview of the rest of the space, along with the street outside.

After every horrible thing I've endured, I've become more paranoid. Always needing full control of my surroundings, or it feels as if I will suffocate.

The town shuffles awake with people getting ready for work. A young boy swishes past on his bike, handing out the morning newspaper while not really handing them out. More like throwing them at people's doorsteps. But no one cares.

There's familiarity in his movements, and there's a sense of comfort in the way everyone always expects him to do it. They know to move away from him now.

A man with a dog walks by, and I smile as another woman comes up to greet the dog.

It's peaceful here. Serene.

A sense of belonging, while still being an outcast. I enjoy people-watching, getting to know people before they've even met me. I've even grown to love this town. No one knows who I am or my haunted past. I think if they did, they wouldn't be as welcoming.

That's not to say I don't miss Vexglade, because I do.

It's a deep-rooted longing aching in my soul, a calling wanting to take me home despite all the trauma I endured there.

Even if horrible things happened between the borders of the morbid town, it's still my home.

Always will be, no matter where in the world I venture.

But I did what I had to do to survive, and that included leaving.

I even filed for a restraining order the moment I left, made sure they couldn't reach me again. Ever. It wasn't easy, and it still isn't. But I survived. In Silver Creek, I've finally found myself. Started therapy. Become self-independent. Stronger. More self-assured.

And yet...there are still days when I miss them. With an ache tugging at my throat like the need to vomit. Nights when I wake up from nightmares where they're no longer with me, only to wake up and realize that that's my reality.

They were my second half before I sent them to prison, and there's a part of my heart that will always belong to them. But they taught me how dangerous love can become.

How obsession can fuel someone into vengeance.

And I can't give my heart to someone when I'm still trying to stitch together the broken pieces of it.

Now? I think I miss them more than ever. The thrill. The chase. The feeling of being wanted so fiercely.

I don't wish to go back in time. I did what I needed to do for my own survival. I needed to move on. But a part of me wants them back.

Some scars, you just have to learn to live with. No matter how much it hurts.

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THE MOMENT I ENTER my apartment after my meeting with my clients, it's already pitch dark outside.

After helping out Janet with closing the café to occupy my thoughts from the reality that it's exactly one year since I left them, I'm tired and ready to take a bath with a glass of wine in one hand and a movie playing in the background.

My keys jingle as I close the door behind me, breathing out a heavy sigh of relief.

It's quickly replaced by an atmosphere of something being distant—off.

The faint scent of a feminine perfume, strawberry-like and sweet as honey, filters through the hallway and leaves a shiver wracking over me. That odor wasn't there before I left earlier.

Swallowing the lump growing in my throat, I quietly lock the door behind me, gripping the keys tighter in my hands. If things come to it, they'll have to be a makeshift weapon.

With tentative steps, I tiptoe my way through the corridor separating the living room from the kitchen.

Everything is as normal, the black sofa—bought second-hand when I moved here—stands as neatly with the cushions as I left them.

A coffee cup from yesterday stands on the glass table before the sofa.

Glancing over at one of my cardigans hanging from the armrest, I'm about to brush it off and move on when I realize it's been nudged.

Only a fraction of an inch, but it moved nonetheless.

Suspicion makes panic crawl from the roots of my soul, the gut feeling of something being even more wrong fills me. I venture deeper into the apartment, careful not to

make a sound.

This apartment is larger than my last one, with its own hallway, a separate space for the living room, and a separate bedroom that's on the furthest end of the apartment with a balcony.

When I left Vexglade a year ago, I only stopped to get my personal belongings, leaving everything else behind. I terminated the contract with the landlord and stayed at a hotel until I found an apartment I could rent in Silver Creek.

Nothing is amiss in the kitchen, but that scent of perfume is even stronger here. Lingering in every corner, on every furniture.

Entering my bedroom, I'm certain it's only my paranoid mind making things up when I can't see anything else amiss, my head too exhausted to function properly.

That is until a wind washes over me, bringing in a coldness that makes me tremble.

The balcony door stands open, the curtains fluttering in the breeze.

Hurrying toward the balcony—located on the first floor but concealed by the tall thuja bushes to block any view—I'm startled to find a letter on the armchair.

Someone has brushed away the snow, leaving just enough space for it to rest undisturbed.

In that split second before reaching the letter, the warm blood flowing in my veins turns into ice. Irreparable and scared, fearing for my fate. It soon feels as if my body has been electrified, anticipation thrumming through me in a way completely tangible.

Struggling to calm my heart, any and all rational senses vanish within me. Excitement rushes through me, sharp and jittery as if a fuse has been lit.

It reeks of the strawberry-honey scent. One so familiar, it sends a tug of heartache through me with the need to suddenly shed tears.

There's no doubt who it's from.

The crumbled male handwriting—so rough yet somehow elegant because it defines him —causes feathers to ruffle in my stomach as I read the words.

Reluctantly. I should call the police, telling them I fear for my life and that they're back, asking the police to come get me.

Take them away again, for good. But I don't know if it's truly them, and that would've been embarrassing.

Who am I kidding? I know it's them.

Happy Birthday

Just those two short words. But they say more than a thousand words could—telling tales of gutwrenching agony in the slight tilt, of warm well-wishing in the elegance of their script.

As if an unseen ghost of memory has passed through me, a swift commotion stirs behind the thujas. Two silhouettes, not hiding but standing proud in the fading light, almost swallowed by the descending flakes.

And instead of a deep-rooted fear urging me to run the other way, a longing ache of despair settles inside me. Twisting and turning, winding its way through my heart



with the weight of desiderium— a fierce desire and yearning.

Despite all, they found me.

### THE DROWNED SOUL

#### The Dagger

When she left a year ago, it felt as if my heart would tear into a million pieces. For the first time in my life, I cried . Tears trickling down my cheeks in non-stop rivulets, refusing to stop, bringing with the intense cracking of my chest being sliced open.

“ My ribcage is collapsing. I can’t breathe. Help!” I told my twin brother, out of breath and desperate to claw the sensation out of me, if only so I could swallow oxygen. But my brother looks equally as lost.

We did everything we could to find her. For over a goddamn year, we searched every corner of the town.

The nearby towns. Searching for her. There was no information to find, because, as a young, easily manipulated officer working at the police station told us, she had filed a restraining order against us.

She hadn’t used our old names for the restraint—Celine and Vernon Duskvik—but had instead somehow found out about our new identities, provided by her ex. She probably found out about them from Casper, who still had some belongings left in her apartment.

We left Vexglade and the castle behind, searching for her in desperation after she left. But she had become a phantom to the world. Not be seen or heard from, but remembered in scrutinizing agony that carved one’s heart out from flesh.

The sheer, utter pain that spread through every blood vessel within me like a toxin made me realize one thing: we're not immortal. And therefore, we cannot afford to take anything for granted, as we so often have.

Our lives are fragile, and our emotions even more so.

Despite believing we weren't capable of such things, we are not immune to suffering, not exempt from loss, and we will be mourned, just as we now mourn her.

We are the architects of our undoing. But we could not let this be the end of us, just like we have never given up before.

With this, I learned that above all, we could never take her for granted ever again.

We needed her to trust us again, and we needed to do this the right way to win her over.

Because finally, after one year of searching every nook and cranny, asking around for clues that led us in different directions and one step closer to finding her, we finally found the town Isolde moved to.

Silver Creek.

And she didn't even change her name, which made it so much easier to find exactly which apartment was her new place. Although with our restraining order, I'm sure she believed she was safe enough not to need to change her name.

I'm not known for giving up. And Isolde Duskvik belongs to us, even when she doesn't dare to admit to it.

Observing her body language now through the branches and leaves of the thuja

bushes covered in snow, reading the letter we left her, her head suddenly whips up as if knowing we're here, watching her.

The moment I see those beautiful blue and gray eyes, my collapsed chest stitches itself together again.

Piece by piece, the threads weave through the agony and ease it.

Until a weight has been lifted from me, and it feels as if I can finally breathe for the first time since she left.

The relief is short-lived when I realize she has quickly disappeared into her apartment again, leaving me staring at an empty balcony.

I clench my fists until my nails dig into my palms, casting a glance at my twin.

Vernon looks better now than he has in the past year—healthier now that we've found her, no longer as dead on his feet like a zombie, but alive .

The past year has been torture without her. Even worse than the time we spent in prison.

Glancing back at the balcony, I notice it's still vacant. Digging my nails harder into my palms, I relish in the subtle pain, thoughts racing through the possibilities. Did she go into hiding again, wishing to never see us? Will she come out? Will I get to hold her again?

This can go whichever way.

For minutes where I debate whether to come barging in and force her to face me, she suddenly appears in the doorway, stepping outside into the winter cold with a coat

wrapped around her. Her cheeks are stained, her lips chapped. A heartbroken look lingers in her gaze as she takes us in.

Her silence calls upon the panic and overwhelming thoughts inside me, teetering on the edge of oblivion.

“You found me,” she whispers.

As I take her in, smaller than usual and more fragile, hair shorter than before and eyes sunken, there’s a glint of something that hasn’t been there for the past week since we found her.

Observing her every day, waiting for the right moment to emerge.

Would she run again? We couldn’t take the chance.

She takes a step closer, blinking away the tears I see glistening in her eyes as she hugs herself. I need to refrain from stepping closer, bringing her into my arms. Breathing in her intoxicating scent. Tasting her again.

“We did,” Vernon answers her statement.

There’s a strain in his voice and body language that only reveals he’s fighting his inner compulsion. Isolde looks away, chewing on her lip as if it’s something edible until it starts bleeding.

“Please, look at us,” I whisper.

She doesn’t, only shakes her head. I can’t take this anymore.

Her refusal only makes me pounce forward like a lioness hunting its prey, compelling

myself to take it easy.

When I'm right before her, I lift her chin up with my finger, forcing her to meet my eyes.

They flutter as they stare at me, taking in my entire face with a sense of relief that I feel all the way into my own bones.

Fuck . Touching her like this again after losing her, then having her for just a short while, to losing her again, feels as if I've descended to the heavens. If a soul like mine can even go to heaven.

"We found you. No matter where you go, or how much time away you need, we. Are. Here. Everything we ever did was for you. I don't function without you, darling. I need you."

More tears trickle down her cheeks, ruining her mascara and soaking my thumb. I don't care. I want her to pour every single emotion into me. If she so drowns me in her tears, I will own up to it and never ever let her leave again.

"You belong to us," Vernon says, stepping closer, mirroring my exact thoughts.

"But I filed a restraining order—"

I cut her off. "We already know that, and fuck it. We're here, aren't we? Despite that shit. We will always find you because you are ours."

Her eyes flutter open, a small smile tugging at her lips that she refuses to let forth. But it's lingering there nonetheless, and that's all that matters.

"I guess I knew you would find me..." Looking back into her apartment, her lips

form a straight line as she contemplates something.

“I never stopped loving you...But I needed to do this for me.” She lets out a deep sigh before continuing.

A look of resignation passes her face, but her shoulders sag in what looks to be relief.

“Now that you’re here...it only proves that you won’t ever leave me alone.

And after everything, I’m okay with that. ”

Anticipation thrums through the atmosphere, both Vernon and I staying silent while hanging on to every word she utters. She’s our lifeline. The only thing keeping our sanity intact while ultimately driving us to insanity.

My heart picks up its pace as she tilts her head to the door, motioning for us to come in.

“I’ll have a fire burning in the fireplace. Come in. Escape the cold. I think it’s finally time we talk. But if I let you in, it will be on my terms this time.”

I nod, swallowing down the urge to reach for her. But this is a step into the future.

More than I could hope for, truthfully.

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 6:37 am*

### DESIDERIUM

Isolde, Three Months Later

I can't believe I've moved back to Vexglade.

The one place I thought I'd never revisit, yet here I am.

It's the only place on earth where I've truly felt at home.

Where I grew up. Where I lost myself, seeing more than someone my age should.

I found pieces of who I was meant to be here, hidden between the cracks of the cobblestone, and became stronger by the fragments hidden in the fog clinging to the trees.

It's a town of gothic isolation marking its borders. Architecture looming with the weight of horrors, sorrows, and love. Narrow streets that call upon all that we have lost yet become a comforting hug when everything becomes unbearable.

Vexglade is as haunting as it's beautiful, and oh, how much I've missed it.

With winter comes familiarity, and with its people comes comfort. And reuniting with Celine and Vernon comes a new chapter of my life where I will find who I am after them, while being with them.

I was sad to leave Janet behind, but we still talk from time to time, and she promised



to visit sometime.

Swallowing hard, anticipation thrums through me like something eccentric and alive.

The castle looms before me with its massive structure.

Arched windows give way to vaulted ceilings that pierce the sky like needles, linked with a sense of antiquity stamped by how long this place has stood.

Gargoyle watches over my every move as if they are living, breathing sentinels.

Mayhem Castle is as dark and foreboding, yet oddly cozy, as the town it belongs to. Hidden deep in the forest, far from the main roads, and forgotten by the world.

And I'm standing right by its gates again after so long, a rush of energy tingling my fingertips with the nervousness eating me up alive. I'm seeing them again for the first time in three months.

We spoke, all those months ago in Silver Creek. It was a much-needed conversation that lasted until the next day, setting boundaries, unraveling truths, and talking through everything. And then, they left.

But they never once left me alone.

I didn't see them, but I could feel their presence.

Always watching me. Letters came, tucked in those elegantly stamped envelopes, reminding me that I was never truly alone.

They gave me the space to wrap my head around this all.

The space I needed to heal and to focus on myself in a way that Casper never

allowed.

I don't miss him, but I did visit his grave, allowing myself to forgive him for everything he put me through.

Isolde and Vernon have always put my wishes before anyone else's. They've respected every choice I've made. And now, I'm back where it all began.

Ready to start yet another chapter of my life.

This time, it's with the people that I was always supposed to end up with. My heart wove me to them as if by fate.

The doors to the castle open as if by a gust of wind.

Inside stands Vernon in a pair of sweatpants that reveal his V-line, leaving almost nothing to the imagination.

Messy brown curls frame his face, and his chest is bare, showing well-honed muscles.

Celine is beside him, wearing red lingerie, sitting in just the right places while forming her curves, matching her burgundy hair.

Their brown eyes take me in with predatory gazes, leaving me almost giddy as a smile splits my lips.

I have no idea what I'm getting myself into, but I know I need to start living. For so long, I was afraid and paranoid of even my own shadow, and I can't keep living like that.

I refuse it.

Taking the final step into the castle, the doors close behind me with a loud thud, marking my fate.

“I’ve missed you,” Celine says, instantly claiming my lips in a heated kiss.

They lead me upstairs to the same fireplace where everything began. Slowly undressing me, I’m left shivering, a little awkward and shy. Vernon ties me up in blue ribbons again, the color of icicles littering the branches outside.

I’m left bare and vulnerable on a fluffy carpet now positioned before the stone hearth, feeling safer than ever.

“You’re the prettiest gift ever,” Celine whispers, leaning in closer.

Her breath whooshes over my nipples, causing a shiver to claim me as I shudder.

I don’t know where to go. How to act. But I know this feels right.

Taking my nipple into her mouth, she sucks gently. Vernon shrugs off his sweatpants and boxers, settling on the fluffy carpet beside me. They both pay me attention, Vernon nibbling on my neck. I can’t help the moans escaping me.

He curls his body around me, hugging me to him before turning my head and claiming my lips. Sandwiching me between the two of them, I groan in pleasure.

“Please, use me. Show me how much you’ve missed me. Please. Love me in the only way you know how, because loving means you’ll stay.”

They’re both quiet for a second, Celine’s eyes glazing over for just a split second before it’s gone. “We’ll always stay. Always .”

She wastes no time, grabbing something from a drawer that has my heart picking up

its pace when I see what it is. It's the same strap-on she used the first time. I clench my thighs together, but she tuts.

"Show us what a good girl you can be," she whispers.

A flush takes over my cheeks, but I obey and spread my legs, leaving her smirking, satisfied.

When she lubes the strap-on, my heart escalates even more, and I begin rocking my hips against Vernon's hard-on I feel brushing against my ass. Without warning, he picks me up and lays me gently on his chest, manhandling me.

A moan escapes me when Celine puts on the strap-on, teasing me with the tip of it. She then gently eases it inside, and I throw my head back on a loud moan that claims me entirely. Vernon takes the chance to devour my lips, hands coming up to play with my clit.

I'm grinding my hips against them both, pleasure overwhelming me after so long without these sensations.

"Have you ever had someone in your ass?"

Vernon's question in that rough, husky voice stuns me, and I shake my head, uncertainly. I can practically feel the smirk radiating from him.

"Celine, give me the lube."

Celine gladly obeys, and I try to sit up, but she's pushing me down on her brother's chest. Trapping me between them.

"Wait. It won't fit," I breathe out.

“We’ll make it fit.”

Vernon turns me around until I’m on my knees, spread open for them as Celine settles on the carpet underneath me. A moan escapes me as she eases inside again, but I’m instantly tensing when I feel something brush against my ass.

“Relax,” Vernon whispers in my ear.

His finger pushes inside me, sliding right in with the lube. I let out a strangled breath. It’s not until long that I feel something bigger pushing against me, screaming at the intrusion. The strap-on inside me rubs against my G-spot as Vernon’s cock enters all the way in, staying still at first.

“Fuck, that hurts,” I whimper.

“Are you okay?” Vernon asks, voice laced with concern.

“Y-yeah. Don’t you dare stop.”

Celine’s lips split into a huge grin, nodding at Vernon. That’s his cue, because they both push in and out of me at the same time.

“Fuck me,” I utter.

“Already doing it, darlin’.”

I’m completely stuck between them both, Vernon pressing light kisses to my neck as Celine begins sucking my nipples again.

They ease inside me gently, fucking me as if they’re making love to me, but there’s an urge for something more. I’ve been without them for so long that a craving need has taken root deep inside me.

Managing to grab Vernon's hand from behind me, I guide it to my throat, urging him to squeeze. He obeys, and I feel my clit pulsing at the sensation.

"I could break you like this, and you wouldn't be able to do anything about it. So fragile, little traitor," he whispers in my ear.

I only moan. Let them use me, make love to me. Heal me.

Both of their thrusts become deeper, more frantic, as if their inner beasts have claimed them. They're fucking me until I see stars.

Celine's eyes suddenly light up with mischief as she looks over at the fireplace. Vernon follows her gaze and groans. I bite my lip, unsure of what's going on.

Until I see what Celine is reaching for, the flames illuminating it in the dark space.

A knife.

I swallow, yet a sense of anticipation stirs in me.

"Do you think you can take it?" Celine asks, teasingly.

I nod.

"Are you sure?"

"Just do it already," I grunt out. "Make me bleed."

Her lips split into a smirk, using the knife to trace my skin.

The sharpness of the blade makes me shiver, waiting for the pain I know will be met with pleasure.

Vernon continues to fuck me from behind, gripping my throat until it feels as if I will black out, just as Celine pushes the tip against my nipple.

She circles it, making it bleed, and I hiss out.

She laps the blood up, the pleasure mixing in a concoction that makes my pussy pulse.

“You’re loving this,” Celine whispers. “Does it feel good? Spilling your blood for me?”

I eagerly nod, pushing my hips down on her strap-on to make her keep fucking me. I feel Vernon growing even rougher behind me, pushing into me so hard, his pace becoming more frantic. It’s not long before I feel him spilling inside me, his moans and grunts turning me on even more.

His fingers trace the blood on my nipple, squeezing it until I hiss. I turn my head as he makes a show of putting his finger in his mouth, tasting the blood.

Fuck, they make me feel so whole.

The feeling of Vernon still pulsing inside me, Celine’s strap-on pushing into me and meeting that sweet spot inside me, pushes me over the edge until I’m falling into an oblivion I will never reemerge from.

Fuck, fuck, fuck. I come on a scream, gushing and convulsing, as Vernon goes to squeeze my nipple again, and Celine lapping up the trickling blood.

They push out of me simultaneously, leaving me feeling satisfied, with a heart full of love for these tainted souls.

“ All mine ,” I whisper.

Celine removes her strap-on. “All ours. Forever.”

“Forever,” I confirm, before diving at her.

I kiss her until she grinds against me, panting. Devouring her lips, biting down until I feel the taste of something metallic.

“Your teeth are razor sharp like a vampire,” she breathes out, pleasure coating her expression. “Tell me, little traitor, would you like my blood?”

I nod, grabbing the knife and making her bleed in the same way she made me. Vernon gives me a kiss before tending to the fireplace. I lap up the blood, tasting it like she tasted mine, groaning as she grinds against me.

“F-fuck,” she moans. “I’m going to come.”

“Come for me,” I whisper, watching the way she’s unraveling. For me.

And she does. Oh, so beautifully.

Later, when the world is quiet and we’re all satisfied, we huddle close by the hearth, skin still warm and our breaths still shared. Vernon’s arm drapes over me, an anchor in this twisted world, and my thoughts settle on a single, undeniable truth.

“I want to stay here with you, forever,” I murmur.

“Then stay,” Vernon replies, kissing my temple with more affection than he’s ever given me. The gesture is a promise to all of us.

Celine squeezes my hand, snuggling into me.

“I will,” I promise.



No matter what happens next, I'll be stronger and stay with them. I've finally realized:

We're the strange and unusual, bound by a love so serene.

The End