



A DARK ROMANCE

MESMER

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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AND USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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ISBN (e-book): 978-1-946722-49-2

ISBN (paperback): 978-1-946722-50-8

Cover design by Laura Hidalgo at Spellbinding Design. <https://www.spellbindingdesign.com/>.

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

"She wasn't an angel, but she was *his* angel."

Tomik took Hannah like he had a hundred women before her, like any other collectable that his mesmer abilities let him control utterly and completely. He wanted to dress her in wings, make her crawl to him, do things to her body that were worse than sinful... they were nightmarishly obscene.

But Hannah isn't like any other collectable.

She's the girl he ran away from, tried to protect... until she called him back.

Now there's no stopping the darkness inside him, the cravings that demand he keep her all to himself — but that's against the rules and his mesmer brothers are dangerous. Unpredictable. And how can he keep her safe when all he wants to do is make her scream?

Before love will come pain, blood, and the near destruction of her soul, and his.

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I
HANNAH

I opened my eyes and found someone impossible—an imposing man in black jeans and a pale shirt squatted on his heels a few yards away.

Tomik? How could it be him?

Instead of soft mattress, beneath my palms and the red sheets was the hardness of floor. I rubbed the blur from my vision then levered myself up on my hands.

A strange magnetic pull beckoned, echoing the last time I saw him.

The day he'd cracked my world open years before.

Here, now, he squatted like a troll spawned under a dirty bridge, a man with the darkest blue tattoos running over his arms and half-bare chest. His shirt was crookedly buttoned in a way that suggested laziness. His short, sandy hair had several shaved furrows that rode from the front to, I presumed, the back of his head.

A badass, nasty man. *How could this be Tomik?*

Dust gathered on the floor as if the rest had been scraped clean by feet, not swept by brooms or vacuumed.

Paint peeled from the palest mauve walls. Damp showed on the ceiling.

Behind him a holstered gun lay on the floor beside a large bed with tussled linen. The holster looked as though it'd fallen there and been forgotten. A dust ball gusted across it when a breeze blew from the window at my back.

How did I know the layout here when I couldn't remember arriving? It was a question to make a priority, but I brushed it aside in favor of watching him watching me.

And still he watched me, silently.

He looked as if he could stroll through the world and not give one fuck for anything.

An apocalypse would not touch him.

How could this be Tomik, the boy who cared too much?

Yet it was him. Certainty *thunked* down inside me. He felt the same. He'd had tears trailing over his cheeks the day he'd returned a suicidal goldfish to the tank and let it slide gently into the water. What had he been then? Eight? I'd never been good at recalling ages.

I pushed myself higher and wriggled into a sitting position, tucking my legs under me and my dress over my thighs.

"Tomik, is that you?" A stupid question. Heat simmered across my cheeks.

That call, that subtle come-to-me whisper that wasn't quite audible. All the way down the street from him, I'd felt it. Once upon a time, then gone. Yet, it was here.

Nervous, I wound escaping strands of my hair behind my ear, after which they promptly fell over my face again.

"Yes. It's me." The words were bone dry and wrung of emotion, the smile fleeting. His mouth settled into a straight line.

I went to rise, to walk nearer, just curious, but he held his palm out flat toward me and said, "Stay."

Already up on one knee, I rocked to a halt.

"What did you just do?" More words bubbled up, a distraction from wondering why I'd stopped dead. "You look different."

I frowned. Bigger, way bulkier. Far... sexier. Some men, just by being close, made that tingle rise between my legs. Even my lips felt the brush of arousal along with my far-too-easily disturbed nipples. Tomik had that distilled essence of man—if there was such a thing. Pheromones, of course.

I inhaled, exhaled. *Be calm. Fuck this insanity.*

"Those tattoos..."

He shrugged, eyes hard, like I was an object that bothered him by existing. "Does it matter? How do you feel, Hannah?"

"Feel?" I stared at the long sleeves of my dress, a dress I'd never bought. *How did I come to wear this?* The translucent cloth whispered over my nipples when I shifted, making them peek through holes in the decorative lace.

I felt exceedingly exposed and naughty, especially with Tomik sitting there, all male and large—a temptation of flesh, bone, and muscle.

We'd kissed once, and I wanted more. I could taste his tongue in my mouth, thrusting in.

I blinked, shook my head. *Dumb imagination*. For a second the room squeezed in to become a tunnel that held only him, me, and the air between us.

Unsettled, I swallowed. This was not normal.

"How do I feel..." I glanced around the room, and asked softly, "Where am I?"

"Hotel Acambo." His words were trotted out.

The name meant nothing, but I should know. *How did I come to be with him?*

I put fingertips to face, found my nose, my mouth, then pinched my neck. It hurt as it should. Not a dream.

When had I met this new Tomik?

When had I? There was nothing. No memories. It was as if I'd been magicked here.

My nearest memory of Tomik was the boy I'd known, the one I'd seen that day at the end of sophomore year. That same day my friend Susan turned into a mute girl. She'd not spoken again that I knew of. Her parents had sent her somewhere for therapy and she'd never returned.

My heart had ached forever after he disappeared, reminding me like a splinter that'd burrowed through ribs and inside, screwing down, refusing to budge.

Forever was a long time, and it fucking *hurt*.

It'd been after school... and he'd been absent from class. I'd spotted him watching from down the street. I could *feel* him watching, as if he stood at the center of a gravitational well, dragging at my feet. By the time I reached where he'd been, he'd vanished.

That had been a bad day all over. Tomik and I had been sixteen.

He was the boy I'd played with on the swings and thrown stones with into the duck pond, the first boy I'd kissed. The boy I'd fought dragons with while announcing absurdities that only made sense in a D&D game. But he wasn't the same boy.

He was Tomik, but he was different... and I was different too. I'd done things, not tattoos, but... things.

There had been college after high school, on a scholarship, and I studied something. Anthropology? Or drama? No, it had been journalism. And I remembered a play and being up on stage. Shakespeare, maybe? Yet, no matter how I searched, how deeply I looked inward, ignoring the tattooed hunk of masculinity a few yards away, I found nothing that made sense. In my mind there seemed a lack, a hole, a pit of nothingness where my memories of then should be.

“I went to college,” I muttered, only half-seeing the floor. “I did. I know I did. Where did it go?”

“Stop thinking whatever you’re fucking thinking.” Tomik scraped both palms down his face, then stared at me through the gaps. He dropped his hands to his thighs with a smack of skin on denim and clicked his fingers. “I give up. Come here, bitch.”

The room shook with the reverberation of his hard-as-stone words.

Bitch? How dare he.

I climbed to my feet and walked to him.

In my thoughts, where dead memories hid, something stirred at the edge of that pit of nothingness.

Am I a hero or a villain? I think I know. I've killed a handful of girls, by proxy, but I figure it's the killing that's important.

Maybe I should've nailed my dick to the floor—that was the only thing that might've stopped this from happening. I rose and met her as she approached on dainty feet. She was taller than when we were sixteen, but so was I, by far.

The flimsy dress was a good choice if I wanted to remind myself of how gorgeously fertile she looked. I'd had her put it on that morning, but away from my grasp and sight. *That* had been wise, *this* was not.

The cloth hugged the swell of her breasts and clung to her hips like a lover, the hem kissing her thighs and whispering of what lay beneath.

Guess I'd set myself up to fail, though losing control could be good, could be a fucking delight. The most vulgar obscenities came from just going for it. How wide can she spread? How many can this girl-thing take? What if we dangle her like that and do this to her? Collectables were dolls with holes and one could bend them, stretch them, dirty them up with blood, sweat, come, and they never protested much.

I liked the whimpers too though. I could make Hannah whimper, scream, babble at me to not hurt her. My dick pulsed. *Guess it knows what I need.*

"Stop," I murmured when she was at arm's length, where I could hear her breathing, drag the scent of her into my nostrils, see the rise and fall of

her chest. My mouth could be on her, sucking at those tits with the roughness of wet material under tongue and teeth.

Those were mine now, all of her was mine.

I placed my hands on her shoulders, not bothering to meet her eyes. Always nice to look down on a girl, to feel that thrill of physical domination, no matter how easy it was to take them. Yet, again came that tease of guilt.

Girlfriend and friend, not collectable? Once upon a time. *Not anymore.*

I allowed my wayward hands to slide beneath her breasts, to raise them, lifting them to my sight and letting me feel their weight. Through the material her dark areolas signaled where to lick, to suck, to pinch, maybe where to stick needles. My cock rose hard against my zipper.

“Guilt, fuck. Who needs guilt?” Curious, I looked into her eyes. Fair hair, blue eyes, pretty, and she used to be smart and funny. Now she was cute collectable candy dangling before me. My mouth twisted. “What am I going to do with you? You’re broken, Hannah... Fuck you. Why’d you come begging?”

Broken like me.

“You can talk. I want you to talk to me. But first...” Stepping back, I pointed, swiveling my finger in a circle. “Take that off. Let it slip down you. Let me see you, slowly.”

“Tomik?” Liquid confusion drifted in her gaze. I watched her shake her head and get nowhere.

“Yeah?”

“I... I— What are you doing to me?”

“Nothing. I already did too much.”

I’d blotted away too much memory, and now she was barely functioning.

“Strip.”

Her hands rose from her sides.

All those years ago, young and horny, kissing, squirming against each other after that school play, wanting to do it, and me with an erection to rival the Eiffel Tower. I’d been to Paris since, seen how big and hard that was... yet before I collected her I’d never seen her minus all clothing. *Nude.* I loved that word, same as I loved the look of females when they stripped for me. Some of them were bewildered at why they were obeying, others

became lost in zombie-robot-girl mode faster and never surfaced much at all to think.

I preferred the aware but bewildered ones—they left a distinct taste of struggle on my tongue. Fucking them made me come like crazy for I was a wolf devouring the sweetest prey.

This one here was prey too. If I didn't use her name, could I pretend she was no one special? I figured I could get to like knowing it was Hannah I was destroying.

At the urging of her fingers, her dress slid to just below her shoulders. She wriggled, and it slid further, catching on her breasts where they swelled to the outermost limits. Her erect nipples had snagged the cloth. I smiled, let my tongue curl out and prod at my mouth.

“Go on. Talk some more.”

I had to keep reminding myself she was a collectable. Ever since this freaky mind-power infection had overridden my tender young naïve self—if *it was an infection*—ever since then I'd been ruthless.

Fucking ruthless.

If there was a food pyramid of predators of the human race, mesmers stood on the peak. We gave quarter to no one, or to no females to be truly accurate. Sure, I had regrets sometimes. Logically I could look at my behavior and *tsk* at myself. I should not have done this or that. I felt bad but went ahead and did it anyway, then I felt good.

People call that positive reinforcement.

I couldn't let a girl from my past throw me. I should take her, use her, discard her, and move on.

My tongue slid over my teeth, such sharp-edged instruments. They left good marks.

I stepped around her, touching her ass, gliding my hand, watching that luscious shudder of desire slip into her. When I traced the line where her dress barely covered her swollen nipples, her eyelids lowered, fluttered, her breath caught. *Succulent thing.*

This was too easy. I wanted to taste her struggles.

Hannah's struggles.

I shut my eyes. Anonymous girls were plentiful. If I forgot her name, it would be like she was anyone else. Truthfully, I wanted her. I wanted it all. I wanted to suck her dry and know exactly who I did it to.

Hannah Jones.

She shivered, looking down at my fingers. I flicked and her dress slipped again, only to halt at hip level.

“Fuck, my girl. You *have* grown.” I smirked. Her nipples were a perfect dusky pink and so ripe.

I gave in to compulsion. I bowed my head, gripped one breast, mouthed her and sucked hard, bringing her desire to my tongue and lips, making her whine. She clutched at me until I growled like a dog. Her hands flopped to her sides, and I sucked more, devouring, taking a huge mouthful of her flesh, mounting pleasure on top of pleasure, pulling at her as if to milk blood from her, hearing her panting deepen and her whimpers sharpen. My little angel had a voice.

The dress fell to the floor.

Lower down, I planted my hand over her mound and squeezed her there, dug my fingers in like a rake, locking her sex to me.

Squirming and crying out, twisting her hips into my hand, humping, it didn’t take long before she was begging incoherently. I slipped two fingers into her, then three. Grinning around my mouthful, I hoisted her a few inches into the air with my cunt hold and made her come.

Hannah jerked but at the last second of her unravelling climax, I bit down, hard.

Her squeal almost tore her breast from my mouth. With the fingers in her cunt, as well as the ones wrapped around her tit, I stopped her from toppling over.

Nice but not enough.

Jaded, yeah, that was me.

Day after day, my mesmer brothers did shameful things, but I could do with a new challenge—and Hannah could be fine-tuned like a toy with dials. Slippery dials all covered in my come and her blood.

Like she was now, slightly brainless, I could nail her to a wall, fuck her, and let her go. She’d never tell. She’d probably end up in a ward staring at the ceiling—unable to orgasm without a mesmer’s touch, her mind blown to smithereens.

No. I wanted to fuck her while she fully, in a very sane way, *knew* it was me. Intact Hannah. My angel Hannah. I needed her fixed enough to make this fun.

Long ago, that last day I’d seen her, I’d been fresh to the call of the mesmer and all of its dark temptations. A vision had seeded itself in me,

spawned by our D&D games, of her dressed as an angel, strung from the ceiling, spread-eagled, bloody, and jerking to the strikes of a whip I wielded. It'd horrified me as well as tempted me, and I'd run... but now it could be fun.

I pulled my fingers from inside her and stepped away. She wobbled, her juices stringing from her cunt.

"I'm no longer that scared little teenager, Hannah." I let my voice saw into her, low and rumbling. "You have no idea what I'm capable of."

She stared at me, doe-eyed and dazed, and I stared back. Watched.

If my mesmer bros knew I was keeping her, they might want to join in on my fun. They might want to kill her. Why? We had a code. Don't mess with what works for us. No connections to our collectables. Which means I probably shouldn't tell them? Though having all of us fuck her at once... *that* idea had me wiping my mouth. So, I could? Keep it in the files as a maybe.

And that spread-eagled angel concept might do for a finale.

Last thing on my to-do list for little lost Hannah.

I sat on the bed, legs apart, and pulled her to me until she was snug against my groin where I ached. Still dizzy from the orgasm, she slipped to her knees. Just the right level for cock.

I worked my fingers through her thick hair, tangled into the roots, wrapping in like I was a part of that hair, then I twisted my wrist backward. A little bit of pain.

Mouth open, forced to look up, she made a high-pitched noise that reminded me of a cat crying for assistance.

"You want something, Hannah, girl from my past? You sound a little..." I savored the warmth of her body wriggling against my legs. "Desperate."

Still she had not talked. I frowned. What if erasing her memories did something irrevocable? Could I bring them back at a command?

I leaned down, put my elbow to my knee, and regarded my latest acquisition. "Have you no thoughts?"

"Only of you," she murmured. "Tomik."

"You're a zombie-robot-girl, right now. I hate those. I may as well have a well-made blow-up doll. I'll find the dials, the levers, the strings to pull in your mind."

I knew little of messing about with their heads except for in a blunt instrument, basic mesmer way.

Now to see if I could bring the memories back.

“I want you to remember the years I took from you, sweet angel.”

“I...” Horror dawned this time. Her eyes fixated on mine. “Oh God. No. No.” She covered her mouth. “What am I doing here? Why...”

Her face went through enough spasms to make me wonder if she was seizing, and then tears erupted. The memory dump must suck. Still, it’d worked. She choke-sobbed and I held her to me, again, for the same reason as that night when I’d made her shower and pack.

“Shhh. That’s enough. Stop thinking. My poor little killer angel, I will make it better. You’re going to forget again now. Forget what you just remembered. I want to mindfuck you, and to do *that*, I need a mind.”

When I first turned mesmer, when the brothers taught me what I was, I’d looked to understand. Why could I do what I did to these girls? Why me, why us? Why not Joe down the street? How did the mind become so vulnerable? I still wanted answers and maybe now I could have them.

“You’re going to be my experiment, Hannah. Forget...”

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I'm not supposed to be here.

That one thought banged through me, and for a moment I could only feel panic. My eyes went wide, frantically looking around the curved edge of the small, private box.

There were six seats, I counted them fast, but we were alone. Only me and him—the large man standing beside me with his fingers wrapped too tightly around my arm.

I pulled back on instinct, and then he faced me, looking at me like I'd pissed him off.

Tomik?

"Sit," he commanded in a hard tone, and my body buckled. Ass into the cushioned seat, arm still grasped in his hand, and a second later I couldn't remember where else I wanted to be. I'm supposed to be here, in this seat, with him—*right?*

"Where are we?" I whispered, watching the people milling about below the balcony as they searched for their seats. The blood-red curtain on the stage was closed, a pattern of light swirling across the front of it that reminded me of water.

"We're seeing a play. You still like theatre, right?" It was a question, but he was gripping my arm so hard I wasn't sure if I should answer. Shaking me, he released a low growl under his breath before he repeated himself. "Do you still like the theatre, Hannah?"

Hannah. I'm Hannah.

“Yes,” I answered quietly, and he finally let me go, but I couldn’t stop looking at his hand. I wanted it back, wanted it on me... but I didn’t. He’d felt dangerous. Everything inside me was telling me to run, but I couldn’t even lift myself out of the seat enough to adjust.

When had I ever liked dangerous?

Something was very wrong. Looking down, I tugged at the dress riding high on my thighs—too short. I would have never worn something like this, definitely not in public. Bright white and cut so low that I could see the round of my breasts in the V. No bra and, as I fidgeted in the seat, I realized there was no underwear either. “Tomik, what—”

“Spread your legs.”

The words were barely out of his mouth when my knees started to move, but I grabbed onto my thighs to stop them.

“Now,” he added, and I felt the vibration of the word. It made my muscles quake, shuddering under my grip as my knuckles turned white, my nails digging into my skin as I tried to fight it... but my legs parted anyway.

I wanted it; I didn’t want it. The opposites flooded me, denying logic.

Now that I’d spread my thighs, I was happy. More than happy—arousal frissoned between my legs, along my slit, burgeoning.

My eyelids closed slightly as I remembered desire from long ago, when we’d held hands while sitting on the reservoir wall. Tomik and I, teenagers, fumbling flirtatious teenagers, his thigh nudging mine and his thumb pressing on the back of my hand.

Today it was both desire and dread.

Fear trickled down my spine, unease unfurling in my stomach as I built up the strength to look at him. He wasn’t even looking at me, he was staring out at the audience like he hadn’t just told me to spread my legs. Why had I obeyed? Why couldn’t I close them now? I tried to stand, bracing my hands on the armrests, but I didn’t lift more than an inch before my body dropped back down.

“Why can’t I get up?” I whispered.

“Stop fidgeting,” he replied casually, without even a glance.

His words weighted my limbs with sandbags, and my hands slid from the armrests and landed limply at my sides.

Panic inched up my throat. I wanted to scream, to lift my arms and grab onto him and shake him. There was no way this could be happening. No

way that this could be Tomik, *my* Tomik. Not the boy who had been my best friend and my first heartbreak. My Tomik wouldn't do this to me.

"Please stop?" I meant to say it as a statement, a demand, but it came out like a question. A quiet little plea that held more of a whine than I wanted it to... *not good*. This was definitely wrong. A bad dream. Clearing my throat, I tried again. "Please stop, Tomik."

"No, I don't think I will," he answered, finally turning to look at me again.

There was a slight smile on his face, just a tilt at the edge of his mouth as if he found it funny that I couldn't move. Tongue sliding over his bottom lip, his gaze traced over my breasts, down my body, only stopping when he reached the edge of my small dress.

My thighs were still apart, my lack of underwear obvious to me, and I had a feeling he knew. Making as small a movement as I could, I swallowed. I hated this—being made to display myself.

How was he doing it? Hypnosis?

"I tried so hard to stay away from you, Hannah, girl who stole my fucking heart. I did so much to spare you. And then you had to fucking call me." Those last words he'd snarled out tersely. I'd have known he was angry even if he wasn't throwing in fuck like it was punctuation confetti.

"I called you?" I shifted as much as I could in the seat, trying to remember that, but the harder I searched for the memory, the more I found only empty space. Empty, scarred space.

There lay a pit where memories had died, and more than just the one. As I tried to focus, to make myself remember, I found the strangest image. Not a memory of Tomik or of any call I may have made to him, nothing helpful.

Instead, I saw ten gray fingers inching over the lip of a dark pit.

Vertigo swam in. Those fingers clutching, holding on, wriggling even, like they had thoughts about coming out—*something* had thoughts. Not me. *That* was not me.

"Never mind. The play is starting. Pay attention." Another command, but at least this one I wanted to obey because it broke me away from the creepy thing in my head.

It wasn't real. Just a... thought, a dream.

Two men strolled onstage and I recognized the play almost immediately. Hamlet. At least I liked this one, but it didn't make me feel any better.

Tomik wasn't answering any of my questions, he barely responded even when I managed to assemble the words I needed.

His heavy hand arrived on my thigh. I stared down at the dimness where my legs and his hand must exist. His warm fingers played with me and the dress, inching it up, toying there, drawing intricate and unseen designs. At times I shuddered, overcome by what seemed a perversion, forced to endure his skin on mine.

Despite my confusion, I grew ever more aroused. If he kept on with his toying, I would leave a patch of wetness on the seat. Embarrassing.

Tomik stroked a single finger along and up my thigh, drawing close to my most intimate parts. If he went higher, I'd move, wouldn't I? I'd slap him?

His thumb and finger pinched my skin, hard, creating sudden fire. I'd swear my clit felt the warmth and shift of air when his hand moved. Gasping, stunned at his act, I bit back a moan.

"N—" The protest died on my tongue though I wriggled. Futile, I wasn't going anywhere.

"Shhh, Hannah." His finger and thumb released me. "The play."

I shut down. I kept doing whatever he told me to, my body on automatic.

I was a passenger in my own skin, and the worst of this was that beside me was the boy I'd loved that day at the reservoir—the boy, now man, I'd dreamed about for years.

Once, I would've rejoiced, now I only felt the rising anxiety. Tears welled in my eyes while below the actors carried on with their Shakespeare and tragedy.

Once upon a time...

As if through gauze, I recognized the scene with a ghost walking along a castle wall. Plays were usually my weakness. Not tonight.

No. Not tonight.

Tomik had me and I was happy after all. A smile hung on my mouth.

He kissed my ear, saying softly, "That's it. You'll like this. Keep watching the play, unless I say not to."

"Hi there. Do you need anything?" A woman's voice whispered from behind us.

I tried to turn but found I still couldn't move. Panic pulsed through my veins with each beat of my heart. Claustrophobia descended, stifling me as I

failed, yet again, to look at her.

“Isn’t this my lucky day?” Tomik said, chuckling under his breath. “Come here.”

Out of the corner of my eye I could see a young woman, and I managed to turn my head enough to catch a glimpse of her, before my head snapped back to look at the stage.

Watch the play.

“Turn around, bend down, and put the tray on the step. Slowly.” Tomik had a low, thrumming edge to his voice that made my skin buzz, but he wasn’t talking to me. He was talking to the girl. The attendant for the balcony box. “Very nice. I think you’ll be much more entertaining than the play.”

“Please, sir, I just want to get back to work.” The girl had a shake of fear to her voice, and distantly I understood why. That raw panic when you realize your body isn’t yours anymore.

Tears sprang up as I fought the weighted feeling in my limbs.

“Keep trying. Your little struggles amuse me,” he murmured before turning to the girl again. “Shut up and get on the floor. Yeah, right in the corner there so you’re nice and hidden.” Tomik’s hand landed on my thigh.

The weight of it seemed to ripple massively, a shockwave that wrenched at my willpower.

I gasped and shut my eyes a second, before stealing another glance of the small, dark-haired girl as she sat on the floor.

“Tomik, stop it,” I said, a little louder, fighting the tears, trying to get him to be the boy I knew, the kind boy, and leave the girl alone.

Suddenly he was at my ear, his exhaled breath brushing my skin. “You need to be quieter, Hannah. We don’t want to attract the attention of the other audience members, now do we?”

“No,” I whispered, and he chuckled just before he nipped my earlobe, sucking on it.

I sighed. *So beautiful.*

Silvery threads of bliss bound up the panic in my veins, choked it off, and made it sink away, to become... nothing.

“That’s right. Be a good girl and stay quiet.” Tomik turned from me, dragging away some of the peace. I needed him touching me. His hand squeezed my thigh, painfully—a good pain that anchored me and made my toes curl. Again, his voice carried that funny edge. “You. Take your clothes

off. On your knees. There. Remember to stay hidden. This is our little secret.”

“Tomik!” I jerked my body, almost able to lift my hand, almost able to grab him. He laughed quietly and my muscles lost their strength.

A near-silent whine escaped my clenched teeth when I caught the edge of one of her legs in my peripheral vision. An arm’s length away at most. Lean forward and Tomik could touch her. She too obeyed, though perhaps with less questioning than I.

“You can watch her, Hannah.” With those words, I found I could disregard the play, turning just in time to see the girl sliding her dress over her head.

Tears ran down her cheeks. A narrow shaft of light that speared her corner revealed wild eyes. Fear had her.

I could only stare, listening to the thudding beats of my heart.

Hell, I couldn’t move my own arms, how could I help her? How could I save her from this man I thought was Tomik when I didn’t even understand what he was doing?

This was insane.

“Sit on my lap.” He squeezed my thigh and with that I was freed.

I was able to move, to pull my knees together, to shake out my hands, but only so I could stand and slide onto his lap. Without hesitating, he adjusted me, pulling me back to nestle against his firm chest.

Throat tightening, I faced the poor girl huddled on the floor as she slid off her underwear, bra then panties. They lay in a dark puddle of cloth beside her. Naked, she hugged her legs to her chest.

I could feel Tomik’s laugh more than I could hear it.

“Both of you spread your legs.” His voice was steeped in lust, coated, glistening with it.

In that moment I despised him, and then his touch settled me.

No. No. I needed to do more than be this thing he manipulated.

“No,” I said as loudly as I could, but my thighs parted at the same time hers did, and Tomik *helped* by draping one of my legs over the armrest. I swiped at the tears on my cheek, trying not to look at the girl on the floor who was now completely exposed. “How are you doing this?” My whisper was almost a squeak. “Why? Please, Tomik, please just tell me why.”

“Because I can. You’ll see, you’re going to love it.” He slid his hand between my thighs and the second he stroked through my folds, my back

arched, a soft gasp tearing its way into my lungs.

“Oh God,” I moaned softly. The pleasure was instantaneous, even though he was barely brushing my clit with each stroke. My nails dug into my thighs, hips tilting, begging for more, and then he took his hand away and I choked on a quiet cry. I was so wet, I wanted more, I *needed* him to touch me again. Needed that back, even though it was horrible, even though the girl on the floor was crying and terrified.

“Girl, why don’t you take that beer bottle and fuck yourself with it,” Tomik suggested, casual as a man carving meat off the bone, and he slid two fingers inside me as he continued. I whimpered, tried to fight the moan that ended up as an undercurrent to his next words. “You can take your time, make it look really good.”

I could tell the girl was fighting it, her hands shaking so bad that the other glasses on the tray rattled when she took hold of the beer bottle. I wanted to fight for her, to make Tomik take it back. I wanted to be disgusted as she held it between her legs, poised to enter herself, but Tomik was slowly fingerfucking me, and all I could feel was the teasing promise of an orgasm.

Soaking wet, I leaned back on his chest, spread my legs wider, twitching my hips in time with each slippery plunge of his fingers.

The girl pumped the neck of the beer bottle in and out of her, crying silently, but I couldn’t feel anything except near ecstasy. So close to coming. My hushed sounds were ever more desperate. More, I needed more of this man in me. More than fingers. I was pleading, whispering that I needed him, that I needed him to fuck me. I was saying things I’d never even thought in my head because I just needed *more*.

“Good girl,” he murmured, and his hand went over my mouth, clamped down hard, and then... I came. My gasp caught against Tomik’s palm, delirious as he slid his fingers free and shoved them in my mouth, choking me a little as he flattened my tongue.

I was still whimpering, still crying, still moaning softly when he growled out, “Deeper, bitch. Stick it deeper.”

The beer bottle stuttered, her head was shaking back and forth, dark hair flailing over her shoulders, then she leaned against the wall behind her and *pushed*. Her mouth opened wider in a silent cry and I watched her body stretch to accept the foreign object.

Horried, I kept sucking at his fingers, starving for his taste, rocking my hips on his lap like some kind of whore.

“Get on your knees, Hannah,” he snapped, almost shoving me off his thighs as he leaned over the arm of the seat.

The second his hand touched the girl’s knee, she writhed, the beer bottle surging inward another inch, and I watched, dazed, as she slid down the wall onto her back, leg closer to Tomik so he didn’t have to reach so far.

“Little slut, that beer bottle feel good?”

She nodded and shoved it deeper, in and out, in and out. Surely that would damage her? Her frenzied, soft whimpers made it sound as if she wanted to climax. Same as me. He was orchestrating this. Playing us. My stomach twisted, and I tried to move backwards, still on my knees because—*shit*—I couldn’t get up. Again.

Worse, much worse, I didn’t actually want to. I wanted him to turn from the girl and touch me instead.

Me. Please.

“Don’t stop. Don’t come,” he commanded as he straightened in the seat, and then his fingers were in my hair, pulling me closer, and I didn’t fight at all. I crawled between his thighs, already salivating before he’d even undone his pants. My face and mouth were still slippery from what his fingers had left. It would take nothing for him to be in there.

I slipped my tongue across my lip.

He was in jeans and a button-down shirt. Not a suit, not even slacks for the theatre. The facts were mismatched with this debauchery.

Logic dribbled into my fucked-up brain.

Why hadn’t I noticed his clothes before now? Had he walked into this place like that? *God, where are we? What city am I even in?*

Then his hand returned to my hair and all of the questions disappeared like smoke on the wind. I was staring at his cock, at Tomik’s dick, and I couldn’t even remember my name.

“Suck.” That word filled me up, every inch of my awareness, and I did exactly as he commanded.

I pressed my lips to that soft-covered hardness and opened. I let his cock slide through them. Everything else faded away. The projected voices of the actors, the squelching sounds of a beer bottle moving where it shouldn’t, my own whine—none of it mattered.

He tasted like God must taste. Some heady ambrosia as he shoved himself to the back of my throat and pushed until my body caved and let him in. Then another push took it past where I could breathe.

I gagged, choked, slurped past drool when he gave me air, not that I even cared if I was breathing. Both of my hands were between my thighs, trying to bring back that sensation from when he'd touched me. It was nothing until he groaned and shoved his cock in deep again, making me choke loud enough that for one flicker I worried about the other people in the audience.

He told me to be quiet. Not to attract attention.

"Come. Come for me, Hannah."

Those thoughts were gone as I orgasmed, barely a sound rumbling in my chest as I jerked my body, and he kept me mute with his dick buried in my throat. Semiconscious, I slurped, sucked harder, wanting him to do it again as he pulled my head back and forth.

Over my head he spoke again. "Fuck yourself harder, I want to watch that beer bottle disappear." Tomik groaned, yanked me down on his cock and underneath the onslaught of pleasure I knew my throat was bruised. Aching. I retched, barely keeping whatever was in my stomach down, and he pulled me up by my hair, extracting his cock all the way.

Only a thick string of drool connected us. Shining in the dim lights, and I stared at it, transfixed. It was pretty. Glinting like liquid glass. Tomik broke it, smearing his thumb across my mouth, wiping the saliva over my cheek.

"See?" He spoke matter-of-factly, educating me, and I blinked, transfixed by this man. "You enjoy being my little whore, Hannah. And so does she. She won't stop unless I let her. Would put that in all the way and past what's safe if I said to."

I only gulped and blinked, agreeing with him.

He turned my face toward the girl, holding onto my chin, and I saw her pushing the last of the beer bottle inside her. It slid back out a little, and she arched off the floor as she shoved it back in with both hands between her thighs. Tomik leaned down just enough to brush his fingers over her knee and she shuddered and came, breathing hard but still silent.

Silent because he'd told her to shut up.

I felt the tears and drool on my cheeks cooling, and some part of me was horrified and so, so angry—but I couldn't reach it. As hard as I tried, I

couldn't find that version of me that wanted to shove him away, to scream at him, to slap him until he stopped this.

All I could do was turn back towards his cock, still shining in the dim lights of the theatre, and reach for it. Desperate for more, for another soul-crushing wash of whatever he was doing to me. I was out of control and not myself. He caught my wrist just before my fingers wrapped around his shaft.

"Naughty little whore. Are you hungry, Hannah?" Tomik's voice slithered inside me, took hold of my spine and jerked my head up and down in a stiff nod. Like a puppet on strings. Lost. He chuckled darkly. "Well, then... you should eat."



TOMIK

For intermission I'd made Hannah lick the attendant's sloppy, stretched cunt. Partially to see if she'd cry while she did it, and partially just because I wanted to see her licking around the damn beer bottle. I'd made them both come, obliterated them with the pleasure I could summon with barely a thought, and now they were just sitting there. Waiting. Desperate, ashamed, and begging for more.

It was exactly how I liked collectables to be.

At least, when I couldn't have them screaming.

I didn't even know the other bitch's name, and I didn't care. I was watching Hannah because I needed to burn her out of me. I needed to be bored, and this damn play with all of the potential public attention was preventing me from doing the things that would make that happen. God damned Hannah Jones with her pretty blonde hair and her small-town naivety. It was too fucking tempting. Every curve on her damn body was tempting me, and I wrapped my hand around her throat just to see her tear-soaked eyes widen. "Did you like eating her out? Answer me."

I watched the tendril of the command part her lips by force, and then her busy little tongue flicked over her cunt-juice-shiny bottom lip. "No," she whispered.

"But you did like it," I replied, pushing the thought inside her in the same way I wanted to shove my cock into her ass just to make her scream.

Hannah nodded like a good little collectable. “I liked it,” she squeaked past my ever-tightening hold on her throat.

“That’s right, you did.” I glanced at the other bitch and saw that the beer bottle was sliding back out of her as she braced her grubby hands on the floor behind her. “Put it back in.”

The girl cried, but she did it. I could have screwed with her mind again if I wanted to, made her nothing more than a little zombie-robot-girl for our visual entertainment... but I liked the way she kept crying. I liked the way the panic had her hands shaking as she worked that whole damn beer bottle in and out of her cunt.

“Tomik,” Hannah whispered, and I grabbed hold of her mind.

The way she said my name put my fucking teeth on edge. I dug my fingers into her throat, made her be quiet, because I didn’t want to remember the way she used to talk to me. I wasn’t that boy anymore. I hadn’t been that quiet loser fuck for a long time, and she needed to recognize it. She needed to stop talking to me like I was the same Tomik from Smalltown, Bumfuck, Illinois. If I whipped her bloody after this fucking play was done she’d stop looking at me like *that*.

Like I was someone good.

Goddammit.

I only brought her to this stupid play because I wanted to see how she’d react. Would she remember me watching her in tenth grade? All the way at the back because I didn’t want anyone to notice how my fist balled up as Edwin Hedgley kissed her? That douchebag with the douchebag name like something from out of *Wuthering Heights*. It wasn’t this play, it was a different one, but the asshat had still kissed her, and I’d wanted her so suddenly, so viciously, that I’d felt sick from it.

Probably just the first hint of the mesmer in me. That urge to possess.

Part of me could probably sense she was collectable, and I’d wanted to make her mine. To take her away from him and kiss her in front of everyone so they’d all know. But... I was never the guy at center stage. I was always at the back of the class, back of the theatre, back of everyone’s minds. The afterthought to everyone in the world except Hannah. And I didn’t have to be in some bullshit high school play to get her.

That night it had just taken one arm around her, one lean in, and she’d kissed me without a single command. Our only kiss.

Back then she had felt like destiny, like it was the first day of the rest of my life.

Now I knew that destiny was a load of shit. If I wanted something, I didn't wait for the universe to hand it to me, I walked out and took it and made them forget they ever had it in the first place. Or I made them grovel and beg me to take it.

Both could be fun in their own way.

Now, if I wanted Hannah to kiss me, all I had to do was nudge her mind and it was mine to have. Her whole body was mine to do whatever I wanted, and I didn't want a fucking kiss. I wanted to feel her cunt gripping me as I left bite marks on her back.

The lights in the theatre pulsed, and then started to dim. Intermission over, which meant it was time for act two of our little game and my cock was hard and ready for it.

Releasing Hannah's throat, I smeared the mess on her chin over her face and then gestured at the other bitch. "Get on your hands and knees, facing our little slut friend."

Another set of tears tracked down Hannah's cheeks, and it made me smile because she was fighting the command. Her muscles twitched, jerked, and I trailed my gaze past the swell of her breasts, down her stiff body, to find her nails biting into her thighs. *There you are.* My little Hannah wasn't a zombie-robot-girl. No, she was going to fight this.

She hated it. Probably hated me. *Good.*

If she hated me then it would be that much easier to burn her out of my system and leave her naked and bloody in an alley somewhere so I could move on to other collectables. Women that didn't remind of when I was weak and invisible.

"Hands and knees," I repeated, pushing just hard enough to get her in motion, but I felt the resistance. I felt how much she didn't want to do it, and it just made my cock that much harder. "That's better."

I grabbed her hair and yanked her head up, listening to the little whine escaping past her lips as I watched the audience over the edge of the balcony wall. The last of them taking their seats as the curtains opened again with a *swoosh* of fabric.

"Go ahead. Say my name again," I cooed.

"Tomik," she choked out, and I smiled at the way her voice cracked. *Much better.* That didn't sound like the old Hannah. That sounded like the

Hannah covered in the other bitch's juices, the Hannah who had swallowed my cock with tears on her cheeks and then tried to come back for more.

"Good. Now shut up and don't attract attention." Enough waiting. I wanted to feel her cunt wrapped around me again. I dropped her head and moved behind her in the dark, shoving her dress up above her hips. The whore on the floor was still fucking herself with that damn bottle, and I knew she'd feel it for days, but she'd have no idea why her cunt felt stretched and bruised. I'd erase it all and let some other mesmer find her. I had to get Hannah out of my system before I collected another toy.

A quiet sound came out of Hannah as I stroked my cock through the sloppy mess between her thighs. She'd come so many times as I played with her, I'd made her come and come, made her beg until her body was wrung out, limp, until she could barely breathe, let alone talk or stand.

The last one she'd lain on the floor in her own mess, shaking, sobbing so quietly.

God, that one had possibly owned the night.

I made her come because I wanted to see it properly, not while in the middle of my own climax, but now it was my turn.

"Put your face on the floor and spread your ass cheeks."

Her body quivered, but she obeyed. She angled forward until the side of her face was on the thin carpet, shaking fingers digging into her ass to pry her round cheeks apart. There was the little pucker of her asshole, and I dragged my cock over it just to feel her tense before I prodded at her wet little entrance hole. Made her think I might ream her there, but not yet.

I was saving that for a time when she could scream for me.

I'd made her shave herself smooth, so every glistening fold was visible as I lined up and shoved in, *hard*.

Her face slid on the carpet, and I chuckled as I slammed in again, not giving her a single ounce of pleasure. Not yet. I wanted *Hannah* to feel me take her, to know that *this* was who I was now. Not her Tomik. Not that boy who'd made out with her in the bed of a pickup truck after opening night of her stupid play.

Fuck, her cunt felt good though. Tight and slick and warm, her muscles gripping my cock, providing just enough resistance for me to feel that domination I craved. Burying my dick to the hilt, I grabbed the little tab on the zipper of her dress and ripped it down. It hung up, and so I just grabbed the two sides and yanked.

The metal broke apart, flimsy under my strength.

Just another gift of this mesmer thing.

I held her still, forced her to not move, to keep those fingers holding her ass, and to stay quiet as I bit down on the thin skin over her ribs.

Every muscle tensed, her pussy clenching me tight as a fist, but her hands didn't move. *Couldn't* move. I released and bit down again an inch or two away just to feel it again. Biting harder—I knew from experience I could draw blood with a bite. I could picture the smear of red across her pale back, imagine it bleeding through the back of her ruined dress as I walked her out of here past all the people dressed in their fancy clothes.

But someone might stop us... and not everyone was collectable. More importantly, I had plans for my little Hannah and didn't want to deal with the delays.

That was the only thing that got me to lift my teeth from her skin, tracing the indentions I left behind with my tongue.

Shoving her hands aside, I grabbed onto her hips and drove my cock in deep. Her cheek rubbed against the floor, arms limp at her sides, but I didn't care. She was just another piece of prey, another collectable, and soon she'd be as used up and boring as all the rest had become.

Until then, I might as well feel her writhing and needy.

I turned on the pleasure with the ease of a faucet, felt her pussy tighten down, her hips twitch, and I smiled like the feral monster I was. "That's right, Hannah. Fuck yourself on my cock."

Elbows braced at her sides, forehead on the floor, she obeyed instantly. Bouncing herself on my cock, wet sounds filling the silence from my two little mute whores as they filled their holes. I felt the pleasure too, enjoyed it as it poured through my veins alongside the hunger of the mesmer side of me. The one that wanted to hear her screaming in pain, moaning as she bled.

Later, I promised myself.

I took back control, gifting her an orgasm with the next thrust, riding the rhythmic pulses of her cunt as I watched the bitch on the floor in front of us. Make-up ruined, nose red, eyes bloodshot with raccoon smears of mascara around her eyes. She looked exhausted, her fingers almost losing hold of the bottle on a few thrusts. She'd look even better covered in come. Maybe I'd tip off the twins about her, have them set her up for a photoshoot.

I slammed into Hannah, dug my fingers into the swell of her hips hard enough to bruise, and then forced another orgasm on her as my balls tightened and fire shot down my spine. I came hard and the world vanished for a cataclysmic few seconds as I filled Hannah with every pulse.

Laughing quietly as I came down from the high, I squeezed her ass, ground my hips against her, round and round—like I could bore a deeper hole. I reveled in the way her muscles shook.

“Oh, I’m not close to done with you tonight, girl.”

She twitched but couldn’t do anything else as I slid out of her and moved back into the seat.

“Clean me off.” I didn’t help her as she pushed herself up, turning to part her pretty pink lips and seal them around my sensitive cock. The hum of a moan buzzed its way up my shaft, and I groaned as I pulled her down. “Taste good?”

Hannah couldn’t answer, and I didn’t give a fuck. She’d reached out to me, begged me to come back to her—and here I was. Not a knight in shining armor, but a beast with sharp teeth that only wanted to taste her blood.

She sucked too hard and I knocked her back, pushing her down with my shoe planted just below her breasts. One of them had spilled out of the dress already, the taut rosy nipple pointed at the ceiling, and I toed the other side of the dress aside so I could see them both. *So pretty.*

Snapping my fingers, I pointed at the bitch on the floor. “Take out the bottle and come lick her clean. Tits first for fun, then down to cunt. Get it all.”

A soft squeak left the attendant as she eased the beer bottle out, and I almost laughed when she took the time to set it back on the tray. All sticky and covered in her dripping juices. Not a single person who passed her with that shit wouldn’t recognize *that* scent.

She crawled forward, and now that I’d finally gotten off... I decided to make them both enjoy it. Just a brush of my fingers and they were both squirming, the attendant’s ankles crossed as she squeezed her thighs together and started licking every drop of my jizz out of Hannah.

In perfect contrast to the melodrama of Hamlet, Hannah sprawled obscenely. Her belly undulated as she humped the girl’s face, with that tongue dabbing at her like she was a fresh lollipop.

I rocked my boot on the girl's back, leaving grit and scratches, then poked Hannah's leg.

"Enjoy it while you can. I've got plans for you." Another nudge of pleasure had her eyes rolling back in her head, and I knew it was all me. The kitten-like licks of the whore on the floor weren't doing jack shit for Hannah.

Grabbing the back of the girl's head, I shoved her face into Hannah's cunt. "I said lick her clean. Suck out every fucking drop I left inside her."

The messy slurping that started could probably be heard over the actors on the stage, but I was too tense to care anymore. I hadn't even paid attention to the play, but I tuned back in to see some girl dead on stage. *Fitting.*

Mesmers followed a pretty simple motto with collectables. Use them, then dispose or kill. Erase them and send them back out or tell them to go kill themselves. They could never talk about it, wouldn't even be able to point at you in a line-up if they somehow managed to get that far. They were nothing more than prey. All of them.

Including Hannah.

I watched them until my patience frayed to nothing, and then I kicked the attendant away as I put my cock back in my pants and zipped them up. "Look at me, slut."

She obeyed, because, of course she did. A good little zombie-robot-girl.

My lips twitched. Okay, good *sometimes*. The way she'd resisted for a while? Fucking amazing. I inhaled, exhaled, feeling the drag in my lungs. A good night, yes, but there was more time. Always more.

"You're going to put your clothes back on, pick up your tray, and go straight to the bathroom to clean yourself up. Then go home. You won't remember me, or Hannah. You won't remember anything about tonight except that the play was boring as fuck. Say 'yes, sir,' bitch."

"Yes, sir," the girl whispered, another set of tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Go." I waved her off, and she scrambled for her clothes. Pulling them on fast enough that I couldn't help but watch her scramble. When she picked up the tray, the filthy bottle fell into the glasses, but she steadied them as she climbed the steps and raced out.

"Want to say something, Hannah?" I turned my attention back to her. She'd crossed her arms over her chest, her hair was a wrecked golden halo

around her head, and I couldn't help but smile. "No? Your turn. Put yourself together."

Hannah tugged the straps of her dress back into place, twisting to grab at the mangled zipper.

"Oh, that won't work. I'll hold the dress together as we leave." Standing, I beckoned her over, and she stood, wiping at her mouth where her drool and the other girl's juices had already somewhat dried. Smear on her face, it made her look like any other collectable.

I narrowed my eyes.

Just get her out of your system.

Grabbing the two halves of the back of her dress, I pinched them together with my fingers and pinned them against the back of her neck as if I were just touching her affectionately.

"Leave the rest. I like the look of a girl who's been crying." *Especially when I caused it.* "Let's go. I've got something much better for you tonight."

While exiting through the crowded foyer, a tall, fair-haired guy in a suit with a pretentious man-bun stopped and checked out Hannah. From his amused leer when he saw my hand at her neck and how his gaze crawled over her body, I was sure he thought her recently fucked.

This close the smell of come and the ripped threads on her zipper were obvious, but everyone else was looking away.

My mouth twitched up in a snarl, and I had an urge to tear out the guy's throat with my bare hands. One of those mesmer traits. Sometimes I felt like an alien predator in human skin.

I tightened my grip on her neck, glared at the asshole until he veered off. Her wince and frantic glance said she felt the dig of my fingers. *To hell with this guy.* I watched him until he vanished into the stampede of people aiming to get to their cars and home.

Don't mess with what's mine.

Maybe I should get that tattooed on her ass? I grimaced. I was going to dispose of her, soon as I was bored with her. None of this *mine* business.

If she could understand what was happening, I was sure Hannah would spit on me. It made me crave one thing over and above all else—seeing her turned into a fuck doll. No. Make that getting her to *agree* to it being done.

There was this weekly group I'd joined a couple of times, to see how the lesser mortals got their kicks. Only twenty or thirty people at most and

they kept a tight rein on who was allowed in. It had a mix of swingers and kinksters and a cute fetish entrance. The main arranger's sub was a collectable, though I'd never touched her.

Time to pull in one of those noncon favors. Tomorrow.

"Places to go, bad people to see," I said, low enough for tear-stained, disheveled Hannah to hear, but nobody else. Through the tips of my fingers, I felt her shiver.

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When we got back to my little slice of hell on earth, Hannah was still quiet, sniffing almost silently in the passenger seat as I grabbed my choice spot under the carport and turned off the car.

Hotel Acambo.

Back in the day, it had apparently been fancy as fuck... now it was just out of the way. Off the beaten path, not enough visitors to be worth the upkeep it would have required to be top-of-the-line real estate nowadays.

That would have made it easy enough to take. The fact that the cunt that had inherited it was collectable had just made it especially easy.

I think she shot herself after we finished with her. Shotgun. *So messy.*

Climbing out of the car, I only cast a single glance over my shoulder at Hannah. But she followed without any nudge from me, back inside, away from any prying eyes on the street, and part of me liked it. Liked watching the way the back of her dress gaped as I let her catch up and then pushed her ahead of me. The red of the carpet burn on her knees and elbows, the mess on her face, it all reminded me of exactly what she was: prey, collectable, nothing more.

I'd had plans when we were in the theatre. I'd wanted to make her bleed, to listen to her scream as I fucked her ass, but as soon as we were in my little suite of a living quarters... I just let her go.

Hands off the controls, little dolly stumbling on her next steps into the room, and then she went down. Onto her knees, hands in her sticky hair, and the first full-volume sob of the night broke past her lips.

I smiled. Couldn't help it as I unbuttoned my shirt and walked around her, watched her fall apart.

"Wha— Why? *Why?*" She was babbling, staring at the floor instead of me, but I let her continue as I made myself a drink and dropped into one of the wingback chairs in this place's version of a living room.

Hiccupping, more broken sobs, and I just tilted my head and took a sip as Hannah Jones fell apart on my floor.

"Tomik... Tomik, why? What happened— what happened to you?" Even through her little breakdown she was asking about me, saying my goddamned name.

Fuck.

I clenched my teeth, rage burrowing through me like a sugar-coated bullet that only made me think of my little bag of tricks in the closet. So many pretty little things I could apply to her *mostly* unmarked skin. I could flay the flesh from her bones, leave her a blood-soaked skeleton in the basement still babbling my name like it would make a fucking difference to her future.

"Oh God... oh God! That girl, *me*, you—" Her pretty blue eyes finally flicked up to mine, then away, back to the floor, the wall, the ceiling. "How, Tomik? *How?*"

"Some things just are," I replied, empty as I swallowed enough whiskey to make my throat burn and my stomach catch fire. I avoided the urge to cough, but only just barely.

Hannah whined, a pretty sound, and then she started rocking. Legs curled at her side, arms wrapped over her breasts to hold onto the dress, she wobbled back and forth. Babbled under her breath some litany of useless questions.

The mess of her was exhilarating.

I liked to let the collectables lose it sometimes. Let them go when I knew they couldn't run just to watch them panic.

It was more fun when the bros were around, when we were at one of our little gatherings and pulled back the mesmer shit completely. The girls always went wide-eyed with panic as they realized they were surrounded by men, by a group of men with hard dicks whom they'd often already fucked. Those memories could be like razorblades, already swallowed, too late to stop them from cutting as reality set in and... then they always cried.

Like this.

Like Hannah.

Hannah fucking Jones. My rage tweaked again, not appeased by the shallow, panicked breaths wheezing in and out of her lungs.

“Shut up,” I snapped, and she went silent instantly. Still crying just as hard, just without the accompaniment. Nothing more than that paper-like rasp of air in and out of her lungs, the soft cluck of her tongue, the guttural swallow as she stared at the floor. “Look at me.”

Blue eyes popped up to mine like I’d yanked her leash—*maybe later*.

“Stop crying,” I ordered, getting a handle on my own anger enough to sound calm, even though inside I was anything but.

It did help, though, when she sniffled once more and then went still. Almost serene on the surface, even though it was false.

Fuck.

I didn’t like this either. She was doe-eyed, like a deer staring down the rifle of the hunter and just waiting for the goddamn trigger pull.

If only it were that simple—even though it could be—but I didn’t want her to kill herself, not yet, not ever? Shit. I wasn’t bored yet, and I definitely didn’t want a blow-up doll.

“Never mind, you can do whatever,” I growled, and she made a small noise, but the tears were softer now. Quieter, like she was afraid I’d shut her up again. No questions now, just her pretty face tilting towards her lap until she was finally brave enough to break eye contact.

Testing her bounds. The limits I’d set... even though I’d removed them. She didn’t understand that though.

My sweet little Hannah. “How did no one else grab you first?” I whispered, half to myself and half to... the universe.

Her eyes came back to mine, anger pulsing behind the blue, and I bit down on my lip because I liked it too much. I could almost see myself shoving her to the floor, letting her fight as I pinned her, forced her legs wide, and took her without a single command. Just me on top of her, listening to her cry and scream... *fuck*, that got my dick hard again.

But some piece of me also recoiled.

Weird. I didn’t like feeling that. Some kind of, what, guilt? Was that guilt? Guilt for just *thinking* about forcing myself between her thighs when she could react, scream? Fuckity fuck fuck. It wasn’t any different than the play, and I hated that my brain reminded me of that. Just because I’d made her come like a good little whore didn’t mean she’d wanted it, wanted me.

And before? It had been the same. Pull the cord, listen to her moan, feel her cunt tighten down and her body quake.

“Why did you fucking call me?” I growled.



HANNAH

I tested my tongue, my lips, and found I could use them. Let a small sound escape my throat to see if my vocal cords would obey, but in the gray haze in my mind I couldn't remember calling him. Couldn't remember how I'd made it to the theatre, or this place that seemed to be his.

There was a guitar in the corner, behind where he was sitting, and a stack of comic books and graphic novels.

All things my Tomik would have had with him. But this man? This tattooed, violent, terrible man... he wasn't my Tomik.

“I didn't call you,” I whispered, prepared to have my vocal cords lock up again, a suffocating sensation—but it didn't come.

“You did, but it doesn't matter anyway.” He sighed hard. “Not anymore.”

Swallowing, I risked another glance at him. Those severe shaved stripes in his hair screamed dangerous. Like bright colors in the animal kingdom, they were a warning. Just like the tattoos, the sheer size of him... all of it said run.

And I could.

Right now, I could run.

If I just stood up, I could make it to the door, I could make it outside in this shredded dress. Could go out into whatever city this was, find a cop and — My thoughts cramped, bunched together like someone grabbed them in a fist and squeezed. It was so visceral that I whined out loud, covered my forehead with one hand as I braced the other on the floor.

But the dull headache was nothing compared to the horrible realization that I *couldn't* go to the police, because just thinking of describing this... this thing that Tomik was doing made my head pound and my heart race.

“What are you thinking about, Hannah?” he asked, but there was no command to follow it. No pulling of my invisible puppet strings. Still, I waited until his gaze met mine before I spoke.

“I was thinking about going to the police for help.”

Tomik laughed, low and dark, and then he tilted the glass of liquor like he was toasting me before he downed the last of it. “That’s funny.”

“This isn’t funny!” I shouted, and he laughed again. “Stop it, Tomik! This isn’t funny!”

“Oh, really? I think it’s hilarious.” He pushed himself out of the chair, wandering to the liquor stand that was also part of the drawers for clothes, and the television support, and the bookshelves leading up behind it. One endless amalgamation of furniture. “Go ahead, Hannah. Think of yourself in front of a police officer, think of him asking you why you look like a cheap hooker after a bad John. What would you say to him?”

His words sank in, and the headache came back. A dull throb that made me wince, grab onto my face and press against my forehead, my eyes, trying to make the odd, vise-like grip inside my skull let go.

“Nothing,” I whispered, and tears burned at my eyes as I pressed my hands into the thin, cheap carpet.

“That’s right.” The *glug-glug* of alcohol pouring out of a bottle made it into my ears, along with another soft laugh from Tomik. Then I saw his hand, and a glass, out of the corner of my eye. “Take this,” he commanded, and my arm lifted automatically.

Fingers wrapped around the glass, the lukewarm liquor inside it, and then he was back in his seat. A throne for the man he was now, who was not the boy I’d thought would be my forever. That person was gone, he’d proven that to me at the theatre, but I didn’t want to believe it. Tears swelled in my eyes again as I remembered *my* Tomik. The boy who’d almost kissed me a dozen times before Edwin whatever-his-last-name-was had kissed me on stage. That had finally made him take action, after all the times I’d tried to hint that I wanted him to, after all the hugs that had lasted just a moment too long, the times I’d grabbed his hand and squeezed... he’d finally kissed me. Made out with me under the stars like some storybook romance.

But this Tomik? This place? This was more like Grimm’s Fairytales.

“You can have a drink, Hannah. It might help.”

Just because he’d suggested it, I set the glass by my knee. I wanted a choice, I wanted to *make* a damn choice, and if this was all he was going to allow me then I was going to choose not to drink the alcohol... even though I wanted to drown in it. Erase all the heartache buzzing behind my ribs.

“Hannah—” His voice held that edge, that promise of a command I wouldn’t be able to ignore, so I spoke first.

“How can you do this?” I asked, forcing myself to look at him, to not feel the ineffable tug I’d always felt looking into his eyes.

“I don’t think anyone quite knows how, Hannah... it just is.” Tomik took a drink, pulling air in through his teeth as he rested the glass on the arm of the chair. A half-smile tweaked the corner of his mouth as he shook his head. “I’m not him, Hannah. Stop looking at me like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like *that*,” he snapped, leaning forward to point at me. “Exactly like that. Like you know me, like you still like me. I know you remember what just happened at the fucking play, Hannah, so don’t look at me like that.”

I swallowed down the bile in my throat, reaching for the alcohol to wash the bitter burn from the back of my tongue. I remembered, but I didn’t want to. I wanted it to wipe away like whatever else was missing from that strange dark hole in the middle of my brain. Something moved near that empty space, that hollow gap in my memories, my thoughts. A gray haze that had the silhouette of a girl.

I drank the liquor just to stop it all. Almost emptied the fucking glass before Tomik was able to shout, “Stop!”

My lips sealed tight, but the glass was still tilted and the last few mouthfuls poured over my mouth and down my front. Not like I cared; this dress was filthy anyway. It needed to be burned. I needed a shower so hot it would take a layer of skin with it.

“Shit, Hannah...” He huffed, climbing off his chair and onto his knees in front of me. Still taller, still so big and masculine and dangerous as he plucked the glass from my frozen fingers and then wiped his hand over my chin. “You can move.”

Free puppet again. *Pinocchio ain’t got nothing on me.*

I laughed bitterly, and Tomik gave me a side-glance that looked almost as unnerved as I felt on the inside.

“I don’t want you to be broken, Hannah.”

“Yeah?” I asked, unable to stop the slightly insane laugh from burbling up my throat again.

“No, I just want to stop—” He growled and slammed the glass onto the coffee table. “I want to be bored with you.”

For one sentence he sounded like the old Tomik, *my* Tomik, and it ended my stupid urge to laugh. Assaulted by the memories of the boy I'd grown up with—the quiet boy, the sweet boy, the funny, clever, musician boy who had stolen my heart—I reached forward and touched his cheek. Barely my fingertips, but he gasped like I'd burned him. "I never stopped thinking about you, Tomik."

"You should have," he grumbled, swiping my hand away from him as he retreated to his chair to swallow another mouthful of the cheap liquor.

"But I didn't," I continued, feeling brave as he let me move, think, feel, speak. "You don't have to be this person, Tomik. No matter what's happened, no matter what you've done, you—"

"Stop." A single finger raised, a softly spoken word, and once again I was locked. His eyes trailed over me, top to bottom, and then he sighed. Leaning forward, he met my eyes, gaze flicking back and forth. "There's no saving me, Hannah. No spell to be broken here, no spell you could cast over me that would fix me. The Tomik you knew is gone. Dead. Buried along with a lot of other collectables. Women just like you."

His words settled inside me like a rock, like a pair of cement shoes attached to my feet just before he dropped me into the water. I couldn't breathe right, couldn't breathe at all, and somewhere in the hazy chaos of my head I saw someone, something, gray and hazy shaking its head. *Tsking* me, warning me away, warning me back. But I couldn't talk anyway, even though the words were right there, just behind my teeth.

You wouldn't do that to me. Not me.

"Go to sleep, Hannah. Tomorrow is going to be a busy day." Tomik leaned back in the chair as my eyes drooped, my body suddenly exhausted and heavy. "I know how to fix this."

Frank happily let his hill-perched house get used for these parties. The dotted lights of the city were far below. You'd need a good telescope to see up here to the entrance walkway. Or a drone.

Sex and kink were the owner's main hobbies since he retired at thirty-two, or so I'd been told by a giggling female guest. Blonde bun, nice ass, with pretty eyebrows like hawks on the wing. She'd watched me install Hannah, grinning hugely and with her eyebrows waggling. Bi was my guess. Not a collectable, so I let her be.

Hannah, covered from head to her little toes in a black latex bodysuit, waited beside the Perspex door.

She had cute latex kitty ears even. Apart from a mouth hole, the catsuit covered her whole body, and that bored me. Though the latex vagina and ass inserts had been interesting to wriggle inside a squirming girl. I'd already cut away the latex in big circles so her face and tits were visible.

"You like being able to see?" I'd asked as my knife severed the last strip of latex under her chin. She'd nodded, her breath shaky—though that might've been the near miss when I went past the eyebrow area.

I think she did like being able to see.

I installed her in the door, strapped her in at wrists and ankles, then closed and latched together the two halves.

Hannah door was a pretend entrance, set up in front of the real door opening, just for the party. The two layers of see-through Perspex could be split apart. Whoever volunteered to stand inside became the filling in the middle. Good solid steel hinges, steel frame, some convenient holes at

breast and butt, as well as dick or pussy level—then get someone to stand inside, bind them or leave them to writhe in place, lock the Perspex together and voila, you have a personalized door perfect for humiliating fun.

From my leather briefcase, I took out red and black lipsticks.

“I’m going to write some dirty words on you unless you can get out of there by yourself before I’m done. *Fuck me hard*—that sort of thing.” Half-smiling, with the red lipstick poised and a hand wrapped around her left tit, I watched her tug and twist. I knew she couldn’t get loose, it just satisfied me immensely to watch her try.

“What do you think? Whore? Slut? Fuck-doll?” I asked, and she choked. “Shhh. Don’t speak. You’ll mess up the letters.”

I drew targets on her tits and both ass cheeks and filled in the space between the circles with those words I’d threatened. Then I applied a heap of red to her mouth and cheeks until she was a cross between a clown and a hooker with no taste. Last of all, I drew two arrows pointing at her mouth.

“Done.” I leaned down and tongued her left tit, sucked, and she gasped then squirmed like a sex-bot against the transparent door. Her tits bulged through the holes most satisfactorily. I slapped one, found my palm smeared with red and wiped it on my coat.

“No more Hannah, just kitty-fuck-doll. Hear me?” No answer, but then I’d put my hand on her below and was stroking over her clit. “Give the lady a show. Let her see you come.”

A few couples went by, stared, smiled, then passed on into the house but my bi lady seemed transfixed by Hannah as her moans grew louder, more desperate. Her eyes rolled up into her skull, her legs strived to spread, fingers scrabbling. The Perspex let us see every twitch and undulation. And all the while I merely thumbed her clit and slip-slid a forefinger along her swollen cunt. Could’ve had her come in seconds but by the time she spasmed and went rigid, squashing herself onto the inside of the door, I could hear the squish of juices inside all that latex every time she squirmed.

It added that nice touch to her degradation.

I stepped away and beckoned to the woman. “Do what you want.”

“Thank you,” she said wryly, and one hawk-wing eyebrow lifted.

She obliged by being the first stranger to feel up Hannah, fingering her latex filled pussy before she shoved her fingers in Hannah’s mouth. Then she clopped inside the house in her tight feathery dress, on high-heeled red shoes that rivalled a stilt-walkers for height.

The breeze coming up the cliff had made Hannah's nipples crinkle into taut buttons. Her breathing slowly wound down.

Poor cold kitty. I twisted my mouth and pretended to read something on my cell phone.

Leaning against the stone wall to the side of the wide entrance let me see everybody as they arrived. Car doors slammed in the parking area below. Soon, shoes were crunching closer, their soles grinding onto the blown-in dirt on the set of wide steps leading up here.

A couple arrived, coats swaying, with kinky couture hinted at through undone buttons—lace, straps, and leather. Smiling their appreciation, they squeezed and slapped the protruding tits then hauled the door open—it swung silently, apart from Hannah's small whimper—and they walked into the hallway beyond. The guy gave her butt a final squeeze once he saw the other side of Hannah door. Further down, Frank beckoned them, with his enormous green strap-on wobbling a lewd welcome.

The door hadn't been empty the last two visits here either. Popular device.

Getting Hannah to volunteer had been easy. I'd told her she was a full, paid-up member of the kinkster's union then told her to forget who I was and to get in.

I figured I'd leave her up a while, and once she was inside the house, the suggestions I'd planted would give me the wild result I wanted—seeing her turned into the sluttiest fuck hole in history. I'd join in, stamp this as a day of infamy, and once she was nothing but a messy footnote, I could forget her.

Seeing her with a ton of others, for hours, would let me wipe her away like spooze on a window.

So, I waited. People went by, mostly amused by the door.

Only Hannah wasn't playing ball, had misread the notes. I had to reset her twice and now, make that three times. She kept fucking remembering me.

Forget me. This is how it is. I whispered instructions in her ear while guests wandered past.

I'd found my wall again and waited.

"Tomik?" Though quietly said, it was understandable.

Shit.

“Why am I here? Really?” Her eyes widened and she jerked, struggling to free herself.

She knew me in an instant in spite of my half-skull mask, my heavy coat and gloves. What’s a man have to do to be anonymous?

“Quiet.” I ripped myself off the wall like I was stuck to it, reverted to upright then stalked to her while shoving the cell phone in a pocket. Already I was scowling. I was pissed off to the max.

The briefcase. Sighing, I retrieved it from where’d I’d been standing.

Commanding was simple and what I did to all collectables. I reminded myself of this as I popped the sides of the Perspex then undid the straps holding her wrists. I knelt to free her ankles.

Easy to command.

I wanted her to just do *more* than that... to be a fuck-doll with a craving for cock and whatever else she was offered—the belt, the flogger, a ten-inch strap-on, a fist... stuff.

I could see the problem, of course. We mesmers never bothered with this sort of back-story shit. *Do this, do that* was the norm. Then they obeyed.

With Hannah I wanted to see her roll in it because it was *her*. Her mindset, her filthy need.

“Come. Kneel! On hands and fucking knees.” The gravel-strewn path was going to hurt those knees. Good. I was snapping this out louder than I needed to. She dropped to her knees, looking up at me with a wobbly mouth.

“Tomik? Why? I don’t—”

“Shut up.” I pinched my nose, hard, to slow myself, then went to the briefcase again. I selected the plain steel collar and the chain-link leash. Had a load of goodies in this thing. I’d planned to use things on her while others did whatever they wanted to. She was under instructions to say she agreed to anything anyone asked her.

Easy.

But... fuck no. Hannah was making this an unhappy night so far.

Fixable. I would get my fun one way or the other.

“Hold up your neck. Behave for me. You know you want this, bitch.” I lowered my voice. “You’re my slut, yes? Say yes.” A mesmer command.

Hannah went into pause-mode for a second. She blinked, licked her tongue languidly over her lip, and said, “Yes. I am,” with complete and utter

certainty.

“That’s my girl. Let’s go meet people.” I clicked my tongue, flicked the leash, then urged her into the house with a nudge of my boot on her butt. “Good kitty. No talking unless I say to.”

Her pale ass with the red target circles and black writing swayed as she crawled at my side, perfectly framed by the holes I’d cut in the latex, same as those tits. If I made her lower herself, her nipples would scrape on the floor. My hard-on agreed this was a good idea.

Once we were in sight of others. Yes.

I’d had enough of trying to do a personality and history implant, for this one night anyway. I needed to nuance this somehow. *Inside every female is a slut*. It was a mesmer brotherhood mantra. I just needed more practice at tweaking her memories.

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“Halt.” Tomik’s word stopped me dead when we reached the entry to a large living room. The temperature wafting out was far warmer than outside.

I flexed my fingers where they met the floor, frowning. My palms felt specks of grit; my body felt the pressure of the eyes turned upon us.

The long sleeves of this black catsuit were ever in my peripheral view. What I wore was yet another weird element in this nightmarish event. My ass was exposed, my breasts—if I looked down, I could see the red writing he’d drawn on me.

Though my heart kept skittering along I was so lost.

What... am... I doing here?

I nipped my lip in my teeth and hung on, anchoring myself with that small pain.

He squashed my front flat with his boot on my back, ignoring my shocked gasp. Cheek to the floor, shoes before my eyes, and when I blinked, my eyelashes caught on the rug. A smear of red lipstick near my eye made me think ridiculously of the cleaning bill the owners would suffer.

People were talking. I flicked my gaze up to their faces then down to the floor again. Everyone was watching.

I should be peeing myself from fright.

The writing on me, this mutilated catsuit, being made to crawl while he held my leash—somewhere inside a part of me was screaming.

Yet...

I’m into this—into kink. Those words were etched into my thoughts.

Then why did this scare me so much? I wanted to hide from the stares. Goose bumps rose on my breasts and elsewhere despite the heat from being inside the suit. I was sure I'd never before been to a party with so much bare flesh, leather, and bondage. Against the far wall, past the milling legs and the raucous conversations, someone was getting tied up with rope. To the right of that a woman was possibly being spit-roasted by a man and another woman, judging by the legs and bodies I glimpsed, and by the grunts and cries that carried across the room. She was strapped to a bench, and her groans said she liked it.

A blush roared in. I should not be here.

Tomik had some terrible plan. I knew it down to my bones.

"Keep crawling." The leash in his hand twitched and snaked. "Waggle that ass so people want to get inside it. My kitty doll is available for play!" He raised his voice. "Who wants a piece of her latex cunt and ass?"

Though mortified, I jerked into motion, my palms and knees padding and tapping on the polished timber floor.

"Latex?" someone enquired. "I'm in. Hah!" The man followed, drink in hand. Another two crowded us as Tomik led the way up a flight of stairs.

I padded onward, upward, wanting to stand and run, wanting to say *hell no*, except the words would not form in my throat.

Upstairs were more padded benches and a bed with chains in a large gray-blue room with a wall of glass looking into the night sky. A light from a plane blinked as it cruised by. Silent. Out there was normal. My chest ached with the yearning to leave.

Maybe I could fly. Get out there and jump... yeah, no, not me. That was suicide.

I just needed to understand why I was here. I looked at Tomik, hoping for something, but got nothing.

We'd stopped at a bench. He patted it with his gloved hand and smiled as I climbed up. On hands and knees still, I opened my mouth as if to talk. I could not, still.

Perplexed, I swallowed. Where were my words?

The followers he'd gathered formed a circle around us, behind me. I dared to glance and counted five, all men, none of them people I wanted to remember.

Though I ducked my head one asked somewhat kindly, with his hand on my hip, caressing, "Is this what you want, girl? You need to be sure."

Say no.

At a rustle of fabric, I looked up to see Tomik unbutton and shrug off his long coat, revealing a plain black T-shirt and jeans, tattooed arms, nasty heavy boots with silver skulls, and a snake tattoo sneaking onto his neck.

I drank in the sight as if he were some perfect specimen of a boyfriend and not a... whatever. What was he? He'd somehow made me do this. This was his doing. My fingers clawed into the padding of the bench, and I frowned, feeling the vile lipstick on my face move as my skin shifted.

"I..." My reply slipped out. "Yes." Then I nodded. Whatever hope had risen now sank, irredeemable, lost to the depths.

"Good answer, Kitty." Muscles shifted under that stretched shirt when he tossed aside the coat. He let it fall to the floor as if it weren't actually worth more than some people's cars, then pulled off the half-skull mask and dropped it.

I wasn't Kitty. I was Hannah. I shook my head, trying to inject sorrow and panic into my expression.

"What is it, Kitty-fuck-doll?" He stripped off his T-shirt and there was a body I'd not seen in years... My thoughts ran down, ticking over. I *had* seen those tattoos before, only yesterday, hadn't I?

A gray figure lurking at the back of my mind sniggered and nodded. *There you go*, she mouthed. *You know. You know. You can remember.*

And I saw her mouth move and I knew her words, but her existence was unfathomable. Was there more of her than a mouth? I saw Tomik too, both then and here and then again. My vision blurred. I shivered, my mouth stuck open.

"Hey!" Tomik slapped my face and leaned in until we were face-to-face, whispering as if we had some secret conference to do. "Be awake. Be you. What's the point of having what you want to happen if you zone out?"

Want? Me want this? He'd asked a question though. I could talk.

I whispered back.

"I don't remember ever doing this. I don't want—"

"You do. You remember, Hannah." Such smooth sly words. "This is what you always craved. Hmmm?" He ground his forehead on mine. "Being a little latex fuck doll, being filled with strangers' come, being made to submit. You want this. You fucking crave it. Nod."

I... nodded.

“Good girl.” He smiled then and kissed me lightly on the lips, his tongue wandering in and meeting my teeth then my tongue, playing with me. A wash of lust filled my mind to brimming, and I moaned into his mouth, felt the vibration echo. I gave in. To his sheer presence before me. It made my clit pop and my breasts swell, my temples throb. *Unrequited lust. Lust lust. The heavens decreed this union. Romeo oh Romeo.* Lines from plays written or imagined ran amok.

I panted, wanting more, and so overcome my eyes stopped seeing.

“Fuck. Fuck.” I even heard myself whimper.

I felt him pull away a distance, and I blindly tried to chase his mouth, which made him chuckle.

Trembling, blinking, I focused, ready to squirm onto anyone’s cock, just like he’d said I would.

Tomik lifted his head. “She’s latex allll the way inside too. Do what you want in there.” Again, he spoke to me. “I am going to watch while they take turns fucking your ass and cunt. Yeah?” Someone laughed and I heard zips being undone, belts being unbuckled. “And I guess I will fuck your mouth and well...” He straightened and put his hand to my chin, stroking his thumb over the corner of my mouth. So gentle and it reminded me of how he once was. “Whatever other shit I make up on the spot. Say thank you.”

“Thank you,” I answered, tears filling my eyes until they began to spill. He sneaked his thumb between my teeth, wedging my mouth open.

Casually he unzipped and took out his cock. I stared, knowing what was about to happen.

Oh yes. Oh yes.

To get fucked in public by these others because Tomik told them to, to be told I loved it, was so wrong and so awesome it messed me up, my thoughts confetti thrown on the wind.

Wedding simile? You’re a journalist. Pick a better simile to be gangbang fucked by.

Was this me?

Couldn’t be, the wind threw back at me, confetti sticking to my eyeballs.

Someone stuck fingers in me back there, and I choked a little at the shock. Plunging them in so heartily I knew they’d used lube, then more were shoved, rammed, both places, and the world went on pause while I registered what they did to me. Me. It felt so damn good.

I stuck my ass up, clutched the bench, lowered my breasts to the padding, cough-whimpering at the rougher thrusts, the coolness sticking to my skin.

No, mouthed gray girl, heaving herself from some place inside my head, emerging, stretching.

Not real. She's not real.

I groaned as they toyed with me, abused me, used me. The squelching of latex amplified, made lewd by lube.

"Fuck!" I shout-whispered.

"Oh, she does like it." Some baritone sexy guy laughed at my predicament.

Gray girl fetched a folded chair from somewhere, sat down and crossed one ankle over the knee of the other. She gave me a wink and a thumbs up, somehow, despite her blurred face. I had the impression she liked my similes, or maybe liked that I remembered my job.

This is a nightmare and not real.

"She is fucking loving this. Right, Hannah?" Tomik clamped a hand on the top of my head.

A liquid *squish* and a murmured, *I'm going first, before you mess her up*, made me shudder in anticipation.

"Yes," I croaked, groaning already. Deep inside I was saying *no* a hundred, hundred times.

Gray girl grinned. I gathered she knew I was fucked, was about to be fucked. Today was fucked. The world was fucked.

Could I keep calling her gray girl, this blurred figment?

I dub thee Greta.

She raspberried silently. I ignored her. Latex meant they couldn't hurt me. Right? Please be right.

And it isn't real anyway. *This cannot be real. This is not me.*

"Just a taste to get me booted up to the right level." Tomik grinned and stuck his cock to my mouth, the pressure squashed the head into my lips and teeth. "Open."

My mind disintegrated into mush as someone pulled apart my ass cheeks and something new and large shoved into my pussy, slapping me forward onto Tomik. His cock shunted over my tongue, making me splutter and try to breathe around it.

Then he stilled despite the movement behind me, his body rigid.

Hands grabbed at my hips, pulling me onto whoever owned the cock that was inside me.

I shut my eyes, opened my mouth wider and someone ran a finger up my latex-covered spine. It felt like acid on skin, burning in, burning deep.

My spine arched, following that racing hot finger with painful frissons curling away into flesh, searing me. Bliss and burn. An orgasm blew me apart. Flesh, blood, and whimpering, I arched deeper, whining.

Those possessive hands tightened on my head and jaw. He stilled. Cock half in my mouth, half-out, with my spit wetting my chin. My breathing rasped in my ears. I heard him curse over the rubbery wet noises from the others, then a “Fuck this.”

He withdrew from my mouth and wrenched me forward, had to catch me so I didn’t fall over the front edge of the bench. I clutched at his pants with both hands.

“That’s enough. Everyone get out. No more fucking. Go find someone else.”

The voices of the other men rose in annoyance, almost anger, but no one asked for my opinion, and Tomik’s hands stayed clamped about my face and neck until they left.

The room was quiet.

He went to the side, scooped me up in both arms, as if I were a piece of luggage, and headed for the glass wall. A part of it opened, letting in a solid breeze that had me shivering in seconds, and letting us out.

A set of lounging chairs was here. Moon and stars too. The sounds of the party were muted, The crickets were loud.

The door shut, and Tomik set my feet to the tiled floor.

“On your knees,” he growled, in nasty mode. “What the fuck? You wrecked that.”

I did?

On knees, with head crooked back, I watched him run both hands into the sides of his hair then stomp closer. He’d asked me a question.

“I did nothing?”

“Fuck you, kitty fucking girl.” His hand swiped over my head, and the cat ears on the suit fluttered as he hit them.

He’s right, gray girl mimed with her mouth. You did something. We need to do it again.

We? What?

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I'd been set to watch them screw her for hours, or whoever I could get, and then *pow* watching some other dick get his dick in her just was not fun.

She screwed with me. Just by being.

I grabbed those stupid cat ears and ripped them off along with the top of the suit's head, threw it past the edge of the balcony where the wind whisked them away. It was so breezy up here even I was feeling the cold. I'd left my coat and T-shirt inside, unhinged by my chickenshit aborting of the gang-bang.

Gang bang kitty fuck. It had a ring to it even.

"We could've made a porno." I sneered at her red lipstick-smeared face, then... then I sighed. "Come here."

I needed to think.

Why couldn't I do this?

With thumbs I applied myself to wiping off the lipstick. Or at the least rearranging it. Harder swipes then softer. The stuff was stubborn. She beguiled me just by touching her. Her tits, I glanced down, those could stay lipstickked. My hard-on resurrected at the sight of those plump melons with their decorations.

I hadn't tucked my cock away, so it insisted on poking at her face. Nice. I grinned. I'd stick it in her once I figured myself out.

"You messed with me, Hannah. Just because you're fucking you. Seems I can't stand watching you get screwed by random assholes. What am I going to do?"

She gawped up at me as I thumbed at the red.

Had I told her to be dumb?

“Talk. Speak. Be you.” What did I mean by that? Her expression was puzzled. The idea of letting her loose again was interesting. I undid my belt, unthreaded it from the loops, and walked behind her. “Hands at your back, Kitty.”

When her hands met each other, I stooped and wrapped the belt around her, tying it so her wrists were winched together tightly. If she screamed, I could handle it. There was a certain thrill in letting her be *herself* but tied up so she could do little about it.

A genuine girl.

With a jolt, I realized I’d never had one quite like this.

I wanted Hannah struggles? I grabbed my dick and squeezed. The throb under my hand made me need a deep breath. *Jesus*.

Let her know what I did.

Fingertips trailing over her hair, I walked to her front.

“Be you, girl, before I took you, before you came begging. Remember you.” The rasp in my voice was obvious. Think I had a new craving. “You know I can control you like a puppet. Thoughts, actions, all of it.”

Well, there I’d done it. Didn’t matter as I could press delete in her head, after. Still. I hard-breathed for a few seconds. This was such a milestone. What mesmer ever explained what he did? The ultimate taunt for a collectable.

She swallowed and her mouth twitched. “You changed my memories.”

She’d made the jump to that fast.

“I did. You wanted help, and all I could think of at first was how much I hated you.” For existing. For begging. For making me recall how pure and nice and like an angel she’d been.

“That’s... that’s wrong!” She shook her head crazily. “We never hated each other. I think I even lo—”

“Stop!” I clenched my teeth. “Don’t say it. We never did.”

I had to destroy her to get her out of me. She’d sunk her claws deep when we were young. I had to tear them out.

“That’s how I saw you,” she whispered. “What happened to you?”

“You wouldn’t understand.” I thumbed away the tears she was shedding. “How could you? Life is for fucking and pain, and why would a collectable understand that?”

“A collectable?” Her mouth moved in the red-smeared landscape I’d created.

“Yes. When I say spread your legs, a collectable does as she’s told. Every single time. That is you.” I smiled cruelly.

“I’m...” Her question trailed off. “Wait. No. Life isn’t sex and pain. That’s a shitty assessment, Tomik.”

I flexed my fist. I wanted to hit her whenever she said my name.

“Life is beauty and moonlight, it’s family and friendship. It’s stars overhead, love, and...” Her voice softened. “And watching the embers from a fire drift into the sky while you hold the hand of your boyfriend.”

I stiffened. That was us, that night. Long time ago, a very long time.

“Open your slutty mouth.”

My clockwork collectable did so. Mouth a perfect O, her shoulders twisted, and she tried to rise from her knees.

“Hard to get up when your hands are tied, huh?”

I grinned at her consternation. Then I jammed my cock into her hole and began to face-fuck her properly, listening to her burbles as she inhaled past cock, her lips stretched to their limits. *Destroy. Get bored. Forget. Remember?* I just needed her around a little longer.

In the meantime, I’d play with how real I could be, how much of her brain I’d let loose. It definitely added spice.

“You can come now,” I rasped out.

Let the gargling commence. She gasped past my cock, spitting, chest heaving in that one last suck of air. Her body responded as it must, wrenching her spine into an arch, tightening all her muscles.

I even had to hold her head with both hands while I fucked it for the last few strokes. The feel of the come pulsing through my dick was sweeter than ever before. With my dick jammed in hard, I watched as she spun down from the orgasm. Then I freed her and stepped back. She swallowed some, spilled some—saliva or come, splattering it to the tiles. Head down, she recovered, gasping in the wet, jizz-flavored air.

I went to one knee and held up her head, almost gentle as I wiped at her mouth. Her bloodshot eyes searched mine, desperately, as if I had some answer for her.

“That was fun. You can forget again now, dear Hannah.”

She slumped a little, her muscles losing their tenseness. Zombie girl. Sadness crawled in. Hannah was gone again. I could bring her back,

though.

I stared at my fist in the dimness on the balcony. When she'd said *Tomik* I'd wanted to hit her. Why?

Why?

I think I had it—it was because she made me feel something.

The starkness of the sky versus the emotionally powerful visual of a shivering, curled-up girl in a torn kitty costume made my head stop trundling through the whys. I told her to stay then went inside and retrieved my briefcase of unused gear. Maybe I could do something after all. I sauntered out, left the case on a chair and took out the camera.

Sucking inspiration through my teeth, I eyed her then the pale night sky. The moon was finally making an appearance. The contrast of her skin against the shadows and the red and black of lipstick and tattered latex beckoned me. Pretty destruction. Chaos and nature.

I took a few shots of her on the floor, then set her up on the chair, with the lighting from inside and outside making her a study in contrasts. My camera was good in low light and I liked the random blurring. Who wanted some perfect shot when you could have this fucked-by-strangers-and-discarded crudity? It made her look thoroughly roughed up.

In the final shot of her crouched over the chair slats, the stars happened to shine in just the right manner around her. A halo of sorts.

Two smudged letters, *UT*, from the word slut still showed on her cheek. A flap of black latex peeled down her neck. Her perfectly formed breasts had swirls of blended black and red and no legible letters, but her nipples stuck out in silhouette. And the curve of her thighs shone in latex.

This stilled my heartbeat for a few seconds. I had to stare. Incandescent beauty. *Yeah. Twinkle, twinkle.*

I straightened from where I kneeled, slowly, admiring the shot as it showed at the back of the camera. She was right. The stars were worth having. Then I noticed a glimpse of shine from where she watched me with one eye, concealed behind a fall of hair.

She seemed too aware, as if she knew something I did not.

I woke and found crosshatched wire before my eyes. That woke me even more. There was a small padlock on the cage door in front of me. Scrambling upright, I brought my knees under me, my heart on fire with scary possibilities. Someone didn't want me to leave.

Beyond, the room looked dilapidated, as if this were a movie set for vampires with a languid and distant affair with real life—let the building rot, we have all the time in the world. Dusty furniture, crooked shutters, light that staggered in through the wreck of those shutters and a dirty window.

Where was I? A blanket and thin mattress lay under my legs. My thighs were bare beneath my hands and cool air was making my nipples rigid. I pinched my lips, realizing I wore no clothes.

Shivering, I felt a strange solidness settle. A sense of place. This was now. Real. Déjà vu had dropped in, uninvited. I *knew* where I was... sort of.

Impossible. I don't know here.

A tall, heavy-set man strolled in through an open doorway to the right, and I held my breath. Spiders skittered about in my stomach. Short sandy-colored hair and down his arms ran tattoos, snaking from under a cream T-shirt. Shorn furrows raked through his hair.

He exuded the surety of a man who had the world by its throat, a man who would calmly squeeze in his fingers and choke anyone in his way.

Had I been kidnapped? I shuffled back from the bars, hands cold from fear, wondering why I bothered. I was not invisible.

"Hello, Hannah. How will we start this time?"

Oh fuck. My temple thudded, like it would cave it in.

If only I could run.

“This time?” I croaked. Tomik? Shit. That was Tomik. “I know you.”

“Yes.” With one hand, he tipped up and hauled a big wooden chair with armrests across the floor, leaving a visible scrape and hurting my ears. When he reached a few feet away, he sat. “You do. You always do. It’s a little boring. Why is that? Do I smell?”

Even that question seemed a threat.

Elbows on knees, leaning forward, he let a hand drape over his mouth, idly thumbing his stubble. I could see his amusement.

Why the fuck did I amuse him? His gaze lowered, dragged itself over my exposed body.

“Every goddamned time, you make me want to pull you out and fuck you.” He shifted his position on the chair.

A hot blush poured over my face; an unwelcome warmth brushed between my legs. My next shiver seemed to coax my swelling clit, make it swell more. I pressed my thighs together, hiding myself but enjoying the pressure. How dare this turn me on.

“But, let’s be slow today... and civil. Civil? That’s a word you’d have used way back in our stupid youth. This is what? The eighth time I’ve reset your brain, dear Hannah?”

He might have thrown ice water in my face. *Reset. My brain.* The weirdness shocked. Truth though, it was the truth. I felt the honesty.

“What does that mean? You’re drugging me?”

“No.”

That *no* echoed somewhere.

He’s not. I heard that too, and not from him. From inside me? I shook my head.

“Let’s get this out of the way. I like you in the cage there because I just do. I like doing a lot of things to you. You make such interesting noises when I mess with you. I’m going to fuck with you and your head today, because I like that. And... you’re here because you”—he stabbed a forefinger toward me—“*you* begged me to rescue you from the sick situation you were in.” He sat back. “Also, you’re a collectable.”

His mouth stilled, and I could hear heavy breathing.

Out of all that *collectable* made me hear it most. That word carried weight.

Was this really happening? I was panicked, but not enough for *this*—for being locked in a cage, naked, with a lunatic in front of me.

“Collectable.” I swallowed. “Go on.”

“I can make you do anything, Hannah. And I likely will before I tire of you. After all, I’ve done so much, and I still want more. And I have no fucking clue why.”

Softly, I asked, “Do I care?”

I needed to leave ASAP. Was this lock breakable? If not, the cage was pretty flimsy. Good enough for a dog but if I kicked at those welds...

Good thinking, the echo said. And I finally looked. Inside. Behind me but inside.

Gray girl. I knew her. I froze.

You?

Yes, me. I swear I heard a smirk in that voice. **Least you remembered.** She wandered across the murky scenery in my muddled brain.

The chair creaked once then kept going, rhythmically, as if Tomik was shifting. The man was heavy enough to make me worry if I let him get hold of me. Escape would be unlikely.

He’d already been pawing me according to him. My memories had been flushed. He’d named that with a five-letter word that I now feared: *reset*.

Was he nervous, or thinking?

“I’m going to have to experiment more.”

“You don’t,” I ventured. “Really. Don’t. What do you want, Tomik? Money? You said I begged you to help me. You don’t need to anymore. I’ll just go. Please?” My voice shook by the end. Knowledge sifted in, awakening some disused part of me, bringing greater certainty of the danger. He might kill me if I didn’t get loose.

That’s it. You’re getting it now. Gray girl sounded happy.

Fuck off, craziness.

I looked to Tomik. “Please?”

“You know, I never thought you had it in you to kill.”

“I’ve never killed. Never. Just, please, let me go.”

“I’m thinking it was something you’d never do again. I can’t imagine you killing either. You were always so ready to defend the environment, save the whales, save the eagle, save the fucking bees.”

The past, he was talking of the past, a much safer subject. I crept forward, snaked my fingers through the wire and held on. "I remember."

"You studied and became a journalist? I think that was it? Went all the way through college and ended up in that dump of an apartment with a boyfriend you hated. Was it worth it?"

Had I done all that? Wait, yes, it was coming back to me. Except the boyfriend part. I shrugged. Anything to keep him from hauling me from the cage. "You know me. I'm persistent. I got a scholarship, worked hard, ended up going around looking for and selling stories. It paid."

Just not well. My apartment *had* been a shithole. Neighbors into drugs, fights most weeks, even most days. I'd been hoping to get out, it was just that money was hard to get. Like always.

He stood, stretched, his joints cracking as he pushed his linked hands at the ceiling. His boots looked like they belonged on a biker. "Yeah. Only now you don't have to worry anymore. I've got you, don't I? Your apartment lease has been broken, paid out so I could make you disappear easily."

Tomik walked toward me, boots clomping heavily on the bare floorboards.

The last room had carpet, gray girl mused. **Hotel Acambo he called it.**

If that was true, maybe gray girl was real? Stupid, but I had to ask.

"Where is this?" I backed away again, gesturing at the room, anything to distract from Tomik coming.

"Guess." His tongue poked along inside his lip, and he bent with his hands propped on his knees. "Fuck, you look edible, Hannah. Stop trying to get away."

His chuckle was low, ominous, and I shivered, my erect nipples almost painful as they tightened more.

"No." Damn, had I whimpered? Ashamed, sure I would wet myself any second, I shook my head.

"Enough. I have you on a string. It was just nice to let it pay out, see the Hannah wriggle on the end of my hook." His eyes glinted with what seemed evil intent. "Enough with trying to worm out of this. Come out, puppet girl." He clicked his fingers then tossed a key at me. It slid across the floor. "Get that. Use it."

Thoughts dwindled, shut down.

I stretched my arm through the wire, fetched the key and unlocked the padlock, then swung open the door. I crawled out and waited.

“Who are you? Your name.”

“Hannah Jones,” I whispered.

“Are you not wondering why you’re obeying me, waiting naked on your knees?”

I stared up at this male god and found no answer for him.

“Ahh. Too far. I’m learning. I can do this, fuck with your head and still see you wriggle. Let’s try a lesser compulsion. Dialing back.” His finger revolved.

A veil lifted and I gasped.

This was wrong. “Let me go? Please?” Begging made me feel terrible but what other choice did I have? I sank back on my knees and contemplated sprinting from the room. If only my limbs weren’t leaden, my fingers cold.

“Better. And no. Open your legs. Play with yourself for me.”

I watched my hand begin to move. Horrified, I stopped it with great effort. “No.” Looking up at him seemed dangerous. So I didn’t. “What are you?”

“A mesmer. That’s what we call ourselves.”

Oh. This is new. Keep him talking.

“You’re not real,” I said firmly to my knees.

“But I am.”

Thank god he didn’t know I was speaking to gray girl. He might think me mad. I giggled.

His knee arrived before me, *thunk* to the floor. Tomik’s hand nudged up my chin. “You aren’t curious about mesmers?”

“I am.”

“Think back over the last minutes.”

Oh. I winced into the realization that he’d already messed with me. “You...” I shook my head, helpless to do anything but wanting to so badly. I’d forgotten myself for a few seconds.

Not me though. Not me, gray girl said softly. **I see all.**

Great. I had an omniscient ghost in my head.

I’m not a ghost. I think. Not sure what I am.

“I hate you,” I whispered.

Tomik laughed, searched my face. “Good. You’re just where I want you to be.” His thumb made its slow way across the surface of my mouth, that mildest of touches, and the hand beneath my jaw seemed to crowbar his possession deep. “There’s something unique about owning you. Maybe having another girl would do the same but I don’t know.” His voice quieted.

He wasn’t saying that to me, I figured.

Uncomfortably hot at his touch, I stared back. “I hate you. I *hate* you. Fuck you.”

His mouth curved into a smile, and he released my jaw. “Even fucking better. Some *fire*. Play with yourself. But don’t come. Did you know you aren’t able to come by yourself without me instructing you, or with any ordinary man? I bet that’s news.”

News? It was a disaster. My eyebrows twitched into a frown before I realized my hand was moving.

Horried, I looked down to see my palm smooth over my mound. It slid further, my fingers slipping between my legs, finding the engorged lips of my pussy. My mouth opened. Anticipation had me speechless.

I needed this.

The small moan I gave out wobbled in volume as I began to work at myself. My forefinger curved inside, separating my lips. My flesh was hot and squeezing onto my finger.

Immersed, I tilted back my head and the first flurry of sensations hit, shaking me, making my thighs tense then release. And he was watching. I should not be obeying.

“Fuck you,” I said quietly, the only curse my brain would cough up. *God*. I squirmed on my own finger, mouth staying open, breaths harshening, my clit plumping with arousal.

“This is nice. Simple but nice.” Tomik walked his knees closer, pushed a hand into my hair, his big hand holding the side of my face with ease.

Distraught, but increasingly turned on, I glimpsed him through the confusion of my building desire.

I wanted him.

Words tumbled, whispered, they almost ran together. “Hey, no, stop this. You have to...” But my fingers kept pumping. I leaned into his hand, nuzzling at where I thought he must be.

“No.”

My eyelids fluttered. I needed him, this dangerous beast of a man. I swore I could scent his erection. With my mouth wide open he smelled amazing, as if he forced the atoms of his existence down my throat. Ramming them in.

I drowned. Rhythmically, I shoved myself onto my hand, hearing clear evidence of my lubrication.

His shadow loomed closer, and he put his mouth over mine.

The taste of him swamped me. Floundering, I gasped around his lips, blinded as he ate and tongued his way over my mouth, my lips, nose, the side of my neck.

My fingers worked furiously. Coming was imminent.

"I need," I gasped out.

"What do you need?" He grabbed my throat in one hand.

One in my hair, the other there. I bucked onto my circling thumb and pistoning fingers. "Please? Please?"

"To come?" His words rasped in my ear and he licked me, languidly. "It's a no. You can stop now. Take your hands off yourself."

What?

Though I whined, embarrassing myself by my weakness, I took my shaking hands away then found myself hanging in his throat grip. My slippery hand was on his wrist. The other I braced on my thigh while I plucked at him.

"Now you see. Hands down. Stop scratching at me."

Lifeless, my arm fell to my side. He released my throat and kept me upright by the hand in my hair, found my right nipple and twisted it. I should've been screaming instead I pushed myself forward.

"More?" His mouth was cruel, his eyes too. "More, Hannah? Say it."

Oh God, a new gush of wetness had leaked from me, and my breathing roughened.

I shouldn't have, but I blurted out a "Yes."

"Of course it's more. It felt good didn't it? Me, making you hurt?"

Screwing up my mouth to stop my answer, I shut my eyes then opened them. Shut them. Dark, light, dark. Pleasure surged again. My spine bowed. I wriggled and strived to hump something, his knee preferably.

"No." His knee shifted. "Tell me. Answer, but don't come. Remember I said not to?"

Distraught, I nodded and caught sight of that devious hand as he trapped my other nipple and... squeezed again.

"Oh! Oh fuck. Yes. Yes. Tomik, please. I want... I want..."

"Look at this tit of yours." He shoved my head down so I could see.

The way my nipple was squashed and contorted by his finger and thumb fascinated me. Manhandled took on a whole new meaning. My panting was surely a betrayal.

He pushed me away then stood.

My hands shook as I tried to place them between my legs but found I couldn't. Instead I clawed them into my thighs. The sheer impossibility of doing what I needed rendered me dumb.

Begging for his touch crossed my mind but thankfully not my lips.

I guess I looked desperate. A disgustingly superior smile stretched his mouth.

"Now you see how well I can control you."

Asshole.

From somewhere I dug up defiance and muttered, "No."

"You think?" A sound came out of him that was almost a growl. "I'm going to fuck your ass today. But first I'm going to show you how far my power goes. There is nothing I cannot make you do."

Answering was filled with bad possibilities, so I merely glared up at him.

"Put your head down, spread your legs, palms upturned on your thighs.

Immediately I obeyed. Then I lowered my head and let my hair shroud me, watched it sway as I inhaled, exhaled. The glistening wetness on my hand was an awful sign of what I'd done.

"Beautiful," he whispered. "Such a good girl, but I have more for you to do."

Fear wormed in. What did he mean?

There must be limits, a way to stop him controlling me?

Maybe. Gray girl huffed, heaved herself onto a sofa.

Useless. Go away, figment. Wait, didn't I name you?

Yeah. You did. Greta. She held up a hand then slowly erected a finger.
Up yours.

Oh hell. My own figment was telling me to fuck off. I would've died of laughter any other time.

Tomik had walked away, and now he was back.

A large red rubbery device dangled from one hand, a white long-sleeved dress in the other. "This anal plug, you're going to sit on it for me..."

My eyes widened at that. It was huge.

"Until it's all the way in, then you will dress in this." He raised the dress. "You will take your handbag which has a loaded Glock inside it." He lowered his head, staring. "Got that?"

I nodded, swallowed. Could I shoot him?

"You will go downstairs. If you see any of my girls, be aware they are collectables. They clean and cook. Sometimes I fuck them. They won't help you. Go to the front door, walk out, my little bitch." *Bitch*, he caressed that word, as if it was an endearment, and I shifted my spread legs, uncomfortable.

Oh hell. I would be free? Was he releasing me?

A smile spread on those sexy lips of his. "You know you're dripping, girl. Your pussy is."

"Oh." A blush heated my cheeks. I wriggled, flicked another glance at him.

Teeth hid in that mouth of his, ones that had bitten and licked me halfway to the nipple he'd crushed. The pain there throbbed awake, flared. I breathed slower, aware he was watching me. He walked closer then around to my rear.

"Lift your ass."

I did so, and he slid that butt plug under me.

"Go down until it touches."

Letting my ass descend, I felt the poke of the tip near my hole and shuddered for he stroked me near there also, going in circles and loops.

"Down more, go slow. I know you can take this. All of you collectables do. Only fear holds you back. Use your hands to take the weight."

I lowered myself more, my hands braced to the floor, wriggling, feeling myself open, the anal muscles relaxing and letting it slide in. My mouth in an O, I shuddered, squeaked, then went down some more.

"Fuck, fuck." I bowed my head, keening, eyelids jammed shut, then wormed myself downward again. "Oh."

"That's it. Yes." He nipped my neck, breathed hot air on me, and sank his teeth in deeper as the plug forged higher.

The last definite *pop* as it seated itself had me gasping. Assimilating this foreign invader left me drifting and feverish, wanting more to be done to

me, not by my own hands but his.

If he would just fuck me, once? I shook my head. *No.*

I hated this. Before he'd just done things to me, and I'd detested that, but this, it violated my own sense of self.

Hell no. Oh, but the feel of him forcing his way into me. It would be—Tomik's hand landed on my shoulder.

"There. That's too highly flanged to fall out without me hauling on it. It'll stay while you walk." His chuckle was evil. "You will leave the hotel and walk in any direction you want to. When you reach fifty paces from the front door, you will take the gun out and shoot yourself in the head. Through your mouth. Angle it up."

I thought my heart stopped, just for that moment. "What?" I swallowed.

Tomik stood. "Or you can choose to turn and come back here before that happens." Then he made his way back to the chair and sat, one eyebrow cocked, waiting. "Go."

He thought I would shoot myself, even if I was away from him?

Incredulous, I still did as he'd said to. I dressed, with that plug inside me—huge and radiating sensations I wished I could avoid.

I left him, still seated, with my handbag over my shoulder and the weight of the gun making it feel lopsided.

Down the stairs, through a long corridor with many doorways, past a girl sweeping and another, as equally doe-eyed as the first, restocking a bar. Did this mean he sometimes had guests? I tried not to imagine what sort of guests those might be.

This Hotel Acambo was dilapidated, needed repainting, and it appeared he used it as his private dwelling. The girls? I guess he fed them.

They weren't dead at least.

Every move I made reminded me of the plug, and at times the bulk and stretch of it fluttered pleasure into my lower body. I had to stop and wait before I could continue.

Nervous, I opened the large timber front door, closed it, stepped out onto a quiet street. Rocking on my feet, I realized I wasn't sure where this was or even what country.

Tomik hadn't instructed me to discover that. I brushed it aside. After I'd gone past his fifty-pace boundary, I would worry. There were no shops or signs nearby. The trees and shrubs were green. The sky cloudy. A man

walking a dog was dressed for mild weather and I... I wore a thin dress, no underwear, and a butt plug.

This was surreal.

A shiver made goosebumps, and my nipples rose in sympathy. My feet were bare, the pavement cool but not freezing. The man passed me, eyebrows up, staring. I guess I looked out of place.

A police station should be my aim.

And if I asked this guy?

I tried. I hurried after him, ducklike until I sorted out how to stride with *that* in me. *One, two... ten... fifteen* steps, with my mouth struggling to produce words, and I found I was mute. No words. No sound. I couldn't even wave madly at him.

After sighing, I kept walking. *Eighteen... twenty-two*. I may as well go in this direction. If nothing else, he might turn eventually and ask why I followed him?

Thirty-three... forty-one. By then I was sweating despite the thin material and the breeze.

Trees shaded us overhead, and soon I would pass near a street sign, then, then I would have a good chance to know where I was. Somewhere that spoke the English language? The dog was a small brown terrier. The man seemed oblivious to me, which might be good. If the butt plug fell out, I could pretend it wasn't mine.

Forty-eight. My hand was already inside the handbag, and I'd found the butt of the pistol.

Forty-nine. My mind seemed filled with too much of everything, and I couldn't think past what was about to happen. I rubbed my left palm around on the side of my head, moving my skin in circles, trying to ignore what Tomik had told me.

To shoot myself. Why? Why would I?

My right hand felt as if it would cramp, with how fast and firm it clung to the metal.

Let it go, I told myself, told my hand. Nothing budged. I dared not take that step, yet how else would I find out the truth?

Risking blowing my brains out was a bad way to test this.

A half-step? I raised my foot as if to do it and my heart galloped faster.

You can do it, Greta urged, speaking for the first time in ages. And I... I had halted.

Forty-nine.

Inside my ass, the butt plug pulsed as if alive. A reminder of him.

I can control you.

“Fuck you,” I said quietly, agonizing.

Things murmured at me. Of possibilities. Of triggers being relentlessly pulled. Shadows of things that could happen next. My stomach lurched as the trees and footpath circled.

I... could feel the hard barrel entering my mouth, could see the steel lurking in the darkness of my handbag where my knuckles were white, amid the chaos of old tissues and receipts and a lipstick.

How long had I been stopped here?

Dead leaves were below, skittering past my bare feet in a gust.

“Can do this,” I said to myself.

The man was surely gone. I couldn’t hear his shoes or the scratch of the dog’s nails on concrete.

I put my foot back down. Cold under me, that concrete.

I knew it now. He was right. I looked up, tilted my head and saw the sky was blue up there after all, the clouds scudding away. I was free here, but I was not. He had me still. The bastard.

What could I do?

I couldn’t be free even if I was not with him, this Tomik, my lost guy, this man who used to be my friend. And I wondered at his motive in letting me loose. Did he only wish to show how absolute his power? That he could make me blow my own head off?

Maybe I should, for my own sake. What use was a future like this, like it had been, forgetting what I’d done the day before, knowing it must have been terrible and disgusting?

I could. I could take that step. But such a futile, useless end to my life. A cowardly end.

Tomik. I rolled his name on my tongue. He used to be good.

Maybe... Tentatively I dared to imagine something brighter. Maybe he still could be?

I rolled my shoulders, sighing a ragged breath that caught on my unshed tears. I let my head drop.

To shoot myself or what?

Something about me was unique, yes? His own words. I hated what he’d become, but what if I could change things? As if. As if that were truly

possible. I was just scared. Dead, I changed nothing. Living was always going to be better than putting a gun in my mouth.

I let go of the pistol and turned back even though tears welled and rolled down my face. The blood rushing back into my gun hand prickled it with pain.

I trudged into the hotel and up those stairs.

"You're back," were his words when I walked into that room. "I gave you a choice and you didn't shoot yourself." His smile was smug.

"Obviously I didn't, no. I almost did. I wanted to. I actually almost did it."

His mouth pursed, relaxed, and I saw a shift in his eyes. I'd shocked him, I think.

"Then I realized I had a purpose."

He grunted. "What?"

Confessing my fear of dying wouldn't advance any cause. Defiant and sure my eyes were ablaze, wishing I dared say more, I said the half-truth, "I came back for your sake."

"Really?"

"To help you."

Tomik's forehead corrugated then smoothed. "Hah!"

For a long while all he did was stare, but then I thought I saw his eyes soften with regret, or remorse, or pain, something. I couldn't decipher the universe in the blink of an eye, and I hadn't caught this either.

Maybe a wish to take back the past? Maybe it had been nothing. It was still an arrow in my heart.

If I'd truly seen it, it meant *something*.

Then he crooked a finger, and a man walked through the same door by which I'd entered. He went partway to Tomik to stand there with his hands clasped before him. The window glare silhouetted him.

Tomik drawled, "You cannot help me, Hannah. I'm dead inside."

Dead? A mesmer was not a normal man. There was a whole new scariness to imagining him dead inside. Then I saw he mocked me. *Thank God.*

"This is Aaron, the head of our brotherhood of mesmers. We have a share and share alike motto, as well as a rule that says to take, fuck, then dispose of."

So casually delivered. So terrifying.

I blinked, chest tightening. One of them was bad enough. I licked my lips and tried not to meet the eyes of this Aaron.

He was taller than Tomik, leaner, with short, near-white hair, and he dressed with flare. His tie was subtly floral. His dark suit had some repetitive tiny emblem and was precisely tailored. Those few steps he'd taken were calculated and quietly threatening. Even standing still he seemed as dangerous as a tiger lounging in a tree.

Such cold gray eyes. I was only an object to him.

"I've decided to share you, but today he's only watching. Strip off your dress, come here and kneel before us. Stick your ass in the air so I can see that plug."

There were degrees of his control, and now I knew the true subtlety. Though I pulled off the dress, I feared what was coming and slowed my steps, yet I couldn't stop entirely. By the time I kneeled before him, facing outward and with my head cradled on my arms, this Aaron had arrived beside Tomik to watch my humiliation.

"Take it out," Tomik said. "If you can."

"Just have her rip it out," he offered dryly. "More interesting."

"No, it's not to me."

I kept my face to the floor. With the fingers of one hand, I reached between my legs, tensing myself not to care that their eyes were on me. I fumbled but found the still lubed edge of the plug. It was difficult to grab. The rubbery thing slipped and slid then was hard to budge as my asshole clamped down at every tug. My fears of pain overwhelmed me, and I simply could not make myself use enough force.

After several minutes of trying, with my fingers numb and my arm tiring, my whimpers and wriggles must have bothered the other man. He grumbled out, "Make her."

"Fuck no." Tomik chuckled and prodded my butt with his boot. "I like seeing her squirm to obey. You can stop. Need me to do it?"

Sweat had wet my forearm where my head lay nestled. In that secret darkness, with my eyes shielded, I managed a reply. "Yes."

"Say please."

Whether compelled or not I could no longer tell, or care. "Please, help me."

"Brace yourself, or not. Either is good. The more you tense, the harder this is to remove." I felt his fingers grab the plug and steadily pull.

To not tense was impossible by then. The final wrench of it being extracted drew a cry from my lips, and I shuddered, panting as the pain ebbed.

“What a good girl you are.”

And what a stupid one, that his compliment gave me a short-lived glow of satisfaction. Mesmers and their creepy ways. He even falsified what I thought of his words.

But... the fucking thing was out of me.

“Now to stick my cock in there.”

“Finally.” Aaron sounded bored.

I heard the rasp as Tomik rubbed his stubbled chin—knew the sound by now. “Get up and walk out ahead of us, out the door to the room across the corridor. You’ll find a rocking horse in there. Climb on it and insert the big dildo in your cunt. Then wait.”

I stood and walked, stumbling at first for my legs wobbled. All the way I wondered if this would ever end, if I’d be dead by then anyway, or if perhaps shooting myself would’ve been the better choice.

I passed my open handbag from which the Glock had spilled. Seeing the gun brought no urge, no way to go to it and souvenir it for later. As if these two men following me wouldn’t simply laugh and take it from me... even if I could have picked it up.

With Aaron watching her as well, this was more voyeuristic and appealing than ever. I could trust him not to go further than we'd agreed on. His visit had been calculated... I was sure. I'd been absent from their activities for almost two weeks now. His push to get me to share was not unexpected.

My own feelings about that... so-so. I thrilled at doing it to her. I also dreaded it to some degree. I would have to make sure they'd didn't harm her monstrously, which the twins especially liked to do. Those two had a thing for getting their own hands dirty. Mostly we reined them in, we brother mesmers. Murder and torture were difficult to mask even when we had a collectable to take the blame.

The brothers would expect Hannah to disappear after we were sated. Or maybe a week or two later at most. As everything stood, I was nowhere close to needing to get rid of her cute ass.

Pulling out her claws could be a slow event. Slow as watching her attempt to pull that plug from her ass. That had been both laughable and fucking hot.

And in here, this room with the rocking horse? *My, my*, it spoke to the photographer in me. Fucking her and photographing her in here was going to make my toes curl and was definitely making my dick hard.

The two windows had no shutters or curtains. Sunlight ebbed in past the dirt on the glass. Their painted frames were vaguely gray, the cream walls ditto, though the peeling paint was more interesting with how the blotches ran into other many-hued blemishes. Orange and red streaks must be where something metal had once leaned. Below one point, a hole had been

knocked clear through to the timber behind. The ceiling light high above us was a mock candelabra with thin ropes of tatty cobweb. Even the spiders had given up.

It was a room decorated by ancient scars. I planned to make some new ones on Hannah.

She'd reached the pastel pink, blue, and gold rocking horse. Due to its size, it seemed more an ornament for adults than a toy.

The sturdiness when I'd sat on it the day I found it had been unusual, so I'd glued a large black dildo to it, a horse-sized one, in case of future ideas. And here we were, with Hannah shakily straddling it, feet in the stirrups, peering down as if in disbelief.

I guess I'd not reinforced the command enough. Like the butt plug, she was going slow.

I strode over, and when I reached a spot behind her, I toed off my boots, kicked them aside, then stripped off shirt and jeans too, all the while murmuring encouragement to her.

Lower, lower. It wasn't going to be as painful as removing the plug, so her progress was visible.

Adorably slow too.

I went to the front of her, rested my arm on the horse's wooden saddle as I kneeled, then bit her naked thigh. The sunken teeth marks went quickly to red and white on her skin. Her squeal and gasp might've been from the dildo or the bite.

"More. Down more." I drew a badly chewed fingernail through my teeth marks. This time her screech was due to me. Drops of blood popped up through the scratch. "Down."

She was huffing and had stopped to frown at me. The bottom of the dildo showed by perhaps half a finger length. I guessed that was the end of her cunt.

"Hmmm. Okay."

Slurping my way up her leg, to her navel, and then to her breast brought a fine arch to her back. I suckled on her there, tasting nipple, biting down a few times as I rose to neck level. Her hands clutched at my shoulders.

Making her orgasm could wait some.

Those half-lidded eyes and the feel of her juices tracking from her swollen cunt lips down the exposed dildo were enough to make me need to take off my edge. I pulled her head low, made her bend and suck on my

cock. I fucked her wetly, rapidly, stopping deep now and then to hear the desperate efforts of her lungs. When I came, I made sure to pump some it straight into her mouth so I could see her splutter. Then I drew the dribblings over her tits.

“Christ, Tomik. You’re sure I couldn’t have fucked her ass while you did that?” Aaron was peeved. Poor bastard.

“No. Mine, today. She’s all mine. I’m going to decorate her with some needles before I do more fucking of her anyway.” I dragged her head up high by the hair and shook it, pleased at the hazy look in her eyes. Soon I’d make her go to the moon and stars... or scream a lot. Both, hopefully.

“I’ll be back with Chinese takeout then.”

“Okay.” I frowned at her. “You didn’t come did you?” So placid and panting so much. I hadn’t meant to make her but...

“A little, maybe?” Her tongue swiped out, found come, and her expression changed to one of distaste.

“Bitch.” Strangely, it amused me. “A small one? If you do that again...”

What? What the hell would I do to her?

More shit, of course. More something bad, just not *too* bad. At that thought, my dick decided to twitch and swell. A hazard of mesmers, the erections were easy to magic up. Not that we minded.

I smiled and said softly as if I were her lover about to kiss her. “Let’s begin. I’ll bet no one ever stuck needles in you like I’m going to. You go and put your hands on the horse’s ears and stay upright. Keep that fucking huge rubber dick in your cunt.”

She let her head flop forward, and I heard her sniff as I walked away. Hiding her exhaustion perhaps, and I’d barely begun.

I kicked the blocks from the ends of the rocking horse because I didn’t want them in the shots. I just wanted her, astride the pretty horsey, with that horse cock inside her. Retrieving my camera, I set up the tripod and took some tasty pictures of Hannah. Her messy with my come would have to be my favorite thing, though needles might top it.

I unrolled a whole sheet of them, the bigger-gauge ones, then swabbed her down with alcohol, mostly because it stung the cuts. Then I took the first needle out, unsheathed it, and threaded it into her right breast just beneath her nipple.

Her squeal then wide-eyed disbelief as she stared down at her punctured tit had me squeezing my cock already. The rocking horse wobbled, but she

never let go of the horse ears, of course. She stayed upright and in place. Still, I needed to put the blocks back in or I'd never be able to fuck her on top of it.

"That's one," I said, letting go of the head of my enthusiastic member. "A few more to go."

Twenty or so.

I stroked my fingertip upward beside her clit, then bumped it over the top and back again, watching her *almost* dissolve into the throes of a rising climax. She wriggled slightly, rotating that cock inside her. I bent and licked over her clit, sucked it. Sucked some more because I liked how it made her gasp. Sometimes it was difficult to hold a collectable back from coming. Worth it though. The moans, the quivering of her thighs, the squeeze onto the dildo. The dripping of her cunt. All beautiful.

It took her a while to settle after that, but I replaced the blocks under the arched base of the horse and waited until the awareness came back in her eyes.

"Such a slut, aren't you, Hannah? You liked that. Look at me." I tapped beside my eye.

She focused finally, shook her head, but her legs were shaking.

"For lying to me..." I unsheathed another needle and sank it into her below the first.

Over the next half an hour I threaded lines of needles down her front—two rows that left some blood on her skin, until I licked it off. And still I kept her teetering on the edge of coming.

I added more needles, wormed my finger up inside her beside the cock, then thrust it in and out while I played with and sucked on her poor deluded clit. The thing had risen high enough for me to consider piercing it. Though I'd run out of needles to stick in her.

Her babbled pleas needed translating.

I straightened, extracted my finger from her, worked the kinks from my spine.

Slowly, I ran my forefinger down one line of needles to just above her clit, placing my other hand on the top of the horse head. Hannah was sucking on her mouth, sweaty, red-faced Hannah with those pretty metal-enhanced tits and belly.

She looked a little overwhelmed, a lot shaky.

“Nothing left to put in you except cock. Does my little bitch want cock in her ass? A yes says you get to come.”

I let her decide her own words. Why not? I slapped her tits a few times, careful not to get caught on the sharp bits. “Going to answer me?” I asked idly, pulling out two of the needles. “Took too long. Now I expect you to beg. Answering means I don’t put these straight through the middle of your nipple and your fucking clit.”

Now *that* would hurt.

Hearing her beg was going to be fun. Already her hands were close to twisting off the ears of the rocking horse.

Yeah, I loved her begging me. Ironic, really. The odd thing I’d discovered while needling her was that I wanted to see her writhe and moan, not just because I could hurt her, but because I could make her scream in climax too.

For a mesmer that was slightly off-key, maybe a lot off-key.

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HANNAH

I couldn't tell what was pain and what was pleasure. It was all mixed up, everything was. Twisted up in my brain like someone had set it to puree and left it spinning.

Tomik was doing this.

Just words, but for him words were power. His touch was power. And I was powerless.

"Naughty girl," he rumbled and squeezed my breast. The needles wiggled under my skin, and I felt light-headed, hot, and then blinding pain as he shoved the needle through my nipple.

I screamed and saw the gray girl in the darkness behind my squeezed-tight eyes. She was shaking her head, sitting sideways in some wingback chair, legs draped over one armrest.

You can make him stop. Look at him.

My eyes popped open, and Tomik was there. Face so close to mine I could feel the warmth of his breath as he chuckled and waggled the last needle in his fingers. "Last chance before I pierce your clit, little whore."

What did he want? What had he said?

Fuck, my brain was still on puree, but the gray girl didn't seem affected. Her hair wasn't even moving as she turned toward the me inside my brain and stared.

He wants you to beg. Now open your eyes.

I opened them again. He was still there, still close. "Please," I whispered, wondering if the figment in my head was just another part of his

power. Something inside me said no, but it was an instinct, not that strange voice-that-was-not-a-voice.

“Please what?” he prompted, dragging the scratching point of the needle down my stomach, just to the side of the row of needles he’d left in my skin. *Oh God, I’m bleeding.*

Tomik grabbed my face, fingers digging into my cheeks hard, and then my body tensed, squeezed down on the massive dildo wedged inside me, and I moaned. Pleasure hit like a tidal wave, dragging me under in the riptide, stealing the air from my lungs as I humped the thick shaft between my legs and mumbled some string of words that I hoped was what he wanted to hear. I needed him, needed him to push me that last little bit so that I could come.

“You want it, slut? Want me to fuck your ass?” he growled, and I nodded—a marionette on strings, bobbing up and down against his grip on my face.

Something pinched deep inside as that fake cock went farther in, but it blended with the pleasure, until Tomik suddenly let go and all of the almost-ecstasy went with him. It was like he’d blown out a candle and left me in a cold, dark room. Tears sprang to my eyes, and I clenched my teeth against the urge to beg, even though I knew my willpower wouldn’t last. I was weak, so fucking weak, and Tomik was breaking me down.

“Say it.” He walked around me, shoving me forward harshly so that I bent at the hips and clutched harder at the ears of the horse.

“This isn’t you,” I whispered, half-trying to convince myself of that fact. That this mesmer thing wasn’t Tomik. It was like a costume he’d worn for too long, but maybe... maybe I could get him to take it off, or at least stick an arm out. His face. His head.

Then we could rip it off.

“No,” I hissed to the gray Greta girl, fingers aching with how hard I held onto the strange fabric-coated leather ears. *I can’t let go. Fuck.*

“No? You don’t want me to fuck your ass and make you come?” He chuckled. “That’s fine, I can just fuck your ass then. You don’t need to come, do you, slut?”

Whimpering, I tried to sit up, to stop him, to make him look at me, *really* look at me and remember that he didn’t want to do this to me.

He wants to do it, trust me. He’s done it before.

What? I whined as I felt him move behind me on the long wooden saddle of the horse. “Please...”

“Oh, you’re going to have to beg a lot better than that now, Hannah.” Grabbing a fistful of my hair, he pressed me down further, his forearm lodged against my spine. “Look at that pretty, stretched asshole. You should be grateful. Say thank you.”

“Thank you,” my mouth said without my direction. The tears burned in my eyes as I felt his cock rub against my ass. It hurt already, still raw from the massive plug, and the thick dildo was taking up too much room inside me. *This won’t work.*

It will, Greta whispered.

“Such a polite slut,” Tomik growled and then he slammed inside me, forced his dick past tense, aching muscles, and shoved me forward with the sheer power of his hips colliding with my ass. “God, yesss...”

“Tomik! Please stop... please, it hurts!” The tears fell, skating down my cheeks in warm lines as I was filled beyond the limit. Both holes stretched too far, and I could feel things inside me shifting, trying to make room for the impossible, and it ached. *Hurt.* Deep inside where there were things like kidneys and livers.

“You’re twisted,” Aaron said from somewhere I couldn’t see. With Tomik’s fist in my hair and his arm on my back, there was no way to turn, no way to do anything except take the next brutal thrust that sent a spike of pain through me, buzzing along each needle piercing my skin, each point stinging as my sweat found them. “And here I thought the twins liked to play rough.”

“I like the sounds Hannah makes,” he growled as he started to fuck me hard and fast. The pain built until I was hiccupping with each quiet cry, cut off when he yanked my head back, craning my neck to the point it was hard to breathe. “Your ass still feels so tight, slut. Next time I’ll use a bigger plug so I can last longer.”

“Please make it better, please! I’ll do whatever you want, just *please*—”

“You’ll do whatever I want anyway, Hannah,” he said on a laugh, but then pleasure bloomed, erased the pain like it had never been there. Somewhere in my muddled thoughts I did feel grateful, almost said it before my body convulsed, tightened down on the cocks buried deep and I came. Obliterated, screaming, dizzy as the world turned into electric light and pretty sparks.

Somewhere in the haze I felt Tomik's dick swell, his damp skin pressed against mine as jets of his seed filled my ass, but I didn't care at all. Didn't care as he let my hair go and my head fell forward, drool leaking past my lips as I hung off the ears of the horse, inner walls twitching around the twin invasions. Delirious.

Weak. Greta was floating in the dark behind my eyes, leaning close, anger flashing in her eyes. **You're not his puppet.**

But I am. I knew that, felt it bone deep, no matter what the strange figment of my imagination believed. Why did other people get Jiminy Cricket and I got the body double for the girl in The Ring? It didn't matter. I'd do whatever Tomik demanded. Fuck a horse, moan while he stabbed me with needles, and even shoot myself in the head.

Greta the gray girl from Lalaland flopped back into her chair, eyes aimed upward, maybe at the top of my skull. Strange, strange weirdness.

The kids aren't all right.

"That was hot," Aaron said, and I turned my head to see him leaning against the closest wall, stroking his dick. "Ready to share now?"

Tomik grumbled, yanking his dick out of my ass so fast that I gasped, whined, clutched the ears of the horse even tighter.

"Sunday."

Aaron laughed. "Actually going to show up to our little party?"

No, no, no, no. Panic filled me as Tomik's touch left me, and somewhere I could hear Greta laughing.

"Yeah, I'll be there."

"The twins are already over there getting shit set up, finding a few party favors." Aaron tucked his dick away, shaking his head a little. "They're going to be glad to hear you're coming... and bringing a present."

His gaze landed on me, and I knew—I fucking *knew*—that he was a monster. Worse than Tomik. Aaron was empty, cold, and Tomik wasn't like that.

Not yet.

I whined as I clenched my eyes tight. All I wanted to do was cover my ears, but I couldn't lift my fucking hands from the horse.

"I've just been having my own fun," Tomik said, popping his boxers back in place before he grabbed my chin, and I had to look at him. I begged with my eyes, pleaded with him not to do this, not to *share me* with

monsters. Mesmers. Mesmer monsters. He just smiled, wiped his thumb through the drool on my chin. “I’ll get her sorted.”

“Good,” Aaron replied.

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TOMIK

“Shower,” I commanded, not wanting to look at her right now. She was a glorious fucking mess, thighs shiny, lips pouty and red from chewing on them—and I didn’t want to share her.

Still. Even after I’d checked off yet another fantasy, two, the horse and the needles. It was like I couldn’t get enough of Hannah. Every time I checked one box, five more seemed to add themselves to the end of the list. More things I wanted to do to her, to make her do, to make her take.

The soft sound of the bathroom door shutting grated my nerves, but I stopped myself before I threw it open. Having a closed door between us would be good.

Space... space is good.

She’d been breathing my air for two straight weeks, and that was probably part of the problem. Maybe I should have her clean the hotel. Join one of the other girls downstairs that kept my life as easy as possible.

Or I could just fuck her on the floor again. Her cunt would be sore after that massive dildo, and it would draw the best noises out of her. My dick twitched in my pants, as if saluting, ready with a thought. Just like Hannah was.

Growling, I yanked open the closet door and hauled out her suitcase. I’d tossed so much shit in it when I’d picked her up, random stuff. Clothes and jewelry and other things. Dropping it on the bed, I unzipped it and started digging. Shoes, socks, skirts and dresses, a bag of makeup—*there*. I plucked out her passport from underneath a hairbrush, tossing that onto the bed too because her hair was a wreck.

Flipping it open, I verified it was still valid, and a creeping unease wound through my veins. No excuse not to go to the brotherhood party overseas. *Fuck*. Three days. Two, really, because we had to fucking fly there.

Which meant tickets.

Snarling, I went to the desk and brushed the dust off my laptop, powering it up. I needed to find a collectable travel agent so I didn't have to do this shit anymore. Someone to handle all the hopping around the globe, the house swaps for fucked-up fun in new locations. The laptop hummed as it started, and I went across the hall to snag my camera from the floor.

I'd taken some amazing shots of her after Aaron left. Blood was smeared across her breasts, her stomach. She'd taken another inch of that mammoth cock while I'd been fucking her, and I let her release the ears of the horse just so I could capture every angle. The orange of the evening light had painted her in warmth and shadow, the pastel colors on the horse perfectly faded, almost washed out, which made the red on her skin all the more vibrant.

She'd cried. Quietly. But, damn, she was pretty when she cried.

It made her look so alive, the pink in her cheeks, her nose, her blue eyes all the brighter from the shine. She was art. Perverted, twisted art.

Perverted by me.

That bothered me, I could feel it, and I tried to ignore it, but it tugged at me like a needy child. Caught on my sleeve, pulling, insistent, bothersome. *Why the fuck do I give a shit that I'm perverting her?*

I set the camera down by the laptop and dropped into the chair, tapping my fist on my forehead as I glared at the login screen. Hannah fucking Jones wanted to help me. The fact that she'd even said that after I'd given her a command that could have killed her made me feel... things. Things I didn't want to feel. Things I'd shed when I'd claimed this whole mesmer thing, made it mine, and I wasn't going to go back to that loser from before. I could do anything I wanted to now. Had more money than anyone in Bumfuck, Illinois could dream of. The world was mine for the taking, along with every collectable slut on every continent.

Hannah Jones was nothing compared to all that.

Logging in, I nodded to myself. Aaron was right. Not sharing was fucking with me worse than anything Hannah might say. This wasn't how we did things. This wasn't how it worked. We shared houses, we shared

collectables, connections, influence. It was how the brotherhood worked, and Sunday would fix this.

Frank's party had been a stupid attempt. I couldn't be myself there, couldn't do the things I wanted to with Hannah. There were limits around the public, even with the lines that were regularly crossed at Frank's kink parties.

But there were no such lines with the brotherhood. Mesmers didn't have lines.

I don't have lines. Not even with Hannah.



I had no idea how much time had passed as Hannah cried in the shower, which I'd blocked out by turning on music and cranking it up. But I was almost done buying the tickets when she finally opened the bathroom door and stepped out wrapped in a towel. I shouldn't have looked, shouldn't have even glanced her way, but I did.

Damp golden waves, her nose still red, eyes focused somewhere around the floor as her fingers clutched at the towel where it met over her chest. There were thin red streaks all over the white cloth from all those needles I'd threaded through her pretty skin.

Swallowing, I tore my gaze away and focused on the computer. But I'd only got halfway through typing in her passport information when I saw her fidgeting out of the corner of my eye, weight shifting from foot to foot.

"What?" I snapped, and she flinched. *Dammit*. That bothered me too, tugged at me incessantly, and it set my teeth on edge. "Speak!"

Her lips parted at the command, tongue working, and then she choked out, "Tomik."

My name. My goddamn fucking name in her voice. It was like nails on a chalkboard and angels singing all at once. Paradise and Hell in a single breath from her throat. "Don't say my name anymore," I growled, shoved the command inside her, pushed it harder than anything else I'd done, and she rocked on her heels, stumbling back a half-step.

"Please stop," she whispered, eyes lifting to me like she actually expected me to just let her go. Apologize. Become that pathetic loser that

had felt thrilled by just rounding second base with her in the back of a truck.

“No. Sit down and be quiet.” The words were barely out of my mouth when she started to sit on the floor, right in my peripheral vision. “On the bed,” I snapped, and her body shuddered, stopping mid-crouch to straighten up and move to the bed behind me. She was a zombie-robot-girl again, and I hated that too. Hated the way *that* tugged at me, but I needed it right now. I needed to get the fucking tickets booked or it wouldn’t be Aaron who showed up next time; it would be the twins, and they were so much harder to predict.

Shit shit fuckityfuck.

I had to book the flight for tomorrow night, which meant I only had one more day with her here, but showing up jetlagged to hell wasn’t going to make Sunday any fun. We’d both need Saturday to recover, even if I made her sleep on the plane... which was my plan. It worked best. Sleeping collectables were harder to notice. I knew that from experience, even if joining the mile-high club was always delicious.

When I was finished saving the info in my phone, I connected the camera and started to scroll through the photos. Uploading them to my private drive online where I could guarantee I never lost a single shot. Thousands of photos, an infinite reel of depravity and sex and violence. It was addictive looking at the old ones where I saw girls strung up in ropes, pinned between my mesmer brothers, coated in come and filth, and then I stopped as I came to one of a girl chained spread eagle to a metal lattice. Her back was bloody, striped with whip marks, and although her hair was a shade darker than Hannah’s... it could have been Hannah. *Could be Hannah.*

I pictured her like that, strung up, vulnerable, could even feel the whip in my hands. She’d scream, she’d moan, orgasm as the whip split her skin if I commanded it. Pretty Hannah wrecked by my hand. I could erase the person she used to be, and then maybe, *maybe* she wouldn’t be able to remind me of the loser I’d been when she had actually known me.

Eventually, I turned around and found Hannah was slumped to the side. Still *technically* sitting but passed out on the pillows next to her. I got up and approached silently to stand over her. She didn’t even twitch. Out cold, but she looked fucking perfect. Somehow still innocent after everything I’d

done to her. Pure underneath that white towel. Like the angel she used to pretend to be in almost every D&D campaign.

An image flashed in my mind. Hannah, wearing fluffy white wings, strung up and bloodied by a whip. Once she was bleeding the blood would probably flick onto the wings, slowly ruining them. Ruining her.

That could be the answer. The key.

Hannah wanted to save the Tomik she'd known, but if I destroyed the old Hannah first... then there'd be no *helping* me. No weak, pathetic attempts to change me back.

Turning away from her, I headed to the shower. All my thoughts tick, tick, ticking away as I imagined where I could put together her special photoshoot. After the mesmer brotherhood party. After I shared her with them, reminded myself of what this was. They'd help me do that, even if they didn't fully grasp it.

Seeing her pistoned at either end by the twins would be good; maybe Sergei would bring that fucked-up metal claw thing, leave some scratches on her as a prelude to the whip.

So many photos to take, so much to make Hannah do.

I'd be fine after this weekend, and then I'd finally rip out the little Hannah claws she'd buried deep when we were kids.

Then... then I'd be free.

HANNAH

“Miss?” the waiter asked, leaning down to look at me, and I opened my mouth to answer him, but Tomik spoke first.

“She’ll have the turkey sandwich with... rosemary fries.” Tomik smiled as he looked up at me, looking perfectly charming, perfectly normal. “Isn’t that what you wanted?”

“Yes,” I whispered, and the waiter nodded and walked away. Left me staring at Tomik and wondering why in the hell I wasn’t screaming, grabbing at every person who walked by the table and begging for help. I’d raised my hand to get the woman’s attention at the table beside us, but I’d dropped it as soon as she’d glanced at me. All the words I’d wanted to say, the terrible things he’d done to me... they just stuck in my throat. Made my tongue cramp, and he’d just laughed softly as he’d looked over the menu.

I couldn’t do anything. Surrounded by people and still helpless. Lost.

I plucked at a torn cuticle on my thumb, hands buried in my lap, on the soft white dress with the pretty blue flowers. It was one of mine, but the gray tights weren’t. I didn’t know where they’d come from, I just knew there was a large hole cut out between my thighs. No underwear, again, and I kept my knees tight together to try and hide my shame from the café full of people.

“This is nice, don’t you think?” Tomik asked, glancing out over the sun-drenched park that began across the street. The air was still a little cool, but the sun was bright enough to warm my skin. “Answer.”

“Yes, T—” *Tomik*. His name choked off, made my throat clench tight.

Can't say that anymore, Greta said, lounging on one of those poolside chairs with an old-fashioned silvery reflector aimed at her gray face. There was no sunlight wherever Greta was, which made it look ridiculous, and I shook my head to get rid of the stupid image.

I'm the ridiculous one, talking to the voice in my head. Or listening to it.

I shifted in the seat and immediately flinched, inner muscles twitching around the dull ache in pussy and ass. Tomik chuckled again.

"Still sore?" He was grinning when I looked up at him, refusing to answer. With a flick of his fingers, he popped the sunglasses up into his wild hair. "We're going to have so much fun with you."

"I doubt it," I mumbled, but he'd heard it, and it only made him laugh again. Quietly, almost under his breath.

"Oh, we will. I've got a whole list of ideas for you, and I'm sure my friends do too."

Clenching my fists tight in my lap, I leaned forward. "Why are you doing this?"

"Because I can, and because I think it will finally be the thing that fixes this."

"Fixes what?" I snapped, my anger growing as he chuckled and dropped the sunglasses down over his eyes again. Hiding.

"All the shit between us. You thinking you can *help* me, me thinking you're anything other than... what you are." He shrugged, smirking as he leaned back from the table. Looking too damned handsome. Like some kind of dangerous biker who had picked me up in my pretty sundress and convinced me to have lunch with him. To the other customers that's probably what this looked like. Tomik was wearing a dark shirt with some band's logo on it, stretched tight across his muscular chest. Those dark blue tattoos snaked up his arms, meeting the *actual* snake that inched up his neck. His short, sandy hair with the shaved furrows. Capped off by the dark jeans, and those massive boots with their silver skulls. He stood out here, didn't belong with all the people dressed nicely and enjoying the late-summer weather before fall stole all the beautiful days away.

He was Tomik, *my* Tomik, and yet he wasn't. Didn't look like the boy I'd known, act like the boy I'd loved, even if he was.

"And what do you think I am?" I asked, a momentary flash of bravery, buoyed by the minimal commands he'd given me to *behave*.

"A complication."

“Because you loved me too?” I whispered, voice almost breaking, but he just huffed. Turned away to look out at the park again. Forcing myself to keep talking, I spoke a little louder. “I meant what I said... I can help you. You don’t have to be like this.”

Tomik ripped the sunglasses off, leaned forward and snarled, “And what if *this* is exactly who I want to be, Hannah? What if this is exactly who I was always meant to be, who I always wanted to be?”

“That’s not true.”

“You don’t know a fucking thing, Hannah. You’re still so naïve. Thinking like you used to when you played the angel, the good one, the defender of the innocent and the righteous voice inside the chaos.” He snorted. “You never did know how to have fun with the dark side.”

Blinking, I swallowed and reached for the water glass, toying with the condensation rolling down the sides. “Are you talking about D&D?”

“Nevermind,” he snapped, waving his hand at the waiter.

“That’s how you see me, isn’t it?” I continued, pressing. “You see me as some naïve goody-two-shoes?”

I didn’t know why it set me off, but that made me incredibly angry. He acted like I’d never had anything bad happen, like my dad hadn’t died when I was seven, like my mother wasn’t a bitch when she drank—which was all the time. He *knew*. He knew all of that, he’d been there for me, been the person I could escape the house with. Ride bikes with just so we could get away from his too-large family and my messed-up mom. I had to bite my tongue as the waiter arrived.

“I’d like a beer, I’ll take a”—he flipped the menu over again—“Zefter Weisse.”

“Of course, sir, and your food should be out soon.” The waiter turned away, going by another table to answer some question, but I swung my gaze back to Tomik.

“Do you even remember what it was like growing up together? Do you remember all the times you helped me get away from my mom?” When he didn’t look at me, I hit the table with my hand, and his face came back to me, his eyebrows slightly lifted. Surprised. “Answer me.”

“That’s not how this works, Hannah. I give the commands, you obey.”

“Then why aren’t you shutting me up?” I snapped, teeth clenching as I cursed myself for saying it.

No, keep pushing. Go on.

“This was supposed to be a nice lunch on a nice day. Or would you rather go back to the hotel and ride the pony again like a good little bitch?” There was an edge to his tone, a roughness, and inside my head I could see Greta clapping her hands, leaning forward on her chair.

More. More.

“Is any of this shit you’ve done to me making you feel any better? Sticking me with needles? Making me ride that stupid rocking horse?”

Fucking you in that theatre. “Fucking me in that theatre?”

“This isn’t— Wait, you remember the theatre?” Tomik pulled off his sunglasses, leaning forward on the table, his brown eyes searching my face. A headache started behind my left eye, and I rubbed at it, flinching when it grew more painful. “Hannah, answer me!”

It was a command, and I tried to talk, but the headache spiked, and I could only gasp, whine.

Uploads are hard, methinks. Greta seemed closer, closer than before anyway, in whatever space existed inside my skull—but my skull felt like it might be coming apart. There were flashes of a balcony box, a naked woman on the floor shoving a beer bottle inside her, and... Tomik. On my knees in front of Tomik, sucking his cock, licking the woman on the floor with the bottle still inside her. *I didn’t want to do that. I didn’t.*

No, you didn’t. He made you do it.

“Stop it!” I shouted, covering my ears, but it didn’t help because the voice was inside.

He’s going to do it again, and again, and again. Greta’s voice was closer, like she was whispering inside my ear, crawled in like a bug. **You can stop him. We can stop him.**

“Leave me alone!” I heard something crash, tried to open my eyes, but the sun was too bright. Everything was too bright, too loud, and Greta wouldn’t stop talking.

It’s okay, I can help. I’m helpful like that.

“Hannah! Stop!” Tomik’s voice slammed into me like a sledgehammer, knocking me back, down... down... under the bright lights.



I was sweating, and it wasn't just from sitting with my back soaking up the sun in a dark shirt. It was because Hannah had freaked out, glitched. Remembering the theatre shouldn't have been possible, but she had, and then... the commands hadn't worked. Not until she'd reached for the knife, looked me in the eyes, and *smiled*. That smile was freaky and with the knife beneath her hand, it creeped me out.

Then I'd done the only thing I could. I shouted for her to stop, put all my will behind it, and she'd collapsed. Dropped back into the chair, unconscious, and now everyone was staring. The woman to my left was pushing her chair back, about to stand, and I held out a hand.

"I'm sorry, it's okay. She has attacks sometimes." I was babbling, and I didn't know what to say because I didn't have a fucking clue what had just happened. "PTSD," I tacked on as I moved around the table and crouched beside her.

I brushed the hair out of her face, concern eating at my chest, but I ignored it as I put my hands on her cheeks and shook her a little. Eyes of the fucking world on my back, I couldn't do anything *too* mesmery. People were paying attention, people would notice.

"Sir, is everything okay?" The fucking waiter was back, with my beer—*too late now, jackass*. "Should I call an ambulance?"

"No!" I said, too loud, and then I took a breath, turning to look at him over my shoulder. "She'll be okay in a second, this happens sometimes."

Turning back to her, I whispered, "Hannah, wake up." The command was light, not too hard of a push, but she blinked, groaned. "Wake up," I repeated, a little stronger.

"What?" she mumbled, almost slurring, and I lifted her higher in her seat, hands under her arms like she was a child. So small, so delicate, so fragile.

What did I do wrong?

"It's okay, you're okay," I said, but it was probably a lie. I had no idea what that was. I had no idea what was going on in her head. Leaning closer, I pressed a kiss to her temple, and then whispered against her ear, "Tell them you're okay, that you have episodes from PTSD."

Sitting back on my heels, I played the concerned boyfriend, speaking a little louder, "Are you okay, baby?"

"I'm okay," she said, just like she was supposed to. Hannah shaded her eyes and looked up at the waiter who was still lurking over my shoulder.

“I’m sorry, I have episodes. From PTSD.”

“Oh, that’s okay, miss. We just want to make sure you’re okay. Maybe I should call someone just to have you checked out?” Fucking waiter being overly helpful. Where was the callous disregard for others so famous in this country?

“She’ll be fine. I just need to get her home. She has meds she can take.”
And I need to figure out how to fucking fix this.

I didn’t do the reset right. That had to be the problem. I had been distracted after the fucking party, had too much whiskey, and I wasn’t able to do it right. Like a bad patch on a hole in the wall, I’d left gaps.

Hannah looked at me, blue eyes under a furrowed brow as she sucked her bottom lip between her teeth. She was worried, lost, and for a moment all I wanted to do was kiss her. Pull her in tight. *No*. I’m supposed to be separating.

The next brotherhood party can’t come soon enough.

“I think we need to go,” I said as I stood, making eye contact with the waiter, who was easily three inches shorter than me.

He nodded, almost as responsive as a collectable as he replied, “Of course, sir. Don’t worry about the bill, just take care of your girlfriend.”

“Always,” I replied, helping her up. Just as I reached for my sunglasses, I felt Hannah wrap her arms around my ribs and... hug me.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered, and I pulled back a little in surprise. She held on tighter, and I slowly laid my arm around her shoulders. It felt good to have her pressed against me, and I was pretty sure I hadn’t done this. Not *this*.

So, was this Hannah? Was real-girl Hannah hugging me?

Was this another of her stupid efforts to *help* me?

Not going to work. Nope. But it helped sell the story to the café full of people still staring, so I didn’t yank her back by her hair. I just left her where she was. Face buried in my shirt.

I turned us around, walking her out, but as we passed one of the tables I heard a woman say, “What a nice man, taking care of a troubled girl like that.”

A muscle in my jaw twitched, but I managed not to tell her that she was fucking wrong. *I’m not a nice man. Nothing about me is nice. Hannah is the angel, not me.*

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HANNAH

“How much can you remember?” Tomik asked, sitting in the wingback chair, staring at me on the floor with his elbows braced on his thighs.

Examining me.

His gaze was intense, but I still felt foggy. Strange.

“Hannah, answer me.” A command. “How much can you remember?”

Lots, if you want to. I think I know what went wrong before...

“No,” I answered Greta, frowning as I looked up at Tomik and answered honestly. “I don’t know.”

No fun. We’re never going to get out of this if you don’t listen.

“What do you remember about the theatre?” he asked, voice almost gentle, but I felt the disgust painted on my face as I remembered the flashes I’d seen.

“You made me do things. Made another girl do things.”

“But *you* are not supposed to remember that, Hannah. I told you to forget.” He paused. “...do you remember me telling you to forget?”

Yes.

“No,” I whispered. “What else did you take from me?”

“Things you don’t want to remember,” he replied, sitting back in the chair and picking up the glass of water at his side. I had one too, by my knees, but I didn’t touch it.

“Things you did to me?” I asked, watching his face, but it didn’t change much.

“Yes, and things you did too. Things you didn’t want to remember.” His tongue traced over his bottom lip before he blew out a breath. “I think I just

screwed up, but I'll fix it."

"Can't you just leave me alone?" Sniffling, I pinched my thigh, trying to keep myself from crying. "Can't you just... let me go? Let me walk out of here and go back to my life."

"You didn't have much of a life when you called me, Hannah." He groaned, wiped his hands over his face, took another drink of water. "Shit. You do realize there's no going back from this? I told you before I sent you —"

"I remember," I muttered, cutting him off. He'd told me that today... yesterday? Before he'd made me shove a butt plug in my ass and sent me outside with a gun to blow my brains out if I walked too far. Yeah, I remembered that.

I will too.

"So, what's the plan then, T—" My throat caught, and I choked on the air pinched behind his name, which I couldn't say because he'd *told* me not to. The frustration turned into a flurry of rage and I screamed. Let it out, slapped my hands on the floor in front of me as my throat ached from the force of it. "WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH ME?"

Tomik was wide-eyed for a second, shocked, and I was glad. I didn't want him smirking, laughing at me. I wanted him just as terrified as I felt.

I can help with that.

"No!" I snarled at Greta, and Tomik tilted his head. "You can't just do this to me forever."

He was in examine-mode again. Eyes narrowed as he shifted on the chair, crossed one ankle over the opposite knee. "I think this shit is because I messed up when I reset you before. But... it is interesting."

"I'm not a science experiment!" My rage simmered, emotions edging in again, and I didn't want to feel them. I didn't want to feel anything. I wanted all of this to be a bad dream. Sniffling, I wiped my nose and stared at the floor. "I'm Hannah. I'm a person. Not a toy, not some *thing* you can mess with."

"You're a collectable," Tomik replied, deadpan, and I twitched.

"You used to care about me. I think... I think you loved me once. Opening night of the play, when you kissed me. That wasn't fake, that was real." I nodded, lifting my gaze to his. "*That* is the real you."

"You're wrong, Hannah," he growled, suddenly seeming just as dangerous as his tattoos and his clothes made him look. "That's not me."

That was some pathetic loser. Some unevolved form of myself that was *never* going to be me. This is the real me.”

“You weren’t a loser. You were *never* a loser! You were quiet, and kind, and you never got the recognition you deserved at home, or at school, but that didn’t mean you weren’t amazing!” Lifting into a kneel, I shuffled forward slowly, moving closer to his legs as I continued. “I always thought you were cool. I was so jealous of your photos, of the way you could calm any animal down and turn it into a cuddly ball of fur, or scales, or whatever. You were my best friend for so long, and then you were more, then I lo—”

“Don’t,” he snapped, and he planted his boot against my stomach, pushing on the tender marks from the needles. I flinched, couldn’t help it, but I grabbed onto his knee anyway.

“I loved you. I loved that version of you, no matter what you think of him. We all change, but we don’t have to lose everything good about us in the process! I can—”

“Stop.” The command was iron clad; it froze my fingers on his jeans, made my lungs twitch as they automatically pulled in a breath. I couldn’t even swallow as my awareness narrowed to just him. Only him. Nothing else. Even the words I’d wanted to say frayed and fluttered away in the stagnant air. “This is a pointless conversation, Hannah, because you’re about to forget every fucking bit of it... but I want you to hear this. I don’t want to be that idiot you *think* you loved. I didn’t want to be that loser when I was him, and nothing you do, nothing you say is going to change that.”

Tears welled in my eyes, a croak slipping from my throat as I almost thought about arguing, and then it was gone. Idea missing. Like I’d left my car keys in the freezer. No logical connection.

“Go ahead and try and save me, Hannah. Do your angel shit, cast all your spells...” He reached forward to tuck a strand of hair behind my ear before he grabbed onto the sides of my head hard. “It’s not going to work. And you’re not going to remember me telling you this anyway.”

I will.

Another choked exhale, a weak sway of my body forward as the world disappeared around his face. His handsome face. The face I’d loved.

Then Tomik leaned forward... and kissed me. Soft, gentle, warm. Pleasure washed away all the concern, the anxiety, the dull throbbing fear, and all I felt was good. I didn’t know why I was so tense, because I could

do this forever. I wanted to do this forever. To do more. I wanted his hands on me, wanted him inside me.

As if he'd heard it his tongue teased past my lips, intensifying the kiss, singeing my tongue with a brush of his. The whole world felt bright, shiny, perfect, and then an orgasm hit. Blinding bliss, nerve-blowing ecstasy that had my muscles shivering. I gasped air against his mouth, moaned, tried to move closer, couldn't, but it was fine. It was good. Everything was good and sweet and humming, trembling aftershocks rolling through muscles I couldn't make move. Still, his lips were on mine, his hands against my cheeks, and he was all I needed.

A moment later he pulled back, still so close I could feel his exhaled breath across my cheek. He leaned his forehead on mine and whispered, "Forget Hannah. Forget everything we've done together. Forget the week you called me. Forget your shitbag boyfriend. Forget all of it. Be Hannah... but forget."

I tried to hold onto the memory of the kiss, the softness of it, but then it was gone. Everything was gone.



"Is this first class?" I asked quietly, slowly becoming aware of the soft seat at my back, the spacious area around my seat and the one just on the other side of a small wall. A man was leaned forward over there, shoving something around on the floor, but he sat up and a small smile tugged at his lips.

"There you are, Hannah," he replied, leaning on the little wall. "Yes, it is first class, and you've been such a well-behaved little zombie-robot-girl for me. And you're going to continue to behave, aren't you?"

Tomik. A voice buzzed in my head. Weird. Discomforting. I swallowed, too confused to respond, so I just nodded at him. Everything in my brain felt slow, like the way my eyes traced his features and linked it to my Tomik. The boy I'd thought I would marry someday before he ran away at the end of sophomore year. Disappeared.

Sophomore year was bad. That was the year I'd lost him. That was the year Susan went crazy, stopped talking. That was the year I'd never felt more alone in the world.

Not true. It got worse.

Thank you, voice, for that ray of sunshine.

I don't do sunshine, the voice replied, but this time I could see a girl somewhere, just to the left of my real vision, inside my head. A gray-ish girl who looked a bit strange. Creepy. But she was smiling even as she flipped me off.

"Hannah," Tomik said, grinning as he leaned closer. "Do I need to make you go bye-bye again, or are you going to be a good girl?"

"Make me go bye-bye?" I repeated, still too dazed to process why he was here, covered in tattoos, and looking so... not like Tomik. "Why are we on a plane?"

"We're going on a trip," he answered like it was the most natural thing in the world. My brain clicked over, brushing off the dust and rust as gears started to turn, neurons firing, bumping into each other to create thoughts, ideas, questions.

"Where?" I looked around, watched as people tucked away suitcases, took their seats in plush little private spaces. Not seats stacked next to seats, but little solo seats in little nests. The oval windows showed an airport, still on the ground. *Where am I?*

"We're going to Moscow," he answered.

I turned back to look at him. "Russia?" I asked, still feeling slow, stupid. I didn't like it.

Me either.

"Yes, Hannah. We're going to go meet some of my friends and have some fun." He chuckled like he'd told a joke, and I felt my forehead wrinkle.

"When did you come and get me, T—" I coughed. My throat felt funny, and I worked to clear it as a flight attendant passed by. "To—" Another sudden clench, like my vocal cords seized up.

You can't say his name. And his friends aren't nice. He's not nice.

"Why can't I say your name?" I whispered, and he grinned.

"Because I told you not to, Hannah-toy. Tell me, do you remember the theatre?"

Yes.

"What theatre?" I asked, feeling something pushing at the back of my mind as everything in my brain picked up speed.

"Nothing, forget I mentioned it."

Tomik was talking, but I'd zoned out. Still too dazed to function. "What did you say?"

"Nothing," he replied on a laugh. "We're going to have so much fun this weekend. You're excited about our trip."

There was a nudge inside me, and then I felt it. Felt a smile moving across my face as I sat up straighter in the seat. "I'm so excited to see Moscow! It's going to be beautiful!"

"Oh yes, I'm going to take so many pictures," Tomik answered, still grinning as his eyes roamed over me. I followed his gaze, looking down at the skirt I wore, tights underneath, ending in little ankle-high boots. *Those aren't mine.*

Nope. Neither is the top.

I plucked at the blouse. It had a plunging neckline, two sweeps of white fabric that dipped low enough to reveal I wasn't wearing a bra. The round curves of my breasts were visible, full-on cleavage.

He always puts you in white. White, white, white. When do we get some black? Gray girl was stomping around in combat boots and a plaid skirt. Her tight, black shirt said 'Haha Haha NO' in bright red block letters on the back. She grinned, posed. **Looks good, right?**

"I don't know what's happening," I said, half to the girl in my head and half to the boy I used to know. Both of them looked dangerous.

"I know you don't, Hannah-toy, but it doesn't really matter." Tomik reached over the little wall and stroked my cheek before pinching my chin, holding me in place. "After we take off, you're going to sleep, because you're very tired. You'll wake up to eat, and then you'll go back to sleep until the flight attendant tells you to prepare for landing."

Oh, how gracious, he's going to feed you today.

My stomach rumbled, and I realized I was starving. I pressed a hand to it, feeling it gurgle. "I'm hungry."

Tomik sighed, leaning forward to dig through something, before he sat up with a package of almonds. "Here. Better hurry, won't be long until we take off."

He was chuckling as he leaned back in his seat, hidden behind part of the divider separating our seats. I tore into the package immediately, not even realizing just how hungry I was until I had food in my hands.

But the almonds were gone too fast, and my stomach growled again.

People were still boarding, and so I leaned forward and held up the empty foil package. "Do you have any more?"

"Needy girl today, aren't you?" Tomik sighed and reached for the backpack tucked away near his feet. Tearing open the zipper, he grabbed another package of almonds and a protein bar, holding them both out. "Have at it."

"Thank you," I said, going for the protein bar first as the stream of people thinned out. It was vanilla coated... something, and it was tooth-achingly sweet, but it was food.

I desperately accepted the bottle of water from a flight attendant, drinking most of it between bites of the bar. When a different one came by offering alcohol, I hesitated, but the gray girl popped up. **Take it. Take two.**

"Um, can I have these?" I asked, holding one orange drink, and one that looked like champagne.

"Of course, miss," the woman answered, still smiling, and I took them, setting them on my narrow table by the divider.

Nice. Chug them before he makes you sleep.

Who are you?

"Naughty girl, are you trying to get drunk?" Tomik peeked at me, half his face visible in the gap, those shaved lines in his hair making him look intense. Scary.

He's bad. Ignore him. Drink.

I shrugged, took a sip, finished off the orange juice with the last of the protein bar, and then I dove into the almonds as the safety demonstration began.

"Remember, Hannah-toy. Bedtime once we're in the air." He didn't even bother to keep looking at me, he just sat back and disappeared.

Nasty man. Keep eating. The girl spun around, finally dropping into a cushy, black leather chair that... hadn't been there before. Of course, nothing was there. There was something wrong with my brain, and this was a side-effect.

Maybe a hallucination brought on by hunger?

That wasn't so strange, right?

Real. Not real. Doesn't matter. She was suddenly close, and I opened my eyes wide, trying to wipe her away. **My name is Greta, and I'm going*

*to show you the things he's trying to hide. I'll do it while you sleep. I think that will help with the upload.**

Upload? I asked my own brain as I devoured almonds, drank champagne like it was water... because the water was gone.

Think of me as your hard drive. I remember for you when he tells you to forget.

Remember for me... Had I forgotten things? More things? I couldn't really remember how we got to the airport. Couldn't remember talking to Tomik at all... I'd tried before. Left messages with his parents, but they were flighty. Distracted. They promised Tomik was fine, traveling the world, taking photographs.

Maybe that's where we're going. To take photos in Moscow, and he invited me to—

No. No. No! Greta stomped harder, but her shoes made no sound in the vacuum. **This isn't a good trip. He's going to hurt you. Bad.**

Tomik wouldn't do that. I looked over at the divider, but I couldn't see him at all. A quiet, slightly unnerving laughter floated through my head, as if it were bouncing from ear to ear.

He already has. I'll show you. Don't worry. We're going to figure this out.

The plane started moving, and a thin frisson of panic wound up my spine. I finished the champagne and snacked on the last of the almonds more slowly, eyeing the world moving by outside the plane. My stomach felt better, not so angry, even though it kept making noise as it attacked the food. *How long had it been since I ate?*

Yesterday... maybe the day before. I can't see things as well when he makes you a zombie robot.

Right, of course, the zombie robot issue. My own brain wasn't making sense, and sleeping didn't sound like a bad idea. I would sleep, wake up... somewhere, maybe Moscow. Was this a direct flight? I should have asked that. Too late now. Already in the seat, on the way, with Tomik. That was weird. Everything was weird.

He'll explain it when we land.

No he won't, but I will.

Shut up.

You shut up. You're the one he's making go to sleep. Greta stuck her tongue out inside my head, and I rolled my eyes at... myself.

I didn't have to sleep if I didn't want to. Even though I couldn't say his name for... some reason, that didn't mean I'd go to sleep just because he wanted me to.

Yes, you will. You'll do anything he says. He's a mesmer, you're a collectable, blahblahblah. Been there, done that. The gray Greta girl mimed talking with her hand. **When you wake up, you'll know more. I promise. Just... don't scream. He'll make you into the zombie robot again.**

Scream? Why would I scream? Panic unfurled in my semi-satisfied belly. There were hoops of logic my brain didn't want to go through, but I was going through them anyway. How had Tomik gotten me on a fucking plane without me remembering? Why wasn't I in my apartment? Why couldn't I remember even talking to him?

This was impossible. Absolutely impossible. And wrong, very, very wrong.

And bad. It's sooooo bad.

Definitely bad.

I could cause a scene, stand up and scream '*Bomb!*' and they'd stop the plane, but just as I reached for my seatbelt to undo it, my hands stopped obeying me. I tried harder to make my thumb flip the little metal flap, to open the seatbelt, but my fingers wouldn't listen.

Behave. Behave. Behave! Greta sing-songed around in circles, laughing again.

I couldn't catch my breath, panic turning my lungs into vises that wouldn't let go. The pressure kicked in as the flight started to take-off, and then that eerie feeling of weightlessness came as the wheels left the ground.

Airborne.

Shit.

Night night.

I tried to widen my eyes, to pinch my arm until the ache made me flinch, but I held on, dug my nails in even as exhaustion suddenly washed over me. Tired, but not tired. It was a lie. It was all a lie.

Someone help me.

HANNAH

“Snap out of it, Hannah,” Tomik growled, and then I saw him. Actually saw him and recognized him. I didn’t know for how long, but I knew he’d made me go *bye-bye*. Fear buzzed in my veins at the sight of him, and I remembered the plane, but... the plane was gone and a cage was in its place. A real fucking cage.

“Where am I? Where the hell am I?” I backed up from the cage door, scrambling backwards the little bit I could until my back hit the cross-hatched wire at the back. I sat down and immediately hissed as pain spiked at my asshole. Just as I reached down and touched fur, Tomik chuckled.

“You’ve got a tail, little Hannah-toy. Ears too.” He pointed at the top of my head. When I reached up to feel them, he *tsked*. “Oh no, those are all staying right where they are. You’re not allowed to take them off... or out, as the case may be.”

It’s a butt plug, with a tail attached. Real original. The gray girl yawned and leaned forward on a blood red couch. **Time to play the memory game.**

Flickering images flashed in my head, so many bad things. Pain. Forced pleasure. More memories poured through me, a torrent of them. A hotel, a beer bottle, a girl fucking herself... a latex catsuit, and Tomik smiling as men gathered and began to fuck me, and... and a gun I almost used on my head. All of it done, commanded... by Tomik.

Staring at him through the metal lattice of the cage, I didn’t want to believe it was Tomik. But it was. It really was.

Don’t scream.

I won't, I won't. But my lip trembled.

"Why are you doing this to me?" I asked, fighting the urge to cry, trying to find some anger beneath the fear and sadness.

"Because you're collectable, and I'm a mesmer, so I have to collect. It's the way the world works." He grinned, and another man walked up behind him, an older man who was vaguely familiar, with short, almost white hair.

I knew that. That he was a mesmer.

Yes, you did. Greta nodded, her strange smile spreading. **Told you I could do it.**

"What are you up to over here?" the man asked, and Tomik chuckled, standing up to his full height, high above the cage. So big.

"Just waking up this party favor." Tomik kicked the cage, and I couldn't help but make a sound. Fear had its skeletal hands wrapped around my spine, and it was squeezing hard.

I felt cold and looking down it wasn't hard to see why. I was in lingerie. Bright white, with pretty ribbons tied into bows on the sides. It was a corset, which partially explained why it was so hard to breathe. White lace underwear revealed more than it hid, and white, thigh-high stockings were already dirty. Dark smudges, a tear on one of the knees already. The faux-fur tail angled over my right foot was also white, almost pearly. I imagined the ears probably matched.

"You're going to play nice and share, yes?" The man asked, grabbing Tomik's shoulder in a friendly way as he chuckled, but when his gray eyes found me, they were empty. Cold.

Shit. Aaron, that's him. I'd recalled his name.

Yep. Told you his friends aren't nice. Greta spun her finger in a circle. **Look around.**

The two men kept talking, but I focused on the room... building... a church? It was ancient, though. Not very wide, or long, and no pews or altar in sight. But it was definitely a church. Though dirty and broken in spots, the stained glass high above me was still beautiful. I stared, watched the way it turned the filtered spears of light into faded purple, cornflower blue, golden yellow. It was too pretty for this neglected place. Leaves and trash littered the corners of the space, old grime on the floor, and high above I was pretty sure I could see another shaft of light coming from the roof. Dust motes danced within.

Nasty man is talking to you, Greta nudged me, and I looked up at Tomik.

“What?” I was lost as to why both men were smiling, staring down at me.

“We’re going to let you out to play in a little bit, but first I want you to watch.” Tomik patted the top of the cage. “Do not hide your eyes, Hannah-toy.”

The corset was too tight for this. I could feel the hyperventilating coming on, and I could already barely breathe, but at least the other men weren’t looking at me. No, because there were two other women. One of them was still in her cage, but the pretty redhead was already naked, and they were circling her like wolves, beside a heavy wooden table.

Aaron walked over, joining the pack.

Someone said, laughing, “Well, shit, this really is Alexa Casey. How the fuck did you pull this off, Sergei?”

I couldn’t resist the urge to inch forward and angle for a better look.

“Bitch snubbed me at a restaurant. I was just trying to say hello.” Sergei had a thick black mane and an even thicker accent—definitely Russian.

I’m in Russia. Unfortunately, that knowledge didn’t help me feel better. As soon as Sergei yanked the woman’s head back by her hair, I saw her face clearly and my mouth opened in surprise.

It actually was the actress Alexa Casey. The one from that spy movie I’d liked last year, and she’d been on a few shows too. Easy to remember with her vibrant red hair... although normally she was smiling. Right now, she looked more like someone zonked out on drugs.

Zombie-robot-girl.

Yes, a zombie-robot-girl. Just like I was whenever he got me here... and on the plane too.

You screamed on the plane. Greta looked a little uncomfortable on her red couch, but she rallied quickly. **It was just because you were remembering, though. Think. You can remember. Do it.**

I shook my head, because I didn’t want to remember more. I didn’t want to panic while locked in what looked like a large dog crate. Of course, I didn’t want to be out there either.

“Get on the table,” white-haired Aaron said in the mild voice of a man ordering a steak. Alexa moved. Stiffly. “Ease off on the control, Sergei. We don’t want her empty.”

“Nah, we’re going to fill her up plenty. Teach her what happens to cunts who don’t play nice,” another man said, swatting her ass with a loud *pop*. The woman didn’t even react beyond a twitch of muscles, and then she was on the table, on her back.

“Spread your legs wide, ’atta girl.” The older man raked his fingers over her belly. Someone had their hand between her legs a moment later, and she arched off the table, moaning, groaning. It was horrible, debasing, and I hated the most that my body seemed to react. To want it. Crave it.

I was already wet, and with her next loud cry my clit thumped in envy.

“Little slut, you want us all to fuck you?” One of two brown-haired men asked, and then he looked at the other... who looked exactly like him. I flicked from one to the other. Both were sharp of feature with dead-white skin and army-quality haircuts.

What the fuck? Twins?

“Answer Mitchell, bitch,” the other twin commanded, and Alexa let out a high-pitched whine.

“Yes, yes, please! Please fuck me!”

“All of us,” Sergei added.

“All of you! Please, please, I need— God! I need to come, please... please fuck me...” She sounded so convincing. Desperate, horny, needy, but I knew better than to believe it. Lurking in my shadowy, broken memory were flickers of me doing the very same. I remembered moaning, panting, asking for more as Tomik smacked his belt over my pussy. I’d come from it with just a word. Alexa Casey would too. We all would... a most horrifying thought.

They slid her down the table to where the Mitchell twin had his cock out, and he slapped her face before he ordered her to “Open up, slut.”

Wet gagging and choking sounds filled the abandoned church, and I looked away, to the beautiful stained glass then my head snapped back to her. Much of her was blocked but her hands... her hands were clutching desperately at the air beside the legs of the man face-fucking her. *Name? What was his name?*

Mitchell, dumbass. Ugly Twin One.

I gulped in sympathy at the rasps and spluttering sounds as she struggled to get air. He hadn’t even dropped his pants. I looked down and my head snapped up, again.

Do not hide your eyes.

The twist of my head had been jarring, involuntary, and it brought on tears. If I were braver, I'd tell them to leave her alone. I'd do *something*.

That would be stupid, Greta snarked.

"Fuck this, she doesn't have enough holes. Who did you bring, Roman?" Tomik laughed, and the unoccupied twin beckoned him to the other crate, a few yards to my right. The girl inside looked younger than me, maybe twenty. The little skirt and top she wore barely concealed anything. Her arms were wrapped over her chest, as if to hide herself, and she was babbling a string of words. "Please, no, leave me alone, please..."

When Roman spoke to her she screamed.

"God, I do love that sound," he laughed, leaning down to open the crate. She panicked, kicked, threw herself farther back, and he snapped his fingers. "Stop."

The girl froze, and I had to force my next shallow breath into my aching ribs. That's what I looked like when Tomik pulled my strings. Exactly like a puppet.

"Come out."

She crawled from the crate, on hands and knees, mouth open. My stomach clenched when Tomik took out his dick, held both sides of her head, and shoved it in.

No, no, no.

Told you. Bad man. Nasty. Not yours. Greta seemed distracted, and she just pointed, somehow aiming my eyes to Alexa.

They'd angled her so she was draped across the narrower part of the table. One twin in her throat, and the older man between her thighs.

"Aaron. And Mitchell," I murmured, trying to remember their names, as if I could repeat them to the cops later. Aaron paused to pull his shirt over his head, and I was surprised to see him look strong. Fit.

The man leaned over her, violently twisting her breast until the sounds of Alexa choking on Mitchell's cock echoed off the rafters. "Say 'thank you, Aaron.'" His quiet voice still rang with power.

Mitchell ripped his dick out so that she could sputter and cough, with a garbled version of "Thank you, Aaron," barely making it out of her mouth before the big Russian, Sergei pulled Mitchell backward and started throat-fucking her.

"Mine, asshole." Mitchell sounded amused as he dragged Sergei away and retook the actress' mouth.

Closer by, bubbly choking sounds filled the air as Tomik slammed his cock in and out of the younger girl's mouth. She was on her knees, in that tiny plaid skirt and a ripped, white button-down shirt. Fucking schoolgirl fantasy, and Tomik had been first in line.

Tears rolled down my cheeks, and I tried to wipe them away, to look stoic, to pretend to be strong—but it was a lie. I'd cry if they wanted me to cry, beg if they wanted me to beg. I'd moan, come, scream, thank them... whatever they wanted. A fucking room full of nightmares, and Tomik had brought me here. Brought me to this on purpose, to *share* me.

Tomik turned his head, and I met his eyes across the maybe ten feet that separated us. "You like this, Hannah-toy?"

I shook my head, tried my best to hide the fear down where he couldn't find it, but he just laughed as he shoved deep and held the girl pressed to him. Her body twitched, convulsed.

"Better answer before she passes out. She loses consciousness, you're next." Tomik grinned, and I felt my fists clench.

"No!" I shouted, and the mesmers laughed. All of them. I flinched and crouched lower.

"That's a word we don't hear much," Roman said, his eyes landing on me.

"Not the right answer, Hannah-toy. You really want to hurt this girl?" he asked like it was my fault he was choking her with his dick.

I inhaled, digging my nails into my legs while staring at the girl and knowing she wouldn't resist, and he could probably kill her that way.

"Yes, okay, yes! I like it! Please just let her breathe!" I was against the side of the cage closest to her, fingers reaching through the wire, watching as her eyelids flickered, rapid blinking, body slumping before he finally pulled out and she wheezed in air, coughed, bent forward to let the drool hang in glinting strings from her lips.

Her hands were plastered to the dirty floor. Such small hands and delicate fingers. For a moment, my wish to help this girl overcame all my fears. *If only*. What would they do to her, us, afterward?

A soft whine escaped her. Tomik grabbed hold of her face, seemingly intent on her every move, and she moaned, her hips tilting, thrusting, humping the air.

"What's the girl's name, Roman?" Tomik asked softly, glancing at me once more before he returned to staring at her.

“Fuck, I forgot.” Roman nudged her with his shoe. “Tell us your name, girl.”

“Kyla,” she said, dazed and still moaning, grinding onto her hands where she’d wedged them between her legs.

“Nice. Kyla, get your filthy fucking hands away from your cunt.” Tomik flicked his gaze to me. “Same for you, Hannah-toy. No touching yourself. Watching is edging enough for you.”

The meaning of that ran deep into me tunneling, tumbling, blossoming into pleasure. Suddenly all I wanted was to touch myself. My clit throbbed.

He’s fucking with you, Greta whispered.

I know. My own hands lowered, kneaded my thighs. The rigid cock sticking out of Tomik’s pants made my mouth water, and I swallowed.

“Please? More?” Kyla begged, reaching for his dick, but Roman snagged her wrist, yanking it behind her back with a vicious twist.

“Did Tomik tell you to touch him, cunt?” He jerked her arm a little higher, and Kyla’s next moan became a stuttered keen. “Answer.”

“No, Master Roman!” Her arm freed, Kyla cried out, clutching it to her chest. Then she licked her lips and opened her mouth wide as Tomik inched his dick closer before pulling it back.

Her tongue sneaked from her mouth, wriggling, straining to lick the tip of his cock.

“Tell me how much you want it,” Tomik prompted, almost purring.

Without removing her focus from his dick, she babbled an answer. “I want your cock. Please let me suck it. I want you inside me, I need—” Her hips rotated, squirmed, then her rattled-out speech was cut off by his next thrust, and he was in her mouth again.

One part of me wanted to throw up, another part of me was getting wetter. This build of arousal was plain wrong and had to be a mesmer effect.

Don’t touch yourself. Tomik and his words.

I pressed my head to the cage, disgusted at myself, then turned to the others. Aaron was grunting, cock out and in his hand as he came all over Alexa Casey’s stomach.

“Roman, come give us a twin show,” Aaron called, laughing as he tucked his dick away behind his boxers, but left his pants hanging open.

Without pause, Roman strolled to the actress. His dick was out, and it took me only a second to realize the twins had dressed the exact same. Both

in crisp, white button-downs, black slacks, shiny black shoes. Even their hair was cut the same. Identical twins stood at either end of the woman on the table.

“Dammit!” Tomik growled as he tore himself from Kyla’s throat. He took her with him by the hair as he strode to the other mesmers. “Don’t come yet, Mitchell. I want this shot before you guys fuck her up.”

“Better hurry,” Mitchell said, slowly shoving in and out of Alexa’s mouth, grunting, his hand wrapped way too tightly around her neck.

On the way over, Tomik grabbed a switch hanging on a cord and clicked it. A small spotlight on a twice man-height support shone down on them. The nasty scenario sprang up in color and stark shadows, caressing the flesh of the naked redhead dominated by two neatly-attired twins.

The moist sounds of fucking seemed to amplify as Tomik’s boots crunched across the grit. Between the men, the girl’s body writhed, her red hair edged in highlights. Her head never left the throat-hold and her legs stayed fastened in place by Roman’s death grip on them. I could see dents in her thighs from his fingers.

Tomik dropped Kyla beside the pack, sprawled out and moaning. Her splayed legs scraped over the floor as if she wanted something she could not have—sex and filthy mesmer orgasms, of course.

In a move that seemed choreographed, Sergei was on top of her a second later, and he had the girl face down on the filthy floor as he slammed into her from behind.

Tomik dug his camera out of a bag against the wall and started taking pictures, circling the pack, crouching, standing, back, forward, the shutter-clicks firing fast as he took pictures of the twins fucking Alexa. Sergei screwing himself into the girl served as a mere backdrop.

I tried to close my eyes. I *tried*, but they always opened a second later. I tried to find the floating dust motes by the ceiling, and almost bit my tongue as my head snapped back into place. Everything about this was horrifying, and they just kept going. They took turns, and didn’t seem to tire, dicks hard and ready. All I could do was watch as they fucked Alexa in the ass, and then shoved something massive inside her cunt.

A big metal... shape.

Still Alexa moaned as they added clamps to her skin, ripped them off, added them back again. They fisted her pussy, her ass, treating her as nothing more than holes to be violated. The other girl, Kyla, begged for

more cock and clawed at the floor as Sergei rammed into her. He seemed determined to pile-drive her through the concrete. Her knees and elbows were bloody, her face and hair coated in dirt.

When Alexa stopped making noise, they dragged Kyla over to lick the sloppy mess between the actress' thighs. Come was dripping off the edge of the table, onto the floor, and it was Tomik who shoved her face down to the floor and made her lap it up.

The others chuckled, upturning flasks and bottles and glugging down whatever those contained. Rehydrating, like men who'd done too much CrossFit at the gym.

I hated him. Hated them all. I wanted to see them dead.

Yes... that's it. Good ideas, good ideas.

Time ratcheted past. Someone dragged a mattress inside, for *their* comfort not Kyla's. Mitchell was fucking her in the ass on top of it, turning the pleasure on and off so that she screamed and moaned in alternating wails of pleasure and pain.

Told you. All bad. Bad, bad men.

I'd covered my ears for a bit, but now I just knelt in the crate. I watched because I had to, only occasionally feeling something beyond blank horror.

Finally, Tomik walked over, banged on the top of my crate, and I looked at him because he allowed it. "Almost your turn."

"Please turn me back into... into a zombie girl? I don't want to be awake for this, T—" Choked on his name, *fuck*. "Please," I begged again. "Do the bye-bye thing?"

No. Don't ask that! It screws me up too!

Tomik crouched beside the crate, close to me, *tsking*. He was on the other side of so many little metal squares.

"Listen to that." He cupped his ear, and I found myself listening as if something precious were happening. "Magic." The moans amplified with the other noises. "The sound of the women's holes being fucked. Such a beautiful twisted soundtrack."

"No. Please make me go away." I shook my head slightly, more afraid than ever, drained, shivering. How could this be me, here, now? How could I have ever liked this man?

I hadn't though, had I? This was not my Tomik.

"Now that's not nice, Hannah-toy. They saved you for last, you should be grateful. After all the times I've reset that brain of yours, this time I want

you to remember what a mesmer is, what a mesmer can do *before* we fuck you.”

Tell him how much you remember. Tell him about the rocking horse. Oh! Tell him about the play again, that’ll really do his head in. Greta was gleeful, standing on her bright red couch and doing little excited jumps before she dropped back down again and sat. **Do it, do it, do it.**

Why, though? I knew why I wouldn’t. I was afraid if I unhinged him more, he would simply kill me.

“Don’t worry, you’ll come, my little collectable. You’ll love this, just like they did.” There was a sick, slick edge of satisfaction to Tomik’s voice, and I recoiled on instinct, fear strumming my nerves.

“I don’t want that. I *don’t* want this.” *Fuck*. Crying, again.

“Problem?” Aaron smirked as he looked down at me. “She’s so... clean.”

“I was trying to find wings to go with it.” Tomik shrugged. “Another time.”

“Wings?” Aaron chuckled, slapped Tomik on the back. “If you do it, send me the pictures.”

“Obviously,” Tomik answered, smiling coldly, and I could do nothing but stare at them. They were soulless. Monsters.

Mesmers.

“About ready to share your toy?” Aaron asked, as Roman... or Mitchell... walked up beside him. One of them had their shirt off, but I’d lost track of who was who in the nightmare game of cups the identical twins had played.

“Going to leave her terrified?” The Roman/Mitchell one asked, clearly happy about the idea, tongue sliding over his top teeth and grinning like a demon with a soul to soil and harvest.

I forced myself to look at Tomik, pleading silently, but he just shrugged, his eyes locked on mine. “That’s my plan, but it’s whatever you guys want. I think Sergei is about to tie things up with Alexa. Don’t miss the show.”

The men laughed, a dark, cruel sound that sent a chill down my back as they walked to her. Alexa was sitting up, though wobbling. Sergei was half-holding her upright. “You guys ready?”

“Give us the endgame,” the *other* Roman/Mitchell called as he dragged Kyla off the mattress and dumped her onto the floor. Literally just dropped her, and the girl was conscious, but she didn’t move. Didn’t even curl up.

That's going to be me. Soon.

Probably, Greta said inside my head, and then shrugged. **I didn't lie to you. These guys are fucked up.**

Thanks, I added sarcastically... to my personal badass figment, but all the while what hurt me most was why Tomik wouldn't just let me go. Or wall this away behind a haze of pleasure or zombie-robot-girl so that I wasn't present for these horrors.

The men had carried Alexa to the mattress, and they set her down surprisingly gingerly, but she was limp, barely there. "Come. Up," Sergei commanded, and it took her a moment, but she fumbled weakly to sit upright, legs crossed, slumped forward. "Show us your face."

Alexa's lip was split, and I wasn't sure when that had happened. I'd mostly seen the other end of her for the last God-only-knew-how-long.

"Do you think you're pretty?" Aaron snapped his fingers to get her attention. "Sergei?" The Russian grabbed a fistful of her red hair and yanked her head upright so Aaron could lean in for some face-to-face. "Answer me."

"Yes," she whispered. Her little words carried across the stagnant space. A place that had once been sacred. Precious... beautiful, now it was a backdrop to a carnal nightmare.

If what they'd done could leave a smell, it would be rotten and rank; it would deposit a vileness on their skin that would follow them for the rest of their lives.

"You know what would make you even prettier?" Aaron asked, crouching down in front of her as he accepted something from one of the twins. "If you sewed that cockholster you have for a mouth shut." Those words, delivered so calmly, made my heart clench painfully. I could see the curve of metal glinting in his hand. "You want to do that, don't you?"

I could feel the power in those words, knew her answer before she nodded like a doll, saying, "Yes, Aaron," like he was offering her a goddamned cup of coffee.

Sewed. What the fuck? Impossible to get anyone to do this, normally, but not to these men.

"This'll be good," someone drawled. "My ideas are never this fucking fantastic."

"We are cruel bastards."

"Yeah."

Then they laughed—that coarse, gutter-bred laughter that came to them so often. They gathered about her, and I pictured them salivating, teeth revealed, their eyes red and gleaming with evil.

I inched backward, hiding in the farthest corner of the crate, my back squeezed onto wire. Something Tomik had said or done allowed me to cover my eyes with my hands.

I heard a few muted squeaks, a few chuckles from the men. The silence ate at me, but I dared not look.

“Feels good, doesn’t it?” Aaron asked, and a muffled, distorted ‘yes’ came from Alexa.

One of the twins rapped out, “Do your pussy next.”

“Hah! Excellent, Roman!” Sergei snorted—I recognized his voice this time. “That is perfection, man.”

Somehow the terribleness of that command must’ve leached through to Alexa’s self, and she gave a few whimpers.

And then, I looked. I opened my fingers. I looked because seeing what was happening in that moment seemed somehow respectful of her fate. I was the only person watching who cared about her.

“Do it!” Roman snarled. His white shirt was still on—and now I knew which twin was which.

Fuck though. Through the gap between the mesmers, I’d seen her face. Dark stripes and crisscrosses of messy sutures laced across her bloodied mouth. I saw her bend and reach between her legs, those thighs spreading, a huge semicircular needle raised and dark thread dangling.

No, no, no, no, no.

You probably shouldn’t look.

“Hey girl, don’t sew your cunt to the mattress.”

“Fuck. Oh god no.” Retching, I shook my head, then ducked it, a coward again, and I felt the tears against my palms... but then I heard heavy footsteps, cracking and crunching over the grit on the floor. Coming closer.

“Please no,” I whispered, rocking, whimpering, as the crate was opened.

“Out, girl,” one of the twins demanded, and I felt the tug inside that jerked my body into motion. Puppet on goddamn strings.

I am so fucked.

You’re about to be. She’d said it dryly, as if she could exist even if I was obliterated.

Heartless bitch.

Yes to the bitch, except you're wrong. I care too.

Every part of me tried to fight, tried not to put my palms on the floor outside the crate, tried to stop as I continued to crawl out, surrounded by three pairs of feet. One of them was Tomik's. The matching set of shiny shoes was the twins.

Mesmer monsters. All of them.

"I hate you," I whispered and heard them laugh.

"God, this is what gets you off, Tomik?" One of the twins pulled my head back so I had to look up at them. Three men staring down at me like I was nothing.

"It's kind of fun when they struggle at first, and then you have them begging for more." Tomik said that as if he were reading instructions on a label. A crease appeared between his eyebrows. What was he thinking? That he should help me? Please let it be that.

"Isn't that how it always is?" Roman asked, his white shirt spotted with blood. He kneeled beside me and thumbed the highest bow on the corset. "You dressed her up for us. Wrapped just like a gift."

"Had to make up for missing the last event, right?" Tomik braced his hands on his hips, a small smirk playing on his lips. Evil. Now he looked evil, just like the rest of them.

Not my Tomik.

I tried to tell you, Greta said quietly, and she almost sounded sad.

That sadness tore at me.

What was coming was going to pull me apart until I was nothing but shredded human.

"Let's see what kind of fun we can have." The shirtless twin, Mitchell, released my hair. "Stand up."

The command had my muscles working before I could even think to struggle, but I felt them quake as I rose, a constant tremor under my skin. *Fight this.* There was an exit somewhere, and I'd run if I could.

Didn't matter what was outside—snow, ice, bears, anything would be better than in here.

"Follow me, little slut," Roman beckoned, and he walked toward the table. The same one they'd brutalized Alexa on. The same one. I could see the evidence of all the sex.

Blood too, maybe.

God.

Don't look, don't look, don't look.

"I call her ass," the shirtless twin said, and the other shoved him.

"Fuck off, Mitchell. You don't get to call it."

"Just did," Mitchell answered, grinning, teeth perfect, brown hair perfect, his skin blooming with health.

It was infuriating that he was attractive. It had to be a mesmer thing. They were all fit, all attractive, as if all the worst things in nature were beautiful.

"Tell me." He leaned in, smirking. "You want me to fuck your ass until you scream, don't you? Tell me how much you want it."

His hand landed on the back of my neck and my knees almost went out from the sudden, blinding throb of need that landed between my legs. "Oh God," I moaned, hating myself for it even as I squeezed my thighs together and panted. I folded my arms over my breasts, hugging myself, trying for some control over my body.

"She's a needy little slut, Roman." He shook me. "Aren't you?"

"Yes." I nodded, wanting him to pull my puppet strings because it was better than the blinding fear. They'd do whatever they wanted either way, and I'd rather be in a vacuum of bliss than in hell. "Please, please?"

Those words hadn't been mine. They'd tumbled out on their own.

"May as well give her what she wants." Mitchell laughed and shoved my upper half down on the table so I was butt out and available. Underwear tugged down to rest at my ankles. His hand swiped along my slit, and I keened, desperate for something to be speared inside me.

Sticky, leftover come smeared under the corset and my forearms, and I was grateful for the barrier—but he began to undo the little hooks. Each hook released was a mercy to my ribs and damnation for the rest of me. Still, as the ties eased, I could at least breathe.

Breathe enough to scream. As I glared at her in my mind, Greta held up her hands. **Honesty.**

If you're my demon conscience, where's my angel one?

Think I strangled her? She might be wedged in the sofa cushion?
Greta yawned. **Pay attention. I can't help you if you fade out.**

"Hey! Your toy's out of it already."

At a slap to my butt, I snapped back to reality, to *them*. I found Sergei looming to my left, and shut my eyes again.

“You look at us, little *suka*,” he growled, popping another slap to my rear end.

I stared at the brute, and a gigantic grin stretched his face.

“Good *marionetka*. Very good.”

“What’s up with the tail?” Roman asked, laughing as Mitchell tugged it before finishing undoing the corset, and then he pulled me upright to wiggle it off over my head.

“Wanted to remind her she’s nothing more than a toy.” Tomik, a dead-pan reply, again. For some reason that lack of emotion in his voice gave me hope.

“Don’t need a costume for that.” As soon as the corset was gone, Roman grabbed my face, reaching across the table. “You’re nothing but a toy for us to fuck with. You’re not real. You don’t matter.”

The words hammered in, blunt nails sticking in me, wedging open painful places deep inside as they settled. *Not real. Just a toy.*

You are real.

What are you? A ghost?

A ghost? A spirit guide? A magical nymph from the land through the wardrobe? I could be many things. But those would be spoilleerrrrsss! Greta cackled, and even through the fear I almost managed a smile.

Did you just make a Doctor Who reference?

Obviously. The gray Greta girl-thing was happy, but it wasn’t comforting. Not really. Not with them surrounding me, hungry and ready to break the me-toy.

“Face down again,” Mitchell growled, hauling me taller then shoving me forward anyway. Hard. Bending me in half like a poseable doll, and my cheek hit the table with a bright flash of pain. I flinched, but it didn’t matter because I didn’t matter. This was what toys were for.

From behind, pleasure shoved with his probing fingers, wet sounds making it to my ears, and I didn’t bother with stifling the soft moans that became guttural as they crept up my throat. It felt too good. Nothing but warm, buzzing bliss inside. Eyes shut I spewed crazy words, “Yes. Oh yes. Oh-oh-oh fffffff... please, please.” I tried to shove my ass back at him. “Please!”

More fingers stretched me wider, wider. It hurt, hurt so good. God, the aches multiplied. My lip curled and uncurled on the table surface as my

body was shoved back and forth by his hand. My eyes wept though I knew not why.

“Please,” I sobbed uselessly. They broke me that easy. This was how it was with mesmers, always. It still appalled some innocent part of me they’d left untouched.

“Want my cock?” Mitchell asked in a harsh whisper, and I nodded frantically, barely aware that something wet was under my mouth and cheek. Some liquid that wasn’t mine, but that faded with the first rough thrust of his dick.

“Oh fff... Yes!” I screamed as he grabbed onto my hips and drove in hard over and over, slamming the fronts of my thighs into the table. I wiggled and tried to force my hips back to meet him. Every hard slap of skin shoved the butt plug in, felt like double penetration. *Like the rocking horse.*

Good! Remember.

There was nothing gentle about Mitchell, nothing soft about the way he pulled the tail free, making me yelp, and tossed the snowy white fur into the darkness. With one eye I caught the arc as it flew. More cock stretched me, filled me. Then pleasure disappeared like smoke on the wind as he withdrew. I was empty for a second before he shoved his dick into my ass.

Shrieking, I tried to rise, but someone grabbed my arms and yanked me flat again, held me down. “Please, God—”

I choked on the sob as I tried to rip air back in, heard a groan behind me. “No God here ’cept fucking me. That’s a *fucking* fantastic ass,” Mitchell rasped out, sounding pleased. “Her ass beats that actress’. Like a goddamn vise in here.” He groaned again, shunted into my ass, ground himself in circles.

“Not for long!” someone chortled. “Let’s have a contest for what we can stick in there without ripping her in half.”

“Please, please, please...” I begged, because even though I was a toy, I was in pain. It hurt so much, and then—it didn’t. The pleasure roared back.

Click. On. I blinked sweat away, saw Tomik had his hand on my head.

Suffocating pleasure and brutally efficient as my clit throbbed, and every sinful inch of the dick driving into my ass became ecstasy. “More!” And I couldn’t have said if I gave out a moan or a sob in the chaos in my head.

“See? You wanted it. You just didn’t know it yet.” Roman stuck his knuckles in my open mouth, wedging it wider. “Isn’t that right, slut?”

“Yes,” I grunted the word through my teeth and tried to grind my clit against the edge of the table, but a second later my actions meant nothing, because I came. An orgasm ruptured mind and body—the force tore me apart as my toes curled and my nails stabbed into my fists, as wave after wave crushed me. Mitchell pulled out, and there were hands on me, flipping me onto my back, and then he was on me again.

I would have reached for him, begged, but Roman caught me by the throat and squeezed. My head dropped backward off the other side of the table. “Open,” he demanded, but I was already doing it.

Already I wanted him in, wanted another wave to tear and pulse through me. I wanted nothing except to be theirs. Their toy, their thing to fuck and destroy.

He pushed in, hit the back of my throat in one go, pulled back and then forced his way past. No air, but toys didn’t need to breathe. Toys didn’t need their mouths to do anything other than what people needed them for. I wasn’t real, I was a toy for them to play with.

Not good. Breathe.

Go away. I wrapped my hands around Roman’s thighs, pulling him toward my mouth every time he pulled back. Sips of air came sometimes, other times no. Dizzy, jolted back and forth between the twins’ thrusts, I hooked my ankles behind Mitchell’s thighs and would have laughed if I could have gotten air out.

Two twins.

Mirror fucking.

Is this mirror fucking?

You’re going to pass out, Greta snarled, and I brushed her away, even as she got close. Got louder. **Fuck you! Breathe!**

Wet sounds were everywhere. Good sounds. My back arched as pleasure curled its way over my ribs, wiggled between my muscles, fired them up, jolted me, and my spine cracked as I arched off the table and exploded into climax. Mitchell’s cock swelled in my pussy, he groaned, came, and then Roman followed, his cock enlarging as he throat-fucked with one more thrust that slid past my tongue and teeth, jamming himself against my lips.

Click. Click. Click. Do you hear clicking?

BREATHE! Greta yelled, too loud, but then Roman slid back. Their hands gone, and I choked, turned, spit up come and water onto the floor, gulped air back in as the pleasure faded. The light looked funny as I stared up at the stained-glass window—extra shiny.

Then someone blocked it.

“More?” I begged, reaching out, but my hand passed right through them. “What?”

That’s dangerous, Greta hissed. Outside. Not in my head. She was outside.

“How?” I croaked, forcing words past my aching throat, and then someone yanked me by an arm back onto the table.

“What are you babbling about, slut? You want more?” Roman twin asked, grabbing a nipple, twisting until I half-screamed, half-moaned as my clit throbbed. I tried to grasp his hand, but my hand stopped just above. “Tomik said no. If you want Sergei to fuck your cunt, you’ll have to beg.”

Tomik said no?

Lifting my head, I saw Greta gray girl standing at the other end of the table. Long table. Far away. *How?*

Focus.

“You want me?” The world spun, my thighs were caught, yanked down until my ass hung off the edge, knees shoved towards my shoulders. Held by the twins. I looked between my spread legs, saw his cock.

Oh fuck. Big. Too big?

Probably.

“Will it hurt?” I asked, dazed. They chuckled and I felt a blush in my cheeks, but there was pleasure to be had. It might hurt, might break the me-toy, but... I needed.

Need trumped pain.

But... blankness shut me down.

Fatigue made me slump to the table, eyes shutting. What had he said?

“Say it,” Sergei demanded. My eyes flared open. Big man, big muscles too. Not as tall as Tomik but... broad. Thick. Aaron handed him a shiny metal glove and he put it on. “You’re slow, fucktoy. Now you have to wait for cock.”

Each finger on the glittering glove came to a sharp little point. It clanked. Rattled as it moved between my thighs. My lips parted, tongue playing over them as I watched with my neck craned off the table.

“Like this?” Sergei smirked and twisted his hand, rotating the tips of the metal fingers into my entrance.

The back of my head banged onto the table as I groaned and rode another clit-pounding wave of bliss. It had me trembling, but not coming. So close.

The cold metal brushed my pussy, plucked at my lips, wiggled inside with little scratches, tiny flicks of pain inside the good. So much good if I didn’t... try... to think.

Don’t think.

“I still want to fuck her. Don’t ruin her cunt,” Aaron grumbled, but all eyes were glued between my legs, so I looked too. His metal armored hand slid back and forth, but there was something wrong. *Inside.*

Yes. Inside. Idiot. Greta paced behind Sergei, growling, teeth bared in a snarl as he thrust his fingers harder, metal bruising in a nice way. A way that was good for toys, it made my hips roll, made me pant. Whine. Beg.

“More! More, please.” The words sliced out of me.

“Yeah. Three fingers for *suka*?” He showed me three, huge, bunched fingers, waggled the wet things then shoved them all inside me.

Pain lanced at me and I screamed but could do nothing except writhe a little until the pleasure amped again, swamping the pain. *Can’t.*

You will. Take the good. It won’t tear you so much.

The good? I almost giggled. I could take the good.

I whined, humped at the metal glove as I tried to help, and then someone leaned down and caught my nipple in their mouth. Teeth and tongue, sucking, fucking bliss. My spine contorted, some unknown language slipping past my lips as I tried to shout, and someone else caught my lips in theirs, mouthed me like they’d swallow me whole, as metal wriggled deep, scratched, stretched.

“Fuck, that’s hot,” someone said, someone not kissing me. Someone whose tongue was in their mouth, not mine. Another orgasm hit. Too soon. Arching into the glove felt so good it almost hurt. Oh God. It did hurt. The pain went away, sluiced back, shook me with nails and splinters of fire, and I groaned and whispered into the mouth that pressed to mine. “It hurts. Oh God, more! No. Please, more!”

I writhed on the hard table wondering who’d said that. Who? I was so lost.

It does hurt. You’re bleeding, fool.

Kissing lips released me.

The mirror twins pulled my knees farther apart, my hips twitching from the spread, but I could still jerk upward, riding the last blisteringly bright edges of nirvana.

“Please, more,” I whined. The room spun, and I blinked at the wash of pretty lights.

“That’s it for now, fucktoy. You do it. Fuck yourself on the glove. Damn, the sight of that in her.”

Obey. That was all I could even think. They had all the strings. Every part of me controlled with a twitch of thread, a flick of sharp, metal fingers. He said to fuck, I whimpered and begged as I humped the glove until someone said “Stop” and my muscles froze.

Shiny fingers were extracted, to be immediately replaced with cock.

“Yesss, more please, more please, more!”

My throat hurt but I kept going, my words disintegrating into hoarse cries as Sergei braced his arms on the table and fucked into me, rocking the table, scraping the legs across the floor on the harder thrusts. Again and again. Tiny pinches started to assault my breasts. My eyes rolled, I looked, saw little black clamps.

Angry red and purple skin inside fierce steel teeth.

Not good. But good. Good fucktoy. Yes.

“Come, Hannah.” Tomik’s voice snapped through the wet sounds, the laughs, the *snickitysnick* of clamps finding new skin—and I drowned again. Lost in the golden haze until I felt Sergei coming deep inside. Squelching into his own come, he thrust a few more times in the mess then pulled from me.

“Less blood than I thought,” Mitchell said from my left. He sounded curious at most. Roman, on my right, high-fived him above me.

“Who’s next?” Sergei asked, moving to stand beside Mitchell. With the glove held in his big hands, he fed one finger at a time between my lips. “Lick them clean. Good fucktoy.”

The sharp points scratched the roof of my mouth, my tongue, and I tasted blood, but I still lifted my hips and spread my legs when Aaron stepped between them, wetting his dick in my cunt before he switched to my ass for a few thrusts. As if bored, he stepped away, eyeing me while perfectly framed by my open legs and knees.

"I'll get the rope." Roman wandered away into a darker part of the church and I heard noises, clinking.

"Good, we should tie her here. I like girl like this, all spread out." Sergei, with his hand on my neck, pulling me up, shaking me. I figured it was him from the voice, though I was losing track of everyone. Black birds swooped in dizzy paths under the high ceiling. Birds, in here. Life, where I figured there was only death coming.

How could they let us go? Those whimpers were from the others because I was too tired to make any more. I let my head flop, chin bumping on Sergei's big hand.

My eyes weren't behaving. I was seeing what didn't match: the theatre, the café, the girl with that beer bottle. And I was there, in my dress with Tomik's hand between my legs. And down there *hurt*. The shot as a gun boomed. Brains on the ceiling. People and places, a man leading a dog and he turned and petted me asking if I was okay. Yes, yes, I murmured. *I am okay, except for these holes in me.*

Holes? I shook away the past, whatever that had been, forced it down.

"Tie her? Hell no. Where are those hooks?" That was Aaron, shouting from behind me now. When had he gone there? "Those chains above are for the ropes with the hooks. We went to all that effort, no way are we not using them."

Hooks. That squeezed past my obedient insanity, made me gasp and jerk up my head.

"Stay, *marionetka*." Sergei shoved me down, metal hand placed across my mouth. "Hooks? Show us."

Not good, Hannah girl. Greta paced closer, peering between the twins.

No. Not good.

"Hooks? I said we don't damage her." Tomik, and by his tone he was angry. Or maybe annoyed only? His hand closed over my forearm, his thumb pressing in hard enough onto bone to make me wince, which was funny... after all I'd had done.

I managed to focus on him before my eyes decided to close.

"We are the Brotherhood, Tomik. We. All of us. You don't get to be possessive about a collectable." Aaron. I was getting expert at their voices. I smiled in the darkness.

Oh, this sounds interesting. An argument?

Then my brain shut down. A different sort of bliss...

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TOMIK

Aaron took my silence as agreement and they continued with their prep of Hannah. The twins brought over a pile of ropes and the hooks used for suspension, the hooks that dug in along a chunk of skin, made for taking bodyweight, made for swinging people high. Normal people sometimes got their kicks from it—meditation and mind games with themselves.

If you had the weights and calculations correct, the hooks didn't tear out. *If*. But I didn't trust the twins as far as I could kick them.

That was only part of my troubles. I wasn't sure what was bothering me, exactly. For a while I watched them splashing her belly, tits, and legs with rubbing alcohol, while I clenched and unclenched my fists.

Okay, this wasn't going anywhere. I went and fetched my camera, took shots of her being hooked as I circled the table.

Aaron thought I was okay now? Fuck no. I was digesting my problems.

Five hooks were in and I'd taken at least twenty shots of her wriggling and gasping, flopping like a fish until they shoved her flat... Hannah naked, and shining with the alcohol and a few streaks of blood. I circled again, stalking this time, camera dangling from my hand, feeling like I needed a better weapon. Anger growled about inside me, stalking its own path.

I watched Roman shove in another hook on the underside of her tit. She squealed, but not enough for him because he scowled at me. "What'd you do? Thought you like them struggling and feeling it? She's almost dead."

"Not dead." Pretending I was amused, I turned and walked the other way on my predatory path around her, the table, the twins, and Sergei. Aaron was staying back, sitting on a chair, watching stitched-up Alexa

worm on the mattress while he mouth-fucked the younger one. His thrusts were lazy, as if she were merely an appetizer.

“Not fucking dead?” Roman slapped Hannah’s face, hard, making her head bounce to the other side. “Crap. Wake her.”

“You do it.” I smiled at him, feeling violent again. I could smash the camera in his face.

“Whatever you did to this slut, I can’t reach her. Fix her. Make her feel.”

“Tomik. Do it.” Aaron cajoled from the sidelines, as if he were my fucking coach. He grunted a few times after that, and I heard the wet squelch of his dick swimming in the girl’s drool and her spluttery gasps.

“Maybe I can’t.” I stopped in place, slung the camera strap over my shoulder and walked closer. “Maybe I don’t want to.” It was curious that Roman couldn’t reach inside of Hannah. Food for thought.

I’d watched them pull Hannah out until she was spread flat in an X shape. Watched the alcohol flood her skin and heard her small whimpers.

Watched them unpack each new hook and slide and thrust them in, saw her skin tent then pop and those little shrieks she made—half from the sting of the spirits, half from the punctures, I guess. Watched the blood meander over her belly in red streams.

Despite the poison in that alcohol mix I’d wanted to go lick that off her and bite her until she shrieked some more.

I saw the mess between her legs on the table, the way her hair had lost its blonde luster and become a damp, bedraggled mess.

I saw it all, and I seethed.

“What, big man?” Mitchell sneered and took his place beside Roman. “Is she special? We figured that from you going missing. Let us kill her, and you’ll be done.”

“No!” I ground teeth on teeth, then calmed. Wouldn’t do to get too fired up.

In that moment I thought I understood what I was, what had changed. A mesmer, yes. I still wanted to fuck Hannah until, until she was...

No.

Correction. I wanted to keep her and fuck her. I was a mesmer who did not want to *share*. I hadn’t stuck my dick in her today even though I’d had every opportunity. It seemed wrong to mix my come with theirs. To take her holes as they had. I wanted her as mine. My fucktoy, my flesh, my Hannah.

There was some core connection between me and her. I could not stomach the thought of losing her. I wanted to keep her, and so damaging her irreparably was bad.

Though hook holes would heal.

If anything, the sharp metal in her only made me hungrier, made my cock harden more. It was a fetish I could do to her once I was rid of these others.

That was it, yes? My reasons. At least I finally had some grasp on this new state of my mind. So be it. Done.

Decision time.

“I need to talk to you all. Come outside. *All* of you. I swept the church and gathered them with my gaze. I might not have the mesmer control over these men, but I was no pushover. They’d follow. Talking beside Hannah would only rile me if any of them made a move for her.

I strode toward the entrance where the foyer led to double doors and the outside. I stopped in the foyer. It’d do. This was the only way out since the back door was blocked and the windows were stained glass or shuttered.

This small church had once been owned by some Russian nobleman. With him shot and his family deposed, the property had ended up being passed down to other rich men, and lastly, a woman. Conveniently, she was a collectable. Sergei still cultivated her. He visited her mansion and fucked her regularly before the servants, just for a laugh.

This place, though? Small family church allowed to go to ruin. We liked it for our get togethers.

Today it was a bubbling cauldron where the slightest wrong nudge would have the walls splattered with blood. If they weren’t following, I’d possibly go back and kill them all.

Sergei was first. He slumped against a wall and pulled out a silver flask of what I assumed to be vodka, gulped some down, burped, then handed the flask to Roman when he arrived. “What is it, pretty man? I think you have a problem with us?” He gestured at the other three who’d come up behind him.

“Yeah. A little.”

I toned down the anger.

This far from the women all their noises were muted and... I could breathe. Just having the men off Hannah for a while was a plus. Yeah, I had

a fixation on my angel. Didn't mean I wouldn't fuck her over just as bad, only that I'd be more careful, and do it all by myself. Those hooks... damn.

I wiped my mouth, took the flask from Mitchell, ignored his curled lip, took a swallow.

"Here's the deal. She was a friend and almost a fuck in my teenager years. I want her. Alone. I plan to keep her until she's just a smear on my memory... Then I will get rid of her." *Liar*. "But right now, I want you all off her and gone. I'm leaving with her." Or else.

I swept them with a gaze meant to imprint my resolve.

"You can't fucking dictate to us." Roman spat to the side.

"I fucking can and will."

He took a step toward me. Another one, and I'd flatten him. There were weapons here but as far as I knew none of us carried them. A gun would've been handy.

"You arrogant piss—"

"Stop!" Aaron held up his hand. "Both of you calm down."

He gave me one of his pin-you-to-a-wall-dissection stares. I could see him pulling my words apart, figuring the angle. The Brotherhood was him—he'd started it, brought us together, found me too. He seemed to be the best of us at detecting new mesmers. He definitely thought us stronger together, and I figured he'd do anything to keep us that way.

"You'll come back to us, when?"

I shrugged. "I'm not sure. Two months? Tops?"

His eyebrows popped up, and the twins glanced at each other and scowled. "I can handle that. You?"

For once he was looking for agreements to his decision, but the twins were pretty determined to have Hannah, so he'd be aiming to settle them.

Sergei only grunted and raised his flask. "What's one fuck? I say yes, with this."

The twins looked at each other, Roman stuck out his tongue as if cleaning his top teeth, then sucked on his cheek, and generally made annoying sounds. "If..."

He stared at me. I stared back.

"If we get to kill the movie girl. Alexa? We'll fuck her with the hooks in her, take her home, let her OD in a month when the holes have healed. She's known to take too many drugs anyway. Easy."

“Hey,” Mitchell chimed in. “And get her to film herself stitching up her cunt again, so it looks all like a drugged-up idea of hers.” He winked and clicked his tongue at me. “Brilliant yeah?”

Wasn’t worth responding to him. Somehow they’d plan to be there to watch her die. Even for mesmers, they were creepy fuckers. I waited and eventually Aaron nodded.

“You got it. Come back on time.”

“I will.”

I was going. *Hell yeah.*

I’d let her heal for a day, then I’d fly out on the next plane. To somewhere good. Where was good for thinking and constructing a whole new life for her?

This time I was playing maestro in her mind. I’d build her up from the bottom, take my time and do it properly, because now I had the skills. I’d make her want me and all my evil ways.

And I would never see these assholes again.

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HANNAH

Alone. Finally.

My eyes were open, but it seemed forever before I could see.

Elbows under me, I saw how my belly skin leaked blood in dribbly trails. They reformed as I clumsily brushed at them with my palm. The blood came from purply-blue-edged holes. *Holes. In me. Fuck.* I gaped at the injuries, ready to cry yet again. I'd done so much crying.

I lay back down, sniffing back the water in my nose. The table was hard and slippery beneath my back and ass.

The mesmers? I swiveled my head, wiping at my face with the back of a shaky, blood-smeared hand. Gone? The church seemed empty, though I could hear distant voices.

Ropes swayed from above, cutting the room into slivers. Higher up the ropes turned into chains, and above that was the ceiling and the birds.

Could I run?

A command reverberated. *Stay.*

The twins said that after they took out the hooks. Hooks were in you.
Greta shook her head, grimacing. **Bastards. We should punish them.**

"Oh yeah. We totally should," I croaked. My throat seemed lined with splintered glass. No wonder. I'd had more dicks in there than I could recall.

Fuckers.

Greta. I smiled. Least she was on my side, whatever she was.

The ceiling wobbled, timber seemed to creak and crack as if splitting, then everywhere shivered, blurred out completely. When focus returned, I

saw Greta outside me again, and I was sitting up and staring at her. I couldn't move from the table, remember? Commands.

But you can let meee do it. Gray girl smirked. **I got this. We shall punish the fuckers. Watch.**

The mesmers had left their supply of liquor and water and God knew what else, lined up on an old box.

Bottles, bottles, bottles. Greta giggled, dancing beside the box. **Let's see what happens when we switch these, make one pour into the other.** Whiskey became a mix of wound-cleansing alcohol and the remaining liquor, so did a bottle of vodka. After that the rubbing alcohol bottle was dry even when tipped upside down. We... she filled it with water. Then Greta came back to me.

Close your eyes, she sang. **Rock-a-bye, baby...**

I closed them. Shivering with a mix of drab fear, exhaustion, and cold, I sank into a gratefully empty oblivion.

When I woke again, I was in Tomik's arms and wrapped in a soft blanket. He was carrying me. There were stars above and I think a slope below us. The sky looked as if it paled. It was, I guessed, dusk. Unless I'd lost a full night. Not impossible.

Dusk, Greta whispered.

Carefully, Tomik sat, keeping me on his lap. He said nothing; perhaps he didn't know I was awake. I dared not tell him. Not after everything.

Again my eyes leaked unwanted stupid tears. How dare he hurt me as he had? How dare he let them? I was alive, though. I'd survived. When would he let them do it again? I would kill myself next time he gave me a gun.

No, you will not. Determination stomped in with every word of Greta's declaration. **Never ever.**

Tomik began to speak. I listened, absorbing every word.

"You won't remember this soon, Hannah, if you can hear me. I have a confession to make, of a sort. I can't imagine being without you. It took this, today, to make me see this. I won't let them kill you or dispose of you as they often do—thrown naked into a dumpster or left on a street in some rundown neighborhood.

"I don't give a fuck for the brotherhood anymore. I'm going to reset you and make you forget this, forever. If it takes me a month of trying, I'm

making you into someone who likes what I do to you, because I'm still in the business of fucking you every way I want to.

"You won't remember this, but those hooks..."

I heard him sigh then curse.

"Those in you and with angel wings, you roped to the ceiling. Me with a flogger striping your tits, your ass, your back. That's my goal. On my list of things to do to Hannah. Hell yeahhh..."

I believed him. I could feel his cock digging into my side. Even so, even so, I just wanted to fall back into dreamland.

Forgetting sounded perfect.

But I won't let you forget, Hannah. He doesn't know it, but you're mine not his. Yesss.

I grimaced and snuggled into the blanket, into his arms. No matter what he said, Tomik felt safe to me. Hooks weren't now. Things could change. He already had. Tomik was getting better. All I needed was the right pill to feed him, maybe?

We are going to make him pay. More hooks? NO. Fuck no.

Shush. Shush, Greta. He kinda means well.

No, he doesn't.

Does. After the brotherhood, what he'd said seemed to whisper of hope, of plans working and fates changing.

We need to make him dead. Dead, dead, dead.

"Sleep now, Hannah." Tomik stood then readjusted how he carried me. "It's a long car ride to the house."

TOMIK

The brotherhood was solid, a team, but they could take one of us leaving as long as we did them no harm. So, I took precautions, but never thought they'd bother finding me if I didn't return. We flew from city to city, rebooking flights and moving on until we ended up in Greece, here, on Zakynthos Island. Beautiful place. Blue seas, blue skies, beaches and sun, fishing boats and villas, pretty tourists, a few of them collectables if I felt the urge for something new to fuck.

I could've stayed here longer, really, but things were changing.

My cellphone was new, but our passports were the one thing it was difficult to alter. Within one country, sure, I could get the records changed given time. Internationally was a whole other trawler load of fish. The interconnectivity of everything made it likely I'd get caught out somehow, eventually. I didn't risk it.

That meant the brotherhood could track us to our last country if they so wished.

They wouldn't wish it, I'd thought, but this last reply to an email meant we might have future trouble.

I deposited the cellphone on the glass outdoor table beside the decanter of wine and the two goblets, watched Hannah walk to the rectangular infinity pool and dive in—effortless entry. A splash of water disturbed the shine of the surface, then a slim, dark red creature was fluidly moving under the water. She might've been a seal, or a selkie, a female creature from mythology. Maybe she had gills for she went the whole length before

popping up her head at the far end where the pool seemed to spill over a cliff.

These emails though. They dragged my attention from her, and I looked down to reread the first email from Aaron.

Why you felt the need to poison us I do not know. Roman and Sergei swallowed most of it. They both survived but were in hospital for a day. Sergei has shrugged it off, though he'd likely throw you into a wall if he saw you. So would I.

Roman and Mitchell?

You need to watch your back. Forever.

Fuck you.

I'd queried it, assuming he'd forgive if I explained.

I did nothing. What poison? Why would I bother?

And his latest reply:

How would I know. That girl has you totally fucked up.

You put the rubbing alcohol in with the vodka. Who else could've? Tell me it was the girl, and I'll laugh. She was told to stay on the table when we talked.

"Shit." I nudged the cell away from me, snuggled back into the half-lowered sun lounge. Hannah padded toward me, dripping and leaving wet footprints. Dripping everywhere but it was the dribble line from between her legs that had me looking harder. Her hips and ass swayed in that teensy red bikini.

Well, the ass was at the back, but I could imagine. I'd seen it enough.

She stopped a few feet away, teeth pinching her full lower lip. My heart gave some extra heavy thuds.

“Here.” I handed her one of the big, white towels. “Turn around.” I revolved my finger. We’d have to leave here in maybe a week, tops. But, in the meantime, I was enjoying the Greek beaches, the history of the place, and her. Especially her.

Swiveling to sit sideways on the lounge, I pulled her back into me, between my legs. Droplets of pool water landed on me as she combed her hair with her fingers. I bestowed kisses on her shoulders and bare back. Her shivers made cute goosebumps, and I kissed those too.

I’d discovered the pluses on gentleness. When I changed and soared to my mesmer peak nastiness, it felt even more exhilarating.

Her fingers kept combing. The sun was rapidly drying the edges of her hair, and golden strands fluttered against the blue. Beads of water shone on her spine. When I nuzzled her damp skin, I could smell the tang of pool water.

When she ceased to play with her hair, I bit her lightly, murmuring, “Keep going.”

The bikini bottoms were close to a G-string and rode between her cheeks, leaving her ass perfectly nude. My bites became fiercer.

“Ouch,” she said, softly, wriggling in my grasp. “Hurts.”

“Mm-hmm.”

I had more than bites in mind. “Be still for me.”

“Tomik...”

“Quiet.” I’d reversed the command to not use my name. It pleased me now—was a way of fucking claiming her by letting her use it. I did not fear my own name and was going to have it tattooed across her shoulders, below her nape, along with chains leading in from the points of her shoulders. Under my name would be a miniature pair of angel wings crossed with axes... or swords or something else sharp and deadly.

I was mesmer who’d claimed a collectable as my own, and it’d made me stronger.

As before, the one hiccup was her story. Her memories. My weaving of a new life and history for Hannah was still flawed. She’d glitched enough to make me reset her twice earlier during the week. It’d been three days since the last glitch, and I had hopes.

Practice makes a perfect Hannah.

Testing her knowledge might help me see any problems, any places I’d missed. My theory was that glitches happened when she remembered

something that did not fit with the rest of her memories, or when there was no memory at all where there should be some.

“Take off your bikini. All of it.” I popped the clip at the back of the top.

Squirming nicely, she took off the bottoms, shrugged off the top, and dropped the bikini to one side.

Naked woman. With my hands holding her ass, thumbs prying the cheeks apart, I took a moment to admire my catch. “Beautiful. What a pity I have to hurt you.”

“Heyyy.”

“It’s true.” I kissed one cheek. “I like you pristine. I like you bleeding... a little.” I liked how she inhaled and let it out, shuddering.

Still sitting, I pulled over the stainless-steel tray that waited on the table, poured some alcohol into a cup filled with gauze swabs, and began to wipe down her entire back, striping her skin with the alcohol beginning at her shoulders and going down to her butt crack.

Her sharp intake of breath when some dribbled into her crack made me smile. “Cold?”

“Yes!”

“Good. I’m going to put my feathers in your skin, and you’re going to take them, aren’t you, my angel girl?” I took up a marker pen and evenly spaced eight black dots down either side of her spine.

“Mmm. Yes.”

She sounded dazed, but my control was loose. This was just her, the Hannah creature I’d created. She loved my pain, and it gave my sadism a whole other color. This version of her was close to perfect.

“Remember the first time we tried kink, Hannah?”

“Mmm. At the club on Recker Street. You tied me up and spanked me.”

“I did. And you loved it, yes?”

Her answer was breathy, soft. “Ohhh yes. Was awesomely spectacular. Specially when you fucked me in the back of your car afterward.”

“Yes. You were a sloppy wet bitch, and you screamed.” I picked up the first feather, eyed the long, large-gauge steel needle at the end. It looked sharp but I wasn’t sticking it in myself to test it. It’d do.

“I did.” Her ass revolved. In tiny circles. Her come-on-and-fuck-me gesture.

Not yet.

I found the top-left dot and slid the point into her then along, grinning at her stifled squeak then gasp.

The first feather. It swayed to the left of her torso, long enough to look... "Spectacular."

Slowly I worked my way down, doing left and right before going lower. A few of them made her skin leak red, and I put my nose near her, breathing in the scent of fresh blood laced with the tang of alcohol. With my hands I played music on her back, letting trickles of my mesmer power sift in pleasure. A few times I reached between her legs to see how wet she was, how plump her cunt was becoming, and to tease her.

Mesmer powers were a blunt instrument compared to touch. I liked using both. Touching her made me feel almost normal.

When half the feathers were in and waving about, I freed my cock, made her squat over me, ever-so-slowly penetrating. Pulled her down until I felt the shudder of a woman being fucked, feeling that possession, invasion—the perfect squeeze of her pussy around my cock.

"Halfway done." I licked along her spine. "You're going to love the rest."

"Up." I pulled her off me, steadied her, made her stay. Her panting was obvious, her fingers curling at her side.

"More?"

"No." Impatient bitch.

I placed six more feathers then admired the results. Only two dots left. Her back was a patchwork of raised skin where the needles ran beneath, and rivulets of blood. To either side the feathers fanned out, trembling with every inhalation and exhalation. Sometimes the breeze ruffled them.

"Tomik?"

"Yes?"

"They hurt." Her whine petered out; her feet shifted. I almost laughed. I swear I could hear her pouting.

"I know they do." Where I ran my nail around a feather entry point, her skin twitched.

"Can we stop?"

"No. Two more. Then... then I might fuck you." I touched her inner thighs, pushing on them. "Open your legs. Let me see this cunt I own. Should I stick a feather there too?"

"Nooo." But her feet shifted, and she spread her thighs. "Please, no?"

“I can smell you, my slut.” My, I liked that. “Hannah cunt.”

“I’m not...” I heard her swallow. “Not a slut.”

Denial in a collectable. Loved it. Maybe a little more struggling would be good, when I wanted it, but close to perfection. I slipped a finger into her pussy, felt her response, inside where she couldn’t hide it. The squeeze. My carnal doorway to paradise.

I leaned down and looked while I fingered her.

Her opening clenched when I circled it, her clit so engorged it was hard and sticking out of the hood. I spun her to verify. She was more than ready for reaming with something. Cock only? Something else would be more interesting.

More degrading.

“I need to defile my dirty, filthy angel.” Breathing warmly on her, I licked up her clit, once, then ignored that part of her. I played with her pussy and her ass, ran fingers and tongue close to her clit, spreading the slipperiness, biting and nibbling everywhere I could reach.

Her mound pushed toward me. Her ‘*Tomik, please*’ became more desperate. Her gasps more frequent. I kept up my mild interrogation.

Do you remember when we bought that house in Michigan?

Visited my uncle in London?

Where we bought that diamond ring?

Because of course, I’d made her my wife, in her mind. Even so... even so, I worried I’d missed something in spite of her perfect answers.

“You like me teasing you?”

“Mm-hmm.” She nodded like a bobble-headed doll, hopeful I’d do more, I was sure.

This happiness...

It bugged me, like a tick burrowed deep, and it was annoying as hell. And stupid. I had my angel.

Maybe this wasn’t my natural state. Maybe I couldn’t *do* happy? I turned her, hips in my hands.

Hannah had red bite marks all over her, pierced skin where the feathers ran in, and yet she looked blissful. I bumped my finger up her back, around each feather base.

For the first time ever, I felt I could see the swirl of my power within her flesh as it infused her.

Fascinated, I saw how it travelled and unraveled—Hannah skin indenting from the pressure of my finger, the power frolicked around and up her spine, slowly swirling, colored magic in a human pond. Mixing with essence, with flesh and blood and mind. Coaxing and commanding.

I released more power, flooding her sexual places with unadulterated lust.

Her sighs intensified then halted, quivering.

The potential for a climax was written on her, plain. I blew on her, nothing more, hot breath on her back.

A small burst of power, red raw, exploded into her spine, rocketing upward. Hannah squealed, bucking onto my hand where I'd cupped her mound. Not a climax, but close. Her clit dug into my palm.

She bucked again, her hands clawed tight over mine, as if she could make me do things to her. As if.

"You want, kitty-fuck-doll?" I murmured, turning her again. The name I'd given her at Frank's party. I licked her clit, one more time. Smiled up at the poor half-damp naked thing.

"Kitty? Wha—?" She reached for my hair.

"No."

She was dying to climb to the heavens on my tongue.

"Turn around. Back to me. Two last feathers, Hannah."

I wiped my wet fingers on her, drawing a line over her hips as she revolved, then I picked up the last two feathers and speared them in over the marks without any more introduction. She shrieked. Every muscle on her tensed, and she rocked in place.

She hadn't moved though; her pain receptors must be telling her that staying here was insane.

"Good girl." I took a mouthful of her ass and hung on. When her begging grew shrill, I licked her and tasted blood, then scraped my finger over every wound on her. A feral, exciting move. Her butt and back muscles quivered, but she remained. The unending squeaks and protests she made added sauce to the mix.

Jalapeno sauce, I decided.

I grabbed my cock and squeezed it, stroked it. *Fuck, yeah.* Her toes were curling and her feet moving as if to push her off this earth. The sadistic mesmer thrill still grabbed me. How could it not? The powers it gave a man were infinite when it came to a collectable.

I had her, I should use her properly. Fucking her with my cock was seriously boring. I kept my voice monotone, an undercurrent to her frantic whimpers.

“You wanna run from me, Hannah?”

What if I let her?

“Oh. Umm.” Her head flopped back, and she quieted, stayed there swaying, murmuring, “No. No. I like it. I think. I do.”

Shit. Really? Spaced-out Hannah was no fun.

The white feathers fanned out either side of her, the tips fluttering in the light. My angel I’d gifted with pain and blood. I pursed my mouth, stood to my full height.

This was a pretty day. Too pretty.

She liked this more than I could bear.

Blue sky, thin clouds drifting. Birds twittering somewhere. I reached for her. My naked, blood-smeared angel with her plaintive cries when I twisted this feather... or this one.

More sauce was needed.

I was getting itchy, lax, just admiring this little bitch. I needed to keep an edge, or the world would trample me.

“Come.” I took her by the hand and drew her toward the deep end of the pool, as careful as a man at a ballroom leading his princess. “Once you’re in, you don’t come up.” Then I threw her in the pool and pushed her head down until it was beneath the water. “Until I let you,” I muttered.

The bubbles from her lungs and the blurred face, her eyes looking up—yeah, this was better. I put my bare foot on her head again and started to push.

And I stopped... I knew this was wrong, but the reverse felt that way too. Not that I wanted to drown her, I just...

No.

Fuck this should not be me anymore. I needed to put chains on my own self.

I reached down and dragged her up then towed her to the shallow end where it came up to knee depth only, left her gasping and hugging the edge of the pool. I stripped off my shorts and jumped in, nudged aside the pool-cleaning robot. It chugged and tried to clean my foot, so I dragged it up and perched it on the tiled rim. The auto cut-off shut it down.

Wet angel girl, wet feathers. That ass, though. I'd still fuck it to eternity and back.

"What have I done to my poor Hannah?" I grabbed a handful of feathers on the left of her, winched them together with my fist.

Screaming a little she turned. "Tomik?" She turned her face to me. "Why?"

"No reason, my pretty." I swept hair from her face, from over her blue eyes. "I'm insane is all."

"Don't you love me?"

I considered that as I pulled her hips into place with her still face down on the tiled edge. I thought harder as I plunged my cock into her, fully, all the way to the end of Hannah cunt.

"God. That's good." I grunted, thrusting and squashing her to the hard surface, watching her slide, her hands try to grab something, anything. I released her hip and grabbed a handful of feathers on the right too. A few needles popped out.

I fucked her some more, rising to climax fast. It had been exhilarating hurting her, even shoving her under water.

I have to control myself, I thought as I pounded her and screwed her against the pool wall.

"Tomik?" she wailed.

"Love?" What was love? I knew other things, but not love.

Into her body, I exploded a whole orchestral symphony of mesmer power, ravaged her, shredded her mind, made her writhe so hard nearly all the feathers came off in my hands.

Grinning, I attempted to fuck my angel into the damn ground. I came, the jerk and emptying as my cock pulsed brought my eyelids to quivering. I fucked in hard, squashing her ass between me and the firmness of the wall, jammed in there.

"No." I panted, yanking her up by her hair. "I don't do love. I do owning. I own you, Hannah, forever. With lots of filthy, come-filled love hearts. Yours truly, Tomik."

And then she started to whisper terrible things, and I knew I'd triggered this, knew I should've stopped. She needed more than what I'd just done.

"The theater and that girl." Eyes closed she rattled on. "The door and the cat costume. Me, you, all of them fucking me. *Ohmigod*. God Tomik, why? He shoved a metal hand in me, and you watched. But our wedding, I

remember. I remember... kitties and fuck-dolls, hooks making holes in me... beer bottles in that girl and her scared so much she peed, you making me do all those things. How could you? How?"

Then I shut her up. Not with my hand on her mouth, with a reset.

Back to the drawing board.

Next time, I needed to be someone else, maybe.

Still inside her, I leaned over her body, sort of cuddling her, my palm on the wet tiles, feathers underneath. My arm was shaking. A needle attached to a squashed wet feather rolled into the side of my hand.

Fuck.

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HANNAH

Music weaved into my thoughts slowly, waking me like a nudge from an old friend. My brain scanned my body, booting up slowly, and simple words bounced back. Warm, comfortable, *ouch*. I was on a soft bed, confused and muddled, my head aching like I'd had too much to drink last night, and I was alone. Opening my eyes, I didn't recognize the room at all, and though I tried to place where I was... no answer floated inside. I didn't know where I was.

Again. A voice buzzed in my mind, and I rubbed my eyes. In the darkness behind my eyelids I could see a gray girl, arms crossed in front of a black shirt slashed to ribbons over pale skin. **I'm Greta, and you're fucked.**

What? Opening my eyes again, I blinked at the room, tried to shake off the strange image, but it wouldn't move. It was inside me. Unshakeable even as I shook my head.

He made you a zombie-robot-girl again. Moved us. Again.

What? I repeated to the strange hallucination in my brain, but then the music infiltrated my thoughts. Tickling notes that beckoned me upright. My skin pulled at my back as I moved, aching, joints stiff as I creaked into a standing position. *Everything hurts.*

Because he always hurts you. In all the places we go. In all the places you have. The gray girl, Greta, tilted her head then dropped back onto a shiny, black couch. It looked like it should squeak, but it made no noise. Just her, as she waved a hand at me. **Go on. Go look.**

I didn't need her permission, the whatever-she-was, but I moved. Padding on bare feet out of the room, down the hall, meandering across the big white tiles towards the sound of a guitar strumming softly. It plucked at me, reminded me of good things, good times.

Tick, tick, tick went my brain. Like a metronome in time with the music as I tried to remember what the sound reminded me of, *who* it reminded me of—and then I saw him. Sitting on the edge of a chair in the sunlit living room, sand-colored hair, bent over the guitar.

Tomik?

Tomik. Bad man.

No, not bad. I loved him, had always loved him. I remembered feeling the missing space inside me that he'd occupied throughout my younger years. I'd felt the hole his absence had left behind, the ragged edges always hurting. That pain had been bad... but he was here now.

It didn't have to hurt anymore.

He will hurt you. He always does.

No. I shook my head, pushed the gray Greta girl away, and focused on each note that Tomik pulled from the strings. I loved the way he weaved them together, blended them into a meandering song, beautiful and soft. He used to do this when we went for walks, hiding in all that open farmland. Just us and the birds. Making music.

I'd missed him so much that it made my chest ache all over again to think of it, made all that pain fresh for a moment, and I wiped at the stinging tears in my eyes, ignoring the way my back twinged from the movement. Swallowing in a dry throat, I waited until the music lulled and then spoke softly. "You're here."

His hands stilled instantly, his head bowed for a long moment while I studied the strange furrows where his hair was shorter than the rest. Let my eyes trace the tattoo of a snake on his neck, the dark blue whirls on his arms and bare chest. A muscular chest. Muscular arms too. I started to doubt myself, started to worry it wasn't really Tomik—until he looked up at me.

"Tomik," I whispered his name like a prayer, wishing for the bright smile I remembered, but I only got a stare. His brown eyes burning into mine as we stayed like that, locked, like he was the sun, and I was a planet orbiting his ineffable gravity.

I'd always been drawn toward him.

And you're going to get burned.

“How did you sleep?” he asked, resting one arm on the guitar, but I couldn’t figure out my answer. My brain turned over the simple question, flipped it and twisted it, but there was no information there. I didn’t even remember falling asleep.

I don’t even know where I am.

“Hannah?” he prompted, a furrow appearing between his eyebrows. “Answer me.”

Two words that felt like fingers in my throat, working my vocal cords, plucking them like he had with the strings of the guitar until sound escaped with a single, croaked word, “Good.”

Was that true?

How the fuck should I know? Greta grumbled, snarled, stood up inside my head and paced in front of the shiny black couch.

“That’s good. Come sit down,” he said, gesturing at the chair angled toward his, and my feet were moving before I told them to. It was strange, like being on one of those automatic walkways except I was the one walking forward.

My brain felt slow as I sat down, frowning at my legs, confused.

He made you do that. Mesmer. Bad man. Greta stomped and grabbed her hair, letting out a little screech that made my skin buzz. **You never fucking listen!**

Tomik sighed, and my attention snapped back up to him. He was so handsome, even more than when we were young. A man, not a boy anymore, but he looked sad as he met my eyes. “Hannah... do you love me?”

“I’ve always loved you,” I answered fast, feeling the truth resonate inside even as the gray Greta girl growled.

“Are you happy that you’re with me?” he asked, setting the guitar beside the chair so he could lean forward, his brown eyes seeking mine out in a way that made me want to get up and hug him. I just... couldn’t.

“All I’ve ever wanted was to be with you again, Tomik. I— When you left, I felt so empty. Why did you leave me?” The tears were back, burning my eyes, and he sighed and raked a hand through his wild hair.

“I tried to protect you, Hannah. I swear.”

“From what?” I asked on a whisper, ignoring the muttering from the angry gray girl.

“From me.” Tomik stood up, pacing toward the empty fireplace framed in shiny white stone that almost matched the pristine tiles except for the silvery veins running through it. He faced the fireplace, showing me his bare back, and I wished he would look at me again because I didn’t understand his words. I tried to get up again, to go to him, but my legs wouldn’t listen.

He said sit, Hannah. Like a dog. Sit, Hannah. Stay, Hannah. Scream, Hannah. Greta sneered, pointing at me from inside my skull. **That’ll come next. You never listen, but it will. He’s ruining you.**

No, he wouldn’t do that.

He is. He already is.

I shook my head hard enough to make myself dizzy, grabbing onto my knees, digging my nails into the red, sensitive skin. Raw. Like rugburn. *Strange.* Tearing my eyes away, I stared at Tomik again and fought the threatening tears.

“You wouldn’t hurt me, Tomik. You’d never hurt me. I love you, and you love me. We’re married.” Just as the words left my lips, my eyes found the shining diamond on my ring finger like a dream come true, and memories clattered into their places. Tomik inviting me to go with him on a photography trip to Rome. I remembered walking around the Parthenon, his camera clicking away as I smiled for him. I remembered Paris, Greece, Amsterdam—

Moscow.

Terrible things came with that word, made all the pretty memories shudder, horrible images leaking into the vision of clouds behind the Eiffel Tower. A storm. It had stormed that day in Paris. The day he asked me to marry him, the day we’d kissed in the rain—

Lies. Lies. Lies! Greta shouted, stomping one combat-booted foot in the black. **Remember, Hannah! REMEMBER!**

Pain lanced through my head, and I gasped. Violence and blood, so much blood. Men and pain. Hooks into skin, little holes left behind, soon-to-be-dead girls on the floor. A girl crying in silence, a beer bottle shoved inside. A tight latex suit on my skin. On my knees before Tomik, begging him to stop—

“Look at me, Hannah.”

He spoke, and I listened, chin lifted, eyes on his, and peace washed through me.

Bad dreams, just bad dreams.

Not dreams. Real memories, not this made-up shit.

"I wish I didn't need to hurt you, my Hannah." Tomik stepped closer, closed the gap between us in a few long strides, and then he touched my cheek. It was soft, warm. Good. "But do you remember why I hurt you?"

"Because I need it too, because I need you," I whispered, because the words were right, even though they felt sort of wrong. But after I'd said them, they seemed to settle deep, to find all the niches in my head that needed filling. It made sense.

It doesn't. It's another lie. He's going to make you scream and cry.

I think I like to scream for him.

You don't.

"That's right," he said, smiling a little. A lopsided tilt to his lips as one side quirked up. Not quite the bright smile I remembered, but better than his serious stares. I smiled back, encouraging, and his thumb brushed under my mouth. "Are you hungry?"

How gracious of him to fucking feed you. Breaking your brain into tiny pieces, but at least you won't starve to death! Greta flipped me off, or flipped Tomik off, it was hard to tell.

Maybe it was for both of us.

It didn't matter though, my stomach did feel empty, and I nodded. "Yeah, I think I'm hungry."

"Good, I had Alice make us some lunch." Tomik offered his hand to me, and as soon as I took it, I was able to stand, to walk with him through a wide doorway and into a brilliantly bright dining room. The curtains were open, and he let go of my hand to let me wander to the windows, staring in wonder. I could see an arched bridge and the Sydney Opera House. I knew it from magazines and TV, but I'd never imagined I'd get to see it in person. It was beautiful, all bright white sweeping curves, and I was here. Really here.

Because Tomik had brought me here.

"I didn't remember..." *we were in Australia.* I couldn't say it out loud, because it felt wrong. Stupid to say aloud. Tomik had told me we were going to visit, hadn't he? *He did.* When we were at the airport. A surprise.

That's at least true, Greta grumbled, dropping back onto her shiny couch to glare. **You'd be able to remember more if he'd stop fucking with*

*your head. Tell him that. Tell him that he's going to make you glitch again if he keeps lying!**

"What is it, Hannah?" Tomik asked, coming up behind me to wrap his arms around my waist, pressing a kiss to the side of my head. "I thought you'd love the view."

"I do," I answered, trying to brush away the strange girl, but how do you push something away that's inside you? *That's a hell of a question.*

Hint-hint, there's no fucking answer. I'm here to stay. You're mine, and he's going to break you. The gray Greta girl lounged back, staring upward. **I just have to wait. It never takes long anymore. Glitchy, glitchy Hannah.**

My stomach growled, and Tomik chuckled against my ear. "You can stay here and enjoy the view. I'll have Alice serve lunch."

Alice is another collectable. Just like you. Has to do whatever he says. Greta whirled her finger in the blackness above her. **Round and round we go. Tell me when you want the fucking truth.**

I tried to ignore the girl, but staring out at the beautiful water, the bright sunlight glinting off the waves, it felt like cobwebs clearing out of my brain. *Obeying. I'd obeyed him. Answer. Sit. Look.*

Want the truth yet?

"Leave me alone," I grumbled under my breath, and then jumped as I heard the rattle of a cart behind me. I turned fast to see a thin blonde girl pushing it, but she didn't even look at me as she moved covered plates to the two place settings across from the windows. Next came the wine, poured into glasses and set on the table without a word, without a glance. Then the carafe of water, poured and placed.

Talk to her.

"Hi there," I said, lifting a hand to wave at her, and she froze with her hands on the handle of the cart. "Are you Alice?"

The girl shuddered, twitched, and then Tomik appeared in the doorway wearing a T-shirt. "Answer her."

"Yes, I'm Alice," the girl replied, and her head turned stiffly. It was creepy, a sharp snap of her head to look at me, and then a quick jerk back to the cart before she started to push it out of the room.

Zombie-robot girl. He does that to you too.

An uneasy feeling unfurled in my belly, but then Tomik gave me another small smile and pulled a chair back from the table. "Ready for lunch?"

“It smells good,” I said as I went over to take the seat he’d offered me. This time I knew I’d walked over, I’d felt my own legs responding, felt in control as I sat down.

Ready for the truth now?

Stop it.

Tomik sat next to me, the rounded curve of the table letting us see each other and the view at the same time. He fluffed out his napkin and laid it in his lap, and I did the same... because I wanted to.

He didn’t command you, dumbass. Greta rolled her eyes and dropped back on the couch, lying down. **The nice shit won’t last, just remember I told you that.**

“She made lemon chicken with risotto. I remember how much you liked the risotto in Rome.” Lifting the covers off the plates, he set them aside and steam rose. I inhaled deeply, it smelled heavenly, and Tomik was already taking a bite, but as I picked up my fork my gaze drifted to the doorway he and Alice had come through.

“Is Alice okay?”

“What do you mean?” Tomik asked, talking through a mouthful of the chicken he’d sliced off while I’d been staring.

“She seemed... off?” I leaned back in my chair, trying to get a better look into the kitchen. I could see the edge of a counter, but no Alice.

Mesmer’d. Just another toy. Just like you. Playing house with you like a doll before he decides to rip your head off and play inside it again.

“Alice is fine. Don’t worry about her,” Tomik said casually as he leaned over to brush my cheek, and then I couldn’t remember why I’d been worried. She worked in this house he’d rented for us. Why wouldn’t she be okay?

“That’s good,” I answered with a smile and took a bite of the food. It tasted even better than it smelled. The citrus tang of the lemon exploded on my tongue with the first bite of chicken, and my stomach growled in appreciation. For a few minutes I was lost to the food, absorbed in each bite as my hunger abated to normal levels. From my left Tomik chuckled.

“I should have woken you earlier. I didn’t realize you were so hungry. But... the jet lag has really been bothering you.”

“I know.” I nodded, forcing myself to take the next forkful of risotto more slowly. “I didn’t mean to sleep so long.”

“It’s okay, my Hannah.” His fingers interlaced with mine on the table, squeezing as he held my hand. “What are you smiling about, angel?”

“I was just remembering the first time you held my hand.” I flexed my fingers, weaving us closer together before I gripped his hand tighter, reveling in the warmth of touching him. “I was so nervous and excited... I don’t think I would have even dared to dream we’d end up together. Like this. For real.”

Not real.

“Yeah... I think it took me a whole week to build up the courage to hold your hand,” Tomik answered quietly, and I glanced over at him to find his eyes firmly glued to where our hands were linked. “I’m not the kid you remember, Hannah. I’m not the same and... I don’t think I can ever be the same again. Not like I was.”

“You’re still the sa—”

“No,” he interrupted with a sharp squeeze of my hand that almost hurt. “I’m not.” Tomik took a slow breath, and his grip gradually eased. “We can’t be the same kids we were, Hannah. Neither of us can and... I’m sorry for that. But you said you wanted me.”

“I do want you, Tomik. Forever and ever.” The words buzzed through my veins, and I gripped his hand, hard, feeling the strength of his fingers between mine. “Whatever you think is different about us, we still chose each other, right?”

“Yeah... I guess you’re right.” He sighed and unwound our hands so he could rub at his neck, his quiet brown eyes meeting mine. “What is it about me, Hannah? Why do you want me? Why me?”

“I’ve always—”

“Really, Hannah. Tell me the truth”—his words were a bright spotlight inside me, lighting up the shuttered places, and I dropped the fork to the plate—“why did you keep pursuing me?”

“I...” My head spun. I remembered calling his parents, asking for a mailing address, a phone number, but they kept brushing me off. Telling me Tomik was always traveling, that his phone was rarely on because of the international rates, that they’d tell him I was thinking of him. But eventually I’d got the number out of them, and I’d called. I’d left a hundred voicemails, and then... one day he’d answered. *Right?*

Wrong.

No... he showed up, he came for me, invited me to Rome. He wanted me too.

Wanted to fuck you. Hurt you. Finally hear you scream for him.

"I always wanted you!" I said, too loudly, because I could barely hear myself think over the Greta girl, but he just stared at me, and I felt more words bubbling to the surface, pushing at my tongue, my lips. *Tell the truth.* "You're the only person who ever saw me, Tomik. You're the only one who ever tried. You never excluded me, you let me play D&D with you, let me hike with you... you never left me behind. You never abandoned me."

"But then you did! You left! You left me behind and it broke my fucking heart, Tomik. You took everything good with you when you left. You left, and the whole world lost all color, all meaning. You left a hole in me and... I was *lost*. Why wouldn't I want you? You're my missing piece, my other half, and I hated my life, hated myself without you! I hated everything!"

I gasped in air as I finished, feeling the tears burning my cheeks, but it was worth it to see Tomik's stunned expression. I'd never said these things out loud, I knew that. Not in any of the beautiful places he'd shown me, not during any romantic dinner, or any night in bed together.

Interesting... Greta whispered, sitting up on the couch and leaning forward as she smiled. **Keep going, Hannah. I think you actually hurt him.**

"Hannah..." Tomik groaned, grabbing onto the sides of his head as he shoved his chair back so he could lean forward. "Fuck, I was trying to protect you."

"From what!" I snapped, twisting in my chair to stare at him. "Tell me what you actually wanted to protect me from! SAY IT!"

"I already told you! From me! ME!" he shouted, cursing under his breath as he looked everywhere but me. The table, the window with its beautiful view, the shimmering light fixture above the table. And then he stared straight up, shaking his head. "I wanted to protect you from what I was becoming. From who I was becoming. I'm a mesmer, Hannah, and you're collectable. I knew it. I'd felt inklings of it before I even knew what it was. The night we made out in the back of my truck, I could... feel it. This empty hunger, this bottomless darkness, and it wanted you. *I wanted you.* But it wasn't that strong yet, I was able to push it away, I was able to keep it away from you. I was able to just kiss you. Just touch you a little."

He licked his lips as his eyes drifted back down, his gaze skirting my face to land on my chest, and then he reached out and brushed the side of my breast through the soft, white dress. Every nerve ending in my body lit up, and I arched into his touch, a quiet moan escaping through parted lips.

“I remember touching your breasts, brushing your nipple for the first time. You made the sweetest little gasp, made that same little moan against my lips when I ran my clumsy hands over you.” Softly, he slid his thumb over my nipple, and I gasped, exactly like he’d described. “All I wanted was you, Hannah. I couldn’t even believe we were together, and it had taken seeing that fucker Edwin Hedgley kiss you to finally give me the balls to do something about it.”

Tomik pulled his hand away, his fingers curling into a fist as he pressed his knuckles into his thigh. I wanted to reach out and bring his hand back, but the tension in his shoulders made me stay still. A bitter laugh came out of him as he tore his gaze from me and shook his head.

“Touching you, feeling your body under mine... it was like striking a match, and once that fire had started, the rest of me started to burn. I woke up the next day and I felt different. I *knew* I was different. I tried to fight it, Hannah. I tried. For you. But more and more of me burned away until there was nothing left but darkness and thoughts in my head... I didn’t want them—but at the same time I did. I just didn’t want to do them to you. Not you. My best friend. My angel. My Hannah.”

“I don’t understand,” I whispered, almost soundlessly, terrified to break whatever spell had come over him.

“I did terrible things, Hannah. To Susan...” He swallowed hard, reaching for the wine and downing half the glass in one go.

You should probably drink too, Greta said, and in my mind I could see her eating popcorn, sitting cross-legged on the shiny black couch. **This is the information we need to destroy him, Hannah. Keep him talking.**

Leave him alone.

Fuck no. He’s a monster. Ask him what he did to Susan.

Instead of doing what my strange mental figment demanded, I reached for the wine. It could have been delicious, or terrible, I didn’t know because I couldn’t taste anything. My taste buds were as numb as the rest of me. Bereft of his touch, I couldn’t feel anything at all, and I didn’t know why... but I was afraid to ask about Susan. The girl who had been a friend. Not close, but we’d had enough classes together. Enough for me to miss her

when her parents pulled her out of school. Enough of a friend that I went to her house to ask about her after Tomik disappeared. Her mother had cried the day I came by, and I still remembered the soft way her father had explained I couldn't see her. The way he'd thanked me before he'd shut the door in my face. She'd gone mute, lost her mind, or at least that's what the rumors had said.

The same week Tomik disappeared. Ask him, Hannah. Ask him, ask him, ask him!

"Tomik... what—"

"I left to protect you, Hannah. To protect you from me, from what I was becoming, from *this*. From the man, the mesmer I am now." He buried his face in his hands, elbows braced on his thighs, and all I wanted to do was hug him. *Mesmer*, he kept using that word. I wanted to take all the darkness away, I wanted to show him it was okay. We were together, so it had to be okay. But before I could move, he whispered something so quietly I would have missed it had I budged an inch. "I should have stayed away."

"No, Tomik." I shook my head and pushed my chair back so I could grab onto his arm, pulling his hand into my lap to grip it tight once more. "I was miserable without you in my life, and—"

"You're miserable with me in it."

Finally, he tells you the truth.

Growling under my breath at the Greta girl, I tugged at Tomik so he would look at me. "No, I'm not. We're happy together. We're married and traveling the world and seeing—"

Tomik pulled me into a kiss before I could finish, and it seared me with blinding heat and mind-blowing bliss. It tore my breath from my lungs. All of the anxiety, the trepidation, melted away in the sheer brilliance, and I was still so rocked by it I barely registered when he lifted me out of the chair while still kissing. A second later I was in his arms, legs wrapped around his hips, unable to do anything other than cling to him as he walked us through the house.

I didn't care about the hallways, didn't care about the elbow I clipped on the doorframe. He bit my lip hard enough to sting before wiping it away with a lick and another fiery kiss, and a moment later we were on the bed. Softness at my back as he pushed the dress up and then stood to drag my ass to the edge. I expected him to go for his pants, to fuck me into the

mattress until I screamed his name—but then he fell to his knees and buried his face between my legs.

Cataclysmic.

That was the only way to describe the first stroke of Tomik's tongue. The orgasm hit with the force of a freight train, and my back arched so hard off the bed that it hurt, but I didn't care about that either. Any small pain was lost in the pure ecstasy that turned my veins to molten gold, had me screaming his name, raking the quilt with my fingers, and shaking.

And I barely got to breathe before he sent me into another. It wasn't natural. Wasn't normal.

It was Tomik.

I felt it. Like a warm brush at the doors of my mind before he blew them off the hinges with a whisper. Just like he'd made me answer, sit, look, Tomik had made me come harder than I could actually remember, twice, and all I could do was babble pleas for him to wait. "Please, please, Tomik, please..."

"God, you're beautiful," he whispered as the bone-melting pleasure eased back to a more tolerable level—a level where I only felt like I might spontaneously catch fire or stop breathing... one of the two. Or both. For the first time I could actually feel his tongue instead of raw, unfiltered ecstasy, but it was still so good. Almost the same. Better in some ways, because it was Tomik's tongue on me. Licking, flicking my clit, sucking and teasing until I was wiggling and lifting my hips in need.

"I want you," I shouted hoarsely before my voice devolved into another guttural moan. The gray Greta girl rolled her eyes inside my head.

One nice moment doesn't erase the rest. Time to remember. She snapped her fingers, and pain lanced through my head, ripping another cry from my throat as shocking images poured in. Flashes of men holding me down, of me begging for horrible things. Metal claws in my flesh. Needles piercing skin. A rocking horse that made me clench in remembered pain. The weight of a gun in my hand, and the promise of a bullet through my brain if I disobeyed.

Those were Tomik too. Tomik's commands. Tomik's decisions.

Greta smiled and held up a shiny knife. **He doesn't deserve forgiveness.**

"PLEASE STOP!" I screamed, covering my eyes, trying to shut out the visions, but just like the gray girl... they were inside me. All tangled up

with pretty scenic views, with memories of rain-drenched kisses, with the sound of Tomik laughing as we played D&D. I started to cry, and then I heard him shushing me, his body moving beside mine on the bed.

“It’s okay, Hannah, it’s okay. What’s wrong?”

Tell him about the theatre. That’ll fuck up his head.

“I can’t remember what’s real,” I whispered through hiccupping tears, and then I felt his lips on my arm, his hand skating over my stomach to pull me against him—then everything faded. Went soft and quiet. Fuzzy.

“Shh, Hannah. You’re okay. You’re safe now. I’m going to keep you safe.” Another kiss to my hair as he reached up to pull my hands from my eyes. “I promise all I want right now is to make you feel good. I want to try and be better for you. I can do it sometimes, I think... No, I will. I swear. Sometimes I’ll need to hurt you, but I won’t do that right now, Hannah. Please believe me.”

“You hurt me?” I asked, feeling an errant tear leak from my eyes to roll into my hair, but I felt calmer. The flashing images in my head were gone, even though I could feel them lurking on the edges of my awareness. Like monsters under Greta’s couch. Chewing on my lip, I searched Tomik’s eyes and could only see sadness. He used to be happy.

There was a time he was happy. He could be happy again.

I could make him happy.

He could make me happy. But...

“Why would you hurt me, Tomik?”

“It’s the mesmer in me, Hannah. If I don’t feed it... if I don’t keep it happy, it’ll take over. I’ll lose myself completely. I’ll lose control and then—*fuck*—I don’t know what it... what *I* would do to you.”

TOMIK

There was no way this was going to work. Hannah was a mess, and it was all my fault.

I'd planned for honesty this time. Still a happier story for us, something good for why we were together, but I wasn't going to lie about my needs this time. If she didn't remember the bad things, if she only remembered good things between us, then it had to be better.

At least, I'd hoped it would be better this time.

I'd lost count of the resets I'd done trying to get this right, but in every reset she'd loved me, or remembered loving me, at least for a little while. So... why not try honesty? Why not tell her about the mesmer side of me? She'd seen the monster inside me before and still told me she believed in me. I sent her out with a fucking gun, and she came back saying she could save me.

That's why I thought she'd understand... because she loved me once. The old me. The me that I could sometimes feel when she looked at me, when she said my name.

It's why I thought this was the answer. Honesty.

Let her know, be upfront, and then I could keep the mesmer side of me at bay. I could lock it up, away from Hannah, at least for a little while. But I would have to feed it... and that was the part I now knew Hannah couldn't accept. I could see it in her eyes, in the tears streaking her cheeks as she looked up at me like the lost little innocent she was.

I'd done horrible things to her, let horrible things be done to her, and she miraculously still looked like my angel.

The same angel I want to string up on hooks and whip until she's bloody.

Groaning, I pushed away the whispers of the mesmer side of me, ignored the aching throb of my cock, and traced my fingers down her arm.

I didn't push lust or want or need, I pushed calm.

Felt it flood her, relax her muscles, watched the whirls of power moving under her skin. This was new, and I could only see them if I focused, if I watched closely, but they were there. This mesmer thing sliding inside her and doing what I commanded.

But for how long?

How long could I control the monster like this? Without making my Hannah scream and cry out in pain?

Million dollar fucking question.

"It's funny... I'm still just trying to protect you." I shook my head, easing back on the calm so her eyes would look less glazed, and a second later, she blinked, and I knew she saw me. My Hannah.

Sighing, I continued to wander my fingers over her arm, trailing down to her stomach, back up, never delving between her thighs no matter what my needs demanded. I pulled back on the power, watching her carefully until I saw her eyebrows furrow again, and I knew she was aware enough to listen.

"I really am trying to protect you, Hannah. I know it sounds insane, but—well, *shit*—it is crazy. All of this is crazy, but it is real. The danger is so fucking real, Hannah, but I'm going to do everything I can to keep you safe."

"How?" she whispered, and I leaned down to kiss her. It was instinct to make her want it, an automatic reflex of power, but I stopped it as soon as I recognized it. Hannah still lifted her hips from the bed, her moan a soft buzz against my mouth, and I cursed myself.

Cursed this mesmer shit.

I thought it had given me the world, but all it had really done was tear me away from the one girl I'd ever actually wanted.

A thousand collectables had rested on my sheets and writhed under me, and I hadn't given a single fuck about any of them. I hadn't cared what the brotherhood did to them. I'd reveled in it alongside them. I'd taken pictures. I'd commanded collectables to kill themselves, commanded others to ruin their own lives just to make mine more convenient.

But I'd never felt a moment of guilt.

Not until the girl on the end of my hook was Hannah Jones.

And how the fuck am I going to keep her safe?

The great question that I was still trying to answer.

"I will keep you safe, Hannah. We'll keep moving. Eventually they'll get bored, they'll stop looking, and I'll find us a place to live." I propped myself up on my elbow and smiled down at her. "You can choose. I'll take you anywhere you want."

"Who are they?" she asked, and I felt her fear. Letting out another ripple of calm, I reminded myself to watch what I said. I couldn't fuck up this reset.

"They don't matter, okay?" A nudge to help her believe it, but that was all.

"Okay..." Hannah blinked, licked her pretty pink lips, and then tilted her head. "What about you?"

"What about me?" I repeated, chuckling.

"Who will keep me safe from you?" she asked, and for a moment I saw something else in her eyes. Something awake, something not calm... and then it was gone. She looked like drowsy, calm Hannah once more.

"That's what I'm trying to explain. I don't want to scare you... not really. Not right now, anyway." Grumbling, I shook my head at myself. "Fuck. It's hard to explain."

"Try," she whispered, reaching up to lay her warm hand on my cheek.

This is what had given me hope. Her damn moments of caring for me. The me that was more mesmer than Tomik. More monster than human. I definitely didn't deserve it, but I was always a selfish prick of a mesmer, and there was no point trying to stop now. Clearing my throat, I slid my gaze down to the pulse thumping just below her jawline, avoiding her eyes.

"It's like an addiction. The longer I go without feeding the mesmer side of me, the worse the cravings get. The more violent the urges. Sex isn't enough, Hannah. It wants pain, blood, suffering. It... *I* need it."

"Or you'll lose control?"

"Or I could kill you," I whispered, and I was pretty sure they were the worst words I'd ever had to say aloud. To admit that was in me, to know it with complete certainty. Sure, I'd probably have her writhing in ecstasy while I bled her dry, but her heart would stop nonetheless. I could trick her

mind into believing anything, I could control her pleasure, her pain—but I couldn't keep her alive by sheer will.

And her death is what the mesmer inside me would demand.

If I starved it, if I told it no, I would lose myself. There had been times in the past that I'd felt it, like a slow-moving black cloud ready to obscure my soul. Preparing to erase whatever pieces of Tomik remained in the wasteland inside me.

Hannah looked like she was about to cry, her beautiful blue eyes shining as she shifted on the bed to bring both her hands to my cheeks—holding me until I had no choice but to meet her gaze. “You’re trying to protect me.”

“Yeah. I really am.”

“Because you love me.”

I opened my mouth to deny it, to make some bullshit excuse, some feeble, cocky retort... but I didn't. Couldn't. All I could do was nod.

“God, Tomik...” Hannah made the most beautiful pained noise as she wrapped her arms around my neck to hug me, pulled me down to her and held me.

Peace washed through me.

For one blissful moment I didn't feel the urge to wrap my fingers around her throat, to make her choke as I shoved her thighs apart to fuck her hard and fast. There was just the warmth of her body against mine, the softness of her skin, the sweet taste of her lips as she caught mine and surprised me with a kiss. Maybe if I hadn't tried so hard to kill this reaction to her, things wouldn't be so fucked up now. I would have never taken her to the brotherhood, would have never taken her away from them, which meant they would have never had a taste of Hannah on their tongues.

Now they were all obsessed with getting her back. Well, really, it was just the twins. Aaron was pissed, Sergei said he'd put me through a wall for poisoning him if he saw me again—which *I didn't do*—but the fucking twins? They were like toddlers who'd had a toy ripped from their grubby little hands. All irrational rage, vile threats, and vicious promises.

They were the reason we kept moving, because they didn't give a fuck about me... they just wanted Hannah. But their latest threatening voicemail had made it clear they still thought we were in Greece, so we would be safe for a few days at least.

Dammit. I needed to stop thinking about Mitchell and Roman.

With a low growl buzzing in my chest, I shifted over Hannah, taking control of the kiss, nipping at her lip before I felt her spread her legs to let me settle between them. No mesmer power, no commands, this was all her.

Hannah wanted me.

“Do you need to hurt me right now?” she whispered as she wrapped her legs behind my ass, and I knew for sure that I loved her. In that moment, I couldn’t help but love her. She was terrified, trembling, but still offering.

If that’s not true love, what is?

“No, baby.” I shook my head and kissed her softly. “Not right now.”

I felt her relax, the tension melting away as she smiled a little and wiggled her ass beneath me. “Well, I liked what you did before. It was...” Hannah blew out a breath and laughed quietly. “Wow.”

“Wow?” I asked, grinning, and then I laughed with her when she nodded. “Well, let’s see if I can beat wow.”



Hannah was naked, welted, covered in drool and come... but I wasn’t done with her yet. I needed more, the monster needed more—and she’d said yes this morning. It was hot, and her soft whines were a steady fucking IV drip of just what I needed.

I’d chained her wrists to a hard point in the ceiling using soft leather cuffs, added fresh lashes to her backside to renew the marks from yesterday, and now she was letting out a steady stream of little noises around the ball gag. Moaning whenever I buried my fingers between her thighs, contorting with every orgasm that wrung her out and made her groan.

But before I showed her my next surprise, I stopped touching her completely. Let her come down to earth a little. It was fascinating to watch the influence and power fade, to watch her awareness tune back in and her eyes clench tightly. I chuckled as I pushed a sweat-soaked lock of hair out of her face. “You still in there, Hannah?”

A shining strand of drool stretched down from the edge of the gag, her hips twitching, but eventually she met my eyes. I could see the awareness there, and then she nodded, a muffled “Yes” forced around the gag.

“You’ve been such a good girl,” I purred, moving behind her to grab what I needed. “I think you can handle some more, though.”

A soft whine buzzed in her chest, and I chuckled.

“Come on, Hannah. Be brave for me. Open your eyes.” I stood in front of her, leaning in close to kiss those pretty pink lips stretched around the bright red ball caught in her teeth. I nibbled, nipped, and teased. I didn’t force her, I wanted Hannah’s reaction, and eventually she looked at me.

Then I showed her the fuckspear.

I couldn’t deny it gave me, or my mesmer side, *or both*, a lot of fucking satisfaction to watch her eyes go wide. To watch the panic flicker in as she tried to push backward while chained to the ceiling. The insistent shaking of her head was just the cherry on top.

The spear was adjustable in height, but the dildo would still be a lot to take. It was similar to the one I’d added to the rocking horse, and my dick was throbbing just remembering the noises she’d made trying to take that thick, rubbery cock.

But she was ready for this one.

Hannah wouldn’t need lube. I’d made her cum so many times while I whipped her with the crop that it was leaking down her thighs, sticky and slick, and as soon as I got the spear to the right height, I braced it against the floor beneath her and lifted her onto it.

Each inch brought a new sound from Hannah, a pleading whine when I eventually let go of her and forced her to stand on her own. Dancing on tiptoe to avoid the thick shaft filling her past what she could easily handle.

A sharp snap of the crop kicked her hips forward, made her take an inch more.

Oh, sweet screaming.

Begging.

Hannah’s legs shook, her calf muscles trembling the worst as she tried desperately to stay up on her tiptoes with the spear buried between her thighs. An incoherent mess of sounds poured from around the ball gag and it had me straining against my pants, but I sat back and watched as she struggled. Kept my hands to myself, my commands silent, letting her really experience it.

This was my Hannah in all her glory.

Soaked and welted and whimpering as she tried so hard to find a comfortable position with that thick cock buried as deep as it could go. Groaning, I cupped myself through my jeans, squeezing hard to try and pace myself.

She'd agreed to this. Agreed to suffer for me.

Of course, I'd agreed to make it not hurt... much. *In time*, I promised silently. Each whimpered cry was a hit of the drug I needed. Each brilliantly red line on her ass and thighs made the monster inside me calmer.

And the best part is she loves me enough to do it.

"You're a dirty girl, aren't you, Hannah?"

She nodded, her eyes wet and desperate, flexing one of her feet as she strained to hold herself up with the other. It wasn't enough. Reaching forward, I unsnapped the gag because I needed to hear her say it.

"Spit it out and tell me what you are."

"I'm a dirty girl," she whined, breathing hard, wavering on her shuddering legs. "I'm yours."

So hot.

"You want me to make you feel good? Want me to fuck your sweet ass?" I traced my tongue over my bottom lip as she moaned and nodded again.

Fuck. If I wasn't careful, I was going to come in my pants, and I wanted to spill every drop inside of her.

I stripped out of my clothes fast, tossing them to wherever the fuck they landed, because all I could think about was feeling Hannah come again.

"Beg for it," I whispered against her ear, pressing myself to her back as I dipped one hand down to trace her stretched cunt. Her hips twitched, but I didn't feed her pleasure or lust—not yet.

"Please fuck me, Tomik." The wobbling pitch of her voice was a giveaway. Frantic girl.

I chuckled, circling a finger around her swollen little clit, then moving my hand to her rear so I could dip my thumb into her ass and *push*, wriggle that thumb in. She stiffened and made a gorgeous warbling noise.

"More."

"Please, please fuck me. Fuck my ass, please. Please!" Hannah practically shouted the last word, and it was a goddamn miracle I didn't pop off.

Dragging my fingers through the wet mess between her thighs, I coated my cock before pressing against that tight ring of muscle. Tendrils of pleasure slipped from my fingers as I traced her skin, easing inside her slowly... at least until the first time she twitched and tightened down around my dick like a vise. Then, then I was lost.

Slamming inside her, I forced the pleasure in just like I'd promised. Felt her come hard, listened to her cries, her keening, as that thick dildo moved inside her with every one of my thrusts against her ass. It wasn't enough, though, not for the monster, and just as she started to come down from the orgasm, I wrapped my hand around her throat.

No more Hannah sounds, but *God* did she squeeze me.

Her panic was what I was missing, what the monster was missing. As I felt her flinch, pulling on the cuffs and trying to twist away—I came. Hard. Liquid fire poured down my spine with a rush, and I lost track of everything for a blink as I filled her ass with jet after jet. It was mind-blowing, deliriously good, and I bit down on her shoulder as she twitched around me.

Finally, I released her throat and stumbled back, leaning on the table to watch her cough and sputter.

"Tomik..." She choked as she said it, coughing as if my grip on her throat had left her with lingering hurt. It made my balls tingle to hear the tears in her voice.

Fucked up. Permanently fucked up.

"What is it, angel girl?" I walked around to the front of her and was about to release her cuffs when she smiled at me in the strangest way.

Just like... like that day in the café when she'd reached for the knife.

"Hannah?"

The smile instantly faded, replaced with a look of confusion, and then Hannah shook her head. "No."

"No, what?" I tried to catch Hannah's eyes, but her gaze was glued over my left shoulder where there was... nothing but wall. Snapping my fingers in front of her face, I felt a chill run up my spine when her eyes didn't waver. "Hannah, what the fuck are you looking at?"

"Nothing," she snapped, closing her eyes tight.

"What's wrong, Hannah? I don't—"

"Greta, stop!" she yelled, suddenly sounding panicked.

Did she say Greta?

"Who is Greta?" I asked, worried something was glitching again, but Hannah just whined. "Angel, you've gotta talk to me or I can't help you. I don't want to make it a command."

All I could do was stare at her as her pretty blue eyes opened, looking over my right shoulder before meeting my gaze. "I just meant stop. I want to stop. I'm so tired, please, Tomik?"

“Yeah... okay.” I searched her face, but I only saw Hannah. Tired, tear-streaked, sweat-soaked Hannah. “I was thinking a shower and then a nap?”

As I offered it, she nodded, but something had me hesitating to unlatch her cuffs from the hard point. It was a stupid feeling, something that bordered on fear, which was completely irrational. Hannah was fine. Exhausted and over-orgasmed possibly, but still fine.

She wasn’t going to glitch this time because I’d explained it all.

Hannah knew about the mesmer side of me. She’d accepted it. She’d volunteered for rough fun yesterday, and again today. And I’d kept myself in control. I’d kept *it* under control.

This was going to work.

It had to work.

Because no matter what... I’d realized one thing in the past few days—I couldn’t live without Hannah in my life. I didn’t even want to.

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HANNAH

Wake up! Greta snapped, and my eyes popped open.

Stop it.

No. You stop it. You're being stupid, she snarled, stomping around inside my head wearing a shirt with a giant middle finger on the front of it. It was impossible to fall back asleep because she wouldn't stop talking.

Tomik is not a nice man. He's bad. He's a mesmer.

I know he's a mesmer, Greta. He told me everything.

She snorted, rolled her eyes, and then she was suddenly outside of me again. Beside the bed, leaned against the wall, and I jerked back against Tomik's chest.

You think this will last? Him being 'in control'? Greta shook her head and walked around the end of the bed, heading to Tomik's side, and I sat up as gently as I could so I could keep her in my line of sight.

I frowned at her, but she ignored me and sat down on his side of the bed. We'd been curled up together, closer to my side, but all she'd have to do is reach out and—what? Hurt him? Could a figment of my imagination hurt Tomik?

Hell, no.

We can. We can get rid of him, set you free. Greta smiled and pointed to the door. **You could go get a knife from the kitchen. We'll make it quick.**

"No!" I whispered harshly, and Tomik groaned in his sleep. He'd rolled to his back when I sat up, and the sheet was down around his waist, revealing all the tattoos I'd grown to like. Asleep, he looked so peaceful. None of the tension I normally saw around his eyes, no hard edge to his

jaw. In sleep he didn't have to fight the mesmer side of him to keep me safe, and he looked more like the Tomik from our youth.

I won't let you hurt him.

I think the real question is if you can stop me. Greta laughed and stood up from the bed, waving a hand in the air as my heart started to race. **Don't worry, I know you're not ready yet... but you will be. He won't keep this up.**

You can't keep doing this to me. You can't keep threatening him, or...

Or you'll slip up again and talk about me? Greta tsked, shaking her head slowly as she wandered the dim bedroom. **Even if you told him, he wouldn't believe you. He'd just think you'd gone glitchy again.**

Maybe I have. Turning away from Greta, I looked at Tomik and felt my chest ache. I loved him so much I could barely stand it. No matter how many times Greta fed me terrible memories, I didn't care.

I'd chosen Tomik.

Tomik and his mesmer half—the darkness in him that made him do all of those things, that made him need to hurt me in terrible and wonderful ways.

I was starting to crave the things he did, even though they scared me. Even though *he* scared me sometimes. The look on his face... it wasn't always him. Not my Tomik. Not the Tomik I'd loved forever—but he always brought himself back. He gave me insane pleasure with the pain, and I was pretty sure it felt even better *because* of the pain. I'd never been into kinky stuff, at least I didn't think I had, but with Tomik I got the allure. I wanted it—wanted him—in all the ways he needed it.

I want you to go away, Greta. Please.

Tears welled. Was Greta truly me? This was so muddled.

Not gonna happen, Hannah. You need me, you just don't wanna admit it. Greta was suddenly right next to me, so close I could have felt her breath if she had any. **I'm a permanent fixture in your life. Not going anywhere. And eventually I'll get you all to myself.**



TOMIK

I woke with a big yawn and reached for Hannah, finding her hip at the edge of the bed. My eyes opened when she jumped, muscles tense as she turned around to look at me, her pretty blue eyes wide... and scared.

“What is it?” I asked, pushing myself upright, because *she* was already sitting up. I glanced around her, but I didn’t see anything that could have her this anxious—unless it was me. The monster in her bed.

Fuck. Had I gone too far earlier?

“It’s nothing,” she answered, smiling, but I could see how fragile it was. Something was definitely wrong.

I wanted to command her to tell me the truth, to tell me exactly what she was thinking... but I’d promised myself I’d stop that. A normal relationship didn’t have mesmer powers, and even though we’d never be normal, I wanted to try and get as close as we could, which meant not commanding her all the time.

It was a hard fucking habit to break.

“Are you in pain?” I asked, hearing the concern in my own voice, and I was tempted to laugh at the absurdity of it. I’d been the one to hurt her, to take pleasure in her pain. “Sorry, that was a stupid question. Let me get you some ibuprofen.”

Just as I turned to get out of the bed, she laid her hand on my arm and squeezed. “I’m sore, yeah, but I’m fine. I promise.”

“No ibuprofen then?”

She smiled again but this time it was real. So was the little roll of her eyes as she shifted to face me. “Okay, some ibuprofen sounds good.”

“That’s what I thought.” Grinning, I leaned forward to kiss her, soaking in the softness of her lips for a second before I forced myself to pull back and climb out of bed. “Be right back.”

“Orange juice?” she called after me, and I laughed.

“Sure, babe.”

Babe?

It was weird to feel so... normal. To say normal things to her, to not have to hide who—what—I was. I should have done this from the beginning. I shouldn’t have ever tried to treat Hannah like some random collectable.

I should have known it would never work with her like that.

I felt light as I walked into the kitchen and dug through the cabinets, trying to remember where I’d seen the ibuprofen. Alice appeared in the

doorway leading to her room, only wearing a tank top and panties, and my cock was hard in an instant.

Motherfucker.

My mesmer side sensed her like a shark did blood in the water. Vulnerable, available... but not to me. No. Clenching my teeth, I forced a deep breath before I looked at her again.

“Bring me some ibuprofen,” I commanded, and she turned on her heel like the little zombie-robot-girl she was. If I was half as decent as Hannah believed me to be, I’d figure out a way to set her free. To return her to her life... or whatever was left of it.

I had no idea how long she’d been in this house, and I couldn’t even remember who owned it. It could have been anyone in the brotherhood, past or present, and I had no idea what commands lurked in her head. If I tried to free her, she might just slit her throat.

Fucking with another mesmer’s collectable was always a gamble... unless you just wanted to fuck them. That was always easy.

But you won’t be fucking her. Nope.

That thought settled over me slowly, because it meant I’d never be fucking *any* other collectable again.

Just Hannah.

I expected to feel panic over that, some sort of bachelor-mode-red-alert, but I realized I was smiling. It was exhausting to deal with collectables. To close off their exits, keep them corralled but still functioning enough to keep themselves alive.

And I wouldn’t have to do that anymore, because I had Hannah, and Hannah accepted me completely.

Turning around, I walked over to the fridge feeling freer than I had in years. I poured the orange juice for Hannah then saw my phone light up where it was charging on the counter. A whole list of notifications was visible, including several missed calls.

Who’s bothering me now?

Yanking the cable out of the phone, I unlocked it and tapped on the voicemail notification from a number I didn’t recognize. A woman’s voice started to play.

“Hello, Mr. Gavinski. This is Laurel from Peterman, Dewitt, and Mathers in New York. I understand that you’re traveling, but we’ve received an alert on your accounts and until we resolve it you will not have

access to your funds. If you could call me back at your earliest convenience we—”

What the fuck?

My heart was racing as I swiped out of the voicemail and scrolled through my contacts until I found the one for the accounting firm. The accounting firm that Aaron had connected me to. “Fuck!”

Growling, I pressed the button and listened to the phone ring as I watched Alice walk back into the room. Her brown eyes sought mine, and I could see the desperation in them, but I hated her for it.

“Leave the fucking ibuprofen on the counter and go back to your room. Now!” I shouted, and then cringed because there was no way that Hannah hadn’t heard me.

Shit, shit, shit.

Had the twins decided to go for my money because they couldn’t find me? It was the only thing that made sense, because without money I couldn’t keep moving us. I couldn’t get to the next house on my list because I wouldn’t be able to buy the damn flights.

I was racking my brain for the collectables I knew about in Sydney when the phone clicked over to an automated answering system. It took effort, but I managed to focus on the various directions until I heard the one about *urgent calls* and I pressed number 4.

More ringing. Motherfuckers. I’m going to kill them. Both of them.

“Tomik? What’s wrong?” Hannah asked, stepping into the kitchen, wrapped in a robe now as she watched me.

“Just a second,” I answered, trying to tone down my rage as I pointed at the bottle of pills. “There’s the ibuprofen, just—”

“Peterman, Dewitt, and Mathers answering service, how may I help you?” It was a man’s voice, which put my teeth on edge, but it didn’t matter.

“Yes, I received a call saying that there was an issue with my accounts? It’s urgent that I speak with someone to have this handled as soon as possible.”

“A fee will be charged based on—”

“I don’t give a fuck what you charge me, just get someone on the phone. Now,” I growled, shoving a hand into my hair, and I almost turned directly into Hannah as she moved to pick up the orange juice. Her eyes were wide

again, the fear in them doing terrible things to the erection still bobbing at my waist, and I knew she'd noticed.

I should have put on pants.

"Of course, please hold, sir." Infuriating hold music started up, and I pressed the speaker button and tossed the phone onto the counter.

"I'm sorry, Hannah. I'm not mad at you, okay? I just need to handle something so that you stay safe."

She nodded, and I brushed her cheek, pressing a hard kiss to her lips before I snagged the phone and stepped back from her. I didn't trust myself not to do something to her, because I wasn't just angry, I was furious—but she didn't deserve to suffer for it.

"Take the medicine, and then maybe go soak in a bath. I'm going to fix this." I turned away to walk back to the bedroom, seeking pants as the hold music continued to blast out of the phone in a tinny, bad version of whatever classical music it was supposed to be. It wasn't until I was digging through my suitcase that I realized I'd just commanded Hannah. Again.

Double fuck.

"Get your shit together, Tomik," I muttered under my breath.

Everything had been perfect earlier. Just a few minutes ago I'd felt like I was on top of the world, and now it was like it was coming down around my ears.

I was sitting on the edge of the bed when I saw Hannah walk into the master bedroom, and then she turned toward the bathroom. "Hey, you don't have to take a bath if you don't want to. I'm sorry."

She smiled and shrugged a bit. "A bath sounds nice, actually. We slept the whole afternoon away. Maybe after you get everything fixed, we can eat dinner?"

"That sounds good," I answered, summoning a smile for her, and she headed into the bathroom. Just as the water started running, I heard the hold music cut off.

"Hello? Mr. Gavinski?"

Grabbing for the phone, I answered fast. "Yes, I'm here."

"I'm sorry, just give me a moment. It's just after three in the morning here in New York, and I'm still getting my laptop booted up."

"Sure," I replied, relieved to at least be talking to someone who could actually do something. The woman sounded like the same one who'd left the message.

“This is Helen Carter, by the way. I’m sorry if I forgot to introduce myself.” She laughed quietly. “Still waking up, you know?”

“Right. Sorry for the late-night call.” *Not really. Just fix it so I can get back to Hannah.*

“That’s what we’re here for, Mr. Gavinski. All right, from what I remember, there was a large withdrawal attempt in Germany... I think. Anyway, the bank obviously flagged your account for safety reasons, and now we just need to fill out some forms so that we know your accounts are secure. It shouldn’t take long at all.”

As she spoke, I stood and wandered out of the bedroom so I wouldn’t bother Hannah with the call—and if I had to yell at the woman it would be best if I was far away from her.

“Do you have access to a printer and a scanner?” she asked, and I groaned.

“I’m not sure. I’m staying at a rental property, just a moment and I’ll see.” Pulling the phone away from my ear, I tapped the mute button and headed straight for Alice’s room. I didn’t bother knocking, and I regretted it immediately.

She was laid out on her bed, her hand working inside her underwear, which we both knew was useless. Alice stopped the second she was aware of me, sitting up fast before she scrambled to stand up beside her bed.

“Snap out of it, I need you awake.” I pushed the command hard, feeling the other compulsions woven into her psyche, but I saw her muscles twitch. “Tell me, is there a printer or a scanner in this house somewhere?”

Her glazed eyes lifted to focus on me, and I could see the desperation in them, and the panic as she shook her head. “No, sir.”

“FUCK!” I shouted, and she flinched, but I gritted my teeth and took a slow breath before I unmuted the phone. “Hey, I can’t find a printer here. Are you sure this is something I need to sign?”

“Unfortunately, I need you to fill out the security form with new verification questions, and then I need you to sign it, scan it, and send it back to me along with a copy of your driver’s license and passport identification.” The woman sighed. “I am terribly sorry to interrupt your vacation, but it’s the only way we can free up your accounts for normal use.”

“Fine,” I snapped. “One second.”

Muting the phone again, I tried to rein in my rage as I looked at Alice again.

“You want to come, don’t you?” I asked, and her entire face lit up.

“Yes, please, *please*, sir. I’ll do whatever you want I—”

“I know,” I interrupted her, waving my hand through the air to shut her up. “You find me the closest place that has a printer and a scanner I can use, and I’ll get you off.”

“I—” She whined, shifting from foot to foot. “I need your permission to use the phone. I’m only allowed to use it to order groceries.”

“Fine. You can use the phone to look this up for me. Do *not* call anyone else, understand?”

“Yes, sir!” Alice rushed past me, moving faster than I’d ever seen her move, but an orgasm is a pretty motivating thing when the only person who can give you one is standing in front of you. I rolled my eyes, trying to ignore the nagging feeling of guilt at the back of my head as I promised myself I wouldn’t fuck her.

Tapping the mute button, I held it back to my ear. “I’m going to have to go somewhere to print this shit and scan it back to you. Can you email it all to me?”

“Of course. Would you like us to use the email we have on file?”

“Yeah. Just... shit... just do it fast, okay? I’ll go right now to get it handled.” Groaning, I leaned against the doorframe to Alice’s room and stared at the ceiling. The fucking twins were going to die for this. As soon as my money was safe, I was going to use a chunk of it to make sure I found someone who could erase them both off the face of the planet.

“I just sent it all over, Mr. Gavinski. I know how frustrating this is, but the security measures are in place to protect your assets.” She sounded so sincere, but I doubted any of it was real. “I do have a bit of good news, the woman who attempted to empty your accounts has been arrested, and we will encourage the authorities to prosecute her to the full extent of the law.”

“Thanks,” I answered, but I knew it was just some collectable who had been forced to do it. She’d probably kill herself in prison, if they hadn’t already told her to do it before then.

Assholes.

“Well, I will keep watch on my email for the documents. I apologize once again for the inconvenience, Mr. Gavinski.”

“Yeah, thanks. I’ll send it all over soon.” Without waiting for more bullshit, I hung up the phone, grumbling to myself as I waited for Alice.

I didn’t have to wait long, though. She came running back down the hall with the phone in her hand and a piece of paper in the other.

“Here you go, sir. This place is open for another forty-five minutes, and they have everything you need.” She offered the paper and as I took it, she reached for my pants, but I slapped her hand away.

“Don’t fucking touch me.”

Her hands dropped to her sides, and I felt the urge to make her scream rising. It would be so easy to shove her against the wall, to rip her panties off and fuck her ass dry. She’d cry, she’d probably bleed, and I was hard as a fucking rock just thinking about it.

But I didn’t have time for it... and there was Hannah.

Hannah. My Hannah.

Cracking my neck, I pointed at her bed. “Lie down.”

She bounded over, fucking smiling, and I wanted to slap it off her face as I shut the door. “Cover your face with the pillow, and you better be fucking quiet. Understand?”

“Yes, sir,” she replied, and then muffled herself with the pillow. At least with it over her face I couldn’t see her smiling.

Not going to fuck her. Not going to fuck her.

There was already a damp spot on her underwear, but I ignored it as I shoved them to the side and cupped her smooth cunt. I didn’t even slide a finger inside her, I just pushed pleasure. Watched it coil under her skin, as she moaned quietly and squeaked underneath the pillow while she writhed. The first orgasm hit... and I heard her start crying.

Alice pressed the pillow harder over her face, her fingers clenched tight in the fabric, and I actually felt a little bad for her.

Who knows how long it’s been since she got off?

I let her breathe for a second, and then forced another orgasm. Her knees came up, bending towards her chest, and then her feet came back to the bed so she could lift her hips, arch her back. Liquid heat smeared against my fingers, and I knew I’d need to wash my hands before I touched Hannah again.

“You want another one?” I asked as soon as she started breathing somewhat normally again.

A muffled, “*Yes! Please!*” came through the pillow, and I sighed and checked the clock on my phone before I shoved three fingers inside her and made her come again. It was too easy, and it felt nothing like making Hannah come.

Mechanical. Boring.

I waited for her to ride it out, let her grind on my hand as she moaned softly and whined into the fabric pressed over her mouth. Then I took my hand away and wiped my fingers on her sheets.

“Thanks for finding the information,” I said and stood.

Alice took the pillow off and sat up, her cheeks bright red, eyes watery, and she bit down on her lip as she stifled another quiet cry. “Will you—”

“Do that again?” I interrupted and shook my head. “No. I’m with Hannah. That was just... a thank you, or something. Okay?”

She nodded, her face crumpling as she tried not to cry again. I turned away from her and went to the door, but I paused and looked back at her.

“You will not mention this to Hannah. At all. If she’s hungry, make her dinner. I’ll be back soon. Got it?”

“Yes, sir,” she whispered, and then she sat up straighter. “Um, sir?”

“What?” I snapped, and she flinched.

“Just... thank you for not hurting me. And thank you for letting me think, I haven’t... I just... thank you.” She looked down at her bed and sniffled. “That’s all I wanted to say.”

“You’re welcome.” I didn’t give her a chance to say anything else as I yanked open her door and shut it behind me.

Is that how all the collectables at the Acambo feel?

Shaking my head, I went directly to the kitchen, set the paper and my phone on the counter, and washed my hands thoroughly. Twice.

I didn’t have the mental space to think about the women I had at the hotel, but I’d figure it out. Later. Maybe if I figured *that* out, I’d feel more worthy of Hannah. I’d just have to talk to her about... you know... handing out orgasms like they were handshakes.

“Fuck, this is way too complicated.”

Shoving all of that bullshit to the back of my mind, I hurried through getting dressed, grabbed the documents I needed, and then stepped into the bathroom to see my angel surrounded by bubbles.

“You look comfy,” I said, walking over to stare down at her. She smiled up at me and stretched, her tits lifting out of the white foam like the best

kind of peep show. “And delectable.”

“Want to join me?” she asked, grinning, and I groaned as my dick was still straining inside the jeans I’d forced over my erection.

“Wish I could, but I have to go scan some fucking documents to fix this account issue. I’ll be back soon though, okay?”

“Okay.” She pouted, and I couldn’t help but smile because it was my Hannah being sad to be away from me. No compulsions, no mesmer tricks—just her. I couldn’t resist leaning down to kiss her, taking control as our tongues clashed, and I felt the buzz of her moan against my lips. But I had to pull back, had to get this done so she was safe. That was the most important. One more too-tempting taste of her mouth, and then I broke the kiss.

“I won’t be long.” I pressed a quick peck to her forehead. “I love you.”

As I stood up, I realized what I’d said, and the broad grin on Hannah’s face made the inner-shock a little easier to take.

“I love you too, Tomik.”

“Yeah...” I nodded, laughing a bit under my breath as I walked backward to the door. “Soon. I’ll be back soon, and then I’m going to fuck you again.”

“Sounds good to me,” she purred, stretching in the water again, and I turned away before I dove into the water with her—damn the consequences.

Yeah. Definitely going to kill the twins. Painfully.

HANNAH

“Are you hungry?” Alice asked as she entered the living room.

“Yeah, but I’m going to wait until Tomik gets back.”

“Well, what are you in the mood for? I can get it started so it’s ready,” she answered with a smile, and it made me turn all the way around on the couch to look at her.

Well, well, someone’s awake. Greta was back inside, but I knew that didn’t mean anything. She seemed to be changing, getting stronger, and it made me nervous. Although, on *this* Greta was right. I could see it too.

I focused on Alice and smiled back. “You seem... better.”

“He woke me up. It’s nice.” She shrugged. “Nice to be able to think, you know?”

Yep.

“Yeah, I understand.” Toying with the arm of the couch, I tried to think of how to phrase the question in my head, but it seemed strange to ask it.

The concern I felt could just be more of Greta’s bullshit, still, I wanted to know the truth.

“Do you... want to be here, Alice?”

Her face fell for a second, and then the smile was back. “I’m very happy to work here.”

Mesmer’d. She won’t give you a real answer, Hannah.

“Are you sure? You could leave, I can talk—”

“No!” Alice shouted, and then she started trembling. “I... I don’t want to. I’m very happy to work here.”

Totally mesmer'd. That's probably all she can say, Hannah. When Tomik gets bored with you, you'll be just like that. Greta lounged back in the chair she'd made appear—a big black recliner, and she pulled the lever to prop her feet up. **It will just be a matter of time.**

Shut up.

"I'm sorry, Alice. You can make whatever sounds good to you, okay?" I smiled at her again, but she looked like she was about to cry. It made me feel terrible as she nodded and went to the kitchen.

I felt deflated as I turned back to the book in my lap, remembering the way Tomik had said 'I love you' before he left and holding onto it like a shield against Greta's constant negativity.

"Hannah?" Alice called softly, and I turned to look at her again. "Tomik is nice. For one of them anyway. You're really lucky he's the one that found you."

Before I could even reply, she'd disappeared through the door, and I could only stare at the place she'd been, but at least I was smiling again.

He's nice, I repeated in my head.

Not nice. Bad man. Mesmer. I don't know why you don't listen.

You heard her! He's a nice mesmer, he's fighting it!

Greta rolled her eyes. **He's only been nice to her because he's been fucking you. That's all.**

Whatever. Go away.

Not. Gonna. Happen.

I was contemplating figuring out how to work the television just to drown her out when the front door opened. Jumping up, I rushed to it.

"You're back!" I called out, but immediately skidded to a stop when I saw two men in the entryway, one of them closing the door behind him.

Hannah, run. Greta stood up in my head, no more chair, no more snark. **Run!**

I started to back up, but then they faced me. Twins. I remembered twins.

"Stop right there, Hannah." The closest one commanded, and I felt my muscles go stiff no matter how hard I tried to move.

"It's like she was expecting us, Roman. Already mostly naked." He smiled and tilted his chin toward me. "Drop the robe."

They're going to kill you. Greta said, suddenly outside of me, standing to my right, but she wasn't helping. She wasn't able to stop the command.

I felt tears in my eyes as my hands went to the tie at my waist and pulled it away. Like a puppet, I had no control over my movements as I let the robe fall to the floor. Instantly cold, all I wanted to do was cover myself, but when I lifted my arms, he shook his head.

“Nope. Don’t cover yourself. We’ve been looking forward to this.”

“We don’t have time to play with her here, Mitchell. We just need to get her passport and shit and then get her in the car.” Roman grinned, looking me up and down. “Then we can have some fun with her.”

“Please... don’t,” I whispered, but it just made them laugh.

Don’t beg. They like that, Greta growled, staring at the twins with all the venom and hate she normally aimed at Tomik.

“Hannah?” Alice’s voice rang out, and I panicked.

“ALICE RUN!” I screamed, but Mitchell was already walking towards her voice. It was barely a second later when I heard him.

“Come join us.”

Roman took a step closer to me, closing the gap between us so that he could trace a finger down the side of my face, a sneer contorting his otherwise handsome features. “I don’t know what the fuck he sees in you. You’re just another slut.”

We just have to wait. We’ll have an opportunity.

In my peripheral vision, I saw Alice and Mitchell arrive, but I couldn’t look away from the anger in Roman’s eyes.

“Say it. Say that you’re just another useless slut.” His command slid into my throat like something slimy, but I couldn’t stop myself from speaking.

“I’m...” My muscles trembled as I tried to fight it, but it came out anyway. “I’m just another useless slut.”

“That’s right,” Roman replied, a sick smile passing over his lips. “Go get your passport and your ID and put on a dress and some shoes. No bra, no underwear. Quickly.”

He turned away from me to look at Alice, and I felt my body move like a robot. Stiff strings as I moved to obey. From behind me I could hear them talking to Alice, but their words faded as I entered the master bedroom.

Tomik’s suitcase was still open, and I knew he kept my documents in there too. Greta pointed at the front of it.

Small zipper pocket. Hurry, we can look for a weapon.

How the fuck am I going to hide a weapon in a dress?

Creatively, Greta snapped, pacing beside me as I got my driver's license and passport out of the pocket.

Turning away from her, I laid the items on the bed to dig out a clean dress, but even the most modest one was less covering than I could have hoped for.

Tomik's fault.

You're not helping!

The sandals were easy to slip on, and at least I could run in them if I ever got the chance... but I knew I wouldn't. That realization brought back the tears, and I hurried to the bathroom as I realized there was no command lurking in my brain to come right back to them. He'd only said *quickly*.

Scrambling for the make-up, I grabbed my lipstick and wrote on the mirror as fast as I could.

'TWINS TOOK ME. I LOVE YOU.'

Waste of fucking time. WEAPON! Greta shouted.

Dropping the lipstick back in the bag, I searched the counter for anything that might be a weapon, but there wasn't anything, and every second I lingered was another second they might find my message.

Don't make this worse.

Biting down on my lip to try and stop the tears, I grabbed my documents and returned to the twins. I found them in the living room with Alice on her knees.

"We could have her fuck herself with a knife?" one of them suggested, and I felt sick as I watched Alice crying silently.

The other one turned to look at me, crooking a finger. "Come here, Hannah."

It was pointless to fight it, so I didn't bother. I just kept my gaze on the floor as I walked over to him.

"We are going to do so many things to you, slut." He grabbed my face, squeezing my cheeks so that my lips squished together—and then he spat on me. I felt the droplets on my skin and tried not to cry, tried not to flinch, but he tightened his grip until I couldn't help but whine. "She does make such pretty noises when she's in pain, doesn't she, Mitchell?"

"I like it better when she screams."

"That's nice too. We'll do that once we're in the air," Roman replied as he let me go, and the twins turned to face Alice again. "What about a gun? I'm sure Tomik has one here somewhere."

“Boring. I want something that’ll look good on camera.”

I looked around and saw the video camera on a tripod just behind the twins. *Did they bring that with them?*

Does it matter? Greta asked as she walked over to it.

“Oh! I know, we’ll have her hang herself,” Mitchell said, grinning as he pointed up at the exposed rafters in the ceiling. “Tell me, bitch, is there rope somewhere in this place?”

Alice nodded as she sobbed quietly. “Y-yes, sir.”

“Good, then after we leave, you’re going to toss it over this rafter, tie it off to something so it will hold, and then you’re gonna make yourself a noose. Set up the camera to record all of it. Make sure it’s all in frame. Then hang yourself.”

“NO!” I shouted, but Roman’s hand was around my throat a second later, squeezing until I felt my pulse pounding behind my eyes.

“Shut up. No more talking.” The command slammed in, and I managed a whimper as Alice looked up at me. When Roman released me, I tried to convey with my eyes how sorry I was.

She’s dying because of me, because they want me.

At least she’ll be free, Greta answered from the other side of Alice, but she managed to look the tiniest bit sorry as she stared at the woman kneeling on the floor.

I was useless, so fucking useless. All I could do was breathe and sniffle as Roman crouched in front of Alice.

“You’re going to do this quickly, understand? Start as soon as we leave. And if Tomik gets home before you manage it, you’re gonna do whatever you have to in order to kill yourself. You. Will. Kill. Yourself.”

Even though it wasn’t directed at me, I could feel the force behind his command. It was like a shockwave through the air, and I took an instinctive step back from it like it might somehow taint me too just by being near it.

Alice nodded, sobbing harder, and then Mitchell grabbed my arm, hauling me toward the front door. Frantically, I tried to turn to look at Alice, to let her see that I would know. I would always know it wasn’t her choice.

I was crying when they shoved me out the front door and sobbing by the time they threw me into the limo parked on the circular drive. It felt like I’d barely blinked when the car started moving, and I backed away from the twins, moving until my back hit the little wall dividing us from the driver.

Turning, I slammed my hands against it, whining as loud as I could because I still couldn't fucking talk.

They just laughed.

"That's not going to do anything, slut. The bitch driving is a collectable, just like you, and she's just happy she's not back here." He leaned forward, smiling. "Now, come here."

I hated them, hated them so much, and it didn't make a difference. I crawled forward and stopped exactly where he pointed.

"Go ahead and take off the dress, and the shoes, you won't need them for now." It was pointless to try and fight the commands, just exhausting, so I obeyed. Tried to block out how they both reached forward to pinch my breasts, twisting my nipples viciously, but I still yelped and whimpered with each sharp spike of pain.

And I knew this was just the beginning.

"Roman, get the case." Mitchell was the one directly in front of me, but I turned to watch as Roman unzipped a large suitcase before shoving it to the floor.

"Time to get you all packed up for our trip, slut," Roman said, tilting his head to the inside where I saw a bunch of leather straps. I shook my head, but he just laughed. "Get in."

I fought hard, as hard as I could, my muscles shaking so hard my teeth chattered—but I inched closer to it regardless.

We have to wait for our chance, Greta said from inside my head once again, but now she was just sitting in the empty black inside my mind, cross-legged, staring. **We'll get them. I promise.**

It didn't make me feel any better as Roman shoved me into place, yanking my limbs until I was bent the way he wanted. My chin went into one strap, another around the back of my head. Arms, thighs, waist, ankles—all strapped in until I could barely move at all. Cramped, terrified... and then they closed it.

No, no, no.

It was empty darkness, a space so tight I felt like I might be claustrophobic for the first time in my life. It just didn't matter. They wanted me to suffer, hated me.

Because Tomik took you away from them. In Russia.

I whimpered when the suitcase was lifted, turned, making it almost like I was on hands and knees, except uncomfortably bent.

Then I felt something behind me.

Fingers touching me through some hole in the case, and a sudden wave of desperate need flooded me. Pussy instantly wet, I tilted my hips, sought out those searching fingers until they plunged inside me, and all I could do was groan.

Yes, more.

No. Fight it. Don't be their toy! Greta was snarling, insistent, but I couldn't focus on her at all. Not when a third finger pushed in, stretched me, and had me suddenly teetering on the edge of an orgasm.

"Don't come unless we say you can, slut," one of the twins said from outside the case.

I tried to nod but couldn't do more than shimmy my head against the straps... which they couldn't even see. But I could see something. Dim light visible through a hole in the front of the case, and more fingers joined in. Shoved into my mouth, and I sucked frantically, trying to earn the orgasm I could feel brimming in the violent haze in my head.

So close, so close.

"Ready?" A male voice came from above the case, and then all the fingers went away. I whined, whimpered, jerked against the straps trying to reach them again—and then I felt it. A cock teasing at my entrance, sending a delirious rush of bliss through me that *almost* made me come. But it all stopped short, left me hanging on that terrible edge as another cock moved through the hole below my eyes.

I opened my mouth, stuck out my tongue, and tasted heaven.

The sound that came out of me was some wanton mix of a moan and a wordless plea, because I needed more. I needed more of everything, and I couldn't even say it. I couldn't say anything, but I was able to rock the slightest bit back and forth. Begging one, both, to push inside me and end the torment.

"Now," one of the twins said and then I was filled with synchronized, rough thrusts. I choked on the moan in my throat as the one in my mouth immediately went deep, shutting off my desperate sounds as the other filled my cunt.

Soaking wet, unable to move, unable to speak, all I could do was take it as they worked inside me. Sometimes thrusting at the same time, others alternating to send me bouncing the inch or so I could move inside the case. I tried to keep up, slurping around the dick buried in my throat, gasping wet

breaths whenever I could, but totally focused on the ambrosia that trailed across my tongue whenever he pulled farther out.

“Listen to this bitch begging for it. Just a slut like all the rest,” the twin behind me grunted.

“Nothing special at all,” the one in front replied. A quiet corner of my mind felt sad as those words sank in, but the next thrust erased it. Hovering me on that brutal horizon, teetering on the precipice of bliss.

Almost, almost.

They’re not going to let you, Greta said, rolling her eyes. **And even if they do, it will just lead to something worse. You’d know that if they weren’t turning you into their Hannah-toy again.**

“I want to hear her scream,” the man with his dick in my mouth growled. “I want to feel it.”

“Yeah,” the other grunted, shoving his cock deep, and then he held still, barely rocking with the movement of the car as all of the pleasure fizzled. Like stars winking out, it all started to fade—leaving me empty, cold, and in the dark.

I tried to tell you.

“Listen to me, you little bitch. You’re nothing more than a collectable. You’re as disposable as every other cunt, but we’re going to make sure you suffer before we finally have you off yourself.” It was the one in front of me talking, and he moved his dick over my tongue slowly. Casually fucking my mouth, only teasing at the back of my throat as he continued. “Just like that slut we left as a surprise for Tomik, you’re going to be another lesson that *no one* walks away from us.”

“And no collectable is above the rules,” the other twin finished, and then he pulled out of me, only to readjust his angle to press against my ass.

I whined, keened, tried to make my throat form words—and then he thrust in.

Brutally hard, vicious, it felt like he tore something, and I screamed until there was a cock buried in my throat and I couldn’t do anything. Nothing but suffer as the fierce pain made my back spasm, my fingers curling into desperate fists.

No reprieve, no more pleasure.

Just violent fucking that bruised my lips, tore me open, and left me even more hollow than before.

We'll kill them, Greta promised, but I didn't believe her. They'd probably kill me before either of us ever got the chance, and I was starting to think it might not be a bad thing.

Alice's death was starting to look more and more like mercy, and as another wave of agony shafted through me... for a moment all I felt was jealousy for the sweet release she'd find swinging at the end of a rope.

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TOMIK

It had taken almost an hour to handle the shitstorm the twins had started. I had to find the damn shop, get all of the paperwork signed and scanned back to them, and then I'd had to wait for Helen to review it and confirm she'd get my accounts fixed.

Waste of my fucking time.

As I pulled up in front of the house again, I reminded myself to calm down. I'd have to pick a new place for us to go as soon as the money was moving again, but this time I'd get to choose *with* Hannah. I could give her some options, take her somewhere she's always wanted to go.

Maybe I could work on making all of those memories I'd planted in her head real.

The idea almost made me smile as I climbed out of the car and went inside. As soon as I opened the door, I called out to her. "Hey babe, I'm sorry that took so long, it was a fucking mess."

Dropping the keys on the entry table, I almost tripped over the robe on the floor as I stepped forward. Picking it up, I listened for Hannah and grinned because I knew she was probably somewhere, naked, waiting for me to make good on my promise.

"Where are you, my Hannah?" I called out, chuckling as I stepped into the living room—and froze.

Alice was hanging from the ceiling, a chair from the dining table knocked to the side, and for a long moment I couldn't do anything but stare. My brain refused to process what I was seeing until a few neurons managed

to rub up against each other as I took in the grotesque way her tongue swelled out of her mouth, foam crowding the edges of her lips.

Was this because of me? Had I triggered some hidden compulsion by letting her think, talk, feel? Had she done this because I'd let her come after God-only-knows how long?

Panic surged as the eerie silence of the house filled my ears. Heart racing in my chest, I turned away from her and shouted, "HANNAH!"

No answer.

Fuckfuckfuck.

Running to the bedroom we'd shared, I found it horrifyingly empty, as was the bathroom, the other guestrooms, and no matter how many times I screamed her name—she never answered.

I couldn't breathe, couldn't stop my hands from shaking as I wandered back into the master bedroom to try and understand what the fuck had happened. Her suitcase was still there, so was all of my shit... but Hannah was gone.

Stumbling into the bathroom, I turned on the light and saw writing on the mirror. Big, red letters, written in lipstick—*TWINS TOOK ME. I LOVE YOU.*

My entire body rebelled against the words, leaving me wavering on my feet as I caught myself on the counter and stared at her handwriting. It was hers, and I had no idea what risks she'd taken to leave it for me, but I knew two things with absolute certainty.

I would kill them.

I would get her back.

The smell of smoke was the only thing that could have broken my focus on the note she'd left me in that moment, but the thought of the house burning down was motivating as fuck. I ran for the kitchen, finding the oven still on with smoke leaking out of the stove. Turning off all the knobs, I didn't bother opening the fucking door. There were no flames, and it wasn't like I could do anything to fix it.

Wandering back into the living room, I looked at Alice again and knew with absolute certainty they'd made her do this. But why? She couldn't have done anything, couldn't have reported Hannah's kidnapping to anyone.

It was just cruel.

Like me... like I used to be? Had I changed that much just by loving Hannah? Did I care about this collectable girl's useless death?

Too many questions. Too many answers I didn't have. Turning around, I felt the panic brimming at the edge of my awareness, ready to take over and send me into a tailspin if I let it—and then I saw the video camera.

"Motherfuckers," I growled, walking over to it. It was still recording, and I knew I'd have to destroy it. I'd have to clean up this whole fucking mess before I could do anything. Pressing the stop button, I rewound the recording to the beginning and hit play.

The chair was already in place, as was the rope with its makeshift noose, just a loop of rope and a few knots—not a real noose like I'd seen in a dozen movies or more. Then again, bright blue rope wasn't usually used either.

That shit was for tying up collectables, not hanging them from the ceiling.

Alice stepped in front of the camera, and the tears rolling down her cheeks made me feel... something. Not like my concern for Hannah, but frustration at the utter waste. She hadn't done anything wrong except for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. A hiccup preceded a guttural sob and then she took a big step back so she was more in frame.

"I-I have to do this. I have to... to k-kill myself." Another sob as her muscles shook, and she took another step closer to the chair. "They left with Hannah, s-so I have to."

Sobbing, Alice climbed onto the chair and delicately slipped the loop over her head, tightening it as she looked at the floor and whined. Then her eyes came back to the camera.

"I had a family before... this." She sniffled harshly, fingers fisted at her sides as her body wobbled forward but she managed to stay on the chair. "You were nice to me. No one had been nice before, so, thank you. I wish... I hope you find her."

Then she dropped. Kicked the chair to the side as she struggled, clawed at the rope around her neck, and I couldn't keep watching. Closing the viewer on the side, I turned away from her and went into the dining room. It was dark outside now, the city covered in lights, the opera house glowing, but I didn't care about any of that shit.

I just wanted Hannah back.

It felt like my chest might be caving in, my breath wheezing as I dropped into a chair and experienced what I could only describe as a panic attack. I couldn't focus, couldn't *think*. My head was spinning with the hundred different places they could take her. A thousand different locations around the world.

Anywhere.

It was too much to process, too much to handle, and I definitely wasn't handling it at all.

Desperate for air, I forced a deep breath, and it came out on a scream. Raw, it made my throat ache from the force of it, and when it ended, I realized I was crying. I couldn't remember the last time I'd cried, some time in high school maybe. But it had never felt like this.

Nothing had ever felt like this.

Hannah was in the hands of the two men I hated most in the world—the two men who had done some of the most depraved shit I'd ever seen. Things that even my mesmer side had paused at for a second before it got in the spirit of it.

But they wouldn't kill her—not yet.

If they'd wanted her dead, she would be. She'd be hanging right next to Alice. No, what they wanted to do to her would be so much worse, and I had no fucking idea where they'd taken her.



I was emailing the accounting people again, trying to find out when I'd have access to my money so I could fucking leave, when an email came in.

The subject just said 'Hannah'.

It turned my stomach to open it, but I did, not sure what I was expecting, but the video attachment was answer enough. The twins had Hannah, and they wanted to gloat.

I debated playing it, but my fingers decided for me when they clicked it. One of the twins was holding the camera, the other had a suitcase on one of the plush seats of a private jet... and it looked like he was fucking it.

"Say hi to Tomik, Roman."

Roman flipped his middle finger at the camera then pulled out of the suitcase. My stomach clenched. The camera turned around to show

Mitchell's face as he rotated to keep Roman in the shot too.

"I'm not as good as you at this photography shit, but I think I can do a decent job with this little camera," Mitchell said through a chuckle. They'd clearly been drinking, but I did my best to ignore them and look around the cabin for any hint of where they were going.

"You probably already got the little present we left behind for you. We've been in the air about thirty minutes now, but we wanted to show you the little souvenir we got for ourselves when we visited the land down under." Roman popped his boxers back into place and flipped the suitcase to lay it flat. With a flourish, he unzipped it, and Mitchell brought the camera closer to show Hannah strapped into the fucked-up suitcase.

She looked dazed, glassy-eyed, and all I could hope was that they'd zombied her out so that she wasn't really aware.

"Want to get out of that suitcase, slut?" Roman asked, leaning over her, and she whined when he reached in to do something I couldn't see. My fists were clenched so tight I could feel my joints aching already, but that didn't matter as Roman unstrapped her and hauled her out of the suitcase.

She collapsed to the floor the second he let go, barely catching herself with her hands. A quiet whine escaped her as she stared at the floor, all of her pretty blonde hair in her face until Roman ripped her head back with a fistful of it.

"Say hello to Tomik, bitch," Mitchell said from behind the camera, and Hannah slowly focused on the lens. I hated myself, but it made me hard to see her like that. She was a mess, her lips red from use, drool and tears making her skin shine.

"Hello, Tomik," she whispered, flinching when Roman shoved her head forward.

"Your turn, Mitchell. Give me the camera." The video shook and wobbled until they handed it off, and then the bastard picked her up off the floor, holding her up with an arm around her waist and a hand around her neck.

"Snap out of it, Hannah. Tomik likes to hear you scream, remember?" Mitchell said, grinning at the camera as Hannah blinked, her expression changing fast as she started to cry and fight.

"Let go of me!" she shouted, kicking and trying to twist, but she wasn't strong enough to do anything, definitely not with two of them there. Mitchell easily walked backward with her to stand beside a highly polished

table, his fingers digging into her cheeks as he forced her to look at the camera.

“Tell him that you want me to fuck your ass.” The feral smile on the bastard’s face had me seeing red, and I wanted to turn off the video, I wanted to stop it—but I couldn’t ignore this. *This* was my fault. All of this was my fault for bringing her to them. For not protecting her.

“I... I want him to fuck my ass,” she said in an empty voice, the tears rolling down her cheeks steadily, but she wasn’t begging, wasn’t fighting anymore, and I couldn’t tell if that was Mitchell or Hannah.

“That’s right,” Mitchell growled and slammed her onto the table. “Don’t move, bitch.”

Hannah went still, bent over the edge as Mitchell pulled out his cock and drove into her hard. It was her screams that got under my skin, panic and fear warring with blatant arousal as the two halves of me fought.

Neither one was winning, or both were—but it didn’t fucking matter.

I had a hard-on, and I felt like I was going to throw up as Hannah screamed, cried, her fingers clawing at the table under her, but unable to do anything about Mitchell.

The camera wobbled again as Roman shifted it so he was in the frame too. He had the same cocky smile on his face that Mitchell had. “We’re just getting started, Tomik. It’s a long flight, and our pilots are gonna have a bit of fun with her too. If we get inspired, we might send you another video of your special little slut.”

“You like that, don’t you?” Mitchell growled, and suddenly Hannah was moaning, pushing back against him and begging for more.

The video ended there, with her head craned back and Mitchell’s hands on her hips.

Staring down at my erection bulging at the front of my jeans, I clenched my jaw and let the rage wash through me. Pure hate. For them, for me, for all of us. Every mesmer.

We all deserve to die.

“Fuck it.” I grabbed my phone and shoved my chair back so hard it toppled over. Then I called the one person in the world I probably *shouldn’t* have called—but I didn’t give a fuck what happened to me. I had to find Hannah, had to get her away from them... then I’d let them have me if that was the price.

“What the fuck do you want?” Aaron answered, and I started pacing.

“Before I say anything, I want to know if you had something to do with this.”

“What?” he snapped, huffing out a breath. “I’m not playing games with you, Tomik. You’ve made your fucking bed, and you’re going—”

“Did you help the twins do this or not, Aaron!” I shouted, barely in control as I felt my hands shaking from the rush of adrenaline.

“I haven’t seen the twins since you tried to kill us in Russia, Tomik. So, no, I have no fucking idea what you’re talking about.”

“For the last goddamn time, I didn’t poison you in Russia! I was drinking the fucking vodka too!” Clenching my fist in my hair, I forced a deep breath. “So, you’re saying you have no idea where the twins are headed?”

“I don’t keep track of you idiots all the time,” Aaron said, his voice low, dangerous.

“But you can find them.”

“I didn’t say that, and what makes you think I’d do shit to help you anyway? After how you’ve behaved? After how you betrayed us?” Aaron chuckled. “You’ve lost your damn mind. Men have died for less, Tomik.”

“Fuck you, Aaron! When would I have had access to the fucking vodka? Think about it. When was I *ever* out of your sight?” A frustrated growl escaped me as I remembered the things they’d done to Hannah, the things I’d *let* them do. “I barely touched the shit that day, but you know who was cuddled up with the fucking vodka the whole time? Sergei. Why the fuck aren’t you harassing him about it?”

“Because *he* spent a day in the hospital getting his stomach pumped and a bunch of drugs to keep him from dying,” Aaron snapped.

“Yeah, well, isn’t he also the one that threw a fit because we’d been hosting parties in the US too often? Isn’t he the one that threatened you last summer?” I shook my head. “I just wanted to keep Hannah alive for a while longer, that’s it. I left with her. I was never alone with the fucking liquor, and that was the end of it for me. *You* assholes turned this into a war.”

Aaron was silent, and I knew it meant he was thinking. He was an absolute bastard, and he’d been a mesmer long enough that his tastes ran dark as fuck, but he was smart. I might hate him along with the rest of them now, but I’d never accuse of him of being an idiot.

“I don’t know why I ever fell for your brotherhood shit, Aaron. You used me like a fucking collectable, and now you’re just gonna toss me away

like one?”

I hated that it hurt a little to admit that aloud. Aaron was maybe fifteen years older than me, but when I'd been lost and too young to do more than find a place to crash so I wouldn't sleep on the streets—he'd helped me. He'd shown me what we could do, the power we could have. He had never acted like a father, but he was supposed to be a brother. A mentor.

“The twins have always been unstable, and Sergei is a fucking drunk, but I never thought you'd betray me. But, hell, maybe you always planned this. Maybe you chose me because I was a young kid that had no fucking clue what was happening to me, and you could make me follow your every command.” A bitter laugh escaped me as I leaned against the wall, feeling every bit the fool I was. “That was it, wasn't it? I was a collectable with mesmer powers. You just added me to your fucking collection and pulled my goddamn strings like—”

“No,” Aaron cut me off. “I liked you, Tomik. Saw myself in you. I didn't want to watch you do something stupid and get killed over it or locked up in jail. I saw you in that fucking bar in New York, using your gifts to scam free drinks off the fucking bartender, and I wanted to help you. I wanted to bring you in.”

“Yeah? Then help me now, Aaron.”

“Help you with what, Tomik?” he snapped. “You've been yelling at me since I answered the fucking phone, and all I know is that the twins did something to you that has you pissed off.”

“They showed up here in Sydney, killed the collectable in the house, and took Hannah from me.” I swallowed as I said it all out loud, feeling the nausea return.

“Alice?” he asked with an odd tone.

“Yeah, they made her hang herself. Made her record it too.” I sighed. “She's still hanging in the fucking living room because I have no idea what to do with her. Just another way they're trying to slow me down.”

“Did you even realize you were staying in one of my houses?” Aaron asked, and I tensed.

“Uh, no... it was just on the list and—”

“Those assholes should have known better. Alice was my bargaining chip with the locals. I've been going there once a month to host a party for over a year now, keeping the people in high places happy so that I didn't have to deal with shit.” Aaron muttered under his breath for a moment

before he took a deep breath. “She was *mine*. Now I’m inconvenienced because I’ve got to find another piece of ass that can handle the rough shit without passing out.”

“I’m... sorry?” I tried to sound sincere, but I was mostly just confused.

“And, fuck, she was a good cook too.”

“Yeah, I noticed. Good food.” Wandering back to my desk, I closed the email the twins had sent and refreshed my inbox to find a new email from the accounting firm.

Tomorrow. I’ll have my money back tomorrow.

“Look, I don’t know what happened in Russia, but I’m willing to admit that it *might* not have been you. That doesn’t make us friends, though. You’ve been a prick, but the twins crossed a fucking line killing one of my collectables without permission. For that, I’ll send some people to clean up the mess they left behind, and if I hear anything from them... I’ll pass it along.”

“Thanks Aaron, that—”

“I really don’t give a fuck what you think,” Aaron cut me off in a gruff voice. “But here’s a bit of unsolicited advice... if the twins have the girl, you’re not going to get her back in one piece, and she’s obviously not good for you anyway. She’s fucking with your head. Let them have their fun, and they’ll get rid of her for you, and then maybe in another six months you can come back to us.”

“I can’t do that,” I replied quietly, knowing I was painting a target on my back. Aaron had always said that to be a mesmer was to be above the rest of humanity. We were the next wave of evolution, the future, and weakness wouldn’t be tolerated in the gene pool.

“That’s too bad, Tomik. I really did like you, kid.”

The line cut off before I could even try to come up with an explanation, an answer that wouldn’t put Aaron and me on the wrong sides again, but I’d lost my chance.

Did you really want it?

Fucking questions.

All I had right now were questions and no answers. Two halves of myself that would never line up neatly.

I loved Hannah, but I liked to watch her suffer. I took pity on Alice, but I would have been fine watching someone whip her bloody—hell, I would have fucked Hannah just as viciously as Mitchell had in the video. My head

was still full of visions of her hanging by hooks, wearing bloodied wings. I imagined that shit way more than I pictured us strolling through the fucking Parthenon together... but I wanted that too. Unlike the twins I didn't ever want her dead.

I wanted to be the Tomik who could love Hannah, could make her happy.

The man who could keep her safe from everyone... except me.

Because at the end of the day I'd still need to feed the monster, and the only cunt I wanted wrapped around my cock was Hannah's, the only screams I wanted were hers, and the only blood I wanted dripping to my floor was my angel's.

I just had to find her.

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HANNAH

“Wake up again. Remember, little darling Hannah.” Someone clicked their fingers. “Talk to us.”

Remember.

I swung my head higher. I was curled into a tight ball and metal dug into my side, into my back. Whatever was under me creaked and moved as I strived to sit up. Through a mesh of metal, eyes were staring at me. Greedy eyes, and a fat wet tongue probing at his lips.

“Roman,” I croaked, remembering with a shudder the vile tortures they’d subjected me to.

“You do remember.”

The loud roll of the suitcase wheels as they brought me into this house... *thump-thumping* over the grit and defects in the floor. They liked their suitcase.

The unstrapping, the unbuckling, the crawling so they could get at me, again and again. The posing while they videoed. My sniveling and my screaming. I wasn’t allowed to scream properly, but I was to do it quietly when anything hurt a lot.

Most of what they did to me hurt.

The line of blood at my wrists, the bruises, the other scratches, they were piling up on my body.

How much could I take before I died?

Mesmers are evil. Told you.

Greta?

As if she were outside my head, I looked above and around, wildly. Was I even still where I'd remembered? The same place?

Yellow-white walls, timber rotting with peeling paint, plastic seats upturned and piled against the walls. Beyond Roman, the man with the brown hair, was a stage. Square windows let in dusty light.

Same.

The place where no one came to help me.

This was a shopping trolley. My fingers slipped through the wire beneath. My entire side had deep dents from the pressure of the mesh. I'd slept here, crammed into this because this was all I was allowed.

You were zombied out. Greta muttered, prying herself off her black couch.

That Greta looked as exhausted as I felt, it panicked me. I'd never seen her like that.

What do you expect? She spat and I swear it was red-tinged. **Being yanked in and out of robot zombie mode while they treat you like combo pin-cushion and commode, it hurts me too.**

"There she is! Awake. Our blue-eyed slut." Sounding amazed, his twin brother, Mitchell, joined him.

Roman straightened, undoing the knot on his gray satin tie and pulling it free.

Both were dressed in perfectly clean suits. I looked down as I winced and raggedly propped myself higher. I was naked. Hurting. Blood had dried on me. There were holes in my skin. My face seemed stretched from some other matter drying on it. Might be blood, might be come.

A cut finger caught on a jagged piece of wire and I whimpered, readjusting my hold and gripping the side of the trolley as if it were a safety zone. It was not.

They'd fucked me through the wire last night. Below, on the worn timber floor was the evidence of that. Dark spots and coagulated mess.

My eyes stung. I should be too tired to cry, but they'd make me if they wanted to.

Roman and Mitchell. How could two men so averagely handsome be so vile?

"What's on the menu today?" one of them said.

The video camera with the tripod was set up to the side.

More videos. Urr. I need reinforcement. Greta tipped a bottle to her mouth, glugged down a few swallows, wiped her face. **Don't be surprised if I go on walkies today.**

More videos. My arms were shaking already.

"Please, don't." I had to try. "You've done enough. He knows."

"Knows what, slut? Tomik knows? That we have you? 'Course he does." I'd lost track of who was who. Was this Roman?

"She's begging us for *his* sake?"

The conversation blurred in my head, and I stared at my hand below, where I gripped my belly.

"She is. Hooks today." From somewhere, a cardboard box on the floor, I think, Mitchell had pulled a mass of entangled chains with hooks on the end. They shone in the muted light.

"Wait. Wait. She thinks we've hurt Tomik enough?" Roman put his hand up, as if to stop his brother. "Get it? She fucking likes him."

Are they going to stop torturing me?

Ahahaha! Greta laughed as if I'd made the best joke ever, and fell over, legs in the air. The black leather of her pants shone. **As if a mesmer could.**

What then? I pinched my lips together.

Mitchell leaned on the trolley, a hook clutched in his hand, the thin chain running from it to dabble over his shoe. "Turn on the cam." Then he spoke to me. "I see you, girl. Question. Why the fuck do you want us to not hurt Tomik anymore?"

Shit. Who gave these two some brains?

The *L* word would be bad. I saw this but it wanted out. Their compulsion pulled words from my head into my throat, and though I struggled to rearrange them my best effort was not enough.

"I... like him?" The question mark at the end had happened on its own.

"Like? Truth."

Truth.

The shockwave of that command was still rocking me as I blurted, "It's love."

"Love? Well, well, fuck that for a surprise." Casually he reached and grabbed my neck, pinching up skin.

A hook slid in and I shrieked. The shriek bubbled down to a whine and a hiccupping whimper.

Love, as if it were a curse.

Is. You just doomed yourself.

The video was on. It was on. They were filming this.

I stared at the chain as it was wrapped around a trolley wheel below by Mitchell's casual turns of hand, winching me forward. I must move or tear it loose. This distracted me from Greta's dire forecast.

Grinning, Roman strolled nearer. "Bang, bang. We got a new nail for his coffin. She wuvs him. I wuvs him not."

"I fucking hates him. But..." Mitchell leaned in and kissed my mouth, tongued me. "Does he love you back?"

Traitor traitor. "Yes." I chased his tongue, humming, smearing our saliva across his mouth. "He does."

"Come closer."

I leaned into the kiss, moaning. The tendrils of mesmer lust sank deeper than any hook.

"He said so?" Another metal hook lanced into and through my upper breast, and I squealed and moved to grab it.

"Fingers down!"

"He does!" My hand clawed, wanting to grab that hook. I whimpered out the words, "He loves me. He does love me."

Beautiful and sad. So awfully sad that saying I loved him could be regretted so deeply. I felt ripped from gut to neck by what I'd said, though the hook pain was winding down. It was the first slice that hurt.

I could tell they meant to use this.

"Grab this." His cock was out, pants unzipped at some unknown moment, and now it poked through the square of wire. I wrapped my hand around his erection while Roman rearranged me, dragging my ass back against the wire, pushing my head down to rest on the bar at the other end of the trolley.

"Yeah. He wuvs her too." Mitchell grunted at what my hand was doing, sucked in an appreciative breath. "Here's the new deal, Hannah baby-doll and love of Tomik's life. I am Tomik."

What? His face pixelated. My heart stopped, beat once, then once more. Hard, rough beats. I breathed in. "Who?"

"You will from now on see me as Tomik, taste my dick as Tomik, hear my voice as his, smell all of me as him. Say who I am. Now."

My eyes sprang wide. *No. No. Please not this.* Tomik was hurting me again. It couldn't be. He'd said he wasn't like this anymore, but then he'd stuck hooks in me. Impossible. Impossible, man, impossible place. The room jiggled, rocked like a rollercoaster ride, and stopped. Blood was running down my neck.

"Speak! Who am I?"

I wept, choking. Tears fell in drops from my chin to the floor before my voice would work. "Tomik. You're Tomik. Of course you're you. You promised you would never hurt me badly again." *He did promise.*

It's not him, you stupid, stupid— Oh fuck. Girl...

"Hah!" Roman sounded as if he'd giggle.

The man loved tormenting me, but that I understood.

Not Tomik? Why, Greta? "I don't understand," I said aloud.

"This is brilliant." Tomik slid his cock from my hand. "Video running?"

"Yes."

"Then we make sure he knows she thinks I'm him." His hand sneaked between me and the trolley, grabbed my hooked breast, and pulled it forward. "Say my name whenever you want to, dear little cunt Hannah. Say it loud. Thank me! Is your cunt wet? Make it so."

"Thank you, Tomik!" A burst of pleasure scintillated into bones, flesh, pussy. Tomik, my magic lover. I huffed, trembling as I let it run deep, closing my eyes to better the feels. My thighs parted, my lips also.

"Open that mouth wider. Tongue out."

I obeyed, opened until my jaw hurt.

Chains jangled behind me. A hook looped into one side of my pussy, tightened and tugged at my entrance. I froze, swearing in hisses through my agony, wanting to wriggle because the desire had amped also. Another hook latched on and I was stretched, played with. Fingered.

The finger probed and dipped inside, and I whimpered, ashamed at how my pussy had grabbed onto that finger. So sore from previous fucking and yet I wanted them.

Stop beating yourself up. Mesmers do the impossible every day. Zzzz.

Where was Greta?

Outside.

I opened my eyes. She was up on-stage pirouetting like a goth ballerina.

"Want her cunt hooked apart... Tomik?"

No. Don't. I begged silently with my eyes. My mouth was still obeying and open. My tongue protruding as I waited for him.

“Fucking excellent suggestion.” He shoved his cock into my mouth, held the trolley with both hands while he fucked my mouth until his balls were jammed in close. Then he pulled out and watched me gasp. “Whose cock do you want, girl? Say my name.”

“Yours, Tomik.”

Three or four fingers wormed in and an orgasm shuttled through me, fucking my mind while those fingers fucked my cunt. I arched backward, painfully, crying out and hearing my spine crack. My ass squirmed, and I felt a squirt of liquid, then another.

Tomik yawned, watching me slump lower, pursing his lips. “Details? Whose cock. Where would you like this cock?”

It was a few seconds before I could answer.

“Back there... where the hooks are. Yours please, Tomik.” I licked my lips. The taste of him alone was nirvana. Inside me...

The red-hot lance of a third hook caught at my pussy. It tugged at my labia, and was tied somehow, to the trolley. The other hooks were tied, and my pussy felt stretched to the point of tearing.

I clutched the wire.

“Hooked and fastened Hannah cunt.” Tomik breathed the dirty words, inches from my face. “Who wants to buy the latest supermarket special item—sloppy Hannah?”

That was me. I knew this, and I was nothing worth having.

This man was my love, my Tomik, and he was treating me like the slops in a piggery.

Tear-sodden, cunt-sodden, blood-decorated Hannah. I was to be fucked through the wire at one end, my mouth used at the other.

The edge of the trolley hurt beneath my chin but the hook he shunted into my cheek and out again hurt far more.

My little screams rendered me a sobbing mess in combination with his next cruel words.

“Tomik doesn’t give a shit for you. It was all pretend. Why would I like a whore thing like you? Tell me why.”

I shut my eyes, refused to see him. I had no answer. None. I’d believed his lies.

Pulling it off and knotting it would be better. Another gulp of imaginary liquor went into Greta. What was she talking about? Cocks?

What else?

The trolley lurched as Roman grabbed the handles and spun it. They paced around the trolley, yanking it. I was holding down whatever was in my stomach. Water only, and bile too I guessed as I swallowed a bitter taste. I'd drunk water, as well as other fluids. I pulled a wretched face. When had they last fed me?

"Magical trolley cunt. Round and round she goes, where she stops..."

When they stopped, Roman pushed a broom handle into my pussy and fucked me with it, while Tomik continued doing my mouth. By then I didn't care.

Whatever they found in this room seemed fair game to put inside me. It was all being filmed. They wanted to shock someone, whoever they were sending copies to.

They used a large dildo, showed me how sticky it had become after I came while they thrust it in and out, laughing. Showed me also a shoe, a section of chain, an old snow globe. I was so freaked out and cracked loose from what was happening to my body that I wasn't sure what was true and what was fake. They shoved things in, made me orgasm, and filmed it. The end.

Afterward I cried. I also leaked from every hole. Their come, mine, I was probably leaking glitter and shoe polish by then.

They hauled me from the trolley, strapped me with a belt and rope, told me to *STAY*, and left me with a noose around my neck up on the stage. I heard one yell at the other to turn off the camera.

Minutes later, one of them came back and gave me some water, then let my head fall to the timber with a clunk.

Night fell. Silence fell, perfect silence except the distant noise of bugs going *creek creek*. Nobody switched on any lights. I curled up, wondering why I wasn't already insane.

I was hurting more than I had when I woke, and I was starving.

My one blessing: I was one day closer to dying.

No one could last through this. No one. They didn't want me to live.

I'd heard doors slam and had a feeling neither of them were staying here, wherever this theater was located. I vaguely recognized the floor I lay on. Something about the design was familiar.

The holes in the worn timber before my nose, denting it, reminded me of the time Billy Handel had bounced an old pogo stick on the stage at Glebe. The end of it had been rusted. They'd banned him from drama classes after that.

Could this be the theater outside my hometown? Did it matter? The place had fallen apart years back. No one went there... here. If it was here. Except spiders.

I'd wake tomorrow and find myself webbed to the floor. Cocooned, strung upside down to be jellified spider food.

If only...

Tomik betrayed me. Again with the dribble of tears, blurring my vision, tickling my nose, dripping off the end of it.

I sniffed.

No, he didn't! Damn. I hate saying this, but he didn't. He's better than these two. They messed with your perceptions. This is not Tomik. Believe me. I am your lodestone, your truth.

Really? Could I dare hope? That had been Tomik. I knew it.

No. That was not him. Tomik is out there. Maybe he's coming.

Make him come then. Before I die.

I heard Greta smash a bottle on a wall. What wall? No idea.

Before I swam into unconsciousness, she whispered words: **You and me both, sister. We're both in trouble. Bad trouble. You die, I die.**

That woke me.

Greta, you know we're at Glebe?

Glebe, yeah. I caught a glimpse of that much earlier.

"You can't have." I squinted at her, realizing I'd said that out loud.

Did. I do that sometimes, catch glimpses of ideas swirling.

"Not possible."

Because I'm a figment of your imagination? Dream on.

I watched her clomp over in her biker boots and sit on the edge of the stage, her back to me, and she was smoking. She seemed as sad and weary as I felt.

I didn't even smoke. There was the usual offensive slogan across her leather vest.

You are a figment.

Neither of us knows what I am.

Smoke puffed out, clouding the air, obscuring the mess of piled chairs and the trolley left abandoned mid-floor, like a discarded pet.

Neither of us knows, Hannah. One of the twins said we'd be moving soon—somewhere else. Bet you missed that. Another cloud of smoke drifted from her. **Go to sleep.**

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TOMIK

The faint notes of a piano solo penetrated the hotel room.

The glass in my hand was cold and solid, with a small sea of amber sloshing about inside. Solid glass, though I was trying to crush it with both hands. I sat in the dark, remembering how and why I'd slid the balcony door aside. I'd walked out there to clear my head, getting some rest from these videos. Wasn't doing the room's air conditioning any good, letting the plastic hotel air out to mingle with real-world air.

I chinked the cut-glass tumbler against bared teeth, thinking. Ice cubes slid and spun.

Tonight I'd watched Hannah be fucked by the twins on four different videos, in twenty different ways. Why? Why watch? I'd seen them all before.

"Give you this at least, you're both fuckin' inventive," I muttered, draining the last of the whiskey from the tumbler. Rotating the glass against my forehead, I stared through it at blurry nothingness.

Empty, like my brain. Leastways, the good part of it. Did I even have a good part anymore?

I stretched my arm along the back of the couch. According to the report, the last email could've been sent from anywhere in the deep south. The last video was completely anonymous in location too, unlike the one I'd known in a second was filmed at the old Glebe Theater.

They'd done that just to show off. By the time I'd flown to the US, they'd moved on. I'd driven there anyway. Had to. Even if my cop had already reported it empty.

They'd left a note on the floor, scrawled in something dark red. I'd crouched and stared at it, head aching with a need to punch someone, wondering if this was her blood. Knowing it was, because the twins had done it.

You're dead, Tomik. So is she.

Ever so profound. Assholes.

Hannah had left her own private imprint, not just in blood, in scent, in some indefinable presence. I could sense her. Had ended up sitting on the edge of the stage next to the stairs, with hand pressed to heart, my head down, trying to feel the thumps of each beat.

She'd rested her head there, once, days before, in one of our quiet moments.

Weak, I knew it was weak, still I'd sat there morose, angry, contemplative. Then I'd risen and gone off to employ another IT expert and a private detective to track the emails. The one huge obstacle, I couldn't show anyone the vid attachments, unless they were collectables. My current pet cop gave me zero. If I used her too much, the police might spot her delving into things that were off limits, and if the twins saw her getting close, maybe worse would happen.

From where it lay on the coffee table, the laptop glowed its ineffably porno screen at me, lid up, like a Venus flytrap begging for one more fly.

I was the fly. A dirty, scummy fly. The thumbnails of the vids taunted me. *Turn me on, one more time.*

The widescreen TV on the wall beyond was off. This was one of the higher floors, and traffic noises were minimal, just that piano solo to remind me of humanity, of the gentle arts, of music. I'd begun to love playing the guitar for her. For years I'd rarely put fingers to strings, all those relentless, violent, perverted years.

New York wasn't the same when your lover was in the middle of a torture session with men you hated—men I hated with a passion that'd see me grind them to a pulp of blood, flesh, and bone, given the slightest chance.

And still the screen taunted.

I reached forward and clicked the mouse, set the latest one going, felt my dick swell into a new erection, same as it had before.

Never failed. Watching her be fucked and hurt never failed... to make me wish I was there, joining in.

I slapped both hands over my face, my eyes, hard enough to sting. Did it matter if I loved her? If I rescued her, I'd still want to hurt her. Same. Same.

I'd not jerked off to the vids, there was that. I should award myself a pat on the back.

If I was truly sincere, I'd delete these. I'd wrung all the info from them and wasn't going to find her by using them. The twins were staying in the States, that was all I knew.

Light flickered on my eyeballs. The video was still playing.

I let my hands slip down my face, feeling the scratch of day-old stubble, staring at them reaming her at mouth and ass with sticks while they chuckled and made lewd jokes. Hand muscles taut, I leaned in and jabbed a finger on the mouse, missed and made it skid. I retrieved the runaway plastic critter, paused the vid. I clicked back and transferred all four videos to trash, knowing full well I could retrieve them from emails if I wanted to.

I rose and padded outside.

On the balcony a breeze ruffled my hair, threatening halfheartedly to blow me sideways. *Claire de Lune* must be on a loop in the room next to mine. They'd have their balcony door open too. Other noises informed me whoever was in there was making love, fucking, also known as making the beast with two backs—the advantage of knowing my Shakespeare. My senses pricked up. The woman was a collectable. How... quaint.

With a little effort I could climb around to their balcony and be the creature from the darkness come to murder him and rape her. Not that rape described what a mesmer could do. It was all so sickeningly voluntary. She'd even shoot or stab her lover for me, if I asked her to. Grind his head in a food blender, if I asked her to.

That was me. The monster. No matter how often I said I loved Hannah, I was the monster.

"Where are you?" I screamed.

The sex noises ceased. A few moments later so did the piano solo.

I sighed, wiped below my eyes with a finger.

“I’m tired of this. So fucking tired. Love’s a useless sentiment, but I’ll find you, babe, I promise. I’ll find you. I’ll kill them.” And if I did this, and I *must*, then... what?

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HANNAH

It was the suitcase again. Whenever they travelled in the car, they put me in it. When they unstrapped me and dumped me out by tipping it over, water dribbled from it, and I could see the inside of a barn. They'd hosed the suitcase out last night. Said I was making it smell worse than a whorehouse. Their insults were expected, like heavy rain after thunder.

A rusted, antique-looking tractor was poised mid-barn. The seat was missing. The wheels were metal not rubber. Bales of hay were stacked against the walls, and light burned down from above. Birds cawed as they flew out through a hole high up on one wall. Sunshine was out there, somewhere. The normal world was out there.

It wasn't my world anymore.

The camera was already waiting, set up and pointing at the middle of the barn where dirt and straw mingled on the ground. I hugged myself, shivering, wishing I couldn't see what they had piled up—chains, a roll of barbed wire, and other things, including bolt-cutters.

Just to scare me? Left-overs from some farm boy tending to a fence?

In the country, this time. For once I couldn't see Greta in my head.

I rubbed dried sleep from my eyes, wincing as bruises reawakened. Off to the side, the men had been talking. Roman stalked in my direction, his cowboy boots jingling. Spurs, this city man had spurs on his boots, black jeans, and a dark brown shirt. Tomik wore a red shirt and the same black jeans.

All the better to hide the blood.

Wait, no. Not Tomik? Greta said this was not Tomik. My eyes told me otherwise, yet I knew a mesmer could make a collectable believe anything.

The twins took you while Tomik was out. Remember?

Yes. That jarred me. This man could not be him.

I licked my lips, and my tongue found peeling skin.

Greta had sounded tired, and I wondered if, sadly, my torture was weighing terribly on her. A strange thought, but better than whining to myself about... this. My situation. In the dirt beneath my palm was a bent and rusted nail. Wistfully I looked down. If I could use that on them, or me, this would be over faster.

Don't. I saw her trudging away toward the barn wall, as if to leave me. Her hands were dark, stained, her fingers slender. I imagined I saw them tremble.

Fuck. Please stay.

Her laugh was ironic, harsh, and she shook her head, but stopped where she was.

The day she left me would be my final day. Somehow, I knew this.

I feel your pain. Every bit of it.

Oh.

My arms shook as they tried to keep me upright. I had my knees folded under me. The nail? I prodded the sharp tip with the pad of my finger.

Using it on a twin would likely result in them hurting me even more. Bile rose to my throat, and I gulped, screwing up my mouth at the taste.

Bad things would happen to me. From what I'd seen them do, I knew they would have a limit past which they'd do things even they regretted. Like dismembering me with an axe on film, just because I riled them. I wasn't ready for that.

Who would be? she whispered, her face turned up, as if she could feel the sunlight on her skin.

With Tomik—or was that Mitchell—adjusting the camera, Roman leaned in and peered at me then grabbed my hair. He towed me higher, onto my knees. “No making any moves that show the camera where we are. No words, no anything. Hear?”

I blinked, nodded. A command.

“Screams are fine. Loud ones, today. Business as usual.” He grinned. “Give the barn a last check before we start! I want him to recognize this place in tomorrow’s vid, not this time.”

“He’s never been in here. We emptied out what was here. I told you he’s only seen inside the house.”

“And tomorrow...” Roman had pulled a knife, and he poked under my chin with the point. “Tomorrow you get to start really hurting yourself in the old room in the house. Cutting yourself on camera. Might have you stitch that cunt like the movie star did. It leaked onto the net that film. The dark porn sites love it, her showing her pussy while she sinks the needles in, sewing her hole tight. You, we can mix it up. Add some other spice and make your lover bleed sad fuckin’ tears. Hey! What did he call it? A ballroom? Was that it?”

“Near enough! We fucked enough collectables up in the house. He’ll know.” His voice petered off. “Nothing here gives it away. Last time I checked the crows weren’t monogrammed, or the hay bales. Let’s get this done. I want some blood on her today.” Tomik-Mitchell came to a halt just past Roman’s shoulder.

“She can use this knife. Your blood or hers?” Roman chuckled, then handed me his knife. So much for grubbing up nails to poke them with.

I clutched the hilt, the indentations of the grip snuggling into my hand. They gave me a weapon and knew I couldn’t do anything, except what they told me to. My heart hurt. The sorrow of having no say in my life, or my death, no *revenge* even.

“Hers.” Said in such a nasty low tone, my nipples rose to peaks. Goosebumps brushed a trail of cold down my body. “Her blood.”

“Good to know.” Carefully, Roman pushed aside the knife then slapped me twice across the breasts, and my first screech tore loose. “Going to be easy to get her making noises today.”

I bit my lip, bit down on the tears, determined not to make more noises than I absolutely had to. Anything that made these two happy was to be avoided. Yet the old scrapes and scratches on my breasts still stung and ached. Some places had deep-down bruises.

“Come to the middle. Crawl.” Roman clicked his fingers then walked backward, luring me on with that big grin splitting his face. It was a lopsided grin, like a clown that had been told it was his day to be evil and not a good day to juggle balls.

Once he’d run to switch on the camera, my man two, my Tomik-Mitchell, also followed me, musing as I winced over the imbedded gravel that bit into my knees and my knuckles where I still held the knife.

“Let’s see. Barbed wire today. Knife in her cunt. The old west revolver we found. Won’t fire but he won’t know it. I want her to do it to herself though. We can fuck her once she’s bleeding.”

“You are the perfect sort of evil, my brother.”

“I get first claim on the bloody anal.”

They planned to get me to suicide. Like the others. What else?

I put my head down. He’d said, *brother*. Logic said Roman’s brother could not be Tomik. So Greta was right.

Bingo. And they said this is near a house Tomik knows. We should remember that.

Not Tomik. Somehow this identical man was not him. I took that fact and let it keep me warm, at least for a while longer. He had not betrayed me. Their laughter and their boots followed me to the tractor.

“Tomorrow I’m going to want to claim bits of her,” Roman muttered. “After she starts to kill herself. That should take another day to be finished. Let her off herself somewhere public. Then we sit and wait for him. He’ll come. Then he’ll die.”

No. Oh no. I shut my eyes until they made me open them.

Mitchell-Tomik patted my cheek. “Let’s begin.”

I was naked already, of course. They had me lean back and fuck myself with the knife, carefully. It was blunt, not sharp as I’d thought, and I guess they wanted to reserve the potentially fatal stuff for the next day. How nice of them.

They made me grab hold of one springy end of the single-strand barbed wire, and my eyes felt ready to pop from the deliberate pain I inflicted, as my hand closed around the sharpness and blood trickled from between my fingers.

“Keep going,” one said. “Twirl it up your arm.”

Oh fuck. The wire took over my arm, a gray metal vine meant for stopping soldiers, straying cows, and people with soft flesh, from going where they should not. It dug its claws up my arm. I flinched when it looped unexpectedly, whimpered at the scratches. I think I peed myself at least the once.

This perfectly deliberate self-mutilation was fearsome, and yet... tomorrow they had worse for me. To stitch myself.

Shhh. Get it done! I could hear the grating of Greta’s teeth.

Mine, my teeth, were locked together, holding back the fear and the noises.

The orgasms were fewer today.

I wasn't sure if I should be grateful. Pleasure abraded the edge off the pain.

Unfortunately, my screams became plentiful as I wrapped the wire about one arm and shoved the antique revolver into my pussy. The wire was kept under tension by the smiling Mitchell-Tomik with his gloved hand. The other end was anchored around the tractor's broken seat.

How sore my throat became. Screaming for too long meant my throat lost its power. I whimpered and coughed now instead, hoarse, a muted victim, though the barbed wire cut me and made blood ooze from where it wriggled.

It gave me some gratification that I couldn't obey his command to scream and scream loudly.

"Deeper, fuck it." Roman had a thing for guns in cunts, he'd said, and I wasn't doing it right.

He strode over and shoved the barrel further in, until he was happy, then he made me kneel and fucked my mouth. I carried on sticking that gun inside myself as much as the bend of arm and hand would allow. He squirted come on my face and chest then walked away backward.

"Ain't that the best?"

Mitchell-Tomik grunted. "Keep winding the barbed wire on you."

"You can stop with the fucking."

I dropped the gun and stood, twirling like a macabre slow-motion ballerina. To get the wire to wind higher up my arm, I had to raise my arm and turn, and raise it and turn, until the wire reached my torso. From there the wire crawled a route across my chest, around my back, my belly, my thighs. More blood sprang from where the points dug in. The wire rolled on, marking me, spitefully, as its own.

"Stop! Wait." Roman scratched his chin, his freed cock wobbling and already erect again. The problem with mesmers, I recalled, with some whimpering and with sweaty brow, with wire meandering over my skin and with pain everywhere... the problem with mesmers was they could keep fucking you forever.

"What?"

"Look. How do we get in to fuck her now?"

Mitchell snorted.

Yes, it is Mitchell.

I'd figured him out, somehow. I swayed one way then the other, weak and pressing against the tension of the wire while they argued how to screw me. I saw him as Tomik. He looked like Tomik but was not him.

They came and untwirled me, this shocked, white, and cold me, this shivering me, who would have fallen to her knees if one of them wasn't already poking into me and fucking my ass. I swear I could hardly tell. So much hurt. I shuddered with each blow of his body as he slapped in, fully inside, pulling the wire into me also.

Good girl. Don't let them hear you. That was bleary-eyed Greta. Her eyes wept blood. There were black and red cracks on her arms.

She felt my pain. I remembered that. Poor Greta. Even her smile was wrecked. Teeth and scarlet liquid seeping.

I moaned quietly, blubbering drool and blood, until Roman chose to again shove cock into my mouth, holding my head low despite the wire. The wet sounds seemed to come from elsewhere. Someone not me.

Not. Me.

I swung in their grasp, making odd squeaks and gasps, battered and hurting.

The wire would kill me by itself, I was sure.

My eyes had shut but I saw Greta, and somehow she was here, before me, though Roman stood to my front. Eyes opening, I saw him move in close, his body squashing my nose and making me retch as he climaxed in a spurting gush. He unplugged himself from my mouth and staggered away, zipping up while I spat and gagged on what he'd left.

You want him back? Tomik? You'd go from being their mesmer meat to being his mesmer meat, again.

Bitter, she was bitter, but I sensed an out. An escape. Better than dead.

I stared at my rebellious, goth figment. The girl who was and wasn't me. What did she think she could do?

Yes. Please. Please.

I will regret this. I know I will. You will too. There will be a price.

The day chose then to shut me down, and I knew I was about to fall as my mind swarmed with black and buzzing, with flickering pixels. As I crumbled, I felt her finger write on my belly.

The camera? It must see this, whatever it was.

I tottered and somehow stayed upright for another few seconds before I began to fall.

The wire caught me, and I spun and I spun, landing with a scream.

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TOMIK

The latest video arrived.

Haggard, chin feeling as if it'd sprouted a small beaten-down forest, I clicked play. I blinked away the ache in my eyeballs. At least I made myself watch it minus sound, the first time. But not the second. My argument was that maybe the twins would drop a name, something that'd let me figure out where they were. They hadn't so far.

I sprawled back on the bed and hauled the laptop higher.

The usual hard-on had appeared, but I was getting better at ignoring it—though *better* seemed the wrong word. When I switched on the audio, all those little noises she made as they fucked her would mean my dick would get even harder.

As weird if appropriate penance, I'd stopped masturbating. Wouldn't get me into Heaven, if I'd believed in it, but it made me feel less disturbed to suffer even a little while she suffered.

Not that I'd ever be stabbing myself in the balls.

This time they'd chosen a barn. I could tell from experience when they were getting toward the end of their daily perversions with Hannah, plus the video timeline at the bottom was almost eaten up. Barbed wire, a knife, and a revolver. Guess they were running out of ideas, though these instruments were the most potentially damaging they'd used, so far.

Was that an ominous hint? The twins were not known for subtlety.

A barn. For once they'd missed the obvious—fucking her with a farm animal or similar. I drew my hand into a fist before I calmed and reached my fingers toward the screen, stopping just above the surface. She was

there before me. These electrons that arrived at my eyes had in a metaphysical way originated where she had been. So, all I needed was the transporter beam from Star Trek.

For how much longer would she be alive?

I switched the sound on and watched it again, hoping, obsessing, lusting.

What would I do when they inevitably killed her? I'd track them down and kill them, of course, but then what? Assuming I survived I'd be in a world minus my Hannah.

It was an unimaginable state of being.

An overwhelming longing welled up, took me by the throat, and squeezed.

Wait. I froze. I stared, trying to somehow extract extra pixels from the screen by willpower alone.

The final few seconds before Roman sauntered past the camera and switched it off seemed to show something odd. Holding my breath, I rewound and pulled the laptop toward me. I adjusted the tilt. I stopped the playback, rewound, played it again, halting the video a few times to peer closer, and finally I saw what my brain had processed almost before my eyes had.

One arm was caught in that vicious wire and bleeding, but the other arm was free. Letters, there were letters forming on her belly where her finger seemed to drift aimlessly, then to flicker, to brush her skin. Letters that did not quite match the spot her fingers dwelled upon. A trick of the light perhaps?

I ran it and paused it over and over, until finally I sat back, leaning on my elbow, sure the letters on her stomach were *BALLRM*.

Ballroom seemed the likeliest meaning. But was this a location or some rambling coincidence? How could letters be unintentional? How could she draw so well when she was injured and under their control?

I had to take this as a fact. Had to. Either they told her to draw it or she had simply wanted to. Either way it must be genuine?

Take it as her doing. I'd go crazy seeing traps. Maybe she'd practiced for days, writing like this.

The letters must mean *something* but there'd be tens of thousands of houses with large living areas. Fewer hotels and mansions with true ballrooms. Was it one of those? Must be. A barn meant in the country.

My brain kicked me again, and I recalled the revolver. Struck by a possibility I rewound to that and enlarged it, enough to see it better without losing it to blurring.

Ballroom plus that antique firearm came close to making a *DING* sound in my head. It was too much a puzzle to be a twins idea. Those two would think a Rubik's cube a table decoration.

"I know it." I flopped onto my back, and the overly soft bedding took me into its embrace. "I know it." I'd held that gun, taken it apart and put it back together, then left it in a drawer in the cedar cupboard in the dining room.

They were at an old mesmer house, a grand country mansion in Illinois, not too many miles from where I'd grown up with Hannah. But how long would they stay? This might be my only chance, and I had to make this work.

I'd been so hung up over my failures and need for revenge, my need to find her, that my days had lately been spent lusting over how I'd swarm wherever they were with ten or twenty mercenaries and wipe them out in seconds in the midnight hour.

Now I had the information I required, the energy to do that drained away in the face of reality.

I was a mesmer, and I could not bring myself to trash that forever, to expose myself by letting others understand our secrets. With this much going on, it'd be close to certain something would slip. Me or the twins or Hannah, or some information the twins had left lying about would reveal us to the world. Like vampires in the sunlight. *Poof*. If law enforcement or the other government agencies already had suspicions, we'd end up hunted.

Either that or the NSA or the cops would intercept messages about my hurried employment of a small army and arrest me before I reached Hannah.

I couldn't use my ninja mercs.

I couldn't even gather a squad of collectables, as any of them could be sensed and grabbed by the twins as easily as I could command them. I had my pet cop, and she would have to stay back. What I needed was a sniper who was a collectable. I knew of none.

I bit a torn nail, chewed it off.

There was me, my cop, and whatever weapons I had. I couldn't simply blow up the house, and I had to keep Hannah safe, so turning the walls into

swiss cheese with a powerful machine gun was also out.

The small hours around one *AM* were the best for sneak assaults. Or so I'd heard via google search.

Me only and with no one else close enough to help in an emergency. This sucked, but they didn't know I was coming. I had a feeling they planned to suck me in and set a trap, but that moment hadn't come.

Shit. Unless they'd doctored the video? Made it look like Hannah had written on herself?

It was possible, but I didn't think they'd let anyone handle these porn torture vids as it was risky to do so. I didn't think the twins had the skills to do it themselves.

"Nothing for it but to believe I can do this, take care, and go in guns... popping, not blazing, because I need a silencer."

The neighbors were over a mile away, but the sound of gunfire might carry.

Drone surveillance to check things out? Likely I'd crash it into a tree or a window. My pet cop in my hometown might be able to arrange a distant drive-by to see how many vehicles were parked in the grounds. This needed to be done within the next day to minimize the chance of them moving on. I needed to be there, *now*.

Fuck.

One big gun, the nine mm HK MP5, and my Glock. Those, a knife too. I'd rely on my innate ability to punch their brains in with my fist if it came down to it.

I'd practiced at firing ranges, dabbled in martial arts, but had never thought to become a gung-ho assassin, unfortunately. Yet I had dabbled, whereas the twins had never been keen on anything unless it involved fucking women or looking like millionaires on holiday.

They'd have guns for sure, but I could get off several shots before they woke, if I did this right, and I was lucky.

I closed the laptop with a soft click.

This was the consequence of my love for Hannah, and if I died doing this, then it would be justice for my past sins. I would save her from this evil we mesmers had spawned.

I threw the laptop and a few things into my suitcase, then slammed it and settled for what I had, the keys to my car, my cellphone, my wallet, the clothes I wore, and the boots on the floor beside the bed.

My one surprise—I was the only one coming.

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TOMIK

One AM, just as I'd planned. I'd hiked in from the fence line, left my car with all the medical supplies and anything else I could think of that might help when I'd freed her.

When. Thinking positive.

The house was about fifty yards away when I decided it was a good place for Lina to wait.

"Here." I pointed at the ground. A thin line of mulberry trees would shield her. Since the moon was barely a thin crescent the twins would need good night vision to spot her, or me.

Lina was the cop I had under my thumb in this locality. I'd barely noticed her following me from the car, knew she'd be there, with her personal arsenal ready. Most importantly she could be back-up. Not to shoot anyone probably, to be a crutch, a first aid station. Maybe I should've found a paramedic collectable.

"I'll be back." There I was echoing Schwarzenegger, without meaning to.

I crept forward at a crouch, the MP5 ready and the shoulder sling dipping down and brushing the grass heads. Ballistic vest, though it would only stop small arms fire, spare pistol in a chest holster, Glock at my waist, as well as the sheathed knife, and I had a key to the front door. Only, just in case I was wrong, and they expected me, I wasn't using either door.

One of the reasons we'd stopped using this place was the timber rot. A crosshatched window in the library had lost part of its frame long ago. A civil war cannon ball had damaged it, or so rumor said, not that Illinois had

suffered from any battle I knew of. The glass had fallen out and been replaced by a square of plywood. Thin ply.

In the wan moonlight, I could see the twins hadn't fixed it. With patient wriggling, the nails fastening the ply came loose from the rest of the weakened timber. If I'd needed to snap the ply, I was going to instead use the key.

I put the ply on the ground and sneaked a leg through the gap, then squeezed the rest of my body through without much noise. The house's lower floor was timber and likely to squeak, so I padded slowly to the closed doorway. A white-painted door, and it gleamed in the moon's miserable attempt at illumination.

From a distance, no lights had showed inside the house, and I wasn't going to make any with a flashlight if I could avoid it.

Upstairs were the bedrooms, with modern comfy mattresses, running water, and with hot showers in the bathrooms once the power was on. The twins would be there. They weren't the types to camp on some makeshift air bed. Hannah though? Not a clue. She might be with them?

I couldn't sense her, yet, which might be because she was asleep.

What if they were being smarter than usual? They'd already grabbed Hannah because I'd been stupid and used the wrong house in Sydney. Alice and Hannah had paid for that mistake.

What if they were down here, waiting?

I shut my eyes to settle my pounding heart, opening them again when I was ready.

They might have told her to stay down here in the dark and the cold? The first rule I'd made: when I found her, if I found her first, I'd tell her to exit the house with no stopping, no matter what happened.

I turned the door handle, MP5 at the ready, and sneaked through into the hallway. To my left was the stairway leading to the second floor. I stopped to listen.

No snoring. All I could hear was the outside chirp of crickets.

I couldn't feel the presence of any collectable so maybe I was right—they too thought it folly to place one in the way of a mesmer who hated you. Whose command would win? Theirs or mine?

I turned right and explored the bottom floor far enough to be sure there was no one down here. Then I headed for the stairs and it was there, as I took the first step upward, that I felt my girl, Hannah. She resonated with

me in a way no other woman ever had. I crept up the stairs, keeping my weight to the outside where they'd creak less. Every tiny noise gave me palpitations, a reaction I despised. It was as if I were a granny on an outing with crocodiles. I needed to recover my balls.

I reached the top and there was a thick darkness. The room doors appeared to be closed. Go left or right? Bedrooms lay in both directions.

Left. That way lay Hannah. I sensed her in the first room. The twins had blocked off the grand arched window that normally illuminated the staircase but had missed a sliver. The top of her door had moonlight playing on it.

My first cautious step landed on something soft that gasped and shifted. I stumbled and registered a collectable, a girl at my feet. Asleep, her mind had been a blank, and perhaps I'd been concentrating on Hannah too much.

Should've seen her, my panicking brain screamed. *Shoot her*. I hesitated, reaching instead for her flailing arm, to touch her, to command, to tell her to be quiet and to leave the house and run. Even silenced, the MP5 would make noise. Besides, I'd never killed by my own hand, not a girl, and a niggling thought begged: *this is not me, not anymore*.

Even so, shooting her would be fucking wiser.

All I could see were her eyes as she jumped to her feet, a patch of paleness on her face. A knife in her hand caught the light at the same time as the door to Hannah's room swung open. I'd grasped her other arm, but the knife sliced across my face. Warm blood gushed and burned through a gouge that split my nose and cheek.

I hissed at the pain, though already the subvocal command had spun out, instinctive, hard. *Kill yourself*. The mesmer touch was potent and overrode past commands. I needed her dead, I justified to myself as she flipped over the banister railing, headfirst. Legs kicking, she vanished.

Before she'd hit, I was spinning, recovering the MP5 from where it'd swung loose on the strap, bringing it up so as to train it on the large dark figure framed in the bedroom doorway. From below there were thuds and a gurgle.

"Stop!" The metal of a gun muzzle rammed into my upper back, just below my neck. I halted. One wrong move and he'd fire.

If only I'd seen the girl, used a flashlight, looked behind me.

If only I'd not been stupid, done something, anything different.

Thoughts skittered about. Too late.

"Drop the gun."

The agony of regret.

I let out a long breath and lowered the gun, let it go to hang loose on the strap. It wasn't simply the threat of my back being blown apart—a light had flickered on in the bedroom, and I could clearly see Twin One, Roman, with a rope in hand. He had Hannah at his feet and his gun aimed at her head.

Roman. His name drummed into my head. He grinned at me, didn't even glance down at Hannah who looked broken and lost. With her hair hanging over her face, she stayed on hands and knees, gaze squarely aimed at the floor below.

My heart keened, and I spared a whole moment of what might be my last few moments on this world wishing I was able to do the impossible.

Blood poured over my chin.

“Worked really well, right, you fucker?” The gun ground into my spine. “We told that girl to sleep and not wake unless touched.”

“Kill him now do you think? Or a bit of fucking him over first?” Roman glanced past my shoulder at his brother.

If I yelled a command at Hannah to flee would it work? Maybe, for a few seconds. I'd still die; so would she. I couldn't duck the weapon wedged into my spine. Should I elbow him and swing, risk getting shot? It was tempting, like a pot of money under a rainbow. If I tried, I'd die in ninety-nine out of a hundred attempts.

There was that one chance... but if Mitchell missed, Roman would get me. This wasn't the OK Corral. I wasn't superhuman.

“Torture,” Mitchell drawled. “What else. He watches her while we do stuff to her. She watches him while we take him apart.”

“Yeah. Good call.” The deep chuckle from Roman's leering mouth was steeped in tar and evil. “On your knees, asshole. Lay your weapons on the floor, slowly and very carefully.” He must've decided his pistol would be best trained on me and began lifting it.

I felt... a waft, a breeze, a glassy rippling strangeness in the air that was punctuated by an electrifying full-stop as something punched into Mitchell, dragging the gun up my back. I ducked fast and was still dropping to my knees as the gun went off. Palms slapping into the floor, knees thudding down, I heard Roman grunt. He fell, legs collapsing, the rope flying loose from his hand.

Our chance. I didn't know what had happened to Mitchell, but this was it.

“Run, Hannah!” I screamed. “Leave the house! Now!”

Blood spilled from Roman’s head, where he lay with his neck wedged crookedly into the angle between door frame and floor. Hannah crawled into the passageway then scrambled to her feet and her eyes were glazed, but she went past me as I spun and grappled with Mitchell. She fled down the stairs, stumbling, half-falling, grabbing at supports.

I tore my gaze off her to concentrate on the man whose ripped shirt I held.

He was staggering, coughing spit that sprayed the air, clutching at his chest. His legs wobbled. Heart attack? There was no one beating him or knifing him as I’d half-imagined there would be. No one here at all. The gun he’d held lay near his feet. I kneeed him then punched him, tugging my Glock free and aiming it at his body while I dared to glance backward at Roman.

The man was still and sprawled, looking as if he were dead from a head wound. I put a shot into Mitchell’s gut then skipped back to check for sure.

Kicked Roman in the head. My boot made a nice sound.

His head rocked up to stare at me sightlessly then flopped back down. Enough blood, and what seemed to be brains, decorated the floor for that to be a full-on killing, brain injury. Besides, there was a hole where one eyeball had been.

“Good shot, Mitchell.” I stalked back, stunned by my luck. Whatever the fuck had caused this, I was on fire. “Your little identical friend over there is dead.”

Mitchell was too busy groaning, splayed out on his back, one hand feebly clutching his stomach where blood welled over his fingers.

I sank the boot into his crotch. Hannah was gone, safe, and I had an overwhelming need.

I needed to hurt this man to the end of the earth and time, to delve into the depths of the horrors I could do. Some things just needed doing and doing well.

I checked him for other weapons, shot him in both knees. Luckily, he was past screaming much more than yelps as the bullets went in and a high keen after that. I threw the other guns into a high shelf. The girl’s knife was gone, probably with her, poor thing. I’d heard no sounds from her below. With that command I’d given, she’d have turned and lain face down in her own blood to choke herself, if she needed to.

Fuck it. Fuck this whole...

I gave up on useless cursing and opened every door upstairs to see where they kept all their shit. *Nothing. Nothing. Nope.* Downstairs then.

I dragged Mitchell down the stairs by one leg, listening to the thump of his head, his mumbling, his cries, and his weeping. There would be satisfaction in this. I would only get to kill him once.

The gut wound would kill him, if I left him alone. That was not enough. It was nowhere near enough.

In the ballroom I found their current set-up. An anvil, a hoist with a chain and hook—a really sharp and big hook, this time. They'd meant to hang Hannah up like meat. Or me. Javelins and hooks. A giant hammer. A tree saw. The sick bastards.

He'd left a wide bloody trail on the floor where I'd dragged him.

I wasn't supposed to do this anymore. I'd promised Hannah, hadn't I?

Not really. This was not a collectable.

Rage, I had rage, though I knew this was not the anger of a normal man, it was a soul-deep need to cause carnage in return for carnage suffered, to hurt this creature past any redemption. It was an amoral rage, but I felt it would cleanse me.

This, and then I would be done.

Hannah was outside the house. I'd seen the back door was open. There were no tigers here in the US of A. Grass, trees, and maybe Lina would find her. She'd be fine for the ten minutes this would take. A long, a very long, ten minutes.

I needed this.

The anvil, first.

I bandaged my face with a rag torn from his shirt and wrapped about my head, taped the cloth as well, then I gagged him with the same tape and taped his wrist to the anvil.

"You're sick, you know?" I said, my mouth restricted and muffled by the rag. It hurt to talk, and I'd have a scar. Lina could staple me together. I grimaced and swung up the hammer, aiming it at his hand where I'd placed it on the flat of the anvil. Then I brought the hammer down with a squelching crack.

Hannah staggered onward, grass brushing her legs. Naked, she suffered scratches from the twigs she encountered as she found her way through a thin boundary of shrubs beneath the trees. Scratches were nothing compared to what they'd done. Every inch of skin hurt. Inside and out, she had pains. The worst were the inside ones. They'd made demons for her that she could never be rid of.

Hannah sobbed, pressed her forearm to her eyes, and kept going.

Water gurgled ahead. A creek or a river, either would do. She needed to end this. Life had become too much to bear.

"Don't. Don't," Greta insisted, and she could almost see her wringing her hands. "I didn't do this, so you'd end it. Not this way. Don't let them win."

"Which way is that?" she muttered to herself. "Would you kill Tomik?" She swallowed and felt the chasm they'd opened inside her and knew it went deep, all the way to the bottom. "Me, I was never meant to live. We know this, don't we?"

Silence. She stumbled onward, down a low bank, until ankle deep in the cool water. Then she lay down and held the knife up to the stars.

I did his other hand with the hammer, smashed it beyond repair, dragged his leg onto the anvil, taped it down, then I pulled off the shoe and smashed his foot. His cries and huffed whimpers through the tape gag were nonstop and oh so fucking satisfying. If only I had all day... I looked around and my brain pounced on the javelin and the hook, both at once, so I pulled him over to them by his good foot. The blood trail left by this squirming piece of meat was getting wider, thicker.

The javelin would've been better if the point was jagged, but I shoved it up his ass anyway, or approximately where his asshole was—couldn't tell without undressing him, and I wasn't doing that. I went to get the hammer to drive it home and dragged it over. This sucker was heavy.

Doing this would kill him if the spear went in too far. I swung back the hammer like a croquet mallet, brought it down in an arc, feeling the wrench and jerk as it pulled at my shoulders.

Spread-eagled on his back, face a mass of tape, Twin Two jerked, a doll that'd lost most of its battery life, bloodied hands and twitching legs.

Did I want him dead yet? Did I?

So much blood and agony and desecration of the human body. Even this... *thing* before me bothered me.

I gulped, swallowed. My face felt thicker and it throbbed. I wore a gory mask of blood and bandages and beneath it, I'd become them. Hannah was outside, and I was here, doing this. This stupid useless crap. Face contorting with rage at myself and not them, not anymore, I tossed aside the hammer and it slid and banged into something. I unholstered the Glock and shot him three times in the face then three more in the brain to be sure, holstered it, and walked away.

My walking hastened, turned into a jog as I negotiated the dark hallway. The open back door beckoned me, but the kit might be crucial. Torn by an awareness of Hannah needing me and by the time I'd already wasted, I made a fast choice, and turned to the front, ran. I fell over the girl's body. Pain shot through my face. I stumbled onward.

Swearing hoarsely, piling up a series of *fucks*, I felt the rawness of the horror I'd done to that twin back there leak out with the words and tears. I burst from the front door and sprinted for Lina. I could find Hannah by feel but she might need first aid.

The cop's mouth opened as I skidded to a stop. Here, where she hid in shadow, her eyeballs looked like dark pits. I could feel her shock.

I didn't give one shit about her. She was a piece of equipment.

"Bring the car to the house and take in the medical kit. No lights. Wait in the front parlor. Don't touch anyone. They're all dead anyway."

Then I ran back to the house, through it and out, then into the area beyond. I stopped to listen, gulping and trying to stop myself from panting, from breathing, listening and feeling for Hannah.

I shut my eyes and waited for that stillness that would help me find her.

There.

Straight ahead toward where trees sprang up against the starry sky. I pulled out my flashlight, not caring if anyone should see it. Not this time. I had to find her. I could sense an abyss inside her, a sea of loneliness and loss. It scared me more than anything had this night, or maybe since forever.

I can't lose her.

Not after all this.

Not after all I'd done to get her.

All I'd done was part of the problem though, wasn't it? Exhibit A: Mitchell with a spear shoved up him, multiple gunshot wounds and with his hands flattened into shreds of flesh and splintered bone.

Shut up, shut up, shut up. Think only of Hannah.

The flashlight waved across the grass and lit my way through the trees.

I snapped twigs underfoot, crushed leaves, and found her lying near the bank in softly tinkling water, her hair drifting in the stream, her arms drifting, and there was blood. A washed-clean knife lay on the small stones next to her hand. The blood curled from one wrist where a line of cut skin was edged by darkness and red.

"Not again!" My anguish came out in a strangled whisper. I dropped the flashlight and scooped her from the water.

She was alive. Of course she was. Her eyelids flickered; her eyes opened.

"Tomik?"

"Yes. It's me. Sleep now."

"Don't. *Don't touch my mind.*" The last of those words were feral, and I tightened my arms on her.

"Sure. Sure. I won't, but don't you fucking die on me."

"I'm okay," she said in a quieter and more normal voice. "Just hold me, please. Greta wouldn't let me die. The bitch."

Her small smile encouraged me. I managed to pick up the flashlight, then I returned to the house, threading between the trees and careful not to knock my poor sweet babe against anything.

"Are they dead?" she asked in a whisper.

"Yes, the bad guys are dead." *Well, except for me.*

As always, the sight of her lying naked before me, the color of her nipples popping against her paler breasts, the curves of her, the weight and smell of female, it'd given me an instant erection despite everything.

All that killing, and still I'd wanted to fuck her back there in the water, with blood unfurling from the shallow cut on her wrist. She'd looked mostly dead, and I'd wanted to fuck her.

Yes, I was a monster. I always would be, and there was the catch in this grand and sacred love. I loved Hannah, and one day I'd likely kill her by accident. I sighed and walked onward. I'd get her well and then I would leave her. Somehow, I would manage this, though it seemed impossible. No other solution came to me. My heart ached and justly so. I'd weighed it

down with the deaths of a hundred collectables before Hannah ever came to me.

But...

Who was this Greta?

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TOMIK

At the house, I helped Lina patch up Hannah. She stayed quiet the whole time the cop was around us. I didn't push her. I had her back, and she was alive. After everything this past week, I had her back. It was her mind that worried me. She'd tried to commit suicide, again. Who would blame her? Not me.

I could fix that, but I'd promised not to, and this time I would keep my promise. Or at least I would until I explored every other choice.

I'd wait for her to talk. Hannah had bruises all over her, purple, blue, red, and black ones, as well as internal pains I couldn't check. A few small cuts needed stapling, so we did those, and Lina stapled my face wound. We cleaned up, found Hannah and me some clean clothes, and we dressed her. The cop drove us to where I'd parked my car. I took a second to sort out my thoughts then I explained that she would dispose of the twins and the girl's body, clean up the house, repair the window, get rid of the twins' BMW and belongings. Remove all hard evidence. Then keep an eye on the house for a month at least.

When she was ready, she would burn the place to the ground.

I wanted us long gone before then. I didn't ask her for details. A cop should be able to figure out how to get rid of bodies untraceably. No one would come looking for the twins, or, hopefully, the girl. I left her all my weapons and tactical gear to get rid of, except for the pistol I hadn't used.

I switched vehicles. I'd use my own Land Rover from here.

I drove a few miles, stopped by the side of the road, put the sim back in my cellphone, then phoned a collectable doctor who owned her own clinic.

Jayne or Janine was her name. I never remembered them. She lived a hundred miles away. Once she knew we were coming, I drove off again.

Though I'd stuck by my promise and not messed with her mind, Hannah fell asleep clutching my belt.

I wrapped my fingers over hers and steered one-handed most of the way.

We met the doctor at her clinic where she let us in the side door then led us deeper inside. I told her I wanted us both fixed to the best of her ability, and that I wanted to know if Hannah would need further tests, then she set to work. Wounds were cleaned and restapled, and Hannah was thoroughly examined before the doctor sat down on a chair and looked up at me.

Blonde hair in a bun, she wore a nice, body-hugging navy dress—a woman who apparently was not flirting. That was unusual when a mesmer had you by the pussy, as we did with all our collectables.

I was ignoring any signals in any case. Hannah had given me practice at that, and incentive.

“You can talk. Say everything.” Just in case she had some roadblock about speaking.

My own staples had been redone, neatly, and I touched them as she inhaled and began.

“I can see she's been sexually violated. The vaginal bruising, hematomas, and abrasions are extensive, but none of them are likely to cause future problems. I'll give you samples of antibiotics you both need to take. I gave her a tetanus injection. Now, the minor wrist laceration is significant for different reasons. The main blood vessels and the tendons weren't severed but the intention is obvious. The mental trauma is not something I can assess easily—”

“Just the physical.” I shot her a hard stare. “What about other internal damage? I don't know...” I held up my hands. “Her liver, kidneys?”

“Without blood tests I can't be sure, but unless this trauma involved poisoning or severe blows, those organs are likely to be fine. I see no symptoms pointing to any other conclusion. However, I would normally advise a thorough work-up for STDs—”

“Enough,” I snapped. “This isn't a normal situation. Give us the drugs, tell us when to get these staples out, and we'll be leaving.”

Hannah was going to be fine. My mind was doing a small, restrained dance. This, after the twins had assaulted her repeatedly for days. But as the

doctor said, her mind was an issue.

A frightfully plaintive look on the female's face told me she was hoping for something more personal from me. I shook my head. Not this time, not her.

We took everything and left without any sweet goodbyes or orgasms for the lonely and frustrated doc.

Once on the road, I tried again. "Still don't want me to help you?"

"No. Not like you used to." Then she stopped talking.

Quiet girl. Again, I let her be.

Five AM. The highway was getting busier. I was aiming for another house we mesmers used. A hotel concierge would take one look at my face and Hannah and call the cops. Two weeks to heal, and then I'd fly us out. There was no one on our tail for vengeance anymore.

Just me and my problems. Hannah and hers. Reconciling them was a big jigsaw which someone had taken to with flame, acid, and explosives.

"I want to talk to you. When you're ready." I glanced across.

A second later she released her seat belt and leaned across to me, laid her head on my lap. I clenched my jaw. The burn of the tires on the road was constant and mostly smooth. New tarmac, however... getting her to wrap her lips around my cock would be stupid, even if I made her. I stroked her head, felt her forehead wrinkle.

She placed her hand on my thigh, bad move. My cock jumped, and I sighed.

"I hurt so much."

"I know babe. To be expected. Want to talk when we get to my house? It's safe and cozy there. You can sleep now."

"Sleep would be good. Not sure I can now. So quiet in here, though. Cars whooshing past. A few lights. And you. You're warm." She clutched the top half of my thigh and shivered. I heard a few snuffles. "Thank you."

"You're welcome. My fault anyway." I lifted my hand from her hair and vaguely waved it. "Everything."

"Mmm. Probably." Her chuckle was pained. "You said no more secrets."

Unease surfaced. "I may have. Okay, I did."

"What did you mean by, not again?"

Crap. I did remember saying that. "When?"

"When... this." She held up her bandaged wrist. "At the creek."

“That. No more secrets?” I mused, softly. I *had* promised.

The dark highway thrummed beneath us. This seemed the worst ever time to tell her, but then again what if not telling her had made it happen again, somehow? I was done with lying to Hannah and concealing myself.

“Once upon a time you called me. You got my number, God knows how. From my parents, maybe. You had a boyfriend who’d been beating you, abusing you.” She couldn’t see my face, so I let my expression show my anger. “One night he tried to kill you, but instead you shot him.”

“What?”

“You shot him dead, and I was the only one you could think of who might help. I was pissed off that you had because I’d tried for years to stay away. And I was happy. It was a confusing beginning. I made you forget, and I kept you and then you made me want to tear loose from the brotherhood, so it could be only me and you.” I curled her hair over my finger, let it unroll and slide past. “Ever since that last day at school, I’ve thought I’d be the death of you. That I’d fuck you up if I let myself. I wanted you so badly and could see all this perverted shit I could do to my sweet girlfriend.”

She still had no idea, my angel. Bloodied wings and crawling to me. Would I ever lose that? *No*.

“That... doesn’t frighten me like it would’ve anymore. And killing an asshole boyfriend sounds fine to me. You need to give me back those memories.”

I grunted. “I will. Just not today, Okay?” She nodded. “I have two other secrets. The first, you’ll hate me for. That last school day I was new to being a mesmer, and the power is a compulsion, a monstrous thing. I don’t know any man it didn’t make bad.” *Say it*. I swallowed. “When I couldn’t have you, *wouldn’t* have you, I took your friend. Just that one night. Then I left town.”

“That was you?” Her head lifted. “*Oh my God*. All those years ago, that was you?”

I ran on with my tale. I didn’t want to dive into some big discussion over her friend. “Last secret. When I got to you, after I found your dead boyfriend, I found you in the bathtub, trying to bleed out from wrist cuts. Same as tonight, you didn’t cut deep enough.”

Which I figured meant she only wanted help and not to die.

“Oh. Oh shit. No. I did that before? Jesus.”

“Yes. You won’t be doing that again now, will you? Ever.”

The energy I needed to *not* fuck with her mind was enormous. I was proud I managed to do nothing.

“No. Like G— but, yeah, it’d be letting them win.” She’d paused then rephrased what she said, for some reason I couldn’t fathom. Her following silence was not something I cared to disturb. I let her be, just pleased she put her head back down on my thigh after a while and held me.

I was perhaps not totally rejected.

I’d come close to destroying her friend’s mind, from what I’d heard afterward, and she still had her head on my lap. What did that say about us?

We were living outside of normal. The real world was not for Hannah and Tomik.

Her silence remained until after we arrived at the new house, a place on the outskirts of Lutsen, Minnesota. This was a big whimsical Victorian with white turrets and stained-glass windows. She looked up at those turrets and seemed interested as I unlocked the front door. Curiosity was a good sign.

I ordered a ton of takeout food for delivery, answered the door with a hood over my face, then brought it to the master bedroom upstairs where I’d installed us both.

The floral-and-white quilt my beautiful Hannah girl lay on looked so cheerful. It made me halt as if slapped. The contrast rocked me in a way that something insignificant should not, but it seemed absurdly wrong after our night of death, of me slamming a massive hammer down on a man I hated.

Life goes on.

“Breakfast in bed,” I announced quietly. Anything in bed, really. For her. Champagne, caviar, the head of a horse, a ballet company... Okay, I was exaggerating but, yeah, anything. I owed her.

“The twins. They’re really dead?”

“So dead. So very dead. In fact, I stayed too long killing them when I should’ve been finding you.”

I put the tray on a side table, sat on the edge of the bed, and reached over to squeeze her hand. I combed my fingers through her damp hair. She’d had me watch while she showered, cleaned herself of their smells, of every molecule of their existence. I knew why, having done the same. Their blood had been under my nails.

Hannah was scared to be alone, and she'd picked me to be her guard while she showered.

That had brought prickles of sad triumph to my eyes.

She trusted me? Dumb-fuck thing to do.

The next morning, I came clean about having to leave her once she was well.

It was for the best.

She clammed up after that, and I barely heard more than twenty words a day.

I didn't push her to talk, though I stayed close. Healing took time, especially when I couldn't do my special style of brain surgery. I'd tried that before and failed, I reminded myself. Maybe she was right.

No, she *was* right.

Even so, we spent hours together. She curled up mostly on my lap while we binge-watched the latest series on the widescreen TV or played Scrabble—for some reason the house had the game—or read books together outside by the empty pool.

I discovered touch without sex: the heat of her body against mine, the subtle shift of her curves, her oh so feminine weight when she stretched across the bed to read and used me as a belly-rest, and the sea-shell whorls of her ear that I found hiding under her hair.

I also discovered I could still cook bacon and eggs, and Hannah was the queen of burned chocolate fudge.

All this was almost new to me because I hadn't paused much in my frenetic, nasty living for years to simply appreciate companionship and friendship. Nothing would ever untangle her sexuality from what I saw in Hannah, but this, it blossomed into a beautiful thing.

We had a world for a few days where nothing outside of us mattered.

It let both of us breathe. Though I had my own despair, I watched her cry to herself while I stroked her, or in bed when she woke restless. I sometimes took myself to another room where I could sit alone, wrap my hands over my head, and scream silently. Lust. Despair. The need to do evil to others just to watch them writhe. None of these were gone, they only lay beneath the floorboards of my mind, plotting, fuming, waiting to wrest control from me.

Being a monster when the entrance fee for being Hannah's lover was not being one... how could I not scream?

On our third morning, breakfast in bed again, Hannah cleared her throat and spoke.

“No more secrets, right? You said that I tried to suicide once before this. You messed up my friend from school. Those were your last secrets?”

“There are no more.” I shook my head.

“Why didn’t you tell me about the suicide? Or that I killed my boyfriend, whose name I think I remember was Craig?”

“I guess, even though I hated you for coming to me, I wanted to protect you too.” I shrugged. “I was stupid about you from the start.”

“I see.” She sat up cross-legged and peered at the food arrayed on the small bedside table, picked up a fork and a plate. “That looks so yummy. I’m hungry. More than yesterday.”

“Then eat.” I smiled. Watching her eat was strangely peaceful. It said she was healing.

Carefully, Hannah placed the empty plate on the bed, left the fork on it with a clink of metal on china.

“I have a secret for you. One I think it’s time for me to tell. You haven’t asked me about Greta. Do you remember I mentioned her?” The fork slid from the plate to the bed as she swiveled in place, looking sexy in the white and tiny-red-hearts underwear I’d found. Aging bruises marched across her legs and stomach. Under the soft bra, her breasts were a mass of splotches.

Though she’d taken her dose of painkillers, Hannah was tough—tougher than I’d let her be for a long while. Instead I’d tried to force her to be what I wanted.

But that underwear... I could see the lips of her pussy through the panties.

Most of our houses could’ve doubled as sex or lingerie stores, we had that much packed away, waiting for any mesmer who dropped by with a collectable he’d found and wanted to fuck. Some of us still appreciated lingerie. I stifled my desires and lifted my gaze to her face.

“Greta?” I frowned. “You said that name at the creek. I figured that was because you were stressed and a little crazy. Sorry. Bad word, but still.”

“Crazy? No. At least I don’t think I imagined her. She’s a girl in my head but sometimes she comes out and walks around. Sometimes she does things that seem real. It’s been difficult for me to be sure. Or it was, until the night you rescued me and Mitchell shot Roman.”

An imaginary girl in her mind. “She’s not real, Hannah. You’ve gone through traumas that’d drive anyone to have imaginary friends.”

“Stop!” She held up her palm. “Don’t patronize me. She’s listing things right now.” Her eyes flicked upward for a second. “Remember the church when someone poisoned a bottle of vodka?”

I nodded. A realization dawned that something odd might be about to happen. Like someone scratching at the inside of my head and begging to be allowed in. I’d been reading too much fucking Stephen King.

“And the writing on my stomach? She did that. That’s how you found me, correct?”

Fuck. “I saw *you* write that... sort of.” Her hand had moved as if fast forwarded. The letters had been so very precise, even if some were missing. I’d wondered if the recording was tampered with. Imaginary girls should stay imaginary.

“Sort of.” Hannah smirked. “We both know you saw something odd.”

I was not going to ask if the *both* was me and Hannah or Hannah and Greta. “I did see something odd, yes.”

“And when Mitchell shot Roman? What did you see? Because that too was Greta. She did something to Mitchell. She doesn’t understand how she did it, but she shocked him. She hit him with her fist, in the side and the arm holding the gun, and I saw him jerk. Then he shot Roman.”

“And I thought mesmers were weird. I figured he’d had a heart attack.” I rested my back against the headboard and rubbed the crease between my eyebrows. “So, have her do something. Prove she exists. What does she look like?”

If she exists then what is she? A part of Hannah or some other creepy if helpful being?

“She looks like a throwback punk rocker with a biker chick aesthetic.” Hannah grinned. “And she’s blowing raspberries at me for that. She’s everything I’m not. Tougher, a rebel, and she’s brought me back from the edge of the cliff so many times.”

I think I had her figured. Hannah had that multiple personality disorder.

That did not explain how she did things in the real world. The vodka incident made me wonder if this simply let Hannah bypass the mesmer commands, sometimes. She hadn’t been tied down that day, just told to stay. And Mitchell? That was filed under what-the-fuck land. I had no answers there.

“You’re thinking this through aren’t you Tomik? I can see it.” She pulled her ankles in closer, which only drew my eyes to her panties and what lay between her legs.

“Stop doing that. I haven’t stopped wanting to fuck you since we came here.” And since before that. Never ever had I stopped. Hah, I did have another disgusting secret.

She frowned. “Is that so awful?”

We were off the imaginary girl topic and onto the other one I needed to talk about. Me, the bad guy. Now she was feeling better she’d also be feeling the attraction between us. It would never go away. But I had to leave and reminding her of that was sensible. I wasn’t going to run away without notice.

“It is. I have to go, soon. I told you that once you’re healed, I’m going far away from you.”

“Tomik.” Her mouth quivered, and she adjusted her lotus position again, while looking at the bed. “Why? I trust you. There is no one else I can say that about.”

“How can you possibly trust me?”

“Shit!” She punched the quilt. “You came for me, rescued me from them. Without you I’d be dead! Why wouldn’t I? Are you stupid?”

I pursed my lips and let out a long sigh, wanting to smack her for her own stupidity. “I’m a mesmer. I will never ever be safe to be around. Okay, here’s my other last final secret. The one I’m so ashamed of I even forgot it for a while.”

Hannah grimaced. “What is it?”

“All those filthy torture porn videos they sent me? Every single one made me get a hard-on and want to be there with them, doing to you what they were doing, joining in.”

“Oh.” Her face paled. “Greta said something like this. She doesn’t trust you. She wants to kill you. Well, sometimes she does.”

“Hah! Well, I agree with imaginary girl. Tell her hi. But my point is that that will never change. One day, if I stay with you, I will kill you by accident. I’ll go too far.” Eyes shut, I shook my head. “I don’t want that.”

“I can’t live without you, Tomik.”

Tears were rolling down her face, and I suppressed the urge to join her, to hug her, to bawl my own eyes out. Instead I sat there like a lump.

“And I can’t live without you, Hannah. I can’t. But I’m leaving. One more week, and I will help you pack, buy stuff, book a flight for you to the safest place I can think of, and then I’m off flying elsewhere. Maybe I’ll go to fucking Antarctica to live with the penguins.”

Her mouth wobbled. “I like penguins.”

I snorted. *Oh boy.*

What were we both doing? I clenched my fists. “I don’t even trust myself to come over there and hug you. I’d have you facedown, hanging off the bed, my hand around your throat while I fucked you into the floor.”

She smiled weakly. “Sounds wonderful. Pretty please?” Her hand sneaked downward and pushed inside her panties. I could see her fingers move onto her pussy.

My sigh of exasperation was more a growl. “Stop that!”

A command. I facepalmed.

“No. Don’t obey. Do... whatever you want to. But I’m out of here.”

I stood up to leave. I should go today; not in a week.

“Greta says she thinks she can help you, but also...” She paused, and I looked at her. It seemed as if she were listening. “It might kill you.”

“Right. And that’s such a sensible thing to do when...” *When I’m going to leave the only person I will ever want to be with.*

She stared at me. “I trust her too.”

No *please* from her. For once it was Hannah presenting me with an option. A bizarre, unreal option. The thing was, I was inclined to take her up on this. How could it possibly make things worse?

It could kill me?

If an imaginary girl could kill me then she was not imaginary; she was real.

If she was real, this was a real choice. Of course, I was pretty damn sure that this Greta had no idea what she was doing.

“Do you even understand what this Greta is?” There was, I admit, a slight whine in my voice.

“Not really, no.” She shrugged then laughed. “I would do anything to keep us together, except kill you. I think she plans to do something like she did to Mitchell.”

Shock me into next week with something like a heart attack.

Antarctica and penguins, or this?

“What do I do?” I asked quietly.

Again, she listened. "Lie down flat on the floor."

"The floor? Why not the bed?"

"She says..." Her lips twisted. "CPR works better if you're lying on something hard."

"That's encouraging, not. Tell her not to ever apply for a job in retail."

Hannah smirked. "She heard you. I guess you want to know why she thinks this will do anything?"

It was my next question. I sat on the bed again. "Go on. Though really, I swear I would walk on lava to be with you for real. She thinks this will somehow kill my monster but not me?"

When had I decided that talking to this Greta via Hannah was rational?

"Yes. It's like a separate thing inside you, just all cozied up and winding around the old you. A parasite, maybe. She's not big on science."

"I'm not sure mesmers are into science either," I murmured. "I'll lie on the floor for you, dear Hannah."

"Thank you." Her smile was crooked.

I did so, wondering where to put my hands and feeling distinctly odd with Hannah peering over the edge of the bed above me. In a few minutes I'd gone from skeptic to this. If this did kill me, and what a leap of logic that was, I prayed Hannah wouldn't blame herself.

"Greta says, no hard feelings, but she's always hated the mesmer part of you."

I lifted a brow. If this did kill me, her Greta would be there partying.

Something rippled toward me and struck me, tried to drive me into the floor that lay under my back. The timber creaked, bent. I gasped, arching my spine, my eyes full of blue lightning. With an echoing crack the world blew apart with pain.



HANNAH

Whatever Greta had done, it did almost kill Tomik. I flung myself on him when he started turning blue and gave him mouth-to-mouth. Luckily, he was breathing again in seconds.

The CPR, such that it was, as there was no cardio, turned from mouth-to-mouth to kissing within seconds.

Ugh Greta waved to catch my attention, and I raised my head. Tomik let me, his hands on my back and my ass, slipping under the back of my panties and caressing me below.

Girl, he's better, but the thing inside him is still there, just weaker. I think it worked. I really do.

"Good," I whispered, knowing he would hear. I figured by now he'd believe in her.

Any harder, any more power, and I'd have killed him.

Which meant Greta could kill mesmers? That was food for thought.

"How do you feel?" I asked, wriggling down onto his fingers. "Greta says it worked as well as it could've. Your monster..." I kissed him again, groaning at what he was doing in spite of my bruising, feeling myself get wet. He was being careful, which was a fresh marvel all by itself. "Any more power and she thinks you'd have died."

"I feel less brutal, definitely." He twisted his mouth and nodded, looking as if he were searching in his head. I knew that feeling and that look so well. "That's about all I can say for now. That craving to see the vids they made with you has gone. Anger at them is in here instead." He tapped his chest, his voice catching as he added, "And love for you."

"Then we'll give this a try, yes?"

"Yes."

Such a simple answer with such powerful consequences. I was squeeing a bit inside, and Greta had let her head fall back while she feigned making herself vomit. *Whatever*, I told her, wishing I could give the girl the finger.

"Good. So you can fuck me now? No more excuses?"

"None, smartass." With that he rolled me over and kept me underneath him while he pulled up my bra and my panties down. At the sight of my marks, he stilled his hand on my breast. "Are you sure?"

My heart skipped. "Yes, oh yes. Please. Be gentle and I can. I *want* to."

Tomik chuckled. "Gentle? That'll be new, but okay."

It was new, but it was perfect as we made gloriously normal, and very quiet, love. And I felt something deep inside me mend and click into place.

EPILOGUE

HANNAH

That had been over two months ago.

We'd flown out of the USA and ended up here, at a pretty mansion on the Côte d'Azur, high above the sea. Tomik had enough money in accounts spread across the world for us to live like king and queen.

His monster isn't gone, but I'm glad of that. I've found I need what he gives me. I love it. Without it, life would be tasteless and without color.

I like the smell of my fresh-spilled blood and my pain, and so does he.

The whip has struck my back and ass what seems a million times and I'm sagging in the complex web he's set up in our ballroom. Yes, we have a ballroom here, with sprung timber floors for dancing and a perfect resonance to set off the music, and my whimpers. I can tell I'm likely bleeding. This is the first time he's had me dress as an angel, with wide white wings and feathers so pretty they make me wonder if I could really fly.

Tomik said he was saving this for when we both were ready. I'm healed enough, and so is he. I understand the courage it takes for him to let his sadist fly. Before this he'd only whipped me enough to let himself feel

right, so that he could stay in control. He wanted to see if his monster was going to take the reins.

It hadn't, and so here I am, sagging, waiting for him to come to me. My bare feet feel the cool timber, and my arms and wrists are held high by the ropes that link to my cuffs. The big square windows let in amazing amounts of morning light. It grants halos to the feathers that fall from my wings.

I'm spread wide at my legs and arms, and quiver as he pads closer, the whip slithering over the floor. He knows how evil that sounds. Then his mouth arrives and sucks on the angle of my shoulder and neck. Tomik steps back and his hands drift over my back, tracing the welts.

"How are you, my angel? Good?"

I'm panting, still feeling the sting fading into heavier throbs, but I lick my lips then nod. "Good."

"Would you like to come?" He enters me with his fingers, playing in my plentiful moisture, smearing the slippery stuff over my thighs.

"Oh fuck."

When my head falls back to appreciate the penetration already happening, he stops and smacks my ass, hard, right where it hurts, then he reaches around with both hands to twist and crush my nipples.

"You didn't answer me."

Squealing, I can't help writhing, though I'm delighted at the attention. I adore his cruelty.

"Yes! Yes. Please. Make me come, sir." Then I gulp and readjust my tongue. "Please?"

"Your wish is not my command," he says slyly, but then he goes to my front and kneels, pulls my pussy lips apart with pegs he fastens into each, and he goes to town with his mouth. The licking and sucking there is my ultimate weakness. I cannot help myself, and soon I'm crying out and bucking onto his mouth.

While I'm still panting, Tomik shoves a large plug into me.

"Some of your whore juices will do for this."

I know where it's going next and I whimper as he pries apart my ass cheeks then rotates it slowly, pushing it deeper. There's nothing quite like the burst of sensation when the plug pops in, after the agony of that stretching pain.

I hiss, and he laughs but stands up to kiss me, his hand in my hair holding me in place, just the way I love it.

I love everything he does to me, or close to it, though I'm sensing him pushing the boundaries of what I can take today. There's a whole new thrill at that prospect. What will he do next?

"I'm releasing you from these ropes, my bloodied angel." His fingers draw over those welts again, pinching a few on my ass. "Not much blood, but enough. I'll have to rest your back after this." He is musing, and I know those last words are for him, not me. "You will crawl after me."

Then he begins to unsnap the ropes.

I didn't expect him to break the wings off close to my body before he lets me crawl, but then he explains how whipping me and having me bloodied and with broken wings, crawling to him, has been his enduring fantasy since that last school day, so many years ago.

These were an expensive pair of wings but I'm more than a little in awe at what he's told me. Besides, he can afford it.



TOMIK

She crawls to me, obedient and enthralled. This fantasy of mine is plain compared to some of the things I want to do to her. But this today, it makes us real.

We have survived.

The stubs of the wings shake as she crawls. The blood-colored lines on her back show well in the magnificent light streaming in. I think maybe we are in heaven. This house is almost in the clouds. The sea is miles below and where I have her halt our swinging bed is at my back. The bed dominates the tower viewing room and there are sea views to all three sides.

I plan to fuck her on that bed, but after this.

I snap my fingers, and free my cock from my pants. Hannah crawls forward and gives it a lick that travels from my balls to the head. There's a singing joy when she engulfs it in her mouth, slowly sinking forward until my cock is a part of her. I absorb the rock and bounce of her ample butt on her heels, as she sucks on me, and the adoration in her eyes, even when I force her down, all the way, and keep her there.

"Good angel." I smirk and let her breathe, gasp, then spin her around and do exactly what I threatened to do that day after I rescued her. I fuck

her into the floor—cunt then ass and leave her on her side, moaning, with my come spilling from her.

My mesmer ways are not completely gone. I can feel the flow and ebb of her emotions. And of others. Yes, I'm less dangerous to her, less uncontrolled, but I can orchestrate her orgasms like a fucking maestro with a golden baton. Collectables are still susceptible to me.

I'm still a controlling asshole. I'm just a more civilized one who knows when his woman needs to be used.

Hannah wants more of that, now. My love is such a well-trained slut.

She'll get to have more once I do a few more slightly evil things to her tits. I carry her to the bed and tie her there, spread apart so I can easily get to all her sensitive female parts.

I walk away to clean myself. All the better to fuck her anywhere. I like to have choice.

Her cries when I force her to come over and over are captivating and would make a saint want to fuck her. All of her pleases me. I remind myself to tell her that. The way she sags and is limp in my arms when I undo the straps and pull her to me on the bed... how she wriggles for more after I plunge my cock into her mouth then her pussy... then her mouth again, her plaintive begging—how did I ever deserve this?

Yes, this is heaven.

Afterward we lie together, too exhausted to bathe immediately. I watch her fall into a light sleep with my arm cradling her head. Our body curves fit together so well. All of us does. We match.

"You're perfect, sweet girl," I whisper against her hair. She trusts me. What man could resist her? I kiss her head and lay mine down again, feeling the bed sway under us and listening to the birds in the trees outside.

"Mmm. You too," she says quietly, then she cuddles closer and heaves in a long, soft breath.

The bed sways, the birds twitter, and I, I look at my big hand on her thigh, feel the press of her against me, and I wonder at this second chance I've been given.

Love comes in many different forms.

THE END

ABOUT CARI SILVERWOOD

Cari Silverwood is a *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling writer of kinky darkness or sometimes of dark kinkiness, depending on her moods and the amount of time she's spent staring into the night. When others are writing bad men doing bad things, you may find her writing good men who accidentally on purpose fall into the abyss and come out with their morals twisted in knots.

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Jennifer Bene is a *USA Today* bestselling author of dangerously sexy and deviously dark romance. From BDSM, to Suspense, Dark Romance, and Thrillers—she writes it all. Always delivering a twisty, spine-tingling journey with the promise of a happily-ever-after.

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