

Ensnared

The Life of Anna, Part 4



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The Life of Anna, Part 4: Ensnared

By Marissa Honeycutt

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*****WARNING*****

This book is for grownups. This book is not for people who are easily offended, get nightmares easily, or have difficulty reading books about tough subjects. I do not glorify bad things, but bad things do happen to my poor characters. This is not your typical love story. My heroine does not fall in love and live happily ever after... at least not like the typical heroine. There is a happily ever after, but it is a long, painful journey to that end.

This is not a stand-alone novel. The series must be read in order.

Anna's story is told in five, novel-length books. There is a subculture within our own world that you've only heard whispers of. The conspiracy theorists wish they knew Anna's story. What the conspiracy theorists think they know is only disinformation, put out there to keep them from the real story.

This book will likely offend you. This book might make you cry; it might make you throw up. It is a dark book. As my friend, Heidi, said, "It's dark. It gets darker. It gets even darker, and then it gets even darker. And then, just when you think it can't get any darker, it does."

But, don't worry. I take you to the deep end gradually. ;)

There are many sexual situations in this series of books. People die. People get hurt. Things aren't always truly the way they appear. The antagonist isn't just a bad guy; he's EVIL. My heroine's worldview is skewed; things that may appall you are perfectly normal to her.

Any violence in this book is non-gratuitous and crucial to the plot and character development.

Do not read this if you are under the age of consent in your country. Do not get angry if the subject or actual book upsets you. If you're reading this, you've been warned.

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~Despair~

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Chapter One

(Two Years Later)

Anna felt herself rising to a stark and brutal level of consciousness, only dimly aware that she lay flat on her back in her own bed at the Manor.

With lucidity came a dull, aching pain that grew with each breath she drew.

Devin had taken Anna's baby. A child conceived out of love with Alex. The last vestige of Alex she had clung to. And Devin took it. Again.

Again?

No. It couldn't be Alex's baby. Alex was dead. He'd been dead for so long...she didn't know how long. He was dead. But then why did Devin say it was Alex's baby and get her so upset?

Anna felt the fog of confusion smothering her mind. She was always confused these days. Some days Devin said Alex was alive. Other days, Devin said Alex was dead. Why did he confuse her? It was hard enough keeping hold of reality as it was. But when Devin bothered to speak to her, it got even more confusing.

Focus, Anna. Her inner voice sounded as weak as she felt, but she tried to comply, vaguely remembering back to a time when she could focus, when she was much stronger than she was now.

They'd just returned home from another Spring Gathering—her third, she thought. She'd been pregnant before they left. She was not pregnant now. Devin had told her before they left that it was Alex's baby, and she'd believed him. She'd fought tooth and nail to keep him from taking it, but now it just seemed foolish. Alex had been dead for a long, long time.

Alex! The pain in her heart began again. She ran to the bathroom and tore open her relief cabinet of drugs.

It was empty.

“No!” she cried. “No!” She’d been a good girl. She’d done everything Devin had asked her to do. Why was he withholding her relief?

She ran to her bedroom door and pounded on it, screaming Devin’s name. She didn’t care if he came to punish her. She just needed him to come. Screaming his name always made him come. And it made him mad.

But no one came. She pounded on the door until her fists were bruised and bleeding, and still no one came.

Devin always came when she screamed. Why not this time?

She curled up in a ball on her bed and sobbed. Where was everybody? She’d been a good girl. She’d tried very hard to be obedient. Why was he punishing her? What had she done wrong?

The only time Devin required her to be coherent was during the Spring Gatherings, and even then she wasn’t completely coherent. He didn’t take her to the Summer Gatherings anymore. He said she didn’t need to be there, so she stayed home and got high. He didn’t really need her at all, except for one thing: a baby in the spring. Anna didn’t understand why.

She didn’t remember much of the last two years, except avoiding thoughts of Alex. She hadn’t seen or spoken to anyone since she’d come home from Germany. Except Wilhelm. He came out every few months and visited with her. She didn’t like it when he came. He reminded her too much of Alex.

But when he left, she felt so lonely.

The drugs were seeping out of her system now and she couldn’t avoid thinking about Alex. She missed him. So much it hurt to breathe.

She looked at her right hand. Devin had made her take off her diamond rings, but made her wear her right hand wedding band. Every time she looked at it, pain stabbed her heart. She tried to take it off one time and Devin got so angry. It didn't make any sense. Why would Devin want her to remember her dead husband?

Her hand was swollen from pounding on the door and it made the ring tight. Normally it was too loose; she'd lost a lot of weight over the last two years. She didn't even like to look in the mirror now.

Tommy had been astonished when he saw her last week at the Gathering. She recalled the shock on his face and his concerned exclamation: "*You've gotten so thin! I'm worried about you.*"

"I'm fine," Anna had protested. She appreciated his concern, but she was fine.

Anna had been astounded to see Aaron at the Gathering. She couldn't make herself speak to him, but saw him and Tommy talking a lot. Travis was there as well and the three of them seemed inseparable.

Life had changed a lot in the last two years. She rarely left her room, was rarely called upon to perform any sexual duties. Men just didn't seem interested in her body without the curves; but Anna didn't mind. Ian stayed with her several nights a week and that was all she needed. Devin only spent the night with her once in a while. If she'd been sober enough to care, she would have been hurt.

The door opened and she flipped over to see Maggie enter carrying a tray.

"Maggie!" she cried. "Where's Devin?"

Maggie gave her a sympathetic look. "Master said that he would come see you after you ate."

"Why is my cabinet empty?" Anna demanded.

Maggie's eyes widened and she flinched at Anna's sudden, mercurial demeanor. "Master said to take everything out while you were gone. I don't know, Mistress."

"I'm not hungry," Anna huffed. If she couldn't have her drugs, then she wouldn't eat.

"Master said he wouldn't come see you if you didn't eat," Maggie said quietly.

Anna narrowed her eyes at the tray of food. "Fine."

She got up on shaky legs and walked to the table and began eating. Maggie left the room after watching her for a minute and Anna was left alone.

It was too quiet. She looked around for the remote for the TV and saw it on the nightstand. Anna sighed. She couldn't reach it and didn't have the energy to get up and get it. Maybe after she ate.

She was finishing up her meal when Devin came in. She was grumpy and angry by then.

"Why did you take my drugs away?" she snapped.

Devin calmly walked in and sat in the chair by the window. "I suggest you watch your tone, Anna," he said in a low voice.

Anna stood on her shaky legs and glared at him. "You promised that if I was a good girl you would let me have them when I got home. You lied."

Devin raised his brow. "Anna, you've been high for two years straight. It's time to come down and get on with life."

She crossed her arms. "I don't want to. I have nothing to do. You want me to sit here all day and stare at the wall? That's going on with life?"

“No. I was going to suggest you start dancing again.”

Anna’s jaw dropped. “Why?” she asked after a long pause.

“Because it’s good for you. Aside from your yearly pregnancy, you’ve become useless to me. I don’t even enjoy fucking you anymore. You’re too skinny and incoherent. Things need to change. Now.”

“You did this to me,” she growled.

“I can take some of the responsibility, yes. But now it’s time to move on. Deal with your pain and start living again.”

His matter of fact attitude infuriated her. “No.” She crossed her arms and glared at him again.

Devin was on his feet and in front of her so fast she gasped. He pushed her against the wall. “I am your Master. You will do as I say.”

“Or what?” she mocked. “You’ll punish me?”

Devin’s eyes flashed. “Oh, Anna. You don’t want to push me.”

She put her hands on his chest and pushed him away. Or tried to. She was too weak to actually move him.

He grabbed her hair and yanked open the door. He dragged her, naked, out the door and through the hallways to the dungeon.

She laughed. “Ooh, the dungeon?” she said with as much derision as she could muster. “You can’t hurt me, Devin. Been there, done that.”

Devin cuffed her arms and legs to the wall and then left the room.

Her laughter bordered on hysterical. This was supposed to make her behave? Ha!

A TV flickered to life in front of her. A movie? This was different.

What appeared on screen sobered her faster than anything ever had. It was video of Alex with three little girls. The volume was maxed out and even though she squeezed her eyes shut, their screams echoed through the room along with Alex’s laughter.

Anna pulled against the chains. “No!” she screamed. “No! Alex wouldn’t do that!”

But the evidence was right in front of her. Tears streamed down her face as the man she loved, the man she thought she knew, did unspeakable things to those little girls.

When the picture faded, she slumped against the ropes and sobbed.

“You mean he never told you about his affinity for little girls?” Devin asked from the shadows, a sarcastic note of feigned surprise in his voice.

“Okay, Devin,” she said in surrender. “You win. You hurt me.”

Devin laughed. “Oh, Baby. I’m not done yet. You mocked me. You defied me. And now you will pay.” He walked up in front of her and held up a syringe. “Do you remember that day when you were with Aaron and you were in incredible pain? The pain that came from nowhere?”

Anna looked up at him with frightened eyes and nodded. Nothing had ever hurt as bad as that.

Devin wiggled the syringe in front of her face. “This is what caused that.” He stepped forward and injected her in the neck with the clear fluid.

She stared at him. “I don’t feel anything.”

“Of course not. It’s not the fluid that hurts.” He trailed his fingers down her chest and she cried out. His fingertips were made of razor blades. “*That’s* what hurts. It even made Alex scream. I can hardly imagine what it feels like to you.”

He stepped closer and took her nipples between his knuckles. “I am going to make sure you never mock me again.”

He twisted and she howled.

Hours later, Ian dumped Anna onto her bed. The injection was still active in her body and her bed felt like glass and razor blades. Devin had tortured her like he always did, but each pain was new and heightened.

She tried to sleep, but couldn't, and tossed and turned until the artificial pain wore off many hours later, and she closed her eyes in exhaustion.

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Chapter Two

It was the same room she'd seen before. Long and narrow with a chair, a bed, and a bookcase. But there was something different this time. A man stood at the window, looking out into the morning. The sunlight glinted off his tangled golden hair and scraggly beard. His shoulders were broad and he was very tall. He looked like....

"Alex...?" she whispered.

The man turned as if he heard her. His cobalt blue eyes widened in shock as he looked in her direction. Could he see her? Their eyes locked on one another and they gazed at each other for an eternity.

The man said something in a harsh language that sounded like a question. Then he smiled hesitantly, but with tender eyes.

"Is it really you?" he asked in English, his deep, baritone voice reverberating in her heart and memory.

"You're dead. This isn't real. No!" she shouted.

Anna sat up straight in bed. Her room was dark and her body ached.

No! She didn't want to dream about Alex. That was one of the things the drugs kept at bay. Her dreams of him. She had seen him before in her dreams. When Devin wouldn't let her take her drugs at the Spring Gathering, she dreamed of him. He never saw her, but she stood and watched him look out the window.

It was just a dream; Alex was dead. She shook her head to clear it and reached for the remote to turn the TV on. If she didn't sleep too soundly she

wouldn't dream. She didn't want to remember him. She wanted to forget. The video she had seen today must have put him back in the forefront of her memory.

Besides, he wasn't the man she thought he was. He was a monster that had tricked everyone into thinking he was a good man. But he was really just like Jack and Devin and the other men who liked to hurt girls.

She turned onto her side and watched some lame sitcom until she fell asleep again.

Devin came with Maggie when she brought breakfast the next morning.

“Are you ready to cooperate, Anna?” he asked as she sat down to eat.

“Yes, Master,” she answered contritely.

“Good. Beginning today, Ian is going to take you for walks around the property. You need to get moving again. You will eat what is set before you. You will no longer be allowed any sort of mind-altering substance.”

“Yes, Master.”

“When you are able to walk a sufficient distance, you will start dancing again. The adult classes like you used to take. I've spoken to Isaak and it is arranged.”

“Yes, Master.”

“When you are ready, Isaak will bring you back up to the Company. Probably in the Corps until you prove yourself ready for more. You will take care of yourself and make yourself a presentable member of society again. I don't care if you're a bitch to your friends, but if you ever act disrespectful to me again....” He trailed off. “Yesterday will look like a walk in the park. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Master.”

“When you’re at the point you are taking the adult classes again, Ian will take you to find an apartment. Presumably you’ll be worth fucking again, and I don’t want to drive all the way out here every time I want you.”

Anna looked up at him. “You want me to have my own place?”

“I know you’ll behave yourself,” he said in a warning tone.

“Yes, Master.”

Within a couple of weeks, Anna was strong enough to go for long walks with Ian. Aside from the occasional shakes, she suffered very little withdrawal symptoms; she supposed it had something to do with the Immortal part of her. She gained weight and looked much healthier by the end of the third week.

When she was ready to begin dancing again, she and Ian went apartment hunting. They found a nice, one-bedroom apartment near her old one. It was nothing spectacular, but it was hers. Ian also told her that her car and other things were still at her house. Wilhelm had held on to it in case she wanted to go back to it.

“I don’t want anything to do with them,” she told Ian. “Can I sell the car and get a different one?”

“Sure. What do you want?”

Anna shrugged. “I don’t know anything about cars. Something basic. Not fancy.”

“I’ll take it a few places and see what I can get you. How does that sound?”

Anna walked nervously into the ballet studio on Monday night. She hadn't been here since before Alex died and the rush of memories was painful. She'd been sleeping with the TV on every night and had so far succeeded in avoiding any more dreams about Alex.

It had been two years since she'd danced last. She didn't know why Devin thought she'd be able to get back into the Company. She was almost twenty-three years old. A little old to start over as a dancer.

But she would obey her Master. She didn't want to anger Devin and worked hard to keep that from happening.

"Anna."

She looked up to see Isaak standing by the stairs with a sad smile on his face. He looked somehow grayer since Alex's funeral. Older, and...sadder.

"Hello, Isaak," she said stiffly.

He walked up to her and hugged her tightly. "We didn't know what to think when you disappeared from the...service," he said. "I kept hoping you'd come back."

"I'm only here because Devin wants me dancing again." She lifted her chin in defiance of the emotions threatening to bubble up inside her.

Isaak looked at her sympathetically. "I'll take you any way I can get you. Come. Let me introduce you to Julie."

She assumed Julie was the instructor for the class.

"Julie," Isaak said when she walked into the small studio. "This is Anna. Anna, this is Julie."

Julie gave her a warm smile, but Anna greeted her new instructor stiffly. She wasn't here to make friends. She was here because Devin thought she

needed to dance again.

“You can stand wherever you’d be most comfortable.”

Anna went to stand in the corner. She recognized many of the dancers from when she was in these classes before. A few of them tried to engage her in conversation, but Anna ignored them. She wanted nothing to do with them. Or anyone for that matter.

Class began. She was stiff, but soon limbered up and felt at home again. By the end of class, she remembered why she loved dancing so much.

She took the bus home—it was public transport until Ian finished trading off her car—took a shower, turned on the TV and went to bed.

The next afternoon Ian came to see her and handed her a black plastic square with buttons on it. “For your new car.”

Anna followed him out to the parking garage and showed her a little blue car. “A Prius?”

Ian nodded. “It’s a hybrid and really popular right now. Brand new too. I put the extra money into your account.”

Anna grinned. It was cute. “Thanks Ian. I like it.” She glanced at him. “Do you need a ride back to the Manor?”

“Nah. I had this delivered here. My car’s outside.”

“Oh. Okay.”

He hugged her. “I need to get back. The Manor’s a lot lonelier without you there.”

She gave him a smile. “You can come visit anytime.”

“I might do that. Oh, Devin said you need to get a cell phone.” He handed her a piece of paper. “Mine and his phone numbers. Call him when

you get it.”

“I guess I know what I’m doing this afternoon.”

Ian left a few minutes later and Anna went back to her apartment to get her purse.

She looked in her wallet. Her credit cards were still valid, but the idea of using them made her uncomfortable. She had some money in her old account now. She could live on that.

She stared at her driver’s license. *Anna Lee Kunze Herzogin von Hesse.* She’d forgotten she had a new name. Ian had signed all the paperwork for her apartment because Devin was paying for it.

She and Alex hadn’t even been married three months before he died. She’d received the news on their three month anniversary. Should she change her name back to Perkins? Was that even possible?

Anna sighed and put her cards away. She didn’t want to think about it right now. Right now she had to find a cell phone.

Chapter Three

Anna had dance class Monday through Thursday because that's when the studio offered the adult classes. Most students didn't go every day, but Devin wanted her to. So she did.

After a few weeks, her life settled into a routine. A rather boring routine, but Anna was fine with it. Isaak offered her tickets to see Swan Lake, but Anna didn't want to go. He also offered her the phone numbers from some of her old friends, including Aaron, Jenna and Travis, but she didn't want to see any of them.

One Friday morning there was a knock at the door of her apartment. She knew it was Friday because she'd had her fourth class of the week the previous night. She couldn't imagine who would be knocking on her door. Only two people knew where she lived, Ian and Devin. Neither of them came over on Fridays because they needed to get things ready for the Gathering.

She sighed and stood, turning down the TV with the remote. She liked it loud because it kept her concentrating on it rather than other, more depressing subjects. She made her way slowly to the door. Maybe whoever it was would be gone by the time she got there.

She took a deep breath and opened the door, then gasped when she saw who it was.

"Wilhelm?" She stared at him for a long time. "What are you doing here?"

The last time he'd come to visit, she ignored him. Well, she did that most of the time when he came. Either she was too high, or it was too painful to look at him.

“Hello, *Liebling*,” he said with an affectionate smile. “I came to wish you happy birthday.”

“Birthday?” Anna frowned. What day was it? She didn’t pay any attention past the actual days of the week so that she knew if she needed to be at the studio or not. What was worth celebrating about her birthday anyways? The day Devin claimed her for his own, setting her on a path of misery?

“Ja. Your birthday is Sunday, correct?”

Anna shrugged. “If you say so.”

Wilhelm looked sad. “Anna, what has happened to you?”

She jutted out her chin. “You really need to ask that question?”

He sighed. “May I come in?”

Anna looked past him and saw it was raining and windy. She stepped back and allowed him to enter. “How’d you find me?”

Wilhelm gave a tiny smile as she closed the door. “Your new car. I received notification that the Mercedes had been sold and got your new address through the title of your new car. A Prius, correct?”

“I didn’t want to keep the Mercedes,” she mumbled, looking at the floor.

“That is fine, Anna. I just want you to be happy.”

She shrugged. “It’s a car. Ian found it for me.”

Wilhelm looked around her sparsely furnished apartment. She had a couch, a coffee table, a TV and a stand for the TV. The room was bare of any personal touches. But it was clean. Devin made sure she kept it clean.

Her bowl of cereal was still on the table, half eaten. She never seemed to be able to finish a bowl of cereal. But she tried, because if she didn’t try, Devin would be upset.

“You can sit if you want,” she said, motioning to the couch. It wasn’t pretty; it was an odd shade of teal, but it was comfortable. She had managed

to not use the credit cards from either Devin or Wilhelm so far.

Wilhelm removed his coat and looked around for a place to put it. Anna took it from him and hung it in the closet. He looked so out of place standing there. He belonged in fancy hotels and huge castle-like houses, not her crappy little apartment.

“You know, Anna, the house is still yours. You are welcome to live there.”

Anna shook her head. “I don’t want to go anywhere near that place,” she said without thinking.

“Why?” he asked gently.

“I don’t want to be reminded of...him.” She didn’t like to say his name aloud.

“Anna, you two were very happy together. Why do you want to forget him?”

So many reasons. “I just don’t want to think about him. And....” Anna hesitated. “...he’s not the man I thought he was.”

Wilhelm truly looked shocked. “What are you talking about, Anna? He never pretended to be anything other than who he was.”

Anna told him about the video Devin had shown her. Wilhelm’s face paled as she spoke.

He put his hand on hers. “Anna, I know my son. And I know Devin. I am certain that what you saw was not the truth. Alex would never do such a thing.”

“How do you know? People don’t imagine that Jack would do the things he does. People lead double lives all the time.”

“True natures are revealed in time. And there are always signs. I do not believe that Alex would hurt little girls like that. It is not possible.”

Anna sighed. She didn't want to argue; it took too much energy. She knew what she saw, but if Wilhelm didn't want to believe it, then that wasn't her problem.

There was an awkward silence. Maybe he would realize how fruitless it was to visit and leave quickly.

"Kurt came with me. He would like to see you."

"Oh?" She stared at her cereal bowl, resolutely ignoring the leap of her heart in her chest.

"He is back at the hotel. I thought it might go better if it was just me surprising you, instead of both of us." He looked at her half eaten bowl of cereal. "Would you like to go to lunch?"

She looked at her watch. It was time to eat again. She wasn't ever hungry, so she just decided on times to eat and ate then. To keep Devin happy.

"Sure," she said without enthusiasm. "Let me get dressed." She was still in her pajamas.

She put on jeans and a sweater and boots and went back out to the living room. Wilhelm was dressed in his usual dress slacks. Well, if he didn't like what she was wearing, he didn't have to go anywhere with her.

He smiled at her. "Ready?"

She shrugged and went to the closet to get their coats.

Wilhelm told her about the happenings of the family on the way to the hotel. Liesl had gotten married as planned, though the celebration had been much subdued. Greta was engaged and the wedding was in two months.

"I would love it if you could come, Anna. We all would. We missed you at Liesl's."

Anna didn't respond. She vaguely remembered him asking if she'd go to Liesl's wedding and her laughing and saying no. She wouldn't go to Greta's wedding either. She had no desire to go to Germany ever again.

He reached over and took her hand. "*Liebling*, you are still part of our family. We love you and miss you."

"Why won't you just let me go, Wilhelm?" she asked with a sigh.

"Because you are family. There is nothing to let go of. The moment you married Alex, you became a Kunze. Nothing will ever change that."

"What if I married someone else?"

He paused. "Are you dating someone?" he asked slowly.

Anna snorted. "No. I won't date ever again." She stopped and thought for a moment. "I don't think Devin would like it if I did. I was just asking out of curiosity."

"Even if you married someone else, Anna, you would still be part of our family. You can try and disown us," he chuckled. "But we will never disown you."

They arrived at the Ritz-Carlton a few minutes later. It wasn't far from her apartment.

She looked up at the huge white palace in awe. She'd been in her bedroom in the Manor for the past two years and, since she'd "woken," hadn't really gone anywhere except the studio and her apartment. Walking in the marble lobby, she was reminded of her house with Alex, albeit this was much larger.

That was a long time ago, she reminded herself, before she'd succumbed to the drugs in her tiny little world. Her safe little world.

Wilhelm took her hand and led her to the elevators. “I spoke to Aaron yesterday and we thought we might take you out for a birthday dinner on Sunday,” Wilhelm said, pushing the call button. “How does that sound?”

Anna looked at her reflection in the brass doors and shrugged. “It’s not necessary, Wilhelm. I don’t see much point in celebrating anything. Especially my birthday.”

The doors opened and they stepped inside.

“I would certainly consider your birthday worth celebrating, *Liebling*. I am very glad you are here.”

Anna didn’t respond. The doors closed and they were whisked up to the ninth floor.

“Your friends have missed you, Anna,” Wilhelm said as they walked down the hallway a few moments later. “They have been worried about you. We all have. Aaron has kept me posted as best he could, but even he rarely saw you.”

“Aaron?” Anna thought for a moment. “I saw him at the Gathering.” She paused. “Why was he there? He’s not a Brother.” She hadn’t considered that fact when she saw him. She was only annoyed that he kept trying to bother her.

“He is. I brought him in about six months after you disappeared.”

“Why you? He lives here. Wouldn’t it make more sense for him to be with Devin?”

“His father is German. I could do it, and I did. Devin would not have brought him in.”

“He was hanging out with Tommy.”

“Ah, yes. Tommy Pendleton. A good young man.” Wilhelm smiled.

“You know him?”

"I have gotten to know him a bit. He has been concerned about you as well."

She knew that. Anna suspected he still wanted to be with her, but she had no intention of getting involved with another man. Devin wouldn't approve and all it would do is make her miserable in the long run, and possibly risk the guy's life. It wasn't worth it.

Wilhelm unlocked the door to the hotel room and stepped aside to let her in. She walked into the enormous living room area and stopped when she saw Kurt on the couch. He stood when he saw her and walked across the room to her.

"Hello, Anna."

She looked up at him. He was different. Older. More mature. Gone was his mischievous smile and glinting eyes. He gave her a genuinely affectionate smile that would have made her melt, if she'd allowed it to. He stood tall and confident with an air not unlike what his father had. And what Alex'd had. An aura of respect and authority.

She couldn't get her voice to work. Her mouth opened, but no sound came out.

Kurt slowly wrapped her in his arms and held her close. She hesitantly slipped her arms around his waist and leaned her head against his chest. He wasn't Alex; she knew that. But not being Alex was a good thing, she thought bitterly as she remembered what she'd seen on the video in Devin's dungeon.

Kurt felt right, and for the first time in two years, she allowed her guard down and let someone hold and comfort her. Tears came unbidden a moment later and great sobs wracked her body. He guided her to the couch and held her in his lap, stroking her hair and speaking in soothing tones.

She felt like she cried for an hour, and maybe she did. But Kurt held her patiently, letting her cry as long as she needed.

When she had cried herself out, she lay against Kurt's chest. Wilhelm handed her a tissue and she dried her eyes. She sat up and saw that the front of Kurt's shirt was very wet.

"I'm sorry I got your shirt wet," she said softly, dabbing at it with her tissue.

Kurt chuckled. "It is fine, Anna. It is just a shirt." He stroked her cheek. "I think you needed to cry. That is more important."

She looked into his kind blue eyes and smiled. "I do feel a little better."

"*Gut*," he said softly, his hand still on her cheek. He looked intently into her eyes. "I am glad you came, *Engel*," he said softly. "I have thought about you often."

"You have?" That surprised her for some reason. Perhaps because of the playboy that he'd always been. She assumed he'd forgotten about her.

He nodded. "When *Vati* returned from his visits and told me how you were, it broke my heart. When he told me that you had moved out of the *Schloss*, I wanted to come with him to see you. Derek and Sofie have had a difficult time with the divorce and I have been hesitant to leave them before now. But they are doing much better now."

"Are you...I mean, is the divorce final?"

Kurt nodded. "It was finalized a few months ago. Gretchen is receiving quite a bit of child support, so she and Otto are well taken care of."

Anna cringed at Otto's name. It wasn't the child's fault, but it still was unpleasant to think about.

"I am sorry, Anna. I did not mean to bring up unhappy memories."

Anna shrugged. "I don't have many good memories."

Kurt frowned and looked hurt. "I hope that is untrue, Anna."

She pressed her lips together. Even the “good” memories hurt. She preferred not to think about them. She tried to stand. “I shouldn’t be here. I should go.”

Kurt held her in his lap. “Please stay, Anna,” he pleaded softly. “Please. I have missed you.”

Anna stopped and looked back at him. The emotion that filled his eyes pained her. He cared for her. A lot. It was written all over his face. Is that why he came to San Francisco? To be with her?

“No,” she whispered, trying to back away. She was as fearful of the emotions that were bubbling up inside her as she was of the emotion she saw in his eyes. “Please don’t, Kurt. I can’t deal with that.”

“Deal with what?” he asked, his voice husky with emotion. As much as she struggled, he held her tight and wouldn’t let her go.

“You. Feeling. Anything.”

Unexpectedly, Kurt leaned forward and kissed her. His lips were gentle, but insistent. His hand tangled in her hair and his tongue probed at her lips. She opened her mouth to receive him and let out a little moan as he invaded both her mouth and her heart. After a moment, she stopped fighting him and instead, leaned in and kissed him back. He nibbled at her lower lip and she gasped softly when he sucked on it. She moved her hand to the side of his face, her fingers tracing his cheekbone to his ear and down to his neck.

He slowly pulled away from her, his lips lingering against hers. He kissed her gently on the lips and gazed into her hooded eyes. “Anna,” he whispered, his feelings for her evident in his eyes. “I love you.”

“K-Kurt...,” she whispered. “I...I can’t. I can’t. It hurts too much.”

He brushed her hair away from her face. “I am not asking you to love me, Anna. I am only asking that you let me love you. I can be patient.” He

gave her a sheepish smile. “Well, now I can be. I have learned quite a bit the last few years.”

Anna couldn’t stop the small giggle that escaped. The delight she saw in Kurt’s eyes lightened her heart. She traced his cheekbone again and then his lips. “You’ve changed.”

“In a good way or a bad way?”

Anna blushed. “Good, I think.”

“You did not like me before?” He pouted, but there was a glint of mischief in his eyes.

Her blush deepened. “I think you know the answer to that.”

His eyes softened and he smiled. “I do.”

Wilhelm cleared his throat and they both jumped. Anna had forgotten he was in the room. She looked sheepishly over at him, but he was beaming at them.

“I think Anna needs to eat, Kurt,” Wilhelm said.

Kurt looked her up and down. “You have lost a lot of weight, *Engel*.”

Anna looked down at her body. “I’ve gained a bunch in the last few weeks. Devin makes me eat.”

Kurt grimaced. “I would hate to see how you looked a few weeks ago.”

“Devin said I was too skinny and not worth fucking.”

Both men’s jaws dropped open and Anna covered her mouth. “I’m sorry,” she said quickly. Her cheeks burned as she realized what she’d said. It was true, but crudely stated.

Wilhelm recovered quicker than Kurt did. “It is fine, Anna. I am glad you are doing better.”

Anna smiled. “I think I am too,” she said sincerely. For some reason, she was feeling more like herself than she had in a very long time. Suddenly

the idea of celebrating her birthday didn't seem as ridiculous as it had an hour ago.

They went to lunch at a little Italian restaurant around the corner from the hotel. Anna felt more lighthearted and content than she'd ever believed would be possible again. Both men were very attentive to her, but Wilhelm seemed to be content to let Kurt take the lead.

Anna decided she liked the attention from Kurt. No one would ever replace Alex. He was her soul mate...or at least she'd thought so at the time. But, unexpectedly, Anna found herself thinking about a future with Kurt. After all, he was now an Elder-Son, and an Elder-Son had rights to an Elder-Mistress.

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Chapter Four

“Anna, please let me buy you a decent car,” Kurt pleaded for the third time that afternoon. “Or find you a better place to live. Vati says your place is hideous.”

They were walking around a park near the hotel. The rain had stopped and the sun had come out. It had turned out to be a nice day.

“I like my Prius. It’s cute. And my apartment isn’t hideous. Well, at least the complex isn’t. I just...didn’t put much effort into furnishing it.”

Wilhelm shook his head. “Do you even have a bed, Anna?”

“Of course I do.” It was a mattress on the floor, but it was her bed.

Wilhelm gave her a look that said he didn’t believe her.

“You don’t think Devin would let me not have a bed, do you?”

Kurt sighed. “Anna, why are you letting Devin run your life? Every time you talk about something, you always include his name in it.”

“Why am I...? Why wouldn’t I? He owns me. I am his.”

“Only half his, Anna,” Wilhelm corrected. “You belong to us as well.”

That was true. But they didn’t have that little syringe that made fingertips turn into razor blades. She shuddered at the thought of Devin punishing her again. “Devin’s made sure I’ve gotten healthy again.”

“After he let you destroy yourself,” Kurt muttered.

“He gave me a way to cope,” Anna protested.

“He bribed you with drugs into returning here with him and then doped you up so bad you could not think straight,” Kurt retorted.

Anna narrowed her eyes. “I couldn’t deal with what was going on.”

Kurt sighed. “We would have been there for you, Anna. If you would have let us. I would have been there for you every step of the grieving

process. Do not forget that we were grieving too. You lost your husband. I lost my brother and a cousin. Vati lost a son. We all lost several friends that day.”

Anna’s chest heaved, feeling indignant and guilty at the same time. “I never asked you to come back here,” she huffed. “I explicitly told your father not to visit me.” She glared at Wilhelm. “And you still did. And now you’re angry at me? For finding a way to deal with my grief?”

“But you did not deal with it,” Kurt retorted. “You avoided it and nearly destroyed yourself.”

“It was my choice. You needn’t have cared what I did.”

“Of course I cared about what you did. We all did. We love you, Anna. We want what is best for you.”

“I don’t need your love,” Anna growled and turned to walk away, but Kurt grabbed her around her waist and pulled her close.

“You do, Anna,” he said softly in her ear. “You do need to be loved. You melted in my arms this morning. When was the last time you were held like that?”

Anna pushed at his chest. “It doesn’t matter.”

“*Ja*. It does. It matters because you are a woman that is meant to be loved and cherished. And as much as you try to deny it, you cannot. You are scared. I understand that. But avoiding people and feelings will not make things any better. You will just be miserable again.”

“I’m always miserable.”

Kurt cupped her chin and kissed her, long and passionately. She was breathless when he pulled away. “Does that make you miserable?”

Anna gasped for air. No, it made her feel alive. But that scared her to death. “Please let me go, Kurt. Go home. Leave me alone.”

“*Nein.*” He kissed her again. And again. And again, until she relented and relaxed in his arms.

She rested her head on his chest and closed her eyes. She couldn’t fight him anymore. She didn’t really want to.

Her phone rang, interrupting the serenity of the moment. It was Devin’s ring. She pulled away from Kurt and dug in her purse for her phone. “Hello Devin,” she said nervously.

“Where are you?”

Anna looked around. “I’m at a park...somewhere downtown.”

Devin didn’t reply.

“Devin?”

“It’s Friday, Anna. It’s four o’clock and you’re supposed to be here.” He kept his tone even, but she could feel the anger radiating through the phone.

Anna gasped and clasped her hand over her mouth as tears filled her eyes. “Oh, God! Devin, I’m so sorry. I’ll leave right now.” She started walking away, but Wilhelm grabbed her hand and took the phone from her.

“Hello, Devin. It’s Wilhelm....” Anna watched helplessly as he walked away with her phone.

“He’s going to punish me,” she said weakly, hanging her head and wincing. She’d been trying so hard to be good, and Kurt and Wilhelm came into town and ruined it all.

“Vati will not let that happen, Anna.”

Anna watched Wilhelm as he talked to Devin. His face remained impassive and he seemed to speak with confidence and firmness. At last, he nodded and ended the call.

“Your presence is not needed at the *Schloss* tonight, Anna,” Wilhelm declared as he walked back to where Anna and Kurt were standing and gave her back her phone. “What would you like to do tonight?”

Anna stood staring at Wilhelm. His ability to stand up to Devin amazed her.

“We had talked about going to the symphony, Vati.”

Wilhelm nodded. “That is true. How does that sound, Anna?”

Anna nodded. She had gone a few times with Alex and had enjoyed it, although it wasn’t as enjoyable as a ballet; there wasn’t much to look at. But she did enjoy the music. “I don’t have anything formal to wear. I don’t have much at all, actually.”

“Finally!” Kurt exclaimed with a grin. Anna looked at him, confused. “I can buy you something!” He took her hand and the three of them walked back to the hotel to get the car Wilhelm had rented.

Anna stood in the shower, immersed in rose-scented body wash, and sighed. She felt...happy. Genuinely happy for the first time in forever. Maybe life didn’t suck as bad as she thought it did.

She liked being with Kurt. He was much calmer than he had been before. He didn’t look at other women and seemed completely devoted to making sure she was happy. Not that she wanted him to revolve his life around her, but she did like the attention. But what did that mean?

Devin surely wouldn’t approve of her getting involved with Kurt. But then again, maybe it wasn’t Devin’s call. After all, she belonged to Wilhelm just as much as she belonged to Devin.

Things just...felt right with Kurt. They’d always gotten along well. Maybe Alex hadn’t been her soul mate. After all, she’d met Kurt first...as long as you didn’t count all the dreams she’d had about Alex....

No. Alex was dead. And a monster like Jack. Kurt was here. And alive. And the son of her Master. A glimmer of hope for a relationship began to take hold.

After dinner, Wilhelm, Kurt and Anna were driven to the Opera House. Anna was having a fabulous evening with the two of them. Wilhelm doted on her like a father would, and beamed at her and Kurt together.

They walked into the Opera House and found the lobby crowded with patrons eager for the world premiere of a new symphony. Once again, she was drawn to the statue of her parents. Wilhelm spotted a couple he apparently knew and Kurt walked over to the statue with her.

He slipped his arm around her waist and nuzzled her ear. “I am glad you are dancing again, Anna,” he said in a soft voice.

Anna sighed. “I’m not sure if I’m glad or not. It’s frustrating when my body won’t do what it’s supposed to.”

“You will get there,” he said encouragingly. His thumb rubbed against her ribs and she inhaled sharply, surprised to find herself getting aroused. She smiled, remembering him pushing her up against the wall the first time he took her out and Alex getting angry at him.

“Anna? Anna Perkins?”

The unexpected voice from her past sent shivers through her body. She turned reluctantly and smiled politely at Zach. He stood with his arm around a blond pregnant woman. The same woman that he’d been with the first night they’d met.

“Hello, Zach,” she said nervously.

He looked her up and down and grinned. “You look good, Anna,” he said in an innocent tone, though his eyes betrayed his darker thoughts.

“Kunze,” Kurt said in a low voice.

“Excuse me?” Zach said, turning a bright smile to Kurt.

“Her last name is no longer Perkins. It is Kunze.” Kurt’s hand tightened on her waist as if to keep her by his side.

“Ah, yes. I’d heard you’d gotten married, but...I thought you were widowed?” Zach’s confusion as he looked at Kurt was evident.

“She was married to my brother, Mr...?”

“Senator, actually. Senator Zach Vail.” Zach extended his hand and Kurt shook it. “Brother, eh?” Zach grinned. “Nothing like keeping it in the family.”

Anna thought she heard a low growl come from Kurt, but he said nothing.

Zach turned back to Anna. “Devin said you were doing better in the last few weeks. I’m glad to hear it.” He looked at the woman. “Patty, do you remember Anna? She’s a friend of Devin’s. Anna, this is my wife, Patty.” He patted her protruding stomach and smiled. “And our little girl.”

The woman smiled brightly at her. “Of course. Anna. From the...CFO event, right? How are you?”

“Fine, thank you,” Anna responded quietly.

“You are a friend of Devin’s?” Kurt asked.

“I wouldn’t be where I am today without him,” Zach answered with that politician’s smile of his. “You know him?”

“I do,” Kurt said stiffly. “And that is how you met Anna?”

Zach smiled. “It is. About...three years ago, I believe. We lived in the same apartment building as well.”

Kurt’s jaw clenched. “I see. Well, if you will excuse us....” Kurt steered Anna away from the couple and back towards Wilhelm. “He hurt you, *ja*?” he asked quietly.

Anna nodded. “He’s very cruel.”

“Anyone can see that if they look at him,” he growled. “I remember Alex mentioning his name. I cannot believe he is in political office.”

“Devin said he was grooming him for several years.”

Kurt rolled his eyes. “No wonder your country is the mess that it is. If that is the type of man Devin thinks should be running the country....”

They returned to Wilhelm and the three of them made their way into the theater. Anna couldn’t hide her smile as they passed by the doors Kurt had pulled her through the last time. She glanced up at Kurt, who watched her with sparkling eyes. He leaned down and kissed her and then caught up with Wilhelm. Wilhelm glanced back and gave an approving nod to his son.

Yes, Anna thought to herself, Kurt has definitely changed.

Their seats were in a box slightly to the right of center stage. Anna suppressed a whimper when she saw Zach and his wife sitting in the box next to their own. Kurt kissed her cheek and took the seat closer to Zach, shielding her from Zach’s view.

Kurt put his arm protectively around Anna’s shoulders and kissed her temple. She sighed contentedly and leaned against him, ready to enjoy a pleasant evening. Kurt wouldn’t let anything happen to her.

“Anna, do you want to come back to the hotel with us...with me?” Kurt asked softly as they waited outside for their limo.

Anna looked up into his eyes and smiled. “Yes,” she whispered.

A grin spread across Kurt’s face. “*Gut.*”

Chapter Five

“You two go on up to the room,” Wilhelm said as they walked into the hotel lobby. “I think I will have a drink at the bar.”

“Wilhelm...,” Anna began, but he shook his head.

“*Nein, Liebling*, you go with Kurt,” he said gently.

She nodded slowly and then allowed Kurt to lead her to the elevators. Her heart pounded nervously as they rode upstairs and walked into the suite.

“Did you want something to drink, *Engel*?” Kurt asked softly, closing the door behind them.

Anna shook her head. Why was she nervous? She’d slept with hundreds of men. Why was he different?

Because he is different. He’s not “other men.” He’s Kurt.

Kurt took her hand and led her through the hotel suite to an adjacent bedroom. He closed the door softly behind him and gave her a tender look.

“Anna, I do not want you to feel obligated to do anything.”

“I...don’t feel obligated, Kurt. I want to.” She took a deep breath. “I want to be with you.”

Kurt grinned and stepped forward to take her into his arms and kiss her soundly.

He stood at the window again, hair pulled back into a low ponytail. The breeze that snuck through the open window caught a few strands of loose hair caught in his neatly trimmed golden beard. He wore his blue denim

shirt untucked from his jeans. The shirtsleeves were rolled up to his elbows, showing the muscles in his forearms tightening and loosening as he grasped the windowsill with his big hands.

He sighed and ran his right hand through his hair. A ring on his finger caught the sunlight as he did so and the golden reflection made her blink. He mumbled to himself and turned away from the window. He froze when he saw her.

“Schatzi?” His eyes glistened with tears as he stepped toward her. “Anna....” He stopped a few feet away from her, clenching and unclenching his fists as if uncertain of what to do.

She stared at him, knowing he wasn’t real, but wishing with all her heart that he was. “Why did you leave me?” she whispered as tears spilled down her cheeks. “Why did you abandon me to him?”

“I’m so sorry, mein Schatzi. I didn’t mean to. I had no idea...it was a trap.” His eyes grew earnest and he spoke quickly, as if he only had a limited time to speak. “Anna, I’m real. I’m still here. I will return to you. Please, tell my father I’m here.”

“No!” she yelled suddenly, pushing away the ache in her heart. “No! You’re dead! You abandoned me!” She shook her head and searched desperately for a way out.

“Anna....” His voice echoed in her ears.

She felt a brush against her shoulder and the vision faded.

“No!” she screamed and sat up in bed. Her chest heaved as she gasped for breath. Where am I?

“Anna. *Engel*.” Warm arms wrapped around her and held her as she began to sob.

She shook her head. “I don’t want to dream about him!” she cried, pounding her fists on her legs.

The arms tightened around her. “Shh, it is okay, Anna.” He rocked her and held her head. “It is okay, Anna. Everything will be all right.”

“What happened? Is she all right?”

Anna heard footsteps and then the mattress moved next to her. She felt a hand on hers.

“She was talking in her sleep and then she yelled and woke up. It...sounded like she was dreaming about Alex.”

Anna’s sobs quieted and the room became quiet.

“Alex? Anna did you dream about Alex?”

She nodded. “I don’t want to dream about him,” she sobbed. “I don’t want to remember him.”

“What was your dream about?”

She shook her head. “I don’t want to remember.”

“Please tell me, *Liebling*. I want to know.”

Anna began to tell him about the room and the man she saw. She didn’t want to say his name. “He said it was...a trap. That he was real and that he would return to me.” She started to cry again. “Why do I have such horrible dreams?” Alex would never return to her. Why did her mind play such tricks on her?

“Have you dreamed of him before?”

She nodded. “I always sleep with the TV on so the dreams stay away.”

“Did he say anything else, *Liebling*? ”

Anna swallowed. “He said to tell you that he was there.” She shook her head. “I don’t know why I keep dreaming about him. I hate him.”

There was a long silence and then she was gently pulled back down to the bed. “Go back to sleep, *Engel*. I will turn the TV on.”

She heard the sounds of late night TV and drifted off to dreamless sleep.

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Chapter Six

Anna woke to an empty bed the next morning. A white hotel robe lay across the foot of the bed, and she put it on before wandering out to the living room. Kurt and Wilhelm sat on the couch, talking quietly and drinking coffee. A plate of fruit and pastries sat on the coffee table in front of them.

“*Guten Morgen, Engel,*” Kurt said with a warm smile.

“Hi,” she said shyly.

Kurt held out his hand and she sat between him and Wilhelm on the couch, curled up against Kurt’s chest. She felt content and happy. Kurt had made her feel so good and loved the previous night. He was still an incredible lover.

“Anna, how would you like to come to Germany for a couple of weeks?” Wilhelm asked.

Anna blinked. She’d told herself she never wanted to go back there. Now...she wasn’t so sure. After all, Kurt would have to be going back soon. He couldn’t leave his kids for long.

“I...don’t know,” she answered honestly.

“I would love it if you came home with us,” Kurt said, nuzzling her ear. She smiled shyly. “Maybe....”

Kurt kissed her behind the ear and she sighed. Oh, what would it be like to be with him all the time? He put his hand on her hip and massaged the area just above her hipbone that he had discovered was sensitive last night.

She giggled. “Are you trying to seduce me into saying yes?”

Both men chuckled. “Is it working?” Kurt asked in a low, seductive voice.

“Maybe,” she admitted and moaned as his hand moved down to her thigh and under her robe. His fingers trailed up her inner thigh and brushed against her outer pussy lips.

Her eyes closed as his fingers found her clit and slowly circled it, making her moan and squirm. She half opened her eyes to see Wilhelm watching Kurt’s hand intently. He glanced up to see her looking at him and cleared his throat.

“I should leave you two alone...,” he said, standing, but Anna grabbed his hand.

“Why?” she asked

“Anna, it is not right for me to be lustng after you when...you and Kurt are getting along so well.”

Anna jumped as Kurt tugged at her clit ring. She moaned softly and pulled Wilhelm’s hand and he sat back down on the couch. She brought Wilhelm’s palm to her lips and kissed it while she loosened her robe, then moved his hand lower to her breast. Wilhelm looked at his hand for a long moment while Kurt continued circling her clit and kissing her neck. She arched her back slightly and Wilhelm responded by caressing her breast gently and leaning forward to kiss her. Kurt pulled her robe off her shoulders and tossed it on the ground. Wilhelm bent down to take her nipple into his mouth.

“Ah!” she exclaimed as Kurt circled faster and faster. She arched her back and cried out as she spiraled up into her orgasm, flexing her hips against Kurt’s hand.

Anna slumped back against Kurt and panted as both men caressed her body. She tugged at Wilhelm’s sweater and he took it off while she turned to pull off Kurt’s t-shirt. She moved to her knees on the floor and pulled

Kurt's sweat pants off and then did the same to Wilhelm so they were both gloriously naked in front of her.

She looked between the two hard cocks in front of her and then took hold of both of them, one in each hand. Both men groaned and she smiled. She leaned forward to suck on Wilhelm while she stroked Kurt, and then switched. Back and forth she went, enjoying herself immensely.

Suddenly, Wilhelm pulled her up into his lap and had her straddle him. Kurt moved behind her and pulled her up on her knees and pressed into her lower back so she would arch her back. Her eyes widened as he gently pushed into her pussy while Wilhelm held her face and kissed her deeply. She moaned against Wilhelm's mouth as Kurt thrust in and out gently several times and then pulled out.

He rubbed himself against her asshole and pushed forward slowly. She pulled her mouth away from Wilhelm and dropped her forehead to his shoulder, groaning loudly as Kurt pressed his huge cock into her ass.

She stroked Wilhelm as Kurt fucked her slowly and then put his hands on her hips to bring her up so she could impale herself on Wilhelm.

Her back arched and she cried out in ecstasy as her body was filled with the two men she loved. They moved together in an erotic rhythm and the room was filled with the sounds of their lovemaking.

Anna could hardly breathe for the pleasure surging through her body. She kissed Wilhelm and then turned to kiss Kurt. God, she was so full! They were both well-endowed and she was amazed that they fit inside her.

The rhythm intensified and their movements quickened. Anna felt her body tingling and tightening and then threw her head back and screamed out as an incredible orgasm wracked her entire body. Wave upon wave of pleasure rolled along her nerves. Vaguely she heard both men groan and shout as they, too, found their release.

She panted and rested her head on Wilhelm's shoulder as he stroked her back. Kurt kissed the back of her neck and then slowly pulled out. He sat heavily on the couch next to Wilhelm and Anna leaned over and kissed him.

"I cannot say I was expecting that," Wilhelm said with a chuckle as he lifted Anna off his lap. She lay on her back with her head in Kurt's lap and her hips on Wilhelm's.

Anna grinned up at both of them. "I liked it."

Kurt brushed her hair back from her forehead and kissed her, but didn't say anything. Anna looked up at him and he smiled back, but his eyes were troubled.

"I will be right back," he said, gently scooting out from under Anna. He grabbed his clothes and walked back towards his bedroom.

Anna watched him leave and then looked at Wilhelm. "Is he okay?"

Wilhelm looked thoughtful. "I am not sure." He shook his head. "I am sure he is fine." He handed Anna her robe and then dressed himself.

When Kurt didn't return after ten minutes, Anna glanced at Wilhelm. "Should I go check on him?"

He looked like he was going to say something, but closed his mouth and nodded. Anna got up and quickly walked to the bedroom. Kurt sat on the bed with his head in his hands.

"Kurt?" she asked softly. He didn't look up. She went and knelt in front of him. "Kurt? Are you okay?"

He looked up at her with mournful eyes. "Anna, I did not...want that to happen. I wanted you to know I was different now. That I...." He sighed. "I do not want to share you, Anna. With my father. With anyone."

She cupped his cheek. "I know you've changed, Kurt. It's very evident that you are a different person now."

He sighed. "Really?"

Anna nodded. "Yes. I noticed it when I first saw you yesterday. I.... You didn't pressure me into what just happened. I...wanted it. I love your father."

Kurt frowned. "Oh." He looked at the ground. A myriad of emotions passed over his face and he shook his head. "I did not want that to happen, Anna. At least, my head and my heart did not. Obviously another part of me wanted it." He paused. "I cannot share you, Anna. I had a marriage like that, and it failed miserably. She wanted Vati and Alex more than she wanted me." He gave her a mournful look. "Do you want me? Or Vati?"

"I love both of you. I suppose in different ways, though." Anna twisted her fingers around each other. "I wouldn't want you to share me with your father if you didn't want to. You have been so kind and sweet to me, Kurt. I...haven't felt loved like that in a very long time."

Kurt didn't respond.

"I...can't be in a monogamous relationship, Kurt. You know that. Devin has me. Devin owns me. He makes me sleep with other men."

"What if I took you away from him? We could go to Germany and get married and then you could stay with me."

"You'd want to marry me?"

Kurt nodded. "I have been waiting for you to get better. Vati suggested it a while ago, but...you were unwell."

"Devin won't approve."

"He does not have to know. Our jet is here. We could leave without him finding out. We could stop on the way to Frankfurt in one of the countries without a waiting period and get married. Then it would be too late."

"Don't the Elders have to approve my marriage to someone?"

"They will. Vati has spoken to them about it. You are not safe when you are with Devin, and he is becoming far too powerful while he has you."

Kurt went to his knees. “I would protect you, Anna. I do not go on missions. I would make sure that no harm came to you.”

What Kurt said was tempting. She was scared to death of Devin. He had new ways to torture her and she didn’t like being around him. And she really did like Kurt. A lot. Maybe she even loved him, though she was afraid to think about it. Being in love frightened her. But he loved her. This she knew.

Anna slowly nodded. “Okay,” she gave him a timid smile.

“Okay? As in you will marry me?”

Anna nodded again and Kurt grabbed her and hugged her hard. “*Oh, mein Engel.* You have made me so happy. *Kommen Sie,* we will go tell Vati.”

Wilhelm was thrilled with the news. “You cannot tell anyone, though. Until we are in the air, Devin can still stop us. We will leave tomorrow after your birthday dinner.”

Kurt kissed Anna soundly. “And Vati, I am not sharing her anymore. She is mine.”

Wilhelm chuckled. “Agreed.”

Chapter Seven

Hope filled Anna's heart for the first time in so long. Part of her disbelieved that she really could be happy again, but when she looked at Kurt, the smile that formed on her face was firm evidence of the long-forgotten emotion.

She put on the new pink silk dress Kurt had bought her for her birthday and looked at herself in the mirror. Yes, she was definitely older now. Today was her twenty-third birthday.

Twenty-three would be a good year. She would marry Kurt and stay in Germany for a while. Or forever, maybe. Yes, she would miss dancing, but if giving it up meant being away from Devin, then she would do so happily. Besides, there were dance companies in Germany...just not in Frankfurt.

Kurt walked into the bathroom, looking very handsome in his dark suit, and wrapped his arms around her waist. He kissed her cheek. "Are you about ready to go?"

Anna nodded. They would go to the dinner as planned, but instead of coming back to the hotel, they would go straight to the airport. Wilhelm wouldn't even check out of the hotel first. He would do it once they were back in Germany and have their things shipped home. He was doing everything possible to keep Devin from finding out they were leaving. He wouldn't even allow them to talk about it when they were outside the hotel room.

They arrived at the restaurant and Anna was immediately grabbed and hugged by Jenna. And then Aaron. And then Travis. And a whole host of other dancers whom she'd become friends with before Alex had died.

Anna saw something on Jenna's finger. "You got married?" she asked incredulously.

Jenna smiled apologetically. "I wish you could have been there. But...you weren't well. Dad said he tried to talk to you, but...." She shrugged. "We can watch the video."

"When did it happen?"

She glanced back at Matt. "Nine months ago? September?" Matt nodded and grinned.

Anna hugged her friend. "I'm so happy for you, Jenna. I really am."

They were seated at a large round table. Kurt sat on one side of her and Jenna the other. Jenna made a big deal about it being Anna's birthday. Anna blushed and buried her face in Kurt's shoulder.

"What's going on with you and Kurt?" Jenna asked softly after the drinks had been delivered. She raised her eyebrow at Kurt's arm draped across Anna's shoulder.

Anna shrugged, then blushed. "We just...I don't know. I saw him on Friday and...it just clicked."

"Isn't he still married?"

"No. His divorce was finalized several months ago." She smiled. "He's...different now. Settled. And he's so attentive."

Jenna giggled. "Yeah, that's obvious. But if he hurts you...." She narrowed her eyes.

"He won't. If you spend time with him, you'll see."

Jenna leaned forward and studied him for a moment. "Well, he's definitely not flirting like he used to."

"I told you."

Anna had a wonderful time with her friends. Aaron told her to hurry up and get back dancing so they could dance together.

It really felt like a celebration. Her first birthday celebration in many, many years. Since Jack started training her. She couldn't imagine a more wonderful day.

Jenna took her phone number and promised to call in the next few days so they could catch up. Anna agreed, even though she knew that she would be gone. But she had to play along. No one could know they were leaving.

After dinner was done, she was thoroughly embarrassed by the servers at the restaurant singing happy birthday to her. A little while later, she said goodbye to her friends and Wilhelm, Kurt and Anna got into the limo to head to the airport.

Anna leaned against Kurt and watched the lights of the city fly past the windows. Wilhelm seemed tense.

“What is wrong, Vati?” Kurt asked.

“Just...concerned. Devin’s contacts are wide and varied. He knows everything that goes on in the city. I will be much more at ease once we are in the air.”

It was late and Anna was drifting to sleep when she heard Wilhelm curse and Kurt sat up straight.

“What’s wrong?” Anna asked.

Wilhelm didn’t get agitated easily. She looked out the window and saw a black car parked by the Kunze family’s huge jet. Leaning against the back of the car with his arms crossed, was Devin.

“Wilhelm?” she asked with a shaky voice.

Wilhelm took a deep breath and set his jaw. “The jet is ready to go. We will board and fly away, just as we planned.”

The driver opened their door and Wilhelm got out first, followed by Kurt and Anna. Kurt held Anna's hand tightly and kept her a good distance from Devin.

The tarmac was wet from the rain earlier in the evening. The orange overhead lights reflected on the dark, wet ground, giving the area a spooky look. Devin's face was lit, though his beard cut strange lines across his face.

"What are you doing, Wilhelm?" Devin asked lightly. He hadn't moved, though his dark eyes were very alert. He was dressed in black from head to toe, which made him look more sinister than usual.

"Going home. I believe I have a right to do that without asking your permission." Wilhelm stood a few feet away from him, standing tall and confident. He exuded the power and authority of an Elder. He was a much larger man than Devin. Taller by several inches and broader by the same. The two of them facing off made her think of two opposing ancient gods.

"Of course. You are always welcome to leave my country. However, I do take issue with you taking my slave."

"I have a right for her to visit me. She is as much mine as she is yours."

"Ah, but you're taking her without asking me. Or even checking out of your hotel. It makes me wonder what you are trying to do." Devin turned and looked at Kurt and Anna. He arched his brow at their intertwined fingers. "Perhaps you have plans for her and your son?"

Wilhelm didn't answer.

"I'm surprised you didn't get her a big fancy ring like your brother did, Kurt. Don't you have access to the same bank accounts?"

Kurt growled and stepped forward, but Wilhelm held up his hand. "They are in love, Devin. I see no problem in their dating."

"Dating? Or engagement? You think to marry her off to your other son so he can protect her from me?" Devin smirked. "It won't work. Kurt isn't

her soulmate. He can't protect her like Alex could.”

“Then why do you care if they marry?”

Devin's jaw clenched. “Because you're taking my property,” he said after a pause.

“She is not property, Devin. She is a woman.”

“She's a slave. My slave. I have a very particular purpose for her and I won't let you take her from me.”

“Your purpose for her is barbaric and forbidden.”

“For you, maybe. I was made Chairman by the Elders of my country and the Immortals. I didn't stage a coup.”

“Not blatantly.”

Devin laughed. “It's not my fault that the Elders of this country are weak and willing to follow rather than lead. I just took advantage of the situation.”

“A situation of your own making.”

Devin shrugged. “Advantages must be seized or lost. I always choose to seize them.”

“Yes, we are quite aware of your propensity to seize opportunities.”

Devin sighed, as though weary of the conversation. “I won't allow you to take Anna. It's as simple as that.”

Wilhelm raised his eyebrows. “Well then, consider this. I *am* taking Anna. She is mine as well. You bribed her into leaving my home two years ago and kept her incoherent during that entire time. I am entitled to some time with her without you watching everything we do.”

Devin chuckled. “It *is* interesting watching you when you come out to visit. I particularly enjoyed watching your little threesome yesterday. Anna does seem to like her big cocks.”

Wilhelm frowned at Devin. “You stretch your hand beyond where it should be, Devin. What I do in the privacy of my hotel room is not for your entertainment.”

“Oh, but where Anna is concerned, everything is within my reach.”

Wilhelm turned and looked at Kurt. “Get Anna on the plane,” he said in a quiet voice. “We are leaving.”

Kurt nodded and led Anna towards the plane, with Wilhelm following behind. Anna watched Devin nervously, but was eager to escape and held Kurt’s hand tightly.

“Stop!” Devin commanded in a loud tone. The three of them froze mid-step. Something in his tone was positively terrifying and made Anna want to fall to her knees in fear.

Like something out of a nightmare, the night seemed to grow darker. The orange lights dimmed and everything faded except Devin, who seemed to grow larger. His eyes flashed with angry fire.

“You will not take Anna from me,” he said in a deep, commanding tone.

Wilhelm turned back to him and started to say something, but in a flash Devin was in front of him with his hand around his neck. Anna rubbed her eyes because Devin seemed...bigger than Wilhelm, even though she knew that wasn’t possible.

Anna saw Devin’s fingers squeezing into Wilhelm’s neck. “No! Devin, no!” she screamed and ran up to him to pull at his arm.

Devin pushed her away and she fell to the ground. Devin’s evil eyes bored into Wilhelm’s. “You will not take Anna from me,” he said in a raspy, evil-tinged voice. “You will get on your plane, both you and your son, and you will leave this country. I forbid you and any member of your family to have any sort of contact with her. I forbid you from ever stepping foot in

this country again. You and every member of your family. No one is welcome here. Leave and never come back.”

Devin released Wilhelm’s neck and, to Anna’s horror, Wilhelm and Kurt both turned and walked to the jet without saying another word. They climbed the steps and disappeared without a single glance back. Devin waved his hand and the door to the jet closed and the engines started.

“No!” she screamed as the jet taxied away.

She ran after it, but it picked up speed and disappeared into the night. She fell to the ground, scraping her knees and burying her face in her hands.

“No,” she sobbed. They were gone. They’d left without her. Her beloved Kurt and Wilhelm.

She heard footsteps behind her and looked back to see Ian walking towards her. She stood to run, but he was too fast. He picked her up unceremoniously and carried her back to Devin.

“I hate you!” she screamed and pounded on Devin’s chest.

He calmly grabbed her wrists and twisted her arms until she fell to her knees and cried out in pain.

“There. That’s how you belong. On your knees in front of me.” He looked at Ian. “Put her in the car.”

Ian picked her up and put her in the back seat. Devin got in next to her. “I believe you need another attitude adjustment.” Ian got in the driver’s seat. “The Manor please, Ian.”

Chapter Eight

Anna lay on her bed in the Manor in agony. Everything hurt. Even her toes hurt. Devin had done everything possible to hurt her, including using the “nerve juice” as he called it. When the first dose had worn off, he’d given her a second one.

The sad thing was she’d slept and was feeling better than she had been before she went to sleep. The idea of suicide flitted around her mind again, but the likelihood of it working was slim.

She was condemned to life. Would she ever die? She was only half-Immortal. What did that mean? How long would she live this hell?

The door opened and Devin walked in. He stood above her for a moment, looking down on her with his hands on his hips, then went to sit down in the chair by the window. Anna didn’t move. Her hatred of him rose inside her chest with a vengeance. But then faded just as quickly. He had a new way to hurt her and she was terrified of feeling that pain again.

Devin cleared his throat and Anna slowly sat up and looked at him.

“Yes, Master?” she asked in a hoarse voice. She’d lost her voice from screaming in the dungeon and it hadn’t returned yet.

He pointed to the floor in front of him. She crawled out of bed and stumbled across the floor to collapse on her heels in front of him.

“This is no longer a safe place, Anna. This is merely your room. You will call me Master at all times when you are in the Manor. When I enter the room, you will get on your knees like all the other girls. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Master,” she rasped.

“If I have to discipline you again, there will be three doses of the nerve juice.”

“Yes, Master.” She shuddered at the thought.

“We will try your ‘new life’ again. You will begin dancing again as soon as you are able. You will eat properly. You will dance well. You will take care of yourself. If you don’t, I will discipline you.”

“Why do you want me to dance?” she whined.

“Because if you don’t, you’re useless.”

Anna winced at his words. He was so harsh. He wasn’t even trying to be nice anymore. She supposed without the threat of Wilhelm, there was no need to be nice anymore.

He leaned forward and removed her necklace. He’d given her a new one when she moved out of the Manor. One without black diamonds. “I have half a mind to give you a ruby to wear. Act up again and I will.”

“Yes, Master.”

He produced a solid gold bracelet and put it on her wrist. “This is locked. You may not remove it.” It was thick and heavy and fitted to her wrist.

“Yes, Master.”

“And, finally, Ian will take you to your new apartment when you’re ready to leave. I don’t want to pay the ridiculous rent I was paying in that other place. This one is much cheaper and closer to the studio, so I can get rid of your car as well. I will pay your rent. You have money in your bank account that you can use to pay for everything else. I removed your credit cards from your wallet. You only need money for food and dance clothes. If I decide I want to take you anywhere I will have Ian take you shopping.”

“Yes, Master.”

“Ian will pick you up on Fridays to bring you here.” Devin grinned. “Zach told me he saw you on Friday. He’s looking forward to spending time with you again.”

Anna’s heart dropped into her stomach. How could she have imagined a life that didn’t begin and end with pain and heartache? “Yes, Master.”

He stood. “I believe that is all. Let Ian know when you’re ready to leave. Maggie will bring some clothes in for you to wear home.” He stepped around Anna and walked out the door.

Anna slumped forward and buried her face in her hands.

Thursday evening, Anna walked to ballet class from her new apartment. It was a tiny studio, but it really was all she needed. It had a kitchen, a bathroom and a closet. She had her TV to keep her dreams away, her mattress to sleep on, her coffee table and couch. If Wilhelm thought her previous place was hideous, she would hate to think what he thought of this place.

But she would never see him again. Devin made sure of that. Ian told her that they would never dare come back as long as Devin’s permission had been revoked. Devin could destroy them with a word.

“How did he get so powerful?” she had asked Ian as they drove to her new apartment.

Ian looked at her sadly. “The spring rituals, Anna. He uses you and takes your power for his own.”

That depressed Anna. She’d caused her own demise. If only she’d fought him harder...well, thinking about that right now wouldn’t do any

good. Right now she just needed to concentrate on making him happy. To keep from being “disciplined” again.

It was a fifteen minute walk from her apartment to the studio. Not bad on a nice night. She was thankful tonight was a nice night.

As she came around the corner, she saw someone standing near the studio door.

“Aaron?” she exclaimed as she got closer and his face became clear in the dim light.

“Anna! I’ve been worried about you!” he exclaimed, grabbing her and embracing her hard. “I’ve been calling you and waiting out here for you every night this week.”

“I must have forgotten to turn my phone back on.” She’d turned it off after they’d left the restaurant and hadn’t thought about it since.

“I even went by your apartment today, but no one answered.”

“How do you know where my apartment is?” She’d just moved in yesterday. “I didn’t hear anyone knock and I was there all day.”

“I...someone told me,” Aaron answered vaguely.

“Someone?”

Aaron gave her a strange look. “Yes. Someone.”

Anna was confused. Who would have told him where she lived? “I didn’t hear you knock.”

“You’re in apartment 760, right? In SoMo?”

Anna shook her head. “I was, but I don’t live in that place anymore. Devin moved me...closer to here.”

“You only lived there a few weeks.”

“He didn’t want to keep paying that amount of rent.” She shrugged. “I have a little studio on O’Farrell. It’s fine.”

“Fine?” Aaron looked outraged. “Anna, you’re a frickin’ duchess. You shouldn’t be living in a tiny studio apartment. You should at least be in a decent apartment. I can help—”

“I’m fine, Aaron,” Anna snapped. “And I’m not a duchess. Not anymore. Alex is dead, Wilhelm and his family are forbidden to come here. I am alone. The only thing I need to do is keep Devin happy. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have to get to class.” She pushed him aside and went inside the building.

“You’re not alone, Anna,” Aaron called after her as she walked away, but he didn’t follow her.

Yeah, right.

She huffed as she went into the studio and sat down on the floor to change shoes. It was better if she just kept to herself. Her only purpose in life was to keep Devin happy. Anything else would just get in the way and cause her more pain.

Within a few more weeks, Anna had proven herself strong enough to start back on *pointe*. She worked with the summer students for a few weeks and then was put in the Company Corps. She knew many of the girls and a few of the guys, but she kept to herself. Jenna had recently been promoted to Soloist, so she wasn’t in classes with her.

Anna figured that her friends didn’t know she had joined for at least a week, because she wasn’t bothered. But Aaron spotted her coming out of the studio after class on the second Tuesday she was there and ran up to her.

“Anna!” he hugged her.

A few of the Corps dancers mumbled around her. Anna was getting a reputation of being a cold, icy bitch, which was fine with her. Anna suspected that some of her fellow dancers thought that, because she'd been a Principal before, she was unfriendly because she was a snob and was too good for the Corps. This, of course, was untrue, because she just didn't want to be there in the first place. It didn't matter what part of the Company she was in. She danced to the best of her abilities because if she didn't, Devin would find out and punish her.

So when she pushed Aaron aside and walked past him without responding, the dancers were surprised.

"Maybe she's just a bitch," one girl muttered.

Aaron turned and stared at the girl. "You have no idea what Anna has been through in her life. Don't you dare judge her!" He turned around and jogged to catch up with Anna.

Anna turned and saw him coming after her and ran quickly into the bathroom. She poked her head out ten minutes later and was relieved to not see him in the hallway.

When she returned to the studio for the morning rehearsals for *Petrushka*, she noticed a couple of the girls trying to be friendly and chat with her. Anna glared at them and walked away.

Unfortunately, Aaron caught her at lunch and held her arm to make her go with him. *Fine*, she thought as he led her out the door. She'd just make him regret he took her.

She refused to admit to herself that she was lonely.

Aaron took her to a deli down the street and tried to buy her lunch.

"I can buy my own lunch," she snapped. Now that she was in the Company again, she would be getting a regular paycheck. Not a very large one, but enough to keep herself fed.

Aaron protested, but Anna glared at him and stood stubbornly with her arms crossed until he walked away. She ordered her lunch and then walked to sit with him at a table near the window.

“What do you want?” she asked before taking a bite of her salad.

“I’m glad you’re eating,” Aaron said, ignoring her sharp tone.

“I have to eat,” she retorted. “I have to take care of myself and dance well. Other than that, I don’t have to do anything.”

Aaron raised his eyebrows. “Is that what Devin told you?”

Anna nodded. “Pleasing him is my purpose in life. Anything else will just get in the way. Especially people.”

He looked sadly at her. “I miss the old Anna.”

She shrugged and took a sip of her ice tea. “The old Anna was stupid and naïve and...just dumb.”

The old Anna had fallen in love with a monster. The more time passed, the more she hated Alex. For lying to her. For making her believe that life could be worth living. If he hadn’t interfered with that ritual...well, none of this would have happened. She would have been blissfully ignorant of many things in life.

“I don’t think she was stupid. God, Anna, I’d never seen a happier woman than when you and Alex were together. You glowed.”

“I was pregnant. Pregnant women do that. And...well, Alex wasn’t who he said he was.” He was a monster who liked little girls.

Aaron gave her a confused look. “I thought you knew about what he did.”

“You knew? How could you still be friends with him?”

“Anna, I found out...after he died. But, I don’t think any less of him. It sure explains all his mystery trips.”

“Yeah, it’s not exactly something you advertise,” she grumbled.

“I imagine it would be dangerous if it was general knowledge.”

“Dangerous? Why would it be dangerous?”

Aaron looked bewildered. “Well, I don’t know...like you said, it’s not something you want to advertise. But, I mean, considering all that the Brotherhood does, I don’t see why it’s a big deal. Aside from the whole killing thing, it’s actually kinda cool.”

“He killed them?” she squeaked. The little girls hadn’t looked like they died, but maybe they died later.

“That was his job, Anna. Or part of it anyways. He wouldn’t be a very good assassin if he didn’t.”

His job? Assassin? “What are you talking about, Aaron?”

“You’re upset because of his...well, the reason for his black diamonds, right?”

Anna shook her head. “No. I knew about that before he asked me to marry him. I’m upset because I didn’t know he had a penchant for hurting little girls. He lied and pretended that he was—”

“Anna, what on earth gave you that idea about him?” Aaron’s eyes were wide. “He would never do anything like that.”

“Yes, he would,” she said, angry tears filling her eyes. “I saw it.”

“You saw him hurting someone?”

She nodded and stabbed at her salad.

“Anna, he’s been gone for over two years—”

“I saw a video. Devin showed me.”

“A video?” Aaron stared at her. “Oh, God. Anna...was it...were there three girls? And Alex was...?”

Anna nodded. “You knew?”

“Anna, that video...it’s not real. Or, at least...God, Devin showed that to you?”

“It is real. He laughed when they screamed.”

Aaron shook his head. “No. Anna, no. It’s not. Yes, he told me.” He sighed. “Do you remember when we were dating? And that afternoon when that pain started. That excruciating pain?”

She nodded. “How could I forget?” Especially now that she’d had the real thing?

“Hon, Devin drugged him and made him do those horrible things. Then Devin tortured him and that’s when you started hurting. Anna, he was drugged. I know. We talked about it afterward.”

Anna shook her head again. “No, even drugged Alex wouldn’t....”

But Alex had done bad things another time when he was drugged. When he raped her after a trip. That’s when he told her he was going back to Frankfurt. Maybe the video wasn’t true? Maybe Devin had been just trying to hurt her. He liked to hurt her and didn’t hide it anymore.

“Alex was the man you loved, Anna. He was exactly the man he appeared to be.”

Anna angrily brushed her tears away and looked out the window. “Well, it doesn’t matter now. He’s dead. He left me alone and now all I have is Devin.”

“He didn’t get killed on purpose, Anna. You know that.”

“He promised me he would come home. That he would come back to me.” She shook her head. “He lied.”

“Anna, give yourself time to grieve. He loved you more than anything in the world.”

“And a lot of good that did. I wish I’d never met him. I would have been better off if he’d never saved me.”

“That’s not true, Anna and you know it.”

Anna glared at Aaron. “When you have lived my life, then you can tell me what’s true or not.” She stood, pushing back her chair so hard that it fell backwards. “Don’t talk to me again.”

She turned and stormed out of the deli and walked back to the studio where she went into the bathroom and wept. Knowing that the video wasn’t showing the truth didn’t help ease the pain. If anything, it made it worse.

If Alex really was the man she thought he was, then the loss was even greater. There was no hope. There was only Devin.

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Chapter Nine

The weekend before *Petrushka* opened, Devin took Anna to the Summer Gathering. She hadn't been there since Alex died, but Devin wanted her there this year since she was "awake."

"I don't want any of your attitude while we're here, Anna," Devin warned as they deplaned in Washington DC.

"Yes, Devin," she said quietly and followed Devin through the airport. Ian and Tyler had traveled with them, but Devin had left Maggie at home because he didn't want Anna to feel spoiled. She would attend to herself.

They arrived at the hotel a while later and Tyler took her to his room while Devin spoke with some of the Elders that had arrived already.

He pushed her into the bedroom. "Take your clothes off," he snapped.

Anna immediately began undressing while Tyler watched with a wicked grin that was so much like his father's. When she was naked, he turned her around and pushed her onto the bed.

"On your knees," he said, slapping her ass.

She obeyed and expected him to take her from behind. Instead he just looked at her. He pressed into her lower back and she arched her back.

"Much better."

Without warning, he smacked her between her legs.

Anna shrieked in surprise, but didn't dare move. He hit her again and again until tears were running down her cheeks. Her pussy felt raw and swollen.

Tyler laughed. "Tommy won't let me have fun with you, so I wanted to do it before he got here." He pinched her clit with his fingernails and she moaned in pain. "Hmm, what else can I have fun with?" he mumbled to

himself. Anna heard him walk out into the living room of their two-bedroom suite and returned a few minutes later.

She felt something cold against her asshole and pulled away instinctively. He punched her hip. “Don’t move.”

The cold moved inside her and she whimpered as it stretched her hole.

He laughed again. “I’m giving you a beer tail. You like a beer bottle being shoved up your ass?”

Anna didn’t answer his question, but cried out as he pressed forward. The neck was in and the bottle widened faster than her body could respond, but still he pressed forward. She tried to relax her muscles, but the cold made it impossible. She screamed as he hit the bottle, shoving it deeper inside. Her ass gave way and he pressed the bottle almost all the way in.

She cried as he twisted the bottle. It was too cold and too big.

“Aw, Anna. It’s all right. The blood’s helping it spin.”

She felt him press forward more and suddenly her muscles clamped shut and she had a terrible cramp in her stomach. She groaned and rolled onto her side.

“I didn’t say you could move,” Tyler snarled and moved her back to her hands and knees. He unzipped his pants and rammed his cock into her pussy.

Anna screamed as the bottle was pushed aside and moved as he fucked her hard. She gripped the comforter and buried her face in it. Every move made the pain worse. She sobbed, which made Tyler laugh.

Suddenly, her pussy was empty and she heard the sound of flesh hitting flesh. She rolled to her side to see Tommy pulling his arm back and then swung forward to hit Tyler in the face. Tyler cursed and lunged at Tommy, but Tommy was more agile and moved aside. Tyler fell forward and

somersaulted back to his feet. They glared at each other, fists clenched. Tommy was ready to swing again if Tyler moved.

“You fucking bastard!” Tyler shouted. “What the fuck did you do that for?”

“You were hurting her.”

“I always hurt her. That’s what she’s for, you idiot.”

“She’s an Elder-Mistress. She deserves your respect.”

Tyler laughed. “God, you sound like that fucking German husband of hers. She’s a fucking slave, Tommy. I can do whatever the hell I want to.”

Tommy swung again, but Tyler saw it coming this time and backed out of the way before his fist made contact. Tyler laughed and didn’t see the next swing coming. Tommy caught him on the temple and Tyler fell to the ground, clutching his head.

Tommy looked back at Anna curled up on the bed. He stepped forward to pick her up and carried her into the second bedroom. He placed her gently on the bed and she immediately curled into a ball again and moaned in pain.

He leaned forward to kiss her cheek. “Anna, what did he do to you?”

Anna’s cheeks burned with shame. “He...he shoved a beer bottle in my ass,” she whispered and shifted positions, trying to make the cramping go away.

Tommy’s jaw clenched but he didn’t say anything. He moved to look at her ass. “Holy shit. He pushed it all the way in?”

Anna nodded.

“God, I don’t know what to do.” Tommy looked around and then made a face. “Can you...push it out?”

“I don’t want to do that on your bed, Tommy,” she said in a strained voice. Even talking made it hurt.

“How about the bathtub? I could put you in a bath?”

Anna shrugged.

He stood and walked into the bathroom. Anna heard the water running and then there was a knock on the door.

“Tommy?” came a male voice.

Tommy walked to the door and opened it. His dad and Devin stood there with Tyler behind them.

Devin’s eyes narrowed when he saw Anna. “What the hell did you do, Anna?”

“She didn’t do anything. She was screaming when I came in.”

“Tommy,” his dad said softly. “Tyler can....”

“Tyler shoved a beer bottle up her ass.”

Tom’s eyes widened and he turned to Devin. “Even that can’t be okay, Devin.”

“Not here at a gathering, no.” Devin seemed to concede. He turned to Tyler and frowned at him. “I brought her for a reason, Tyler. Not for you to fuck her up the first hour we’re here.” Devin turned and pulled Tyler with him towards the door. “I’ll get in touch with Kaveh.” They left the room, leaving Tommy and Tom looking at Anna with sympathy.

“I was gonna put her in a bath,” Tommy said hesitantly.

Tom nodded. “I’m not sure what else to do.” He looked at Anna with sad eyes. “I’m so sorry, Anna,” he said with sincerity.

It surprised Anna that he would feel bad for her. After all, he was Devin’s best friend. Why would he care?

Tommy picked her up and carried her into the large bathtub.

An hour later, Anna was wrapped in a robe and lying in Tommy's bed feeling much better. She lay with her head on his chest and watched TV.

"I can't believe you hit Tyler," she said, looking up at him.

"He's changed so much since he got his piercing." Tommy shook his head. "He's so...I don't know. He's just not the same." He kissed her forehead. "I'm sorry he hurt you."

Anna grimaced. "It's okay. I wish I could say I got used to it, but I can't." She sighed. "I don't even heal as quickly as I used to. Devin's...punishments hurt for a lot longer now."

Tommy stroked her cheek. "I wish...." He shook his head and sighed. "I'm sorry, Anna," he said and kissed her. His hand slid around the back of her head and she turned her body to his.

She ran her hands across his shoulders and down his arms. He had matured in the last few years. He was now a grown man. His shoulders were broader; his arms were bigger. He played football and basketball at Harvard. He had turned into a kind, courteous, thoughtful man. He was going into his senior year of college and would graduate in May.

His kiss was gentle and full of affection. His lips caressed hers and then moved down to her neck and collarbone. She pulled at the tie of her robe.

"Anna, you're hurt," he said in a husky voice.

"Please, Tommy," she implored softly. "Make love to me. It'll be the last gentle touch I have for a while."

Tommy's blue eyes searched hers and then he bent down to kiss her again. "I never want to hurt you, Anna," he murmured against her lips.

"I know," she smiled and wrapped her arms around his neck.

Later, when they were laying together, immersed in post-coital bliss, the door opened and Tyler walked in.

Tommy sat up and covered Anna to her neck with the sheet. “You could’ve knocked, dude.”

Tyler raised his eyebrows at Tommy. “You gonna tell Kim about your mistress?”

Tommy went pale and Anna’s heart pounded. Who was Kim?

“Not cool, Tyler,” Tommy growled.

“Oh, c’mon, Tommy. Anna would have to be an idiot to not know you’ve got a girlfriend by now.” Tyler turned his smirk on Anna. “Or did you think because he defended you, he still wanted to be with you?”

A shame-filled chill ran through Anna’s body. Of course Tommy would have a girlfriend. He had to get married once he finished college. This Kim was a lucky girl.

“Get the fuck out of here, Tyler,” Tommy snarled.

“My dad wants his slave back now. That’s what I came to tell you.”

Anna shakily crawled out of the bed. This was the end of the good part of the weekend. She walked out of the bedroom towards Tyler’s room where her clothes were.

“Anna...wait,” Tommy said, following her. “I’m sorry, Anna. I never meant to hurt you.”

Anna smiled as best she could and turned to Tommy. “It’s okay, Tommy. There’s nothing to be sorry for. I...should have realized you would be in a relationship by now. I’ve kinda been out of it for a while.” She turned and went to pick up her clothes and started dressing.

Tommy sat on the bed. “Anna, you were the first girl I fell in love with. God, if things were different....” He ran his hands through his scraggly hair.

She gave him a weak smile. "If things were different...a lot of things would be different." Her heart ached for Alex so suddenly she gasped and pressed her hand to her chest.

"You still miss him?" he asked quietly.

Anna closed her eyes. "Yes," she whispered. "So much I can hardly stand it sometimes."

Tommy stood and hugged Anna, holding her for a long time.

"Your girlfriend's a lucky girl, Tommy," she said, pulling away. "You're a good guy."

He looked down at her. "Maybe. Although she'll never have all of my heart." Tommy brushed Anna's cheek with the back of his fingers, then leaned down to kiss her again.

Anna reluctantly pulled away from him. "I have to go. Devin will be angry."

Tommy let her go. "Find me if you have any free time."

Anna nodded and followed Tyler to the hotel suite she would share with Devin tonight.

The Gathering was much like the others she remembered, though Devin no longer pretended to be nice to her. He treated her as a slave and passed her around to the cruelest of the men. The only nice thing he did was send her home with Ian on Sunday night rather than taking her to drop off Tommy and Tyler in Massachusetts. She was sad to say goodbye to Tommy without any more time with him, but knew it was for the best. He needed to get back to his girlfriend and she needed to get home to rehearsals.

After she returned from the Gathering, she distanced herself even more from those around her. She snapped at anyone who tried to talk to her. Before the first dress rehearsal in the theater, Isaak pulled her aside and told her she needed to fix her attitude.

“Or what? You’ll kick me out? Devin won’t allow it.”

Isaak sighed. “Anna, this isn’t you. You’re not an ice queen.”

“How do you know, Isaak? Maybe this is exactly who I am.” She stalked off and left him staring after her in the hallway.

Devin was at her apartment waiting for her when she got home that evening. He grabbed her around her throat and pushed her up against the wall.

“I don’t like having to come down here and talk to you about your attitude, Anna,” he said through clenched teeth.

She clawed against his grip and gasped for breath as he held her there. At long last, he released her and she fell to the floor. She grasped her neck and felt the tender skin where Devin had squeezed. She would have bruises in the morning.

“You told me you didn’t care what I did, as long as I took care of myself and danced well.”

“Well, your attitude caused Isaak to call me and ask if he could pull you from the Corps. I told him I would speak to you and that it wouldn’t be an issue any longer.” He pulled her to her feet by her hair. “So I’m talking to you,” he snarled. “Fix your attitude or we will have another attitude adjustment session.”

Anna burst into tears. Desperation made her bold enough to speak out. “I don't know what you want from me, Master. I'm trying to keep people away from me so they don't interfere with my devotion to you. If I'm nice to them, they start trying to be my friend. I just want to go there and dance and they won't leave me alone.”

Devin caged her chin and studied her eyes. She could feel him reading her thoughts.

“Fine. I will take care of things. For now, be polite and cold, but not rude. Opening night is this Friday, correct?”

“Yes, Master.” She paused. “Are you going to come?”

“I will be there. Did you get your dress?” He released her chin.

Anna nodded. Ian had taken her shopping a few weeks ago. The dress frightened her because Devin had insisted on a red dress for the evening. It was slinky, strapless and low cut with a high slit on her right leg.

“If you behave between now and then, I will help you out.” He didn't need to give the rest of the threat. She would behave.

“Now go clean up. I want to fuck you before I leave.”

Chapter Ten

Dress rehearsals ran all that week. The entire company had morning class together on the stage, which made it difficult to avoid her former friends. They didn't seem to understand she wanted nothing to do with them, so she just ignored them when they talked to her.

Friday morning, there was more buzz than normal. Anna figured it was just opening night jitters until she heard the girls gossiping about a new dancer.

“Omigod, did you see his ass?”

“Is he gay?”

“He’s Russian. He doesn’t have to be gay to be good.”

“And his eyes!”

Anna rolled her eyes and walked to the corner of the stage where she got ready for class. The girls were starting to get really annoying when Isaak clapped his hands for their attention.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to introduce you to our newest dancer, Peter Asimov. He will be hanging around for the performances the next two weeks so he can get to know you all and how the company works. He will, of course, be performing in the Nutcracker with us.” Isaak went on to list his impressive resume.

Anna looked up to see the girls watching the new dancer with bright eyes. As she finished tying her pointe shoe, she glanced at the new dancer.

And gasped.

Oh God, this had to be some sort of trick. Standing not ten feet away from her was Peter, grandson of Vitaly, who had taken Alex away from her.

His warm brown eyes lifted to meet hers and he smiled. He had grown a goatee since she saw him last and looked older, but it was definitely him. Devin hadn't told her he was a dancer. Not that he'd had a chance. *Fuck.*

Anna clenched her jaw, but didn't move otherwise. He was a future Elder and she had to be polite and accommodating to him. Maybe he wouldn't recognize her. She turned quickly away and got ready for the first warm-up. Thankfully, he went to stand next to Aaron and Stephanie and she didn't have to think about him anymore.

She was heading off the stage after class when she felt a hand on her elbow. She turned and looked directly into Peter's eyes.

"You're Anna, right?" he said with an accent, though not as thick as she would have expected. His voice was deep and, had he been anyone else and she been in a different life, would have made her knees turn to jelly. "I don't know if you remember me...."

"I remember you," she interrupted coldly, lifting her chin. "Why are you here?"

"I wanted to have a break from my family and have always heard wonderful things about the San Francisco Ballet Company. You were the first to bring Nutcracker to America, right?"

"You left the Kirov to dance here?" She arched her brow in disbelief. The Kirov was one of the best dance companies in the world.

Peter smiled a megawatt smile and shrugged. "I had an opportunity to come and dance here. I also heard there were very pretty ballerinas here." He looked her up and down. "They weren't lying."

“Yes, well, I’m sure you’ll have your pick,” she said in a dry voice. “They seem quite enthralled with you. Excuse me.” She turned and walked away. He wasn’t technically an Elder-Son yet...right?

Throughout rehearsal she felt Peter’s eyes on her. Why was he watching her? There were plenty of other girls that would be thrilled to have his attention. Had she not made herself clear?

When rehearsal was over, she saw him walking towards her and escaped to the Corps dressing rooms before he caught her. She changed and got out of the theater quickly, walking home in half the time it normally took her.

Anna walked back to the theater that afternoon carrying her dress and everything she needed to get ready for the after-party. She should have taken the bus.

She paused to catch her breath before she opened the door.

“Can I help you carry your things?” a deep voice behind her asked.

She whirled around to see Peter behind her. Some of the other corps dancers were walking up to the door and they looked at the two of them curiously.

“No,” she snapped and opened the door and walked away as quickly as possible.

To Anna’s relief, she didn’t see Peter the rest of the afternoon and evening. She stayed in the dressing room as much as possible, and kept to herself. The other girls gossiped about him and Anna tried not to listen.

There was a burst of laughter. “Yeah, maybe that’s why he thinks he likes her. She reminds him of his icy home.”

Anna had hidden herself in a corner, so no one saw her. She had a feeling they were talking about her, and she didn’t care. At least that’s what she told herself. She would not admit that she was lonely and missed her friends.

The show went very well. Standing ovations and all. Anna thought Aaron was spectacular as always. She didn’t realize how much she’d missed his dancing. Without thinking about it, she went up to him after the curtain fell and hugged him.

“Anna...,” he whispered as he held her.

She backed away suddenly, realizing what she’d done. Several of the other dancers stared. Without a word, she ran away and hid in the dressing room backstage. How could she have been so stupid? She needed to keep herself aloof. Apart from people. For their sake as well as her own. She needed to be wholeheartedly devoted to Devin and no one else.

She began to get ready and soon heard the other girls coming in. She was putting her dress on when the other girls began to enter the room. Anna looked in the mirror and hated how she looked. What would Devin do to her in a red dress?

“Damn, you clean up good,” Cindy, one of the dancers, commented.

Anna didn’t reply and made her way out to the lobby where the party was in full swing.

She felt awkward and self-conscious as she made her way through the crowd. She recognized many of the men, and didn’t like the smiles they gave her. Finally, she spotted Devin near one of the tables of food and walked over to him.

“Anna,” he said, kissing her cheek. “You danced well tonight.” He handed her a glass of wine.

“Thank you, Ma...Devin,” she corrected herself.

He pulled her close. “You look delicious in red, Baby,” he whispered in her ear. “I’ve noticed many of the men admiring you.”

Anna smiled nervously and looked at the floor. She hated to think about what they were thinking. Jack walked up to them a few minutes later.

“Look how pretty my little Anna is,” Jack said with a grin. “I think we should have put her in red sooner, Devin.”

Anna blinked back the tears of fear as they talked about her with subtle innuendoes at what the color meant.

Devin introduced her to several men, some who looked familiar. He even sent her off with a few of them to find a dark corner where they could push her up against the wall and fuck her ruthlessly. One even went in her ass and she dug her fingernails into her palms to keep from crying out. When he was finished, she walked slowly back to Devin and told him the man had been satisfied.

“Good girl,” he said with a smile.

She’d noticed a few of the dancers giving her strange looks when she was walking with the various men and saw them looking at her as she stood next to Devin. She flushed and stared at the floor as Devin put his hand on her hip and kiss the side of her head.

Why did it bother her what other people thought? She was Devin’s slave and that was that. But at the same time, she had to pretend she was respectable and she felt ashamed that she wasn’t. She had felt respectable when she’d been married to Alex, but those days were long gone.

“Ah, there you are Peter,” Devin said and Anna’s head snapped up. “Anna, you remember Peter, right?”

Peter smiled at her and moved his eyes over her entire body.

“Yes, Devin, I remember,” she said softly.

“We were reacquainted this morning, Devin,” Peter explained. “Anna’s been playing hard to get,” he added with a smile.

Anna looked between Peter and Devin. “You knew he was here?” Anna asked Devin.

“I invited him to come,” Devin grinned. “Anna, I’ve come to realize that you are much more...pleasant to be around if you are in some sort of relationship. Therefore,” he motioned to Peter. “I am providing you with a relationship. Peter knows me, knows what I want from you, and has agreed to ‘date’ you and provide you with companionship that I approve of.”

“Devin, you can’t—”

“I am perfectly serious, Anna,” Devin growled. “You will give the appearance that the two of you like each other and all that is involved when two people meet. He will become your boyfriend and eventually you will move in with him. He won’t interfere with any of my needs for you, but will give you some stability and, as I said, companionship.”

Tears of frustration filled her eyes. “Devin, I don’t want a boyfriend,” she pleaded quietly. “Especially not him.”

“It’s not for you to choose, Anna. You are lonely, even though you won’t admit it. You need someone to be with.” He motioned to Peter. “I have provided you with someone I trust.”

Anna’s shoulders slumped. Arguing would just anger him. “Yes, Devin,” she said softly.

“Now, why don’t you two run along and let people think someone has broken through your icy exterior.” He took hold of her arm and pinched it. “You will treat him with respect, Anna.”

Anna winced and nodded quickly, rubbing her arm when he released it.

Peter smiled and reached for her hand. It took every ounce of willpower to not run away, but this is what Devin wanted. He would punish her if she didn't do as he wanted her to.

Peter led her to a bench near the wall and they sat and talked. If she didn't despise him so much, she would have admitted that he was very handsome. She guessed him to be about twenty-five years old. His thick dark-brown hair hung over his forehead and he had eyes the color of cognac. He was well built and tall and looked incredibly sexy in his dark suit and tie...if she would let herself admit it, which she wouldn't. She listened politely and was as respectful as she could manage. He explained how he had arrived yesterday from St. Petersburg after receiving a call Monday morning from Devin.

"So, you left the Kirov because Devin asked you to?" Anna asked, coming to fully understand why he was here. There would be no other reason to leave such an amazing dance company.

"I did. My grandfather respects Devin immensely and your ballet company is very good. Plus, an opportunity to date the famous Mistress Anna.... Well, I couldn't resist." He took her hand and kissed the back of it.

A shiver ran through her body, and it wasn't a good one. She liked his grandfather even less now that she knew he respected Devin.

"You can join me when I look for an apartment if you'd like, since you'll be living there soon."

"Don't you want to really date someone? I mean, don't you need to get married soon?"

"Ah, I don't need to get married until my uncle becomes *Starshiy*."

"Your uncle?"

"*Da*, Vlad is my *dyadya*. My uncle. He had five daughters. My father is next oldest and I am his oldest son. Therefore, I am next in line for

leadership after Vlad.”

“Oh.”

“Besides, I have a girlfriend at home. When it is time, I will marry her.”

“She doesn’t mind you coming over here and...becoming my boyfriend?”

He shrugged. “She doesn’t really have a choice. She will make a good wife. We’ve been friends since childhood. She knows there are things that I must do in life. This is certainly one of the more pleasant ones, I must say.” He gave her that megawatt smile again.

Anna looked away. “Well, I guess that it’s good that neither of us are looking to have a real relationship.”

When the party was winding down, Peter offered to take her home.

“You have a car, but not an apartment yet?”

“It’s a rental. I’ll get my own soon.”

Anna sighed, resolving herself to the inevitable. “I suppose I should let you take me home?”

Peter smiled. “I would like to, if that is all right with you.”

She shrugged. “All right.”

They went through the backstage so she could get her things and then to the garage to his car.

“A Mustang?”

“I’ve always wanted one, and I couldn’t resist. They’re so...American. Though I don’t know if I would buy one. I think I like some other cars better.” He opened her door to let her in and then closed it before walking around to his side and settling into the driver’s seat.

Anna gave him her address and he plugged it into his GPS system. “You live very close.”

Anna nodded. “Devin didn’t want to pay for a car for me.”

“Ah.”

He made his way out of the parking garage and headed towards Anna’s apartment.

“So, what do you do for fun around here?”

Anna sighed. “Devin told you I was doped up for two years, didn’t he?”

“Well, yes. So, what did you do before you got ‘doped up’?”

Anna clenched her fists. “I spent time with my husband.”

“Ah. Yes. Of course.” He glanced at her. “What did you do with him?”

“Nothing that I want to do with you,” she snapped. Maybe being disciplined would be better than having to spend time with him.

Peter didn’t respond, but tapped his thumbs on the steering wheel as he drove through the narrow streets.

Anna looked out the window and leaned her head on the headrest. She knew better than to ask Devin to change his mind. She was stuck with Peter.

He pulled in front of her building a few minutes later and stopped the car. Anna swallowed nervously. She had to invite him up. She hoped he’d say no. “Did you want to come up?”

Peter grinned. “Do you want me to come up?”

No, I don’t want you anywhere near me. “If you’d like to,” she answered softly.

Peter chuckled. “You’re a good liar, Anna. No. I’ll let you sleep tonight. Nothing’s worse than being tired for a performance. Maybe Sunday night.”

“Okay.” She opened the car door.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” he said.

“Yeah.” She turned and went inside her building without looking back.

He wasn't looking out the window this time. He was sitting in the chair reading. Oh, how often she saw him like that when he was alive. No wonder she dreamed about it.

She shifted on her feet and he looked up.

"Anna."

He said it with such love that it brought tears to her eyes. He walked over to her and knelt in front of her. His eyes were so blue. So kind and full of love. His hair was still long and he still had his beard.

"I don't want to dream about you," she whimpered.

"Oh, Schatzi, I know," he said gently. "But it's not a dream. I'm real."

She shook her head. "You're dead." She reached for his ring around her neck, but it wasn't there. Where was it? What happened to it? "I lost your ring," she whispered.

His eyes filled with tears. "We'll get a new one when we're together again."

"Devin took my other rings. All I have is this." She held up her right hand where her gold ring was.

He smiled and held up his right hand, showing her his ring. "I still have mine. You're still my wife, Anna. Nothing will ever change that."

Tears started running down her cheeks. "The baby...it wasn't Ben's. Devin...he...."

"I know, Schatzi. I know. I'm so sorry I wasn't there for you." Tears fell from his eyes and caught in his beard. He reached out to her but stopped short of touching her. "I miss you," he whispered.

"I miss you, too," she admitted. She hesitantly reached her hand out to touch his cheek, but when she touched him, the room faded to darkness and she found herself reaching out into the dark in her apartment.

She had been so upset about Peter she'd forgotten to turn the TV on and Alex had invaded her dreams again. She stared up at the ceiling. The mini blinds made weird line patterns on her ceiling.

Why did her mind insist on giving her false hope about Alex? He was dead. Her mind needed to accept that. But, the dreams did give her hope, and she hated it. She didn't want to hope that maybe it had all been a misunderstanding and that Alex was still alive somewhere. That he stared out the window in the direction of San Francisco and thought about her. That he trimmed his beard in case she showed up in his room in her dreams.

NO! It was just a dream. Alex was dead and that's all there was to it.

She pushed the button on the remote to turn on the TV. She flipped onto her side and fell asleep crying.

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Chapter Eleven

Anna tried to avoid Peter all weekend, but inevitably he would find her. When he wasn't with her, Anna saw other girls shamelessly flirting with him. Even some of the guys tried, but Peter made it very clear he wasn't interested in them.

"He likes you, Anna," Aaron said as they were standing backstage Sunday night, waiting for the overture to finish.

Anna looked up at his face, made up to look like a clown puppet. "No, he doesn't."

"He watches you constantly. He's always trying to talk to you. Of course he does."

"Devin brought him here to 'date' me. He's acting that way because he's supposed to."

"Why would Devin do that?"

"He thinks I need a boyfriend."

Aaron frowned. "Well, hell, Anna. I'd gladly take the job." He looked at her with all the love he had for her years ago. "And I wouldn't be faking it," he added softly.

She shook her head emphatically. "No, Aaron. I couldn't do that to you. Don't you remember what happened to Ben? He sent Nate away. He sent Kurt away. Even Alex died." She gave him a pleading look. "I'd never forgive myself if something happened to you." She bit her lip and reached out for his hand with both of hers. "I need you too much, Aaron," she whispered.

She saw tears in his eyes but he nodded. "Okay, Anna." He sighed. "Then please stop pushing me away. And Jenna. And Travis. We care about

you Anna and want—” He stopped and looked behind Anna.

Anna turned around to see Peter looking at Aaron suspiciously. “What are you two talking about?” Peter said in a low voice. He had a threatening aura about him, which made Anna worry about Aaron.

“I was telling Aaron that I was glad he was my friend.”

Peter narrowed his eyes as he looked at the two of them. “He doesn’t look at you as just a friend,” he said slowly.

Would Peter tell Devin? “Please, Peter,” she whispered, stepping to him and looking up into his eyes. “He’s just a friend.” Anna looked around at the other dancers who were watching them now and blushed.

Peter looked back at Aaron and then at Anna. He nodded and then walked away.

Aaron stepped closer. “Is he also a spy for Devin?”

“I wouldn’t be surprised,” Anna said softly, watching Peter walk in the direction of the dressing rooms. She looked back at Aaron. “That’s why I stay away from you.”

Aaron clenched his jaw and sighed. “I don’t like that, Anna.”

“I’m sorry, Aaron. I wish...I wish things were different.” She turned and walked away, praying he wouldn’t follow.

“May I drive you home?”

Anna jumped at the sound of Peter’s voice as she walked out of the dressing room. She looked at him and was about to say no when he gave her a look that indicated she better say yes.

“Yes, thank you,” she said, her cheeks reddening with shame, knowing she was being watched. She just wanted to be left alone and Devin was

forcing her into a relationship. Peter would probably tell Devin everything she did, too.

Peter took her hand and they walked outside and across the street to the parking garage. They got to his black rental car and suddenly he stopped and pulled her towards him. He put his hand on the side of her face and kissed her. She kissed him back without thinking about it, sliding her hands up his chest and over his shoulders.

His kiss was confident. He knew she wouldn't pull away. Not like other first kisses she'd had, where the guy had been hesitant and gentle. Peter probed her lips with his tongue and demanded entry. He held her tight against his chest, as if to prevent her from escaping.

"There, now maybe those women will stop flirting with me," he murmured against her lips.

Anna opened her eyes and looked up at him, then turned to see several dancers watching them. The girls all looked disappointed. She looked back at his chest.

"I won't resist you anymore," she said, hoping he'd loosen his embrace.

His eyes were dark as he gazed down at her. "Good." He backed away slightly and opened the passenger side door for her. He certainly gave the appearance of being polite. Would he be as demanding in other areas as he was with his kiss?

"Your place or mine?" he asked, backing out of the parking space.

"Place...?" Anna repeated softly. "Oh!" she exclaimed as she remembered he said he'd stay with her Sunday night. "I...really should shower before...anything happens."

Peter nodded. "All right. Your place."

Anna fidgeted as he drove to her place. He produced a parking card for her garage and found a spot a few minutes later. "Devin gave me the card so

I wouldn't have to worry about parking. He says it's rather difficult sometimes."

"Yeah."

He walked around the car and opened her door and they walked to the elevators. They rode and walked to her apartment in silence

It really was a pathetic little apartment. There was a long hallway that led to the back center of the apartment. To the left was a tiny kitchen. To the right a tiny bathroom. Up ahead was the living area where her coffee table, couch and bed were. Her mattress sat on the floor along one wall with a fitted sheet and a blanket balled up in the middle. Her couch sat perpendicular from the wall facing the TV, which sat next to the window.

Peter looked around with a look of disdain on his face. Well, if he didn't like it, he could leave, Anna thought to herself.

"Next time we'll go to my place," Peter said turning in a circle. "You can keep whatever you need there until we move in together." He stopped and looked at her. "Are you going to go shower?"

Anna blinked and walked away quickly. Well, at least he didn't yell or hit her. Yet.

After she had showered and washed her hair, she put her pink satin robe on and walked out to find Peter on her couch watching TV. He had taken off his shirt and was sitting with one hand behind his head, his bicep flexed. His upper body was trim and well defined, with a thick carpet of black hair on his chest that tapered down below his navel to disappear under his pants. He laughed at something on the TV and his mouth opened to reveal straight white teeth under full lips that looked almost too sensuous for a man.

He looked up at her and smiled. "You're much prettier without all that stage makeup on."

"Thank you," she said softly. She glanced at her bed. "I'm sorry it's...like that. I don't have overnight guests often. They...usually just leave after."

"Who says I'm going to stay the night?"

Her cheeks burned. "Oh. I...." She swallowed and turned away. "Of course. I'm sorry I assumed you were. I shouldn't have done that." Would he make her leave when they had sex at his place?

The TV turned off and she heard him stand and walk up behind her. "I might," he murmured against her neck. "I haven't decided." He reached in front of her, untied the belt to her robe and pushed it off her shoulders so it fell onto the floor. "You have beautiful breasts," he said, sliding hands up her belly and to her breasts where he kneaded them gently.

She leaned her head back against his bare chest and sighed.

"You like that?" he asked softly.

"Yes," she sighed. She wasn't often touched gently anymore, and his touch was surprisingly gentle.

One hand moved back down her stomach and between her legs. His finger slid between her pussy lips and found her clit. He held her against him with his left hand on her right breast and circled her clit with his other hand. His touch was demanding and she found herself trying to escape his relentless touch. It was too intense to be completely pleasurable. She moaned and writhed against him, trying to get control of her body so she could give him what he wanted. Or what she thought he wanted. But she couldn't. He kept circling the sensitive nub with just the right amount of pressure that made it not-quite-painful. Her body wouldn't listen or work the way she wanted it to and her release wouldn't come.

She screamed in frustration to being so close but not being able to push over the edge. She'd never not been able to come before.

“You want to come, don’t you?” he whispered as she struggled against him. Her forehead was wet with sweat and every nerve in her body was on edge.

“Yes!” she screamed. “Please! Please Peter!” she begged.

Abruptly he released her and she fell to the floor, panting and shaking.

“Remove my pants,” he said calmly. She trembled as she rose to her knees and pulled at his belt with nervous fingers. It took her much longer than it normally did to unfasten pants. She wasn’t afraid of him, exactly. She didn’t know how she felt other than the need for release was so intense she could taste it.

Finally, she was able to push his pants to the ground and his boxer briefs followed shortly after. She stayed on her knees, with his cock at eye level. She licked her lips as she stared at the long, pierced rod, uncertain as to what he wanted her to do.

“You are well trained,” Peter remarked. “I’m impressed. Most Elder-Mistresses are rather...independent.” He sat on the mattress and ran his fingers through her hair. “I’m not a cruel man, Anna. I don’t enjoy hurting women. But Devin has given me permission to punish you if I deem it necessary.”

Anna looked at him fearfully. What did all this mean?

“I will tell you what I expect, and I expect you to do it. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Peter,” she said softly.

“Stand. I want to see you.”

Anna stood and he studied her body. She had gained her weight back and she knew she looked like she had before she let herself waste away on drugs.

“Turn.”

Anna turned around to face away from him. She felt his hands caressing her ass and thighs. “You have hips. Most dancers are so skinny there’s nothing to hold onto. I like it.” He put his hands on her thighs. “Second position and put your hands on the floor.”

She stepped her feet apart and bent over at the waist, keeping her legs straight. She looked back between her legs and saw Peter’s eyes dilate as he looked at her wide open pussy. He reached up and caressed the swollen, wet folds and then slid his thumb up to her asshole.

“Do you like anal?” he asked with a thick voice. She closed her eyes as he caressed the hole.

“I...I’ve had some enjoyable experiences, but most of the time, not really.”

His thumb pressed inside and she moaned softly. “Stay still,” he murmured, and she felt his hot mouth on her pussy a moment later.

As he devoured her, she cried out in pleasure. His tongue was everywhere and his thumb thrust in and out slowly. Her knees threatened to give way when he locked his lips around her clit and sucked hard. He held her thighs so she couldn’t escape, not that she wanted to. She gasped and came with such force that she screamed and clawed against the carpet. She was blinded by the fireworks that exploded behind her eyes. She knew nothing but the waves of pleasure that pulsed through her body.

As the waves subsided, she felt dizzy and her knees collapsed, making her fall to the ground. She panted for air and her head hung loose between her arms.

Peter rubbed her back for a moment and then pulled her backwards onto his lap. He sucked on her neck. “Did you like that?” he asked, nipping at the lobe.

“Yes,” she breathed, and shuddered as aftershocks wracked her body.

“You have a beautiful body, Anna.” He slid his hand between her legs and lightly stroked her swollen pussy. “I am going to enjoy getting to know it better.” She shuddered as his fingers brushed over her clit.

When she had caught her breath, he pushed her gently to the bed on her hands and knees. He rode her hard, but he didn’t hurt her. She cried out as he plundered her body, digging his fingers into her hips. He shouted in an unknown language that Anna guessed to be Russian, and pushed himself even deeper as he came.

He stayed where he was for a minute and then leaned forward to kiss the middle of her back before pulling out and collapsing on the bed next to her.

She sat on her hip and looked at him nervously. “Are you staying the night?” she asked softly.

He turned his brown eyes to hers. “Is that okay?”

She smiled hesitantly. “Whatever you would like, Peter.” She glanced at the TV. “I have to sleep with the TV on, though.”

He raised his eyebrows. “Why?”

“I have...unpleasant dreams if I don’t.”

“Nightmares?” He sat up on his elbow

Anna shook her head. “No. I just...I don’t like the subject matter.”

“What are they about?”

She didn’t really want to tell him. “Is this one of those things that you’re telling me to do?” she asked as respectfully as she could.

Peter smiled. “No. I was just curious.”

“I don’t like talking about it.”

He lay back down. “All right. You don’t have to. We’ll have to talk about that before we move in together. I don’t know if I can sleep with the TV on all the time.”

Anna picked at the blanket. “They don’t happen every night. But I try to avoid them all the same. Mostly if I’m upset about something.”

He looked at her curiously and then reached for the remote to turn the TV back on. “Does it need to be loud?”

Anna blinked in surprise. “Um, no.”

He turned the volume so she could hear it but it wasn’t overbearing, and set the remote back on the floor. “Okay?”

She nodded and gave him a grateful smile. She stood to turn the lights off and then spread the blanket to cover the bed. She only had one pillow, and told Peter she didn’t need it, which wasn’t true, but she didn’t want to be rude.

He didn’t cuddle with her, but didn’t scoot away either. She turned on her side to face away from him and stared into the darkness. Peter was difficult to figure out. He was kind and intimidating and demanding and thoughtful all at once. He was an enigma.

She tried to ignore the questions in her mind and concentrated on the inane laughter that came from the TV.

Chapter Twelve

Anna awoke to feel a warm body shifting closer to her, a gentle hand caressing her back. She knew better than to stiffen in surprise, but she wanted to turn over and look. The body moved above her, pushed her legs apart, and a large cock slowly entered her body. Hands held her arms above her head and she was pressed into the mattress, unable to move. The cock moved in and out, slowly at first, but then picked up speed. It felt good. He moved in such a way that his cock rubbed against the sensitive spot inside her.

She moaned and tried to move her hips against him, but couldn't. She could only accept him into her body and allow him to work that small spot until she felt the tingling increase into orgasm. He shouted out his climax a moment later, then lay panting on top of her.

Anna hoped he hadn't fallen back asleep. He was heavy and it was difficult to breathe. When he rolled off a little later, she sucked in a deep breath and turned to look at her new "boyfriend." He was watching her intently with his cognac-colored eyes, and smiled when she looked at him.

"*Dobroye utro,*" he said quietly and propped his head on his fist.

"Does that mean good morning?" she asked hesitantly.

Peter nodded. "*Da.*"

"Good morning," she said with a nervous smile. "Do I...I mean, did you enjoy yourself...with me?"

His eyes lit up. "Oh, yes. Very much so. If nothing else, we'll have great sex."

Anna smiled timidly and then looked down at the bed. He hadn't hurt her yet. She couldn't complain.

“I was thinking maybe we could go apartment hunting today, unless you have previous plans.”

“No, I...don’t do much. I don’t have to go with you. My input won’t be of much consequence.”

“You don’t have an opinion on where you live?” he seemed bewildered.

“Why would I? As long as Devin approves, that’s all that matters.”

He looked at her for a long moment without speaking. “What if he wanted you to live in a metal box with no windows?”

“Then that’s where I would live,” she answered softly. “I try very hard to obey him. I....” She sighed. “My devotion must be to him and him alone. I dance because he wants me to dance. I eat because he wants me to eat. It’s just easier that way.” She looked up to see Peter frowning at her. “You don’t believe me?”

“I think that it is sad that you believe that. He cares about you a great deal. He told me he wanted me to help him keep an eye on you because you needed to be watched at all times.”

She stared for a moment. “I suppose that’s true,” she conceded. “Though I don’t think he cares about me. Not anymore, at least. Maybe I can be a better slave to him if you’re there to remind me.”

Peter took her out with him to look for an apartment, regardless of her protests that she didn’t care what he chose. They drove around areas that Peter had been told were nice and toured various buildings. Anna had gotten used to her little apartment and the ones they looked at seemed enormous by comparison. Peter liked apartments near the water and they

saw several near the Bay that he liked. He always asked her opinion and she told him they were nice. He didn't seem to understand that she didn't care.

"I think I like that one by the bridge the best," he said as they were eating dinner at a Mexican restaurant.

"Okay." She picked at her rice and reminded herself that she needed to eat or Devin would get angry.

He put his fork down and glared at her. "You know, Anna. I'm trying to be nice and make sure you like the place we're going to live. And you don't seem to care."

"I'm sorry, Peter. But I told you, it doesn't matter. Your opinion matters, not mine." She could see he was upset, but didn't know what else to say. "Why don't you ask Devin?"

He hit the table and Anna jumped. "I don't care what Devin thinks." He cursed in Russian. "Finish eating. I'm taking you home."

Anna ate a few more bites and then indicated she was done.

He muttered in Russian the entire drive home. He pulled up in front of her apartment and stopped. "No wonder you drive Devin crazy. You can't even do something as simple as offer your opinion."

Anna blinked back the tears and reached for the door handle to escape, but snatched her hand back and looked at Peter.

"Get out. I'll see you in the morning."

"Yes, Peter," she said and quickly exited the car. His tires squealed as he pulled away from the curb.

She went into her apartment, flung herself on the bed and cried. She couldn't do anything right. Devin was right, she was useless. She undressed, turned on the TV and turned out the light.

A pounding on her apartment door woke her later. She stumbled to the door to find Devin glaring at her.

“Dammit, Anna. Why do I have to keep coming here to deal with you?” He pushed her against the wall and closed the door behind him. He grabbed her hair and dragged her further into the apartment where he pushed her down onto the bed. “You fucking pissed off Peter and I promised him I’d deal with your attitude.”

“But Devin, I—”

He slapped her across the face. “I don’t want to hear it, Anna. I’m sick of having to remind you how to behave.” He pulled a syringe out of his pocket and waved it in her face.

“No! No, Devin please,” she shrieked. “Please, I’ll do better. I promise.”

Devin grinned. “This stuff really works on you, doesn’t it?” He grabbed her hair and injected the fluid before she could pull away. “You always promise and always fail, Anna. I just can’t trust you to keep your word. At least I have someone to tell me what you’re up to now. If he can stand you, I’ll have you move in with him sooner rather than later.”

Chapter Thirteen

Anna dragged herself out of bed only a couple of hours after Devin left. She hadn't slept because the injection hadn't worn off completely and every movement brought pain. She dressed for class and it hurt to put her clothes on. But she had to go. It was a performance day. And she had to apologize to Peter for being apathetic.

She slowly walked to the theater and made her way to the stage. Peter was there, surrounded by girls, and ignored her. She slumped to the ground and pulled her shoes out of her bag. Oh! She just wanted to curl up on the floor and go to sleep. But she had many steps to dance before she could go home and take a nap. Or maybe she'd just curl up in the dressing room and sleep there. Yeah, that sounded like a good idea.

"He lost interest in you already?" Jackie, one of the Corps girls, asked.

Anna shrugged but didn't say anything. She was too tired, too achy to expend the energy it took to answer.

"Anna, what happened to you?" Isaak squatted down next to her and lifted her chin. "You have a bruise on your cheek and you look like you haven't slept."

"I do?"

He nodded. "Did Peter...?"

She shook her head. "No. Just Devin."

Isaak frowned. "Did you sleep at all last night?"

Anna shook her head.

"Go to Aaron's dressing room and sleep. I'll tell him what you're doing."

"But Isaak, I can dance...."

Isaak shook his head. “I don’t want you to hurt yourself. Go sleep. Just get a good warm up this afternoon, okay?”

Anna nodded and stumbled her way slowly to Aaron’s dressing room. The moment her head hit the couch, she was sound asleep.

Something brushed Anna’s cheek and she jumped and opened her eyes.

“Aaron!” She sat up quickly and looked around. “Where am I?”

“My dressing room. Isaak sent you in here to sleep, remember?”

Anna blinked several times as she got oriented. “Oh, yeah.”

Aaron reached up to stroke her cheek and she winced. “Devin hit you?”

She nodded. “I...misbehaved.”

He grimaced. “I can’t imagine what you did was really that bad. He just wants any excuse to hit you.”

“Does it really matter whether he has a good reason or not? He’s my Master. He can do what he wants.”

“No, it doesn’t matter because he shouldn’t hit you regardless.” Aaron sighed. “What did he say you did?”

“I upset Peter.” Anna twisted her hands together.

“You upset Peter? What happened?”

Anna sighed. “I told him I didn’t care what apartment he picked out.”

“Why would you care about his apartment?”

“Because we’ll move in together eventually. And he wanted to know which one I liked. I told him I don’t care. That my opinion doesn’t matter and if he really wants to know if it’s an okay apartment he should ask Devin.”

Aaron frowned. “It sounds like Peter was just trying to be nice, Anna.”

Anna's shoulders slumped and she looked at her hands. Yes. Peter was just trying to be nice. Aaron was right.

"I don't know why Devin thinks I'd be able to be successful in a relationship. But I guess it doesn't really have to be successful. We just have to stay together."

"It's too bad you can't be with someone who really cares about you," Aaron said in a low voice.

She turned to look sadly into his eyes. She knew he was talking about himself. "He'd hurt you, Aaron." Oh, how that hurt to say! She reached out to stroke his cheek. "I'd never forgive myself if something happened to you," she whispered.

They gazed at each other for a long time and then suddenly their lips were touching. Aaron put his hand on the back of her head to keep her from escaping when she pushed against him, albeit unenthusiastically. His lips seized hers and his kiss was full of every emotion that had plagued him for years. Anna finally relented and let him kiss her, returning his kiss and emotions with abandon.

"Oh, Anna," he murmured against her lips. "I've missed you so much."

Tears rolled down her cheeks as she wrapped her arms around his neck and held him as tightly as he held her. His lips didn't part from hers as he pushed her back onto the couch and moved on top of her. He stroked her neck and pulled her leotard off her shoulder before kissing her neck and collarbone and shoulder.

Anna pressed her head back into the couch and sighed as Aaron's hand moved down to her breast, bringing her leotard down with it. His lips followed his hands and his mouth quickly found her breast.

"Oh!" she cried softly as he sucked on her nipple.

Within a few minutes, they had disposed of their clothing and Aaron's body covered Anna's, their bare skin rubbing against each other, sharing desperate emotions that had been pent up for years. She felt his hard cock against her thigh and pulled her legs apart, hoping he'd enter her.

"I need you," she whispered.

Aaron kissed her and moved his cock to her entrance. When he pressed forward, they both sighed and when he was buried deep inside of her, they moaned collectively.

"God, Anna, I love you," he moaned as he began moving.

"I love you, Aaron," she whispered, matching his movements and rhythms. Her legs wrapped around his hips and they made love with desperate abandon. They gazed into each other's eyes as their bodies moved as one. Pleasure and love mixed together.

The tension built and suddenly both exploded with passionate cries as their orgasms overtook them. Their bodies tensed together for a long moment and then slowly relaxed.

Aaron kissed her neck and then her lips, looking at her with such love she could hardly stand it. The only other man who had ever looked at her like that was Alex. She cradled his cheek and kissed him soundly.

He propped himself on his elbows and smiled at her. "That was better than I remembered," he whispered.

She giggled and her eyes sparkled. "I agree." He was still inside her and she moved her hips and squeezed his softening cock, making him shiver and moan softly.

"Anna...," he whispered and kissed her again.

Unexpectedly, the door opened and they heard a low growl. Aaron and Anna both jumped and turned to see a very angry Peter standing in the

doorway. He glared and stepped into the room, slamming the door behind him.

Aaron held Anna close to him. “Get out, Peter.”

“You’re fucking my girlfriend,” Peter growled. “I think I have a right to say something.”

“If you had actual feelings for her, I’d feel bad. But you’re just with her because Devin told you to.”

Peter’s eyes narrowed and he glanced at Anna and then looked back at Aaron. “Well, then. If you know that, then you know what a dangerous situation you’ve put yourself in.”

“No, Peter!” Anna exclaimed and untangled herself from Aaron’s arms. She fell to the floor in front of him and bowed at his feet. “Please don’t hurt him. Please don’t tell Devin.” She looked up at him with tears in her eyes. “Please,” she begged.

“You beg as his cum drips out of your pussy?” Peter said derisively. “Devin gave you to me. You don’t have the right to let anyone else touch you, Anna.” Peter looked down at Aaron’s cock and then his hand, where he wore a sapphire ring that Anna hadn’t noticed before. “A common Brother dares to fuck an Elder-Mistress? That’s even stupider.”

“My Elder gave me permission to be with her.”

“Devin would never—”

“Devin is not my Elder. Wilhelm is. And Alex, her husband and Master, gave me permission before he died.”

“Alex is dead. His word no longer stands.”

“Maybe. But Wilhelm took ownership of her after Alex died, and he also gave me permission.”

“Wilhelm is forbidden from contacting her.”

“He is still her Master,” Aaron retorted. “Devin can’t change that, no matter how badly he wishes he could. She was given to the Germans by her father before she married Alex. If anything, Wilhelm’s claim is more legitimate.”

Peter stared at Aaron and didn’t speak. He looked troubled. Anna remained on her knees and watched Peter’s changing expressions on his face. Finally, he sighed and spoke calmly. “Don’t touch her again. Keep your distance and I won’t say anything to Devin.”

Anna’s mouth dropped open in surprise. He wouldn’t tell Devin?

Aaron gave Anna a pained look. “Don’t punish her. She didn’t start it. I did.”

Peter nodded stiffly and then looked at Anna. “Get dressed.”

She pulled on her tights and leotard as quickly as possible and Aaron pulled on a pair of sweats.

“Pull your bun out,” Peter barked. “You look like you’ve been fucking on a couch.”

Anna brushed her hair out with her fingers and stood looking nervously at Peter. He studied her face and then reached out to touch the bruise on her cheek. “What happened?”

“Devin was angry that I had upset you yesterday. He...gave me an attitude adjustment.”

“Do you see what he does to her?” Aaron growled. “This is nothing compared to the things I’ve seen.”

Peter held up his hand to Aaron and then looked at him. “Keep your distance,” he said, but not unkindly.

When she was dressed, Peter took her hand and led her out of Aaron’s dressing room. “Why were you in Aaron’s dressing room? I didn’t see you during rehearsal.”

“Isaak sent me to sleep. I...didn’t sleep last night and he knew it.”

“Why didn’t you sleep?”

“Because Devin came over.”

“All night?”

She shook her head. “But the injection didn’t wear off until I got here this morning and I couldn’t sleep.”

“Injection?”

Anna shrugged. “He calls it nerve juice. It...makes the lightest touch feel like razor blades.” She touched her cheek. “This he gave me before he used the syringe.” She turned to Peter. “I’m sorry I angered you yesterday. I...think the apartment is very nice.”

He stopped and looked at her. “He really hurt you because of me?” he tucked a piece of hair behind her ear.

“It’s okay. I can handle it.” She didn’t want to make him feel bad.

Peter sighed and looked troubled again. He kissed her gently on the lips. “You should go warm up. I’ll see you later.” He turned and walked away.

Chapter Fourteen

Anna went to the dressing room and warmed up in an empty corner. She worried about Aaron. Being with him again had been incredible. But would Peter keep his word? Why wouldn't he tell Devin? He told Devin that she'd pissed him off yesterday, why was this different? She'd never forgive herself if something happened to Aaron.

When she had warmed up sufficiently, she began to get ready for the performance as the other girls were doing. They ignored her for the most part, though she saw them whispering and looking at her every once in a while. She lifted her chin and put on her protective icy exterior again.

"Does Peter know you're a slut?" someone asked as Anna was pulling her costume from the rack.

Anna looked up to see Jackie giving her a look of disdain. "What are you talking about?"

"I saw you opening night. Going off with all those men. You get off on fucking married men in public?"

Anna felt tears coming to her eyes and shame filling her.

Stop it, Anna. She was tired of being a doormat. At least she could stand up to the dancers without getting in trouble with Devin.

She pushed away the shame and narrowed her eyes at Jackie. "Do you want me to share them with you?" She laughed and looked her up and down. "Though you're probably too skinny to hold their interest."

"I didn't know fat girls were the rage these days."

Anna gave her a wicked smile. "Your dad seemed to enjoy my *fat* body. Though his cock was so tiny I could hardly feel him."

Jackie's eyes widened and she took a swing at Anna, who ducked easily out of the way. "Don't you dare talk about my dad that way."

Anna laughed again. "Has he started comparing your pathetic little body to mine? Jealous that he wants me instead of you?"

"Why you little bitch!" Jackie lunged at her, pushing Anna to the ground. "My dad would never do that to me."

"Because you're not worth it," Anna snarled, holding her hands up in front of her face to block the other girl's blows. She got a hold of one of Jackie's wrists and twisted it like Devin had done to her. Jackie fell to her knees. She studied Jackie's face. "Is your dad's name Mel?"

"How did you...?"

Anna grinned menacingly. "I know your dad," she said softly, kneeling down in front of her. "I've watched him lust after me and lick his lips as he stared at my pussy." Anna's voice filled with spite as she lowered her voice even more. "He's not good enough for me to bother with. I only fuck important men." She gave Jackie's wrist one last twist, and then stood and pushed her way through the crowd that had gathered.

"Anna!"

She froze at the anger in Isaak's voice. Isaak walked to her and gave her a disapproving look. "What the hell is wrong with you? You don't start fights."

Anna was about to give a smart remark when she looked behind Isaak and saw Peter standing in the doorway frowning at her. Her anger melted, replaced with fear.

She looked at Isaak. "I'm sorry," she whispered and ran out of the room, pushing past Peter and running out the nearby exit.

She could feel Peter's anger as he walked up behind her. "I said I wouldn't tell Devin about Aaron, because you seemed like a lost little girl.

“But you’re really nothing but a bitch, aren’t you?” He turned her around to face him. “I don’t know what to think of you, Anna. I really don’t. Devin said you might need discipline, and I was beginning to disbelieve him. Did you have Aaron lie for you?”

“Lie?”

“All that stuff about Wilhelm and him having permission to be with you? Is he some past lover that you don’t want to get rid of? Or are you just defiant and like being punished?”

Anna blinked, not knowing what to say. “I would never ask Aaron to lie for me. I know Alex told him he could...comfort me before he left. I don’t know what Wilhelm told him. I didn’t even know Aaron was a Brother until recently. I haven’t slept with Aaron since we broke up shortly after I turned twenty. We were dating and then Isaak made us break up because I was a student and he was in the company.” She looked up at Peter. “I will stay away from him to keep him safe. He was my best friend. And Alex’s too. I would do anything to keep him from getting hurt.”

Peter studied her as she spoke. “Why were you fighting with that girl? Jackie, is that her name?”

Anna sighed and told him what happened. He watched her carefully as she talked, weighing her words carefully. “I’m tired of crying at everything. I can’t stand up to anyone without fear of being punished. But I thought I could with her. Though her father is a Brother and I’ll probably be punished anyway.” She stared at the ground.

“I went and filled out the application for the apartment this afternoon. I’ll be moving in this week. I want you to move in with me when I do.”

“Why so quickly? I thought you didn’t like me.”

Peter shrugged. “The sooner you are staying with me, the better I can keep an eye on you.”

When she was at the theater the rest of the week, she stayed away from Aaron and Aaron stayed away from her. Travis and Jenna avoided her too. She suspected Aaron warned them to. She began to feel lonelier than she had before Devin had brought Peter to the city. She danced her best during classes and performances and hoped Devin and Peter would be pleased.

By Friday afternoon, Anna and Peter were living together in the apartment that Peter had picked out. Anna had to admit it was much nicer than where she'd been staying. It was four times the size, with floor-to-ceiling windows at the end of each room. Half of the apartment consisted of a large kitchen with breakfast bar, a dining area and living area. The other half consisted of the bathroom, two huge closets and a bedroom that could easily fit a king-sized bed along with a small desk.

For the first few nights, Peter let her sleep with the TV on, but then said he couldn't deal with it anymore and made her turn it off. She was so afraid of her dreams that she managed to keep herself from sleeping too heavily and avoided them. When she began to see the room, she managed to wake herself before it fully materialized. She didn't want to see Alex.

Peter put up pictures of his family and of the St. Petersburg countryside. Every day, Anna had to look at the picture of the man who took Alex away from her. What seemed even worse was that Peter had his eyes, so every time she looked at him, she saw Vitaly. She liked looking at the nature pictures, though. St. Petersburg was very pretty, whether covered in snow or not. Anna was fascinated with the pictures and found herself staring at them at odd times.

Peter kept sex very impersonal. He always approached her from behind and would only have anal with her. He said he would not use her pussy again until she knew with her whole body that he was in control of her, with deference to Devin. They had sex every night and every morning. He used lube, which Anna was thankful for, and did thank him, several times. This seemed to please Peter. At night, he would caress her clit in that special way he had that wouldn't bring release. When she had screamed and begged and pleaded for a sufficient amount of time, he would put her on all fours and suck on her clit until she came with an orgasm that shook her entire body. Then he would fuck her ass and then go to sleep.

After *Petrushka* finished, they had a few weeks off before Nutcracker rehearsals began. For the most part, Anna stayed in the apartment. Peter had made friends with many of the dancers and went out with them. He didn't invite Anna, and she stayed home alone.

Isaak called her one day and told her that she had been promoted to soloist and that she would be one of the ribbon dancers in the second act of the Nutcracker. "Don't make me regret this decision, Anna," he warned.

When classes and rehearsals began again, Anna found herself thankful to be around people again, even if they ignored her. She and Peter joined the principals and soloists during morning classes. Peter never held her, or even kissed her unless they were at the theater or studio. When they were at home, he ignored her, unless he wanted sex. She began to look forward to being at the studio, just so he would be affectionate towards her, although the schizophrenic relationship was starting to take a toll on her emotions. She became very shy again and wouldn't speak to anyone. She was no longer the ice queen. She was once again the scared little girl who had left Jack's house.

She put all her energy into dancing and hoped that both Peter and Devin would see how hard she was trying. When Devin wanted her on Friday nights, she would sit at his feet and do exactly what he asked of her without thinking about it. Peter would pick her up the next afternoon and take her home.

One Saturday, about a week after rehearsals began again, Peter picked her up and Devin walked out with her to speak to him.

"If it's all right with you, I think I'll send some men over to your apartment that would like to spend time with Anna."

Peter shrugged. "Sure."

Devin didn't know when they would come, but Anna was supposed to be home in the evenings in case someone wanted to see her.

A few days later, the first man knocked on their door. Anna opened the door and her heart dropped into her stomach. It was Zach.

"H-hello, Zach." She hadn't seen him since the night she'd gone to the Symphony with Kurt and Wilhelm.

Zach smiled broadly at her. "Hello, Anna. It's good to see you." He walked in and stopped when he saw Peter sitting on the couch. "Who are you?"

Peter stood and greeted Zach. "I'm Peter. I'm...Anna's keeper."

"Lucky man," Zach commented. He turned back to Anna. "Bedroom?"

Anna nervously walked to the bedroom door and opened it.

"In here," she said softly.

Zach walked in and Anna glanced at Peter, who had returned to watching his TV show.

Zach grabbed her hand and pulled her inside the bedroom.

After Zach left, she huddled on the floor next to the bed, bloodied and bruised from Zach's "play." She had tried not to scream, so as not to disturb Peter, but didn't think she'd succeeded.

She knew she needed to change the sheets and take a shower so she could take care of Peter before they went to sleep. With trembling limbs, she started pulling the blankets and sheets off the bed. She got the sheets into the washing machine and then stumbled into the bathroom to take a shower.

"Anna, why are the sheets off the bed?" Peter walked into the bathroom as she was getting out of the shower and he stopped short when he saw her. He exclaimed something in Russian. "What happened?"

Anna saw herself in the mirror. She had welts and scratches all over her body. Her nipples were bright red from Zach biting and pinching them. Her pussy lips were bright red as well.

"I... I'm okay," she said, reaching with a shaking arm for her towel.

Peter pulled it off the rack and handed it to her. She looked at him warily. Why was he being nice now? He stepped towards her and she instinctively stepped back and nearly fell on the slippery porcelain. He caught her arm before she fell and when she was steady, put the towel on her shoulders and helped her out of the shower.

She trembled with fear and cold as he gently dabbed the towel over her body to dry her and then helped her into her robe.

"Let me put the other set of sheets on the bed," she said and walked towards the linen closet.

“No, I’ve got it. Come sit down. I’ll take care of it.” Peter led her to the desk chair and then proceeded to make up the bed.

Anna shook with fear as she watched him quickly make the bed and replace the pillows and blankets. He picked her up and placed her gently in bed and then sat next to her.

“What happened?” he asked softly.

“Didn’t you hear?”

Peter shook his head. “I went out. I...didn’t want to listen.” He pressed his lips together. “Maybe I should have stayed.”

“To join in?”

Peter gave her a disgusted look. “I don’t get off on hurting women, Anna,” he snapped. “I’ve told you that.”

Anna shrank back on the bed and tried not to cry. “I’m sorry,” she whispered.

He inhaled deeply and exhaled slowly. “Do you know him?”

Anna nodded.

“You’ve been with him before?”

She nodded again.

“Has he hurt you before?”

“That’s all he does. He likes it.”

“You looked scared when you saw him. You knew he would hurt you?”

She nodded.

“Why did you let him come in?”

“What do you mean?”

“If you knew he would hurt you, why would you let him come in and be with you? Haven’t you told Devin?”

Anna stared at Peter, not understanding what he was asking.

“Anna, why haven’t you told Devin that he hurts you?” Peter demanded loudly.

“He...he knows. Zach’s always been like this with me.”

Peter stood and walked to the window, standing with his hands on his hips and looking out into the night. Anna watched him, not knowing what to expect. Suddenly he wheeled around and looked at her.

“Let me get this straight: Devin knows how that man is, and still allows him to come to you?”

“Of course,” she whispered. “Most of the men who have visited me in the past have hurt me. It’s why I was raised the way I was. They can use me as they want and Devin gets what he wants out of them. I heal quickly...or at least I used to.”

“Is this what Aaron was talking about when he said that bruise was the least of what Devin does to you?”

“I don’t know. Maybe. I don’t know what Aaron knows.”

“Has Devin always been this way?”

“What way?”

“Abusive.”

“Well, not always. He was nice to me when I was little. And when Alex was alive, he treated me respectfully. Alex made sure of that.” She twisted her wedding ring on her finger.

Peter ran his hands through his hair and looked troubled. “Go to sleep, Anna. I need to go out for a little while.”

Anna knew better than to ask him what he was doing and simply nodded and untied her robe.

“Do you want the TV on?”

Anna gave Peter a startled look. She still didn’t understand why he was being nice. “No, thank you,” she whispered. “I’m fine.”

He kissed her on the head and then left the room. She heard the apartment door open and close a few minutes later. She turned out the lights, curled up under the covers, and cried herself to sleep, hurting and confused.

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Chapter Fifteen

Arms were around her when Anna woke the next morning. She was on her side and there was an arm across her upper chest and an arm around her waist. She knew it was Peter's warm body behind her, but why? They'd met over six weeks ago and he had never held her before, except when other people were around. She saw the alarm would be going off in a minute and tried to untangle herself from his arms. He wouldn't be happy if he woke up this close to her.

"Anna, what are you doing?" he asked as she pulled at his arm.

"I didn't want you to know you were holding me," she said softly, not looking at him.

"I wouldn't be holding you if I didn't want to."

Anna didn't speak for a moment. "You've never held me in bed before."

"Maybe I was wrong not to."

Anna didn't know what to say, so she kept quiet, though her jaw trembled slightly.

"How are you feeling?" he asked quietly.

"Okay. I'll be fine in a few days. You can still...I mean, we can have sex this morning. You don't have to worry about hurting me...if you were worried, which you don't have to be...."

The thought of him taking her in the ass made her want to cry, but she wouldn't tell him. Zach liked to do cruel things to her ass. She rolled onto her stomach, as was their morning custom and braced herself. He still hadn't done anything except anal, aside from the first night they were together.

Peter grabbed hold of her shoulder and turned her onto her back. He cradled her cheek and then kissed her. Anna froze in shock and her mind went wild trying to understand what was going on. Why was he kissing her? Why was he being nice? Was it a trick?

He continued gently kissing her, his lips softly caressing hers until she got hold of her wits and kissed him back. He stroked her cheek and neck and shoulders as he kissed her. He gently kissed his way down her neck and to her tender breasts. She braced herself for pain, but his kisses remained gentle. He ran his hands lightly over her arms and stomach, and kissed her all over.

He moved back to kiss her mouth. “Are you okay if we have sex?”

She nodded and tried to roll over again. He shook his head and kissed her neck, then pushed her thighs apart.

“What are you doing?” she asked nervously.

He smiled gently at her. “Sex?”

“Like this?”

“Is that okay?”

Anna blinked. “Y-yes, if you want to.” She wanted to so badly, but was nervous, too. Her ass had been the primary means of pleasing men for several weeks. Even at the Gatherings, Devin had them using her ass or mouth instead of her pussy.

Peter positioned himself at her entrance and she gasped as he pressed forward. Tears sprang to her eyes and she bit her lip to keep from crying out. She was tight from disuse and it hurt. She was also swollen and sore from the previous night’s activities with Zach.

“Are you okay, Anna?”

She squeezed her eyes shut and nodded. It would be much easier to answer that question if she was facing away from him as she normally did.

She didn't know how she felt about being face to face with him.

"Anna, look at me."

She obediently opened her eyes and looked at him with fearful eyes.

"Am I hurting you?"

Since when did he start caring if he hurt her? Well, no that wasn't entirely fair. He never really cared if she enjoyed herself, but didn't seem to want to hurt her.

"I'm fine," she said quietly, looking away from his face.

He leaned down to kiss her neck as he pressed forward again. Anna held her breath and clenched her jaw as he slowly entered her body. Her breathing was shallow and she kept her eyes closed and hands by her side, clenching the sheets against the pain.

"God, you feel good," he murmured against her ear and started moving slowly.

She didn't dare embrace him or do anything to make it personal for fear of upsetting him. He'd made it clear many times that sex was just a physical act and he reserved the emotions for his girlfriend back home.

She moved as she could to make sure he enjoyed himself, uncertain as to whether he would want her to climax or not. She decided against it, since he liked being in control of that and concentrated her movements on what he seemed to like. His movements quickened and he moved so that it was difficult for her to not orgasm, but she kept her mind concentrated on his pleasure. When he shouted out in Russian and stiffened his movements as he came, she winced, but smoothed her face as he relaxed so he wouldn't know she was hurting.

He nuzzled her neck for a moment before rolling to his side, bringing her with him. She lay stiffly by his side, not knowing what to do as he stroked her hair and kissed her head.

After a few minutes, he stretched and sat up. “We should get moving.”

Anna nodded, and got out of bed quickly, glad to be away from his confusing touch. She dressed in her long sleeves and pants to hide her bruises and was thankful she didn’t partner yet. That would have been difficult with how she was feeling at the moment.

“Anna, this was sent to me for some reason.” Aaron handed her a large envelope and glanced at Peter, who was standing next to her.

She looked up at Peter before taking it from him. He nodded and she took it. The return address was a German one. “Do you know who it’s from?”

Aaron shrugged. “I can’t read German.”

“It looks like it’s from a lawyer of some sort,” Peter said.

“A lawyer?” Had Wilhelm finally come to his senses and decided to disown her? She pulled at the flap and found a letter and several smaller envelopes inside. The letter was addressed to *Herzogin* Anna and indicated that there had been suspected fraud in the Kunze finances and that all the family members were being issued new credit cards and online account information, including her Amazon.com and Kindle account. There were five envelopes with credit cards in them with her name on them. “I don’t think Devin will want me having these.”

Aaron and Peter looked at each other. “It’s not really for Devin to decide, is it?” Peter asked. “Wilhelm is your Master and your father-in-law.”

Anna looked at Peter, once again frightened at his new niceness. Was it a trick so he could tell Devin and get her punished?

“I wanted to thank you for speaking to me last night, Aaron,” Peter said, glancing at Anna. “I appreciate your candor.”

Anna looked between the two men, not understanding what was going on. Peter hated Aaron. Aaron hated Peter. Why had they talked last night?

She shoved the papers and cards back into the envelope and handed it back to Aaron. “Send it back. Tell Wilhelm I don’t need them.” She walked away as fast as she could and sat down in her normal spot to get ready for class.

Peter stood next to his dance partner, Erin, during classes. They were dancing the part of the snow king and queen and Erin was ecstatic. She gazed at him with wide eyes whenever he spoke to her, and he usually would flirt lightly with her and some of the other women as well. Not enough to be thought of as cheating, but enough to keep them interested in him. Though when he was near Anna, he held her hand or had his arm around her waist.

Anna was surprised when she didn’t see him flirting that morning. He was friendly, but there was no sensuous smile offered and he backed away when she touched him. He and Aaron were even acting like friends.

At lunch, Peter paid for her meal, which he never did. He asked her several times if she was feeling okay, to which she always responded with a “yes,” even though her body was aching.

When they got home that evening, Peter handed her the envelope that she had given back to Aaron. “You should read the letter.” He gave her a pointed look and then went to take a shower.

She dumped everything out on the table and picked up the letter again. A line was underlined at the bottom of the letter that she hadn’t noticed this morning. “Purchases made on these cards will be monitored by the Herzog.” What did that mean? It was a warning not to use them? Then why

did Peter give them to her? She sighed and rubbed her forehead. This was one of the most confusing days she'd had in a while and it was giving her a headache.

She heard the water from Peter's shower turn off and was about to go take a shower when there was a knock at the door. She went to answer it with a churning stomach and prayed it wasn't Zach. Jayce Corbin, one of Devin's deacons, was standing there. Well, at least it wasn't Zach. Jayce could be rough, but nothing compared to Zach, and sighed in relief.

"Hi, Jayce," Anna said softly. "Won't you come in?" She stepped aside and he walked in.

"Hello, Anna. Nice place."

"Thanks." She looked around nervously. "I, um, just got home and haven't had a chance to shower yet. Do you...mind waiting a few minutes?" She winced as she waited for his answer.

Jayce frowned then shrugged. "Yeah. Just hurry."

She gave him a small smile and hurried into the bedroom where Peter was getting dressed. She glanced back at the door. "Someone's...here to see me. He's one of Devin's deacons."

Peter frowned and cursed in Russian. "Does he hurt you too?"

Anna found that question strange. "Sometimes."

She went into the bathroom and took the fastest shower she could. When she was done, she braided her hair and put her robe on before going out to get Jayce.

He and Peter were sitting on the couch talking and they looked up when she walked into the room. Jayce raised his eyebrow at her and for a minute she couldn't figure out why. Then she remembered that he liked her incredibly submissive, and quickly dropped to her knees by the bedroom door.

“Robe,” Jayce said, walking over to her.

She quickly untied her robe and dropped it to the ground.

“It hasn’t been that long, Anna. Is your memory going?”

“No, Sir,” Anna said softly. “I’m sorry, Sir.”

He tugged on her braid and she followed him into the bedroom. “Do you still have the toys?”

“Yes, Sir.” She went to the closet and pulled out a bag of the things Jayce liked to play with and handed it to him, then went back to her knees.

“Naughty girl. I think you need a spanking and a reminder of what I like.”

“Yes, Sir.”

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Chapter Sixteen

Anna changed the sheets after Jayce left. Peter was nowhere to be seen and she was struggling with the fitted sheet. She was exhausted and sore and just wanted to go to bed, but couldn't get the fitted sheet to work right.

She cried out in frustration and tugged again, but it still wouldn't work. Peter would be angry, she knew it. She felt like an idiot, standing and crying over a sheet, but she couldn't stop herself.

"Here, let me do it." Peter unclenched her fingers and took the sheet from her. He took it off the bed and started again, doing it as he did everything: perfectly.

"I'm sorry," she whispered and reached for the other sheet. Tears blurred her vision and she wiped them away.

Peter put his hands on her upper arms. "Have you showered?" he asked kindly.

Anna shook her head. "I wanted to get the sheets changed first."

He took the sheet from her. "I'll take care of the bed. You go shower."

She did as he told her, showering quickly, and then returned to find the bed made and Peter sitting on it, waiting for her. She started to untie her robe for him and he put his hands on hers.

"No, Anna. It's okay. Do you want some dinner?"

Anna hesitated. She wasn't hungry, but knew she should eat. "Sure."

He took her out to the dining table where there were several take out containers. "Do you like Chinese? I got it while you were...busy."

She sat down and looked at him nervously. He got plates and silverware and placed them on the table. Steam escaped as he opened the containers and he pushed them towards her.

“Take what you like. I got a variety.”

Anna dished out some rice and some sort of chicken and vegetable dish as Peter sat watching her. If he told Devin what she was eating, he would have something good to report.

“My parents are coming up for opening night,” he said, scooping out a heaping spoonful of rice and dumping it on his plate. “Vlad and Nina as well.”

“Nina?”

“My aunt.”

“Oh.” She frowned. “Up?”

“Yes. My parents live in Laguna Beach. My mother is American.”

That would explain his excellent English. “I didn’t know that.”

“I grew up in Laguna Beach, but went to secondary school in St. Petersburg so I could dance there. I lived with Vlad and Nina. When they gave up the idea of having a boy, I started spending more time with them.”

“You have a thick accent though.”

“I’ve spent the last ten years primarily speaking Russian. And I spoke Russian when I lived at home too. At least to my father. My mom made sure I spoke proper English as well. Being here has helped a lot. She’s happy.” He chuckled.

“Were you born here?”

He shook his head. “I was born in St. Petersburg. So were Sergei and Pavel. But Yuri and Natalya were born in California.”

“Your brothers and sister?” They had “been together” for six weeks and she realized she barely knew anything about him. She knew he had three younger brothers and a sister, but never knew their names.

Peter nodded and smiled. “My mother is thrilled that she doesn’t have to freeze to see me dance Nutcracker this year.”

Anna nodded and smiled.

"Did you read the letter?" he asked, nodding towards the yellow envelope he had given her.

"Yes."

"I was thinking maybe we could go shopping this weekend. You could probably use some more clothes. And do you have a dress for opening night?"

"Devin buys me what I need, if I need anything extra," she said softly. "Though he hasn't said anything about a dress. Maybe he doesn't want me going to the party."

"I'd like it if you were there."

Anna stared at her food. "I'll ask Devin when I see him on Friday. I suppose I have some dresses at the house, if Wilhelm hasn't sold it. I don't know if they're still in style though."

"House?"

Anna glanced up. "Mine and Alex's house. I haven't been there since he died."

"You have a house and you were living in that crappy apartment?"

"I don't want to live there. I don't even want to see it."

"Where is it?"

"Presidio."

"Why don't you want to live there? I would imagine it was pretty nice."

"It was beautiful. I loved living there, but...." She swallowed back tears. "I don't want to be reminded of him. It's bad enough I dream of him." She put her fork down and pressed her fingers to her eyes to keep from crying.

"You really loved him, didn't you?" He sounded almost awed.

"I did. He...saved me. He loved me. He told me he wanted to make up for all the years of abuse...and he did." Her voice squeaked.

"I didn't think Elder-Mistresses felt things so...deeply."

Anna sighed. "I don't know about the rest of them. They seemed to think me strange at Alex's funeral. Like, they couldn't understand why I was so upset about a man dying." The tears spilled onto her cheeks. "But when he died...all the beauty in the world died with him. Devin offered to make me feel better with drugs. I couldn't stand the pain anymore. That's why I left Wilhelm. But maybe if I had stayed...."

She shook her head and sniffed. Things might have turned out so differently. So many 'if onlys' in her life. Maybe Devin wouldn't have become so powerful. Maybe she and Kurt would have been married by now. Maybe she would have been happy again.

Peter reached for her hand and intertwined his fingers with hers. "I'm sorry, Anna. I misjudged you. I shouldn't have listened to...some people and should have listened to my gut when I met you."

He tugged at her hand and she went and sat in his lap and cried while he held her.

Peter became genuinely affectionate towards Anna after that conversation. He held her when they went to sleep and when she woke, he was still holding her. He didn't ignore her at home anymore, and even took her with him when he went out with his friends, though she still didn't speak to people much. But when she did, she wasn't mean or rude.

Among Peter's group of friends that he went out with regularly was Aaron. Anna didn't speak to him much, but Peter didn't get upset when she did. Sometimes he even seemed to be encouraging their friendship, though

Anna still kept her distance. She didn't understand what had happened to make Peter nicer and didn't fully trust it. Devin had been nice once, too.

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Chapter Seventeen

Devin gave Peter permission to take Anna to his family's home for Thanksgiving. The weekend before Thanksgiving, she went to the Gathering at the Manor as usual, but Devin didn't have sex with her or anyone at the Gathering. He'd had her play with his cock, but wouldn't let her finish him off. He slept with her in his bed that night, but didn't have sex with her.

The next morning, he woke her early, sucking on her clit. He brought her to the edge of her climax and then stopped and held her down and fucked her hard, but wouldn't allow her to come.

Ian appeared and with a strange sense of *déjà vous*, he and Devin tied her to his bed. Suddenly she realized what they were doing.

"No! No, Devin, please don't." Kaveh would come later and impregnate her. It was the same nightmare that happened this time every year.

Devin smiled and held up the syringe. "I thought about mixing it with your favorite fluid." Anna was about to relax, but then he continued. "And so I did."

He pressed the needle into her neck and the fire started immediately. It was much, much worse this time and she screamed as it rapidly entered her bloodstream and caused her whole body to feel as if it were on fire. The nerve juice made it worse and everything inside and outside was so painful she couldn't stand it. She screamed and tugged, which made everything worse.

Devin sat with her and traced patterns on her stomach with his finger, which felt like razor blades digging trenches in her skin. She screamed in pain until she couldn't scream anymore.

Kaveh appeared as the fire was subsiding, but the nerve juice was still active. When he entered her body and pushed into her womb, it was the worst pain she had ever experienced and had she been able to scream, it would have likely echoed through the whole Manor. Kaveh moved his hips and pressed in deeper and deeper. Tears ran down the side of her face as her stomach cramped and he thrust hard and deep, the pain rising to unbelievable levels. But she couldn't scream. She could only lay there and feel it. She felt her body tense and explode as if she were having an orgasm, but there was no pleasure. Only pain. Her muscles involuntarily clenched against him and he shouted as he came.

She hoped that once he left the pain would subside a bit, but it didn't. She couldn't sleep, she couldn't think. All she could do was lie there in pain.

“What’s wrong with her?”

The voice sounded familiar, but her brain was too fuzzy to put a face to the voice.

Anna opened her eyes, realizing with relief that the white-hot pain was gone, though she was still hurting. She was in her bed at the Manor. The light coming through the windows was faint. She must have fallen asleep and slept through the afternoon.

“She’s fine. Just some aftereffects of the morning.”

She brought her knees to her chest as her abdomen began cramping. She groaned and someone pulled at her shoulder to roll her to her back. Kaveh looked down at her with his golden eyes and put his hand on her stomach.

He smiled. “It’s done.”

Anna closed her eyes and hopelessness swept over her. Another pregnancy to deal with. There was no happiness with this one. No Alex to give hope. The baby would stay inside her until Devin needed it in the spring. And he would once again rip it from her body. She wished she were doped up on drugs again. She didn't have much memory of the previous two experiences, and was plagued with the happy memories from the first time.

"Can I take her home? I have things I need to do this evening." It was Peter. That was the voice she'd first heard. He sounded...irritated.

"Of course. Or you can come get her tomorrow." Devin sounded amused.

"I don't want to drive back out here. You could have told me before I came that I'd be waiting. Besides, you had her already last night. I had to sleep alone."

"You are always welcome to come, Peter. You know that."

"I appreciate that, but Friday nights are my favorite night to go to the clubs. The women are more...willing on Fridays after a long week of working." He laughed and Devin laughed with him.

So that's what Peter did on Fridays when she was here. Well, at least she knew that he wasn't sincere in his changed actions towards her.

"She gets pretty bad morning sickness about a month in...just to warn you."

"Great. And I get to deal with it?"

"You get to fuck her every night. That more than makes up for it."

"Except for those lovely nights when she's too beat up to be any good to me."

"It can't be helped, Peter. Men have violent appetites."

Peter sighed. "Where are her clothes?"

Anna felt fabric hit her legs. “Get dressed, Anna,” Devin said. “Your boyfriend wants to take you home.”

“Will I hurt the baby if I fuck her?”

“No,” Kaveh answered. “It’s nearly impossible to hurt the baby. Just don’t stab her in the stomach and you’ll be fine.”

The three men laughed and Anna sat up slowly. She didn’t look at them as she reached for her clothing. She was trembling and it took her a few minutes to get dressed.

As she walked with Peter and Devin out of the Manor she felt foolish. Peter had deceived her like Devin had when she first came to the Manor. The last few weeks she had slowly begun to trust Peter. He had started treating her like a real girlfriend. She thought he had begun to really care about her. But now she saw how stupid that was. She once again saw what a stupid, naïve, too-trusting girl she was. Maybe Peter would let her sleep when they got home.

Suddenly she had an unexplained urge to go to the house she’d shared with Alex. She didn’t know why, but she wanted to see the house again. Maybe it was because that was the one place she’d felt completely safe in the entire city. Maybe she could ask...? No. Peter wouldn’t take her. Did she dare sneak out? It was almost worth it. Besides, how would anyone know where she was?

But no, that would be foolish. She would make Peter angry. And Devin, too. She pushed the thought aside.

Peter helped her into the blue Audi R8 he had bought a few weeks ago, and then drove off towards home. Well, the apartment. The only home she’d ever truly had was where she’d lived with Alex.

Peter put his hand on her knee and she tried not to stiffen. “How are you feeling?” he asked in a gentle voice.

“Fine,” she whispered, staring out the window.

“Are you hungry?”

Anna shook her head.

“I talked with Aaron and the others about going out tonight, but if you’re not up for it, we can stay in.”

He really did have things to do tonight. “You can go without me. I’m sure you’d enjoy yourself more that way.” Her voice was faint but there.

“I like going out with you. I have fun with you.”

Anna didn’t respond. She wouldn’t let herself be sucked into his niceness again. She would obey him and please him as she was supposed to. Her hands tingled painfully and she rubbed the backs of them. She wanted to cry and scream at herself for being such an idiot. Why would Peter really care about her? He had a girlfriend at home. He was here because Devin wanted him here to keep her company because that’s what Devin thought she needed. That was it. Nothing more.

“Are you sure you don’t want your uncle to bring your girlfriend to LA for Thanksgiving? I don’t mind staying here.”

Peter didn’t respond and stared at the road ahead of him. Anna looked out the window and watched the buildings fly by. It was getting dark.

“Vlad wants to get to know you,” Peter said after a long silence.

“Why?”

Peter shrugged.

They didn’t speak again until they were in the parking garage. Peter hurried around the car to help her out. She had learned that he didn’t like it when she tried to get out herself.

“Do you want me to carry you?”

“I’m fine.” She walked slowly to the elevators and he pushed the call button.

He stayed by her side the whole time, not rushing her. When they made it to the apartment, he helped her onto the couch then pulled out his phone.

“Hey, Aaron...yeah...no, I think we’ll stay in tonight...Anna’s not feeling well...no...okay...okay, ’bye.”

She looked up at him. “You can go out. I’m fine.”

Peter sat next to her and rubbed her leg. “No, you’re not. Devin told me what he did to you.” He sighed and shook his head. “You sure you don’t want to eat?”

Anna shook her head.

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Chapter Eighteen

Later, as Anna lay in bed, she couldn't get the idea out of her head about going to the house. She glanced at Peter snoring softly next to her. He was a sound sleeper. Would he hear her if she got up?

Without trying to overthink the situation, she slipped out of bed and went to her dresser. She pulled out clothes and then went to the bathroom. After she'd dressed and brushed her hair, she went back out to the bedroom and paused to study Peter. He hadn't moved. After digging quietly through a box of her things, she located a spare set of house keys that she'd seen when she'd moved in with Peter. She grabbed her shoes, snuck out into the living room and silently left the apartment. She put on her shoes in the hallway, then hurried to the elevator, looking up the bus information on her phone on the way down. A bus was leaving in ten minutes two blocks away. She stopped briefly and purchased a bus pass at a kiosk, then hurried to the bus stop.

The bus was pulling up as she arrived and she got on and found a seat. As it pulled away from the curb, she began to doubt her plan. But what was wrong with going to see her old house? She wasn't trying to run away...really. She just...wanted to see it. She needed a happy memory to overwrite the horrible ones that were plaguing her.

The schedule indicated that the bus ride would take about a half hour. She kept expecting to hear her phone ring...that Peter had noticed she was gone. As soon as she arrived at the house, she would turn the phone off. Somehow, she could be tracked through it, but she needed it to find her way.

Her old neighborhood was about a half-mile walk from the bus stop. It took her much longer to get there than she expected when she set out, but eventually the entrance to the neighborhood came into view. The gates were closed, but she had a key on her ring to unlock them, and within moments she walked the circular road to her driveway.

Her heart pounded as the side of the big white house came into view. The house was dark, as she would have expected. She walked up and hesitated at the front door. Was it still her house? Would the key work? Did she really want to go inside?

Part of her wanted to run away. But she wanted...something of Alex. She needed his comfort, even if he was dead. Would the house still smell like him?

She bit her lip, put the key in the lock, and turned it. A sigh of relief escaped her mouth as the door opened, but the relief was replaced with anxiety as a beeping sound echoed in the entryway.

The alarm? She searched her memories as she walked to the glowing panel on the wall. After staring at the numbers for a few seconds, she pushed the code she remembered and winced. The pause between the last number punched and the double beep that signaled the correctly entered code seemed to last an eternity.

She flipped the light switch and stared at the marble entryway where she last saw Alex. The table and rug were there, but the white vase that had sat in the middle was gone.

She wandered slowly through the house, basking in the memories of Alex for the first time in two and a half years. An unexpected peace descended over her as she did so. She stopped in the great room and stared at their wedding pictures.

Anna hardly recognized herself. She looked so happy and Alex looked so handsome. She pulled the picture of Alex off the wall and held it to her chest as tears fell down her face. Her heart ached for him. It felt as raw now as it had the day she found out he was dead.

She ran up the stairs and into the master bedroom. The bed was made and the room was clean. So many memories of being with Alex here. What she wouldn't give for one more chance for him to hold her and kiss her and tell her that everything would be okay.

She walked through the room and into Alex's closet where his familiar scent filled her lungs and memory. She inhaled Alex's essence, drawing it deep inside until it rubbed like salt in the rawness of her heart.

Like a thrown switch, fury overcame her and she yanked at Alex's clothes, tearing them off the hangars until there was a large pile on the floor in front of her.

Chest heaving, she stared at the pile for a long moment before burrowing herself into the pile. She clutched the picture of Alex to her chest and fell into a deep sleep.

Distant shouting dragged Anna out of her peaceful sleep. She opened her eyes in the dark room and once again inhaled Alex. His clothes were so soft and warm and big. She never wanted to leave.

But her name was being shouted and footsteps pounded nearby. Light suddenly invaded her eyes.

“She’s in here!” someone shouted.

Anna blinked several times before her eyes focused on Aaron coming to squat down next to her. “What are you doing, Anna?” he asked.

“How did you find me?”

Aaron held up her arm with the gold bracelet. “GPS tracker. Peter could track you on his phone.”

“Peter’s here?” Anna looked around frantically. Oh, he would be so angry! He would take her back to Devin. She would get the injections again. What had she been thinking, coming here?

She hung her head for a moment before burying it back into the pile of fabric.

A few moments later, Anna heard more footsteps and she looked up to see Peter in the doorway. She backed away on her hands and feet and huddled next to the wall, still cradling the picture of Alex to her chest. She looked up at him, terrified of going back to the Manor.

“Anna, why didn’t you ask me to bring you here?” Peter asked softly. “Why did you sneak out?” He came to kneel next to her and pulled her into his arms. “Why didn’t you ask me to bring you?” he implored.

Anna didn’t know what to say. Why was he being nice? “I thought I was a bother. I’m sorry I snuck out. Please don’t take me to the Manor,” she begged.

“Anna, you’re not a bother. Why would you think that?”

“Because of what you said to Devin this afternoon.”

Peter’s brown eyes filled with concern. “Anna, are you talking about when Devin was telling me about your morning sickness and such?”

She nodded.

He closed his eyes and sighed. “I was hoping you were asleep. Anna, I...I couldn’t let Devin know that I was disgusted by what he did to you.” He took her hand in his. “That night, after that guy came and tore you up, I went to see Aaron and he told me your story. It was very, very different than what Devin had told me. And, honestly, a better explanation of your whole

attitude and demeanor. Devin had told me that you were a pain in the ass and needed watching at all times and that he didn't have the time to do so. That...you were a bitchy Elder-Mistress that had gotten too arrogant and needed to be brought down a notch. I could do what I liked to you and just needed to accommodate his need for you." He looked back at her. "I'm sorry I believed him, Anna."

"I wasn't very nice when you came."

Peter smiled. "No, but there was still something sad about you. And Aaron defended you to the teeth. He didn't seem like the type of guy that would have been beguiled by you. At least not that much." He paused and glanced at Aaron. "I heard you tell him backstage that you wouldn't date him because you were afraid that something would happen to him. I've never seen an Elder-Mistress feel as deep emotions as I have you, Anna, and I've met them all."

He stroked her cheek. When he spoke again it was with a soft and gentle voice. "I said those things to Devin so he wouldn't think that I disbelieved him about you. I hate to imagine what he would do if he didn't trust me anymore. You're not a bother, Anna. I've become quite fond of you." He slid his hand around the back of her head and leaned in to kiss her gently, his lips enveloping hers and his thumb stroking her cheek. "Very fond," he repeated in a whisper.

They gazed at each other and Anna saw that he was telling the truth. She gave him a timid smile. "I'm sorry I snuck out."

"I was scared to death when I woke up and found you gone. Fortunately, Devin told me about your bracelet when I first got here so I didn't have to call him. I don't want to think about what Devin would have done if I'd had to do that."

Anna swallowed nervously. "You're not going to tell him?"

“Absolutely not. I have no desire to see you punished.” He shuddered as if he knew what all it entailed.

“Thank you,” Anna said sincerely. She was glad she had been wrong about him.

Peter helped her to her feet and the three of them went back out into the bedroom and sat on the bed.

“When I tracked you, I got to the gate and couldn’t figure out how to get in here,” Peter said. “I drove around for a half hour trying to figure out how to get in. So I called Aaron, hoping he might know.”

“Alex gave me all the information to get in before he left,” Aaron said. “Even a remote to open the gate. I’m glad nothing had been changed.”

“What time is it?” Anna asked, yawning suddenly.

“A little after three in the—” Aaron’s phone interrupted him. “Who the hell is calling?” He pulled his phone out of his pocket. “Oh.” He stood and walked out of the room.

Anna glanced at Peter, confused.

“My guess would be Wilhelm. I believe he gets notified if the house codes are used.” Peter looked pointedly at her. “He gets notifications about a lot of things around here.”

Anna thought for a minute. “So, he knows I’m here?”

Peter shrugged. “I would guess so. I would also guess that he likes it when he sees receipts from credit cards and knows what his family members are purchasing. I think he would be able to see what they are doing by the things that they buy.”

Anna stared at Peter. “You mean by using the cards, I can tell Wilhelm that I’m okay and what I’m doing?”

Peter shrugged again, but his expression said yes.

“You’re not allowed to tell me?”

“No.”

So she could send coded messages to Wilhelm through her purchases? And Devin wouldn’t know? “Maybe I should buy more ribbons for my pointe shoes.” Since she was a “Ribbon Dancer” for Nutcracker, he might understand the code.

Peter grinned. “I think it would be a good idea.”

“Thank you,” she said, reaching for his hand.

“It wasn’t my idea,” he responded, looking up as Aaron walked back in. “Everything okay?”

Aaron nodded. “Yeah, there was a call from the alarm company about unusual activity here at the house.”

“Anna thinks she needs to buy new ribbons for her pointe shoes.”

Aaron grinned. “Appropriate.”

Anna yawned again and Peter stood and pulled the covers back from the bed. “We’ll stay here tonight, if that’s okay?”

She nodded, and was pleased when the two men got on either side of her in bed. Snuggled between their comforting presence, she was asleep within minutes.

“This is a really nice house, Anna. Are you sure you don’t want to live here?” Peter asked the next morning.

Anna shook her head. “No,” she said softly. “Not without Alex.”

While Peter took Aaron home, Anna gathered up some things that she wanted, including some clothes, her memory box and a picture of her and Alex on their wedding day.

Peter had remarked that he hardly recognized her as the same person in the picture.

“It was almost three years ago,” she’d pointed out. But he was right. She had been a different person with Alex and it showed in her face.

“That’s really sad, Anna,” was all that he said, but he looked even more troubled.

Anna had asked Aaron if he wanted Alex’s car, but he declined. “I couldn’t afford the insurance,” Aaron had laughed. “Nah. Maybe you’ll want it for something.”

Anna frowned and told him she wouldn’t, but he still didn’t want the car.

Peter returned a while later. “Ready?”

She looked around the entryway again and then nodded. “I’m ready.”

They walked outside and Anna locked the door.

“Anna, if you want to come back at any time, just ask me, okay?” Peter said, holding out his hand towards her. “Don’t feel like you need to sneak out.”

Anna took his outstretched hand and nodded. “I will.”

Chapter Nineteen

The Company only had rehearsals through Wednesday morning. Peter and Anna flew down to LA that afternoon and drove the rental car down to his family's home in Laguna Beach.

He drove into a very nice neighborhood and parked in front of a wide, pink house with two garages and a gated courtyard. Behind the house, the sky was pink and gold with the setting sun and the air was salty. She could hear the ocean in the distance. As she stepped out of the car, she held Peter's hand and closed her eyes, absorbing her surroundings.

Peter stepped closer and slid his hands around her back. "You look like you like it here," he murmured and pressed his lips to hers. They had been getting along very well this week and Anna had begun to feel close to him.

"It's so warm," she said, wrapping her arms around his neck. "It's so different from home." She went up on tiptoe and kissed him passionately.

"I hope my parents let you stay in my room, otherwise I'll be visiting you in the middle of the night."

Anna giggled and leaned her head on his chest. "I just hope they don't hate me."

"There's nothing to hate about you, Anna," Peter protested, though he couldn't hide the concern in his eyes. He had told her that his father and uncle could be very stubborn and once they got a notion in their head, it was difficult to dislodge. "Let's get our bags and face the music."

He closed the car door and popped the trunk. Once he retrieved both suitcases, he led her through the gate and to the front door. He smiled at her and then opened the door.

The door opened into the top of a two-story high white room with windows on the opposite wall that exhibited the magnificent golden sunset over the ocean. Anna stopped and stared. She'd never seen anything so beautiful as that sunset.

"Oh, Peter," she sighed. "It's amazing."

Peter chuckled. "It is. Just look where you're going and don't fall down the stairs. Isaak will kill me if you get hurt."

She glanced at him and smiled, and saw in front of her a curved staircase leading down into a long living room full of people.

Peter said something loudly in Russian and the people downstairs looked up and shouted in excitement. He and Anna made their way down the stairs and a girl ran up to Peter and hugged him hard.

"Peter!" she exclaimed. She was beautiful, about fourteen or fifteen, with long, almost-black hair and blue eyes. She was tall and thin and had dimples in her cheeks. It was clear by the way she looked at Peter that she adored him.

"Natalya," Peter said with a grin and put his arm around Anna's waist. "This is Anna. Anna, this is my little sister Natalya."

"Hi," Anna said shyly.

"Hi, Anna," Natalya said with a warm smile. "Welcome to our home."

The other people walked up to them and Peter greeted them all with hugs and kisses and affectionate greetings.

"I thought I heard you, *Dorogoy*." A woman in her late forties with shiny black hair pulled back into a low bun walked in from another room. She was about Anna's height and smiled broadly at Peter.

"Hello, Mama," Peter said hugging her tightly.

She beamed at him and tapped his cheek. "I like the beard. You look like your father."

“Everyone, this is Anna,” Peter said loudly. “Anna, this is...everyone.” He laughed. “My mother, Jackie. My brothers Sergei, Pavel and Yuri.” The three younger guys nodded as Peter said their names. Anna guessed Sergei to be about her age, Pavel was a few years younger and Yuri looked to be about sixteen. “You’ve already met Natalya. This is my Uncle Vlad and Aunt Nina and my father, Mikhail.”

Anna smiled shyly at everyone as they were introduced. Nina and Jackie both smiled at her, but Vlad and Mikhail looked at her suspiciously.

“Dinner is ready,” Jackie said with a smile. “I was hoping you’d make it in time. Let’s eat.”

Peter took her hand and the whole crowd moved into the next room where a large table was set. Steaming dishes sat in the middle of the table and smelled delicious. Anna sat between Peter and Sergei. Peter sat near the end next to his father.

Dinner was a noisy affair. Everyone wanted to hear stories of living in San Francisco and Peter’s dancing. He apparently hadn’t been to visit for several years, though they had gone out to visit him.

“You couldn’t come visit us?” Natalya pouted prettily.

“I’ve been busy, Nati. You know how it is.”

Once Peter finished telling them his stories, the conversations drifted here and there around the table. Anna kept silent. Peter’s father and uncle spoke softly in Russian and looked at her every once in a while. Vlad seemed especially unfriendly and Anna wondered what she had done to offend him. She’d only met him once, at Alex’s funeral, and he’d seemed cordial, though Anna had been less than that. Maybe that’s why he didn’t like her.

“Dariya called me,” Sergei said, looking past Anna to Peter.

Peter’s face went slightly pale. “Why did she call you?”

“You weren’t answering your phone, so she called me to find out what happened to you.” Sergei looked at Anna. “I guess I know now.”

Anna was dying to ask who Dariya was, but she had a feeling she already knew: Peter’s girlfriend.

“Can we talk about this later, Sergei?” Peter asked calmly, though she could tell he was upset.

Sergei shrugged and went back to eating.

Anna took a few more small bites of food and then was done. Since she and Peter had been getting along, she’d forgotten about “the girlfriend.” Did he call Dariya at all? Did he miss her? Anna was glad she wasn’t further along in her pregnancy or she might have gotten sick. As it was, her stomach was churning with the reminder that Peter wasn’t really her boyfriend. They were still only together because Devin wanted them to be. How long would Devin make him stay with her?

Peter put his arm around Anna’s shoulders. “Anna, are you all right?” he whispered into her ear. “Sergei...I’m sorry. He shouldn’t have said that in front of you.”

Anna shook her head. “It’s okay,” she said, smiling weakly. “I...just forgot about her.”

He gave her a look filled with such affection she had to turn away. She didn’t want him to look at her like that. She liked him, there was no denying that. The reminder of his real life was necessary, she decided. A dose of reality that would keep her from getting hurt...maybe. They spent so much time together it was already hard to imagine life without him.

After dinner, Jackie showed Anna to the room she would be sleeping in. She would not be staying with Peter. Instead, she would be sharing a room with Natalya, who had two twin beds in her room. Anna heard Peter arguing with his father in Russian, but Peter didn’t seem to be winning.

Peter stood behind Anna with his hands on the deck railing on either side of her as she gazed out onto the dark ocean in front of her. The house sat on a cliff above the ocean with an amazing view of the beach below. Peter said it was even better during the day.

The air was a little chilly, but Peter kept her warm. “It’s so peaceful here,” she sighed.

“Until my dad and uncle start arguing,” he chuckled. He leaned down and sucked on the side of Anna’s neck, making her sigh again. “You like that, don’t you?”

“Mmm.” She liked it when he touched her, period. She was learning he was an excellent lover.

His hands slid up her arms to her shoulders and he pulled at the fabric of her top so he could kiss her bare shoulder. She leaned her head back onto his shoulder and closed her eyes. When his thumbs brushed the bottom curve of her breasts, her nipples hardened and pressed against the thin fabric of her bra.

“I don’t know if I can go four days without being with you,” he murmured against her neck and pressed his erection against her ass. “My cock will get lonely without you.”

Anna giggled. “I would miss you too,” she whispered, pressing her hips back against him and making him groan. He cursed softly in Russian and moved his hands to cup her breasts. “Oh, Peter...,” she sighed.

“There’s a reason I didn’t want you sharing a room, Peter.” Vlad came and stood next to Anna and Peter, leaning against the railing. “They can be

rather....” Vlad looked at Anna with a lustful glance. “...addicting. You need some time away from her.”

“She’s not a ‘they’, Vlad,” Peter corrected. “She’s a person.”

“She’s an Elder-Mistress. Their job is to seduce men.”

Vlad’s words pierced Anna’s peaceful bubble. He clearly didn’t like her. Why did he allow Peter to come be with her in San Francisco? Maybe he had to obey Devin because he was an Elder.

“Let’s walk, shall we?” Vlad said, indicating a gap in the railing on the side of the deck.

Anna looked up at Peter, who looked at his uncle with narrowed eyes. “Why?” he asked.

“I told you, I want to get to know Anna. I can’t very well do that in front of the family, can I?”

So that’s what he wanted. He wanted to use her. Anna’s shoulders slumped and she walked in the direction Vlad had indicated.

“Anna, you don’t have to—”

“Yes, she does, Peter,” Vlad corrected.

The three of them walked to the side of the house where there was a small, dimly lit flower garden.

“Keep watch,” Vlad told Peter, then pulled Anna further into the garden and to a bench where he pushed her until she bent over with her hands on the back of it. He pushed her skirt up over her hips and pulled her panties aside to delve his fingers inside her.

She glanced back at Peter, who watched with a helpless look on his face. Vlad smacked her hip. “You are to please me. Don’t worry about him.”

Anna’s jaw trembled. “Yes, my lord,” she said softly, glad he couldn’t see the tears in her eyes. She hung her head and let him touch her as he pleased. She heard a zipper, he pulled her panties down and a moment later

he was inside her. His fingers dug into her hips as he thrust into her hard. She clung to the back of the bench and braced herself against his movements.

“Devin said you could come on command,” he said with a gruff voice. “Do it. But softly.”

Anna bit her lip and concentrated on the sensations in her body. It had been a while since she’d done it, especially in this position.

Vlad’s movements quickened and he growled at her. “Do it.”

She closed her eyes and felt relieved when her body responded as he wanted it to. She gasped and covered her mouth as she came, breathing heavily and trying to remain silent. Vlad came with a groan a moment later and dug his fingernails into her skin.

He pulled out, but Anna didn’t dare move until he told her to. She kept her eyes down so he wouldn’t see she was upset, but he grabbed her chin and looked into her face. “Why are you upset? This is what you are for.”

Anna blinked several times. “Y-yes, my lord,” she whispered over the lump in her throat. Would the whole weekend be like this?

He looked at her with narrowed eyes for a long minute and then turned on his heel and left. Peter moved to go to Anna, but Vlad snapped at him in Russian and he turned and followed his uncle out of the garden.

As soon as they were out of sight, Anna fell to the ground and cried. She was apparently due to have many doses of reality while she was here. She cried for a long time, and no one came to the garden. Should she stay here? Vlad hadn’t given her further instructions and she didn’t know what to do. It started to get even cooler and Anna shivered, paralyzed with indecision.

She heard footsteps and saw Peter a moment later. Her heart leapt at the sight of him, and then she pushed the happiness aside.

He walked over to her and kissed her forehead. “I’m sorry, Anna.” He helped her to her feet and led her back inside, keeping a distance between them.

“What do you want to do?” Peter asked in a gentle tone.

“Can I go to bed?”

Peter nodded and led her up the staircase to Natalya’s room. He pointed out the bathroom again. “If you want to shower, go ahead.”

“Is it okay if I do?”

Peter nodded. “Anna, I don’t know why Vlad’s acting this way. He’s usually a really nice guy.”

“He didn’t hurt me,” she said softly.

“Physically, maybe,” he growled.

Anna tried to give him a brave smile. “I’m okay.”

“No, Anna. It’s not okay that he did that. I’m going to—”

She put her hand on his chest. “Please don’t get into trouble for my sake, Peter. I’m okay. I’ve been through much worse.”

“That’s not comforting.”

Anna shrugged. “It’s true.”

“I know. That’s why it’s not comforting.” He sighed. “Go shower. I’ll stay with you until you fall asleep.”

“Peter, you don’t have to do that. You’ll get in trouble.”

“I don’t care. You don’t deserve to be treated this way. I was hoping he’d see that if he got to know you.” He rubbed his face. “Go,” he said in a gentler voice. “I’ll be up in a little while.”

Anna nodded and he headed back down the hallway. She went into the bedroom and opened her suitcase to pull out her toiletries and pajamas and then went to the bathroom and showered. When she went back to the bedroom later, Peter was sitting on her bed.

“Feeling better?” he asked, opening his arms.

She nodded and gladly went into his embrace. His arms were so comforting. She knew she shouldn’t let herself get lost in her emotions for him, but right now she couldn’t help it. She needed comfort. After a while he pulled back the covers and tucked her into bed, then lay down next to her with his arms around her.

“I’ll let my family know you weren’t feeling well and went to bed early. You remember where my room is?”

Anna nodded.

“Come get me if you need anything.”

“Okay.”

Anna closed her eyes and relaxed, letting his warm embrace lull her into the peaceful oblivion of sleep.

Chapter Twenty

“Is there anything I can do to help today?” Anna asked as she helped clear the breakfast dishes.

She had one year of Thanksgiving experience behind her; the Thanksgiving she’d spent with Ben’s family. Katherine had taken command of the kitchen the whole day and Anna had helped out where she could. She wasn’t very good in the kitchen, but knew a few things. Plus, maybe she could stay busy enough to keep out of Vlad’s presence, though it would mean being away from Peter as well. But that would also keep Peter from getting into trouble.

“Oh, you’re so sweet Anna,” Jackie said with a smile as Anna brought a stack of dishes to the sink. “Do you have any family traditions from growing up we could try to incorporate?”

“No,” Anna said softly. Thanksgiving had been like any other day with Jack and she didn’t remember much from her parents. She didn’t remember much of a celebration from growing up. Her mother didn’t have any traditions and her father...well, Immortals don’t exactly have families.

Jackie gave her a kind look. “Peter said your upbringing was kinda rough.” She smiled. “Don’t worry, I have enough to fill the day.”

Nina and Natalya were in the huge kitchen as well and they laughed.

“Poor Jackie has had to teach all of us about the American traditions,” Nina said. “I am becoming quite fond of them. I like coming out here this time of year. For one, I do not freeze.”

Anna laughed. “I was in Germany in December a few years ago and I remember it was absolutely freezing. But St. Petersburg gets much colder, I understand.”

Nina nodded. "Oh, yes. I would consider a German winter to be very nice."

"What were you doing in Germany?" Natalya asked.

Anna bit her lip. How did she answer that? She picked up a cloth and began wiping the table down. "I...was visiting someone. It was a few years ago."

"Is your family German?" Nina asked.

"No, they're...." Anna chuckled. "They're Russian, actually. My grandparents settled in the Russian part of San Francisco when they emigrated. But not Russian hill."

"Really? That would explain why we get along so well," Nina smiled. She had been very nice to Anna both last night and this morning. "Do you know where they are from?"

Anna shook her head. "No." She hesitated. "My parents died when I was twelve." She worked at a sticky spot on the table.

"Oh, that must have been difficult," Jackie said. "I'm so sorry."

Anna shrugged.

"Who raised you?" Jackie asked.

"My guardian, Jack. He was a friend of my parents."

"Are you close to him?"

Anna stared at the table and considered how to answer the question. "I don't like him," she said softly, amazed that she could actually say the words aloud. *I hate him!!* She closed her eyes and took several deep breaths.

"I didn't mean to bring up unsettling memories, Anna," Jackie said.

"Forgive me."

Anna opened her eyes and stared at the table. "It's okay," she said.

She finished wiping the table in silence. Nina changed the subject, talking about one of her daughter's upcoming wedding. Anna didn't pay much attention, instead she immersed herself in memories of Alex and his family.

Jackie kept the women busy all day. She had Anna peel potatoes and cut up fruits and vegetables. Jackie and Nina made pies and Natalya helped with both. Anna handed Nina a bowl of cut apples and Nina caught sight of Anna's wedding band.

"What a pretty ring. May I?" Nina reached for her hand.

Anna nodded timidly and held her hand out for Nina to see.

"Is that a...oh, what is it called in English...poesy ring, I think it is called?"

Anna nodded again.

Nina looked at her thoughtfully. "Are you married, Anna?"

Jackie and Natalya both stopped and looked at her.

"I was," Anna said, pulling her hand away. "He died."

"When?" Nina asked softly.

"Two and a half years ago. We were together for less than three months when...it happened." She looked away to hide her tears.

"What was his name?"

"Alex."

"Was he German?"

Anna looked at Nina, surprised at her question. "Yes."

Nina frowned. "Excuse me a moment, will you?" She walked quickly out of the room and Anna looked at Jackie.

"Did I do something?"

Jackie shook her head. "No. I don't...I don't know what's wrong." She smiled. "Those apples are perfectly cut. Do you cook a lot?"

Anna smiled, thankful for the change of subject. “No. Peter and I eat take out or microwave meals. Though he cooks occasionally.”

“You live together?” Natalya asked with wide eyes. “But I thought—”

“Nati, why don’t you ask Papa to pick out the wine for tonight?”

“But Mama—”

Jackie looked sternly at her daughter and Natalya dutifully turned away and went in search of her father.

“I’m sorry if I said something I shouldn’t have,” Anna said quickly.
“I...I’ve been told I’m socially awkward.”

Jackie smiled at her. “Don’t worry about it, Anna. You’re doing fine. I’m sorry if we ask you uncomfortable questions. We just didn’t know you and Peter were so serious. He...just told us you met when he came back here.”

Anna sighed. “Yeah. It’s...complicated.”

Jackie changed the subject and after Natalya returned a few minutes later, the mood in the kitchen lightened quickly.

Vlad strode silently into the kitchen about a half hour later. “Nina apologizes, but she isn’t feeling well and decided to take a nap. She’s hoping to make it for dinner, but we’ll have to see.”

Jackie frowned at Vlad. “She was fine earlier.”

“A sudden headache,” he explained. He glanced at Anna and then left the room as silently as he had entered it.

Jackie stared at the entryway where Vlad had just exited with a puzzled look on her face and then sighed. “Well, Anna. Would you like to learn how to make pie?”

The rest of the afternoon went quickly. Jackie showed Anna how to roll pie dough and prepare it for filling. Anna was amazed at how complicated it

was, but enjoyed it all the same. Her apple pie wasn't as beautiful as Jackie's other pies, but it smelled good and Anna felt very proud of herself.

When the turkey came out of the oven mid-afternoon, Anna helped set the table and set out the many dishes of food. She grinned, proud of all she had done to help, and felt better than she had in a long time. The men came in a few minutes later, along with a pale Nina, and they all sat down to dinner. Peter was not as boisterous as he had been earlier, but he was affectionate towards Anna.

Dinner was delicious. Peter teased Anna quietly that he would have her start cooking back home.

"Are you feeling better, Nina?" Anna asked as they cleared the dinner plates. Nina looked at her with sad eyes and nodded.

Vlad spoke sharply in Russian and Nina hurried away from her. The rest of the evening, Nina kept quiet and avoided any contact with Anna. Anna wondered what she had done to upset Nina. Or Vlad, as the case might have been. She knew Vlad didn't like her; maybe he didn't want Nina liking her either. Or maybe he was concerned that Anna would tell Nina about what happened the night before?

When it was time for dessert, Anna beamed when her apple disappeared before any of the other pies. Jackie praised her and Anna blushed and hid behind Peter.

"You made this?" Vlad asked her with narrowed eyes.

"Yes," Anna said softly. "With Jackie's help. I...couldn't have done it without her help."

Vlad stared at her for a moment and then stalked away without saying another word.

Chapter Twenty-One

Peter snuck Anna upstairs to his room later while the rest of the family was occupied with evening activities.

“I hate sleeping alone,” Peter remarked, locking the door behind him. He walked quickly across the room to Anna and kissed her soundly. “We have to be quick, but when we get home, I’ll make it up to you.”

They returned downstairs about a half hour later and watched a movie with his family. She sat with Peter on the couch and he held her close. Anna was drifting off to sleep when Peter’s phone rang.

She looked at the clock on the wall. It was almost midnight. “Who is it?” she asked.

Peter looked troubled when he saw the name on the phone. “I have to take this. I’ll be back.” He stood quickly and answered the phone in Russian.

Only Vlad and Mikhail remained in the room, the rest of the family having gone to bed earlier. Anna glanced awkwardly at them and then stared hard at the TV.

“Dariya,” Vlad commented a moment later. He looked at Anna. “You know he has a girlfriend, right? A proper girlfriend?”

Anna flushed and looked at her hands. “Yes,” she answered softly. She hated the reminder and hated the ache in her heart knowing that eventually Peter would return to St. Petersburg and marry Dariya. Why couldn’t she stay aloof from men and not get attached?

“That bothers you?” Vlad asked, sounding surprised.

Anna looked at him with sad eyes. “It shouldn’t, but yes, it does.” She hugged her knees into her chest and rested her chin on top.

“Did it upset you, what I did yesterday?” Vlad asked abruptly.

Anna bit her lip. “In the garden?”

Vlad nodded.

Anna didn’t know how to answer that without offending him. “I didn’t like it,” she admitted in a voice barely above a whisper, and then winced, waiting for his answer.

Vlad leaned back in his chair and studied her. “How does Devin treat you?”

Anna’s eyes widened. “Is that a trick question?” she asked without thinking.

“No.”

She didn’t know how Devin would want her to respond. Would he be upset if she told Vlad about his abuse? Sometimes Devin freely told people how he kept her in line. Other times he made sure he treated her nicely around certain people. “He is my Master. He can treat me as he wants to treat me,” she answered finally. It wasn’t an answer, but she didn’t know what else to say.

Vlad frowned at her. “Does he treat you well? Is he affectionate?”

Anna hugged her knees even tighter. “Sometimes.”

“Does he hurt you?”

“Sometimes.”

Vlad sighed and frowned. “Do you ever give straight answers?”

Anna swallowed. “I try. I don’t know how he would want me to answer you.”

Vlad narrowed his eyes thoughtfully. “Can’t you answer as you want to?”

“I don’t want to get punished.”

Vlad and Mikhail glanced at each other. “He punishes you?”

Anna nodded. "When I misbehave."

"Do you misbehave often?"

"I try not to. I try to be good, but...." Anna sighed. "I seem to always manage to anger him."

"You enjoy angering him?"

Anna shook her head emphatically. "No, not at all. I try to be good."

"What was Alex like?"

Anna's chest tightened. "Why do you ask me that?"

Vlad shrugged his shoulders. "Curiosity, I suppose. Why would an Elder-Mistress choose to marry? It would seem...counterproductive to your...natural desires."

"Natural desires?"

"To be with men. Why tie yourself down with marriage?"

"Tie down?" Anna blinked. "Alex...freed me. He kept Devin from hurting me. Or at least he did until he died." She took a breath, willing the tears away. "They were the happiest days of my entire life."

"You seemed rather upset when he died."

She stared at Vlad. Upset was a complete understatement. "My whole world came crashing down around me the day I found out he was gone. Alex...loved me, unlike anyone had ever loved me before. He protected me. I thought he was invincible." Tears welled up in her eyes. "I thought he couldn't die." Her voice cracked.

"Everyone dies, Anna."

"But with the bonding and everything, I thought...." She sniffed. "I guess I was wrong." She wanted to run up to the bedroom and go to sleep. These questions made old wounds feel new and raw again.

"That was almost three years ago. You're still upset about it? You were only married three months."

Anna shrugged. Was she overdramatic about it? Should she move on from him? But there was nothing to move on to. “Alex was my only hope. He was the only one that Devin couldn’t hurt. And now...there’s nothing left, except Devin. A hell-filled life with him.” She closed her eyes and shook her head. “Nothing.”

Vlad didn’t respond and Peter returned a few minutes later. He looked like the phone call had not gone well.

Anna stood and looked at him. “If it’s all right with you, I think I’ll go to bed,” she said softly.

Peter nodded. “I’ll walk you up.”

“No, that’s okay,” Anna said quickly. “I...I’m okay.” She turned quickly and fled up the stairs and to the bedroom that she shared with Natalya, who was fast asleep. Anna buried her face in her pillow and cried herself to sleep.

He was looking out the window again, his hair glinting in the sunlight. The window was closed and he had his arms crossed as if he were cold. A fire blazed in the fireplace.

She wondered what he looked at. Why was he always there? Was there anything beyond this room?

“Alex?” she said softly.

He turned and smiled at her. “Schatzi. Oh, my Schatzi.” He walked towards her and stopped a few feet from her and sighed. “I want so badly to hold you,” he said with such longing in his voice she felt a lump forming in her throat.

“Me too,” she admitted softly. “I went to the house and piled your clothes in the middle of the closet and fell asleep.” She smiled. “It smelled like you.”

“Are you living there again?”

She shook her head. “I don’t want to live there without you,” she whispered. “I miss you so much. I...Devin...got me pregnant again. I wish you were here,” she added, her entire body burning with grief.

He frowned and clenched his jaw. “Again?”

“He does it every year.”

He ran his hands through his hair. “Anna...I will rescue you. I will get out of here somehow and I will find you.” His face was fierce with determination.

Anna swallowed. “I wish that were true,” she said sadly. “But I’m not afraid to dream about you anymore. At least Devin can’t control my dreams.”

Several emotions flitted over his face and then he smiled gently. “Dream of me. Yes, I like it when you dream of me.”

Anna smiled.

“Have you seen my father recently?”

She shook her head. “Devin told him he couldn’t come back after he tried to take me to Germany. He got...scary and forbade your entire family from even contacting me.”

“Scary? What do you mean?”

“He got...big...tall...and he could make your father do anything he wanted him to do.”

Alex looked thoughtful. “How is that possible?” he asked softly.

“Ian said it was because he took my power for himself.” She stumbled as the room spun around her.

“Anna? Anna, are you all right?”

She held her head and winced. “I don’t feel good.”

“Schatzi, I think you need to wake up. You’ve been here too long.”

Anna looked up and shook her head. “I don’t want to leave.” But the room was starting to fade.

“Dream of me again, Schatzi. I love you. So much.”

“I love you, too,” she whispered and closed her eyes.

Anna opened her eyes to see Peter and Vlad standing over her, watching her with concerned expressions. It was still night, but a dim light next to her bed lit their faces.

“What were you dreaming of?” Vlad demanded.

Anna couldn’t speak and just stared at him.

“What were you—” Vlad repeated in a harsh voice, but Peter stopped him.

“Please don’t scare her. It won’t do any good.” Peter sat next to her. “Gentle touch is more effective.” He brushed her hair back from her face and smiled gently. “Were you dreaming of Alex?”

Anna nodded.

“Have you dreamed of him before?”

“Lots of times. But before I met him, they were real. Now they’re just dreams.”

Peter frowned in confusion and seemed to repeat in his head what she said.

“You dreamed of him before you met him?” Vlad asked in a gentler voice.

Anna nodded.

“Why do you say they were real?”

“Because Alex told me he saw me. That I was really there.” She sighed.
“But now they’re not real,” she added softly.

“Tell me what you saw,” Vlad said.

Anna told him about the room that Alex was in and how he looked different than he had when he was alive.

She looked up at Vlad and gasped. “I dreamed of you!” she stared at him, terrified. “No! It couldn’t be...No, why would I...?” She rubbed her eyes and shook her head. “I don’t understand.” She felt panicky and looked wildly around the room. Why did she dream of Vlad?

Vlad mumbled something in Russian, then pulled out his phone and spoke in Russian to someone. Maybe it was just the language, but he sounded irritated. He put the phone down a minute later.

“Anna. Anna, shh.” Vlad put his hand on her forehead and spoke calm, soothing words that she didn’t understand, but did indeed calm her. “Shh. Go back to sleep.”

Anna tried to protest, but her eyes grew heavy and she drifted off.

The rest of the weekend was uneventful, but relaxing and enjoyable. Vlad left Anna alone, though she felt him watching her a lot. Peter took her to the Muse Boutique in downtown Laguna Beach where she bought a few things to let Wilhelm know where she was. She remembered her dream about Alex, but didn’t remember waking to find Peter and Vlad looking at her.

Chapter Twenty-Two

“I just made the flight arrangements,” Peter said Monday evening when they were back in San Francisco. Peter had told Anna that he was going to St. Petersburg for a week after Nutcracker was over to visit Dariya.

“Did you tell Dariya?” Anna asked softly.

Peter nodded. “She’s placated for the moment. I need to go. I’ve barely spoken to her since I left and she’s...upset.”

“I know.” She didn’t understand why he felt the need to justify himself. It wasn’t as if their “relationship” was real. He needed to maintain his relationship with the other girl. Anna tried to smile and tell him she was okay with it, but couldn’t bring herself to speak the words.

A knock at the door interrupted her thoughts and she went to answer it.

“Jack, what are you doing here?” Anna exclaimed after she opened the door. He leaned against the doorpost with a smug look on his face.

“Why do you think, Baby?” he asked with a grin, pushing the door open. He saw Peter sitting on the couch. “Is this the new boyfriend?”

Peter stood. “I am. And you are?”

“Anna’s former guardian. I don’t believe we’ve met, although Devin told me quite a bit about you.”

Peter’s face remained impassive.

“Jack is a very good friend of Devin’s,” Anna explained as a warning that he would tell Devin about anything that was amiss.

Peter’s face broke into a smile. “Ah, of course.” He walked forward and shook his hand. “I have heard much about you.”

“You’re Vitaly’s grandson, eh?”

“I am.”

Jack nodded and studied Peter for a moment. “You look like him.”

Peter smiled. “I’ll take that as a compliment.”

Jack laughed. “You should.” He glanced at Anna and then looked back at Peter. “You don’t mind if I use Anna for a bit, do you?”

Peter shrugged. “I’d appreciate it if you didn’t hurt her. Opening night is Friday and she’s taking longer to recover these days.”

“Really?” Jack looked at Anna. “That’s too bad.” He sighed. “I suppose I can take it easy on her this time. I’ll just make up for it after the first of the year.”

Anna motioned to the bedroom door and she and Jack walked through it. He wasn’t nice, but he wasn’t as mean as he normally would be and he left, mostly satisfied, an hour later.

Anna heard Peter say goodbye to Jack and then he rushed in to check on her. “Are you all right?”

Anna sat up and nodded. “Yes,” she said softly. As all right as she ever was after a visit like that. Peter sat next to her and she lay her head on his chest. “I suppose this is a reminder that all of this isn’t real,” she said softly.

Peter didn’t answer, but hugged her tightly. After a while, Peter kissed her on the head. “Go shower. I’ll take care of the bed.”

“Thank you,” Anna said. She kissed his cheek and headed into the bathroom.

Nutcracker opened as a great success. Aaron and Stephanie danced the *Grande pas de deux* beautifully, as usual. Peter was stunning as he and Erin danced in the snow scene. Anna felt like she performed well, and Peter told her that she outshone her fellow ribbon dancers.

Afterwards, Peter escorted her out to the party in the lobby. His parents, brothers and sister, and Vlad and Nina had all come up to see him. They were happy to see them both again and praised Anna for her beautiful dancing. Mikhail thought Peter had been wasted as the snow king, but Peter said he didn't mind.

"It was nice not to have all the pressure of dancing the prince, like I normally do," he remarked. "I don't mind it, Papa. I really don't."

Mikhail mumbled something in Russian and Peter laughed.

Devin walked up a few minutes later and greeted everyone. Anna resisted the urge to step closer to Peter. Peter had to play the part. That was all there was to it.

"Peter, you really are an excellent dancer. I would love to see you and Anna dance together. That would be...quite a pairing."

"I agree," Peter said. "Isaak mentioned the possibility once she's promoted to Principal."

Principal? Isaak was already talking about that? Oh, she would love to dance with Peter. And Aaron. Anna was thankful she didn't have to make her partner decisions. She didn't know if she could choose between the two.

Devin and Vlad walked away for a bit and the family continued talking. When they returned, Devin looked pleased.

"Anna, may I borrow you for a few minutes?" Devin said, offering her his arm.

Anna nodded nervously and took the proffered arm.

"You danced well, Anna. I was very pleased."

"Thank you, Devin," she said softly.

"You have been doing very well in everything lately, Anna. You've even managed to charm Vlad, which is not easy to do."

"I did? I thought he disliked me."

Devin shook his head and guided her around a corner where there were fewer people. “No. He said he understood why I wanted you.” He looked around before opening a door and pushing Anna through gently, before joining her. It was a small janitor’s closet and Devin closed the door and turned the light on. He turned her around and kissed her neck while pulling her skirt up. “I don’t get near enough of you anymore,” he murmured before delving his fingers inside her panties.

Anna leaned her hands on the wall and moaned softly as he thrust his fingers in and out of her. He straightened suddenly and a moment later was pushing her up against the wall and thrusting his cock into her. They both panted as he rammed himself repeatedly into her body.

“Come for me, Baby,” he whispered, and Anna did a moment later. He drove himself deeper inside her and groaned as he came. “I needed that,” he said in a low voice.

They fixed their clothing and emerged from the room a few minutes later.

“I think I want you to stay with me once a week. Both of my daughters are out of the house, so I don’t have to explain your presence.” He glanced at her. “While performances are going on, I want you Monday evenings. Peter can bring you over and I’ll drop you off at the studio on the way to work on Tuesday morning.”

“Yes, Devin,” she said softly.

“Tell Peter, as I won’t likely have a chance. Come at...oh, seven-thirty will be fine.”

“Yes, Devin.”

Anna told Peter about Devin's new demand when they got home that night and were lying in bed. "Every Monday?" Peter asked.

Anna nodded. "While there are performances."

Peter sighed. "I guess it could be worse. He could want you every night." He turned over to his side to kiss her. "I don't know if I could part with you more than one night a week." He slid his hand down her bare hip. "I like having you in bed with me."

Anna looked up at him. "I'd rather be here with you, too," she said in all sincerity.

Peter smiled, his brown eyes warm, "It makes me glad to hear you say that."

Anna didn't want to think about the fact that he would eventually leave her and go back to St. Petersburg. She just wanted to enjoy what was going on here and now.

Something brushed her hip and she looked down. "Again?" she asked with a smile.

Peter grinned and shrugged. "Can't help it," he said, and captured her lips with his.

Chapter Twenty-Three

The myriad of Nutcracker performances made the next month pass quicker than Anna would have expected. Anna spent Monday nights at Devin's house. Her morning sickness showed up a few days before Christmas. Anna had woken up and ran to the bathroom before Peter realized what had happened. He wet a washcloth for her and rubbed her face and neck with it as she sat on the floor every morning.

Peter flew to St. Petersburg the day after the Nutcracker closed. Anna found the apartment very lonely without Peter there, but resolved to not sink into another depression. She didn't want Peter to feel guilty for leaving. She could see it in his eyes that he didn't want to leave. But Elder-Sons and grandsons, must perform their duties.

The next day was what would have been Anna and Alex's 3rd wedding anniversary. Anna couldn't make herself get out of bed. She had put his picture on the bed next to her and stared at it, missing him so much she could hardly breathe.

Anna attended a formal New Year's Eve party with Devin and Tyler. Several of the Deacons were there as well, including Jayce and Trenton.

"See, Anna," Devin said as they danced together close to midnight. "You are much more useful to me when you have a stable relationship. Even with Peter gone, you are holding it together. You have been very pleasant to be around all evening, and have charmed the men I told you to

charm.” He spun her around and then kissed her bare shoulder. “I like this version of you.”

“What happens when Peter has to go home?” she asked quietly.

Devin smiled. “Maybe you’ll come live with me,” he murmured in her ear. “With the kids all moved out, the house is rather empty. And I would love to have you in my bed every night.”

Anna blinked and stared at his chest. Live with Devin? In his house? She didn’t know what to think about that and just hoped that Vitaly would never die.

Most of the week that Peter was gone, Anna kept to herself. Jenna came over one afternoon and they hung out, but for the most part, Anna was content to be alone...aside from missing Peter. He had sent a text message letting her know he had arrived safely, but she hadn’t heard from him since. She didn’t really expect to, though; he was with his girlfriend. He had told their friends in the Company he was visiting his family.

Friday morning, Anna met Peter at the airport and greeted him happily after he gathered his luggage.

“Peter!” she exclaimed and ran to hug him. She had missed him more than she realized.

“Hello, Anna,” he said with an affectionate smile.

“Did you have a good trip?” she asked as they walked towards the car.

“Yes. How was your week?”

“Good. Not very interesting, but that’s okay.” She smiled up at him. He looked preoccupied. “Are you okay?”

Peter nodded. “Tired. It’s a long flight.”

He wasn't very talkative as they drove back to the apartment, though he did say that he appreciated the warmer weather here. Anna wanted to ask about his seeing Dariya, but was hesitant. He wasn't very forthcoming with information about her in general, and now that he was home from seeing her, seemed even less inclined to talk about her.

Anna looked at him as he drove. "You're growing your goatee out again?" He had shaved it off for Nutcracker. It was very thick already.

Peter shrugged. "Dariya likes it."

"Oh."

Anna looked down and noticed a ring on his right ring finger that he hadn't had before. Three colored gold bands were put together as one ring. Anna stared at it for a moment. "Did Dariya give that to you as a Christmas present?" she asked quietly with the premonition that it wasn't just a Christmas present.

Peter tightened his hand on the steering wheel and shrugged slightly. "Something like that," he said softly after a moment.

Something like that? What did that mean? Unless.... "Peter, did you get married?" she asked softly.

His knuckles turned white. "Why do you have to be so observant, Anna?"

Anna took that as a yes. She turned to look out the window and rubbed the back of her hand, determined to keep silent the rest of the way home. She didn't want to upset him any further.

She told herself it shouldn't bother her. It's not like Peter was ever going to marry her. Sooner or later, he would go back to Russia and get married. He just did the marrying thing sooner than she expected. It wouldn't make any difference in how they related to one another. After all, their relationship wasn't real.

Neither of them spoke for the remainder of the drive. Anna was proud of herself for not crying. After all, what good would crying do? It's not as if it should have been a surprise...really.

Peter parked the car in their stall and they walked to their apartment together in silence. He reached for her hand and held it while they walked, but didn't speak. When they got to the apartment door, he unlocked it and they both went inside. Anna went to sit on the couch while Peter unpacked.

Anna didn't know what to do. What would happen now? Why didn't he tell her he was going to get married? Should she move out? No, Devin probably wouldn't like that or allow it.

She sighed and stared out the window. Why did she feel the need to be loved so much? Why couldn't she be like the other Elder-Mistresses and not care about things like love and marriage?

"Anna? Can we talk?" Peter asked a few minutes later, sitting down next to her.

She forced a smile. "Sure."

Peter played with his ring. "She accused me of falling in love with you," he said. "And said she didn't believe me when I said that I would come back and marry her."

Anna shook her head. "Why would she think that? All this is just to keep me...sane."

"Because I did fall in love with you, Anna."

Anna looked at Peter in shock. "You...you can't. Dariya..."

"I couldn't help it, Anna. I tried not to, but the more I got to know you...." He sighed. "You're a difficult woman not to love."

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

He took her hand in his. "She told me if I didn't marry her while I was there that she would end things. We've known each other since we were

children. I couldn't lose her." His expression was pained. "She knows enough about the Brotherhood that she doesn't complain about me being gone, as long as I visit her often."

"Doesn't she mind you being here with me?"

"Yes, but she knows it's only temporary. She is a good choice for a wife, Anna. A proper wife is difficult to find." He paused and looked at his hands. "If I thought I had any sort of chance to take you for a wife, I never would have married her. But Devin will never let you leave here, and I have to return to Russia sometime in the near future. *Dedushka* isn't going to live forever and he's...been sick lately."

"Does she know you...love me?"

"I didn't tell her in so many words, but I didn't deny it when she accused me of it."

"She must hate me."

Peter laughed sadly. "I wouldn't recommend meeting her in a dark alley."

Anna was quiet for a few minutes. "When did you get married?"

"Monday. We flew to Gibraltar."

"Didn't you have to go through the Elders? Germany is very strict about approvals and stuff."

Peter shook his head. "Germany is strict about everything. No, as long as *Dedushka* approves, that's all that matters. It's not as big a deal since I'm not next in line for Elder yet."

"Did you...get your piercings?" Anna bit her lip, but was curious.

He nodded and then grinned. "You want to see them?"

Anna had never had issues with sleeping with married men, but she felt awkward with Peter having been married less than a week ago. "Do you love her?"

“I do.” He shrugged. “We’ve been together for so long, I suppose I couldn’t imagine my life without her.” He glanced at Anna. “But being with you these last few months has been....” He sighed. “I hate to imagine my life without you either, but we both know this can’t last.”

Anna nodded. “I know,” she said sadly.

“I want to enjoy the time we do have together. I don’t want anything to change...if that’s possible.” He gave her a tender smile.

“I don’t want anything to change either.”

He leaned forward and kissed her. “I missed you,” he whispered.

“I missed you too.” She wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him back.

He stood and tugged her to her feet. “Shall we see how you like my new jewelry?”

Monday morning, Anna saw Peter staring at his wedding ring as he sat on the bed.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, kneeling behind him and kissing the back of his neck.

“I don’t know if I should wear this while I’m here. I don’t want there to be questions asked.” He turned to look at her. “I don’t want people to think badly of you.”

“I don’t know if anyone would think of it as a wedding ring. We don’t wear ours on our right hand.”

“You do,” he pointed out.

“I married a German. I had other rings...I don’t know what happened to them.” She paused. “But, no one’s ever taken much notice of my ring.”

“Would you be uncomfortable if I wore it?”

“It doesn’t change anything if you wear it or not.”

“That’s not an answer.”

“Peter, it’s not my place to tell you to wear it or not. I’m only a slave.”

Peter frowned. “You’re not a slave to me.” He cradled her cheek and kissed her. “I’m sorry I ever made you feel that way.”

Anna smiled. “It’s okay. You don’t anymore.”

“Good.” He kissed her again. “I’d like to make you feel something else,” he murmured against her lips and pushed her backwards onto the bed.

“Did I mention I like your new jewelry?” she asked in a husky voice.

“You did. Several times.” He laughed and kissed her neck. “I’ll have to make sure you tell me again tonight.”

Anna reached her hand down. “Or now?”

Peter groaned. “I wish we had time.” He sat up and pulled her with him. “But we need to get moving.”

Chapter Twenty-Four

Rehearsals passed quickly and soon it was time for opening night of *Swan Lake*. In the afternoon before the performance, Peter and Anna went home to relax before they had to be back at the theater. They were naked in bed with Peter poised to thrust into Anna when there was a loud knock at the apartment door.

Peter shook his head and Anna moaned as he pushed into her body. “Whoever it is can come back later,” he groaned and kissed her as he thrust in and out. Anna wrapped her legs around his waist and met his rhythm with her hips.

A few minutes later, the knocking repeated. Anna looked up at Peter who shook his head again. “You feel too good to leave,” he said in a breathy voice, quickening his movements. A few minutes later, as they moaned and thrust hard against each other, Peter’s phone rang.

It was Dariya’s ring. Peter cursed. “I’ll call her back,” he said and kissed Anna as he thrust even harder. They both cried out loudly a few minutes later and Peter rested his head on her shoulder, breathing heavily. “This is a really strange time for her to call,” he mumbled and rolled off Anna. He picked up his phone from the nightstand and looked at it.

There was another knock at the door. Peter cursed in Russian and stood. “Whoever it is, I’m going to fucking kill them,” he mumbled. He pulled on his sweatpants and went to answer the door.

“Dariya!” Anna heard Peter exclaim a moment later, and then he proceeded to speak rapidly in Russian.

Oh, no! Anna stood and looked for her clothes that had been discarded. She found her pants, but her shirt and bra was out in the other room. She

pulled another shirt out of the dresser and dressed quickly.

It didn't sound like Dariya was happy, and Anna was hesitant to go out into the living room. But she was curious about what Peter's wife looked like.

A few minutes later, Peter walked into the bedroom. "I'm sure you heard?" he asked quietly.

Anna had sat down on the bed and nodded. "Why is she here?"

He frowned. "She wanted to see me dance, and surprise me."

"She doesn't seem very happy."

"Well, I did just answer the door in a sweat from making love to you."

"Doesn't she know we live together?"

"I told her that, but I don't think she put two and two together. She—"

Peter stopped as a beautiful woman with long blond hair and sapphire blue eyes stepped into the doorway. Her skin was flawless with expertly applied makeup and fashionably highlighted and styled hair. She was tall and curvy, wearing tight jeans that showed off long, thin legs and a red low-cut peasant blouse that showed off impressive cleavage. Anna couldn't help but stare. Peter fell in love with her when he had Dariya waiting for him at home? Why?

Peter ran his hand through his hair. Anna could tell he was upset and uncomfortable with the situation.

"Peter, do you want me to leave?" she asked softly. She didn't want to be in the way.

He sighed. "Dariya, this is Anna Kunze. Anna this is Dariya."

Anna stood and gave her a timid smile

Dariya looked her up and down and then looked back at Peter. "She's rather fat for a ballerina, don't you think?" Her voice was low and thick with accent.

Peter gasped. "Dariya! That was rude."

Anna put her arms around her stomach. Her face had filled out and she imagined she did look rather fat for a ballerina.

Dariya shrugged. "Is true."

"She's pregnant. Give her a break."

Dariya's eyes got wide. "You got her pregnant?"

Peter narrowed his eyes. "What if I did? It was before you gave me your ultimatum."

She snapped in Russian and then proceeded to speak very rapidly, pointing to Anna several times.

Anna stood silently looking at the ground as they argued. Oh, this was not what she wanted for Peter. Who could she stay with while Dariya was here? Aaron? Travis? Devin? She supposed she could stay at the house. Yes, that would be the best option. She could use Alex's car to get around.

Peter raised his voice at Dariya and pointed to the door. She narrowed her eyes and then left the room.

"Peter, I'm so sorry," Anna said softly. "I don't want to cause trouble. I was thinking maybe I could go stay at the house for a few days...or however long she's in town."

He looked at the door and then at Anna and stepped close. "I don't want to lose you," he said softly, cradling her cheek.

"It's not real," she whispered with longing in her eyes. "Take me to the house and fix things with her. I can use Alex's car to get around."

"You shouldn't be in that big house all by yourself."

"I'll be okay. Aaron lives close by." Peter didn't mistrust Aaron anymore and, in fact, they had become good friends. He always cautioned Aaron about getting too close to Anna because of Devin, though.

Peter sighed and thought for a few minutes. “I won’t tell anyone she’s my wife. She said she wants to stay for a while. She can be...an old friend or something and we had a fight over her or something like that. I’ll be the bad guy.” He gave her a sad look. “I never wanted to hurt you, Anna.”

“I know.”

An hour later Peter dropped Anna and two suitcases at the house in Presidio. He was hesitant to leave her, but she insisted she’d be all right. Now that he was gone, though, she wasn’t sure. The house was so big and empty. She wondered if Frau Gersten was still around. She decided to call Aaron. Maybe he would know.

Aaron told her that Frau Gersten had moved back to Germany, but there was a woman who came and cleaned the house every few weeks. “Are you thinking about moving back in?”

Anna looked around at the great room. “I’m here right now. Peter and I...had a fight.”

“Oh, Anna. I’m so sorry.”

She tried to smile. “It’s okay. I forgot how big this place was.”

“Do you want some company?”

It was tempting, but she didn’t want anything to happen to him. “I’m okay.”

“I’ll...make some calls about a housekeeper for you and let you know. Do you need a ride tonight?”

“Alex’s car is here. Do you know if it runs?”

“Everything in the house has been kept in order, just in case you needed it. The car should be running perfectly.”

“Thanks, Aaron.”

“Come see me when you get to the theater tonight, okay?”

“Okay.”

Anna went upstairs and unpacked. She noticed that Alex’s clothes had been put away. Strangely, it didn’t hurt as much to be here. She missed Alex terribly, but didn’t feel the stabbing pain in her heart. It was more like a dull ache and it was almost comforting. She pulled one of his sweaters down and put it on, and then went to watch TV until she had to leave for the theater.

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Chapter Twenty-Five

Anna carefully parked Alex's silver Mercedes Roadster in the parking garage. It was such a powerful car that it was a little scary to drive. But she'd done well, considering how little she drove these days.

She got out to retrieve her things from the trunk and Aaron walked up. "Hey," he said giving her a hug.

She smiled. "Hey."

"How ya doin'?"

"Okay." She closed the trunk and stroked the car. "It's so him, you know?"

Aaron nodded. "I always thought so." He took her garment bag from her and they walked across the street to the theater. "What did you and Peter fight about that made you leave? And does Devin know?"

Anna's heart sank. She didn't know what to tell Devin. "I haven't told him."

They made their way through the backstage halls until they came to the row of dressing rooms for the soloists and principals. "At least you'll have privacy for this performance," Aaron pointed out.

"Yeah." She opened the door and turned on the light.

A vase of red roses sat on her vanity. She picked up the card. They were from Peter. "I'm sorry," read the card.

Anna smiled to herself. She missed him, but she knew how things were. Peter would stay as long as Devin wanted him to and then go home to his wife. He needed to make sure things were good with Dariya. That was more important than his fake relationship with Anna.

"Holy shit. Is that what you two were fighting over?"

Anna turned to see Aaron gaping at something in the hallway. She hurried to the door and saw Peter walking down the hall with Dariya, who was looking even more beautiful than she had earlier in a slinky black dress.

“Who is that?” Aaron asked. “She’s fucking hot!”

“A...friend from St. Petersburg.”

Aaron looked at Anna apologetically. “Sorry, Anna.

She shrugged. “She’s very beautiful.”

“So are you.”

Anna shook her head. “Not like that.”

Aaron turned and put his hands on her shoulders. “Anna, you are a knock out. Guys follow you with their eyes wherever you walk. Yeah, she’s hot. And you are too. But you have...I don’t know...there’s something about you that makes you even more beautiful than that.”

“The fact that I’m half Immortal?” she asked wryly.

Aaron laughed. “Well, that could be part of it. But tonight at the party, see who gets more attention. You or her.”

“Men like blondes. And I don’t care if they find me more attractive. Sometimes I wish they didn’t.” Anna sighed. “I just...why would he love me if he has someone like her at home?”

“What are you talking about?” Aaron asked suspiciously.

Anna’s eyes widened and she clapped her hand over her mouth. “Nothing.”

Aaron frowned. “Who is she?” He closed the door and crossed his arms over his chest. “Tell me.”

Anna told him the whole story with Peter getting married when he went to St. Petersburg, and Dariya showing up that afternoon at the apartment.

Aaron got angrier as she spoke. “That fucking bastard.”

“Aaron, you know our whole ‘relationship’ is fake. So we’re having a fake fight. He’s not going to tell anyone they’re married.”

“I thought he loved you.”

Anna sighed. “He does. But...c’mom. You know Devin will never let me leave. He has to get married.”

Aaron sighed and reluctantly conceded the point.

“I left of my own free will. He didn’t kick me out.” He looked at her doubtfully. “I did. Please don’t be angry at him. He did what he needed to do.”

Aaron sighed. “All right. For you,” he added, giving her a stern look. “I’ll back him up.” He glanced at his watch. “I gotta go get ready. I’ll see ya later. Come get me if you want to talk.” He kissed her on the forehead and left.

Peter knocked on the door a while later. “Hey, you okay?” he asked, closing the door behind him.

Anna nodded. “I miss you.”

He sighed. “I miss you too. She’s...gone to the lobby. Man, did I get some looks when I came in.”

“Why did you bring her?”

“She wanted to see. I told her that she couldn’t let anyone know we were married or I’d ship her back to Russia and not visit her.”

Anna smiled shyly. “That might be nice.”

Peter rolled his eyes. “Yes, but I do have to live with her the rest of my life.” He walked to Anna and put his arms around her waist. “And when I move back to Russia, I will come here and visit you,” he said softly and

kissed her, and what started out as a playful tease quickly progressed to a kiss filled with hunger.

He walked her backwards to the couch, laid her down and settled on top of her. He pressed his hip against her thigh. She reached down into his sweatpants and stroked his hard cock.

“Do we have time?” she asked.

Peter sat up and pulled at Anna’s sweats. “Always.”

When her pants were on the floor, Anna took his cock in her hands and guided him into her body, sighing as he entered her.

“I love being with you, Anna,” he murmured against her neck as he began moving in and out of her.

They made love quickly and quietly. He crushed his lips against hers as she began to cry out her climax, keeping her quiet. A moment later he groaned and stiffened as he came.

“I love you,” he whispered, and kissed her again.

“I’ll tell Devin about Dariya,” Peter said as they made their way out to the lobby for the after-party hand in hand. “Dariya said she was planning on staying the week. I told her I would be busy most of the time, but she said she still wanted to stay. I also told her she can’t come to the theater to hang out during the day, but she still insisted on staying in town.” He kissed Anna’s head. “So, we’ll have time together here.”

Anna nodded. “I’m glad.”

The other dancers had accepted their word that Dariya was just a friend, and that she and Peter had a fight about her but were getting over it. So

Peter could be affectionate, but it explained why Anna wasn't at their apartment.

When they got to the lobby, Peter spotted Devin and went to talk to him. Anna went to get something to drink.

"Anna," a familiar female voice said from behind.

Anna turned to see Peter's parents behind her. She nearly spit out her drink, but recovered before it left her mouth. "Jackie! Mikhail! W-what are you doing here?"

Mikhail smiled. "We came to surprise the both of you," he said with his deep, booming voice. "We don't get to see Peter dance as much as we'd like and wanted to take advantage of his being close."

They both hugged her warmly. Mikhail had warmed to her the last time they'd been in town and was quite affectionate with her now.

"Where is Peter?" he asked.

Anna looked around nervously. "He...had to speak to someone." Oh, what would they do when they found out Dariya was here?

She spotted the tall blonde across the room. Dariya saw her at the same time and narrowed her eyes at Anna. Her blue eyes widened when she saw Peter's parents and a malicious grin spread across her face as she made her way over to them.

Anna looked around and saw that Peter was still talking with Devin, who didn't look happy.

"You danced beautifully, Anna," Jackie said with a warm smile. "I can't wait to see you and Peter dance together."

"Thank you, Jackie," Anna said sincerely. "Isaak hasn't promoted me yet, though...." She drifted off as Dariya approached.

Dariya spoke in Russian and a surprised Jackie and Mikhail turned to see her. Their expressions were one of complete shock. Mikhail spoke in

Russian to her and didn't seem very happy.

Jackie looked back at Anna. "Anna...do you know Dariya?" she asked a bit warily.

Anna smiled nervously and nodded. "We met this afternoon."

Jackie looked back and forth between Anna and Dariya, clearly confused.

Anna saw Peter approaching with an inscrutable expression on his face.

"Mama, Papa," he said, greeting them with kisses on the cheek. "I didn't know you would be here," he said.

Mikhail frowned at Peter and spoke in Russian.

Peter nodded and put up his hand, then looked at Anna apologetically. "Devin would like to speak to you."

Anna nodded and hurried away, glad to be away from the family tension. As she approached Devin, though, her apprehension rose. His face was impassive as he looked at her. That didn't usually bode well.

"Why didn't you call me when you left Peter?" Devin asked with a frown.

"I'm sorry, Devin," she whispered, terrified at what he would do to her for upsetting him. "I was...settling in."

Devin looked at her for a long time without speaking. "He's been married for a while now. How are you doing with that?"

Anna knew he wasn't asking to be nice. He was asking to make sure she wouldn't lose it and go crazy again. "I—I'm okay." She smiled sadly. "We went into it knowing it was just for appearances. I can't begrudge him wanting a real relationship. Especially with someone that looks like her."

Devin didn't respond and Anna stayed silent.

"He assured me she would be gone by the end of the week. I want you back in the apartment the day she leaves. Do you understand?"

“Yes, Devin.”

“You’ve matured, Anna. You’re much more stable than you used to be. I’m pleased to see it.”

“Thank you, Devin.” She paused. “Do...do you know what happened to my wedding rings? And Alex’s band?”

Devin studied her with narrowed eyes. “Why?”

“I’d like to know where they are, if they can be found. Not to wear, but....” She sighed. “I know I belong to you and I’ll never have any sort of real relationship. I just...would like to have them. For the memories.”

“You are getting quite a collection of diamonds from men.”

Anna blushed in shame. “I know,” she whispered.

He sighed. “I know where they are. I’ll get them for you next time I’m at the Manor.”

“Oh, thank you, Devin.” Anna smiled brightly.

Devin looked amused. “Maybe I’ll have you come stay with me this week since Peter is busy. It’s a shame to let your pussy go unused.”

“If you’d like, Devin,” she responded. It frightened her a bit to think about being with him every night. But he was her Master.

“I understand you have access to a car?”

She nodded. “Alex’s.”

“Good. Yes, get what you need for the week and plan on staying with me this week.”

“Yes, Devin.”

Devin was a cruel lover. He didn’t use the spikes on her, but he always made sure he hurt her in some way. And for some reason, Anna enjoyed it,

at least at the time. She came so hard when he hurt her. She was always sore the next day and was reluctant to let Peter touch her. The pain compounded, and by the time the next weekend came around and Anna was back at the apartment, she didn't want to have sex with Peter because she was hurting so badly.

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Chapter Twenty-Six

Spring arrived and Anna started to get antsy. She knew another Gathering was coming and she knew what would happen. She had become attached to the baby, even though she had tried not to because of its fate. She became quiet and depressed and Peter worried about her. She didn't tell him what happened at the Gatherings because Devin had told her not to. Peter said he didn't intend to go, because it wasn't his place to be, but Anna overheard Aaron encouraging him to attend.

Anna arranged to have the week surrounding the Gathering off from dancing. Isaak worried about her, but she assured him she would be back. Devin would make sure of that.

Thursday before the Gathering, Anna went to the hotel with Devin and Tyler. Anna watched Tyler carefully and hoped desperately that Devin wouldn't let him take her to his room.

"Dad, can I have Anna for a bit?" Tyler asked as they took the elevator up to the floor where their suites were.

"No. She needs to be in one piece for me." Devin put his arm around Anna and rubbed her belly. She hated when he did that but didn't dare change her facial expression. "You can hunt for her tomorrow night like all the other men."

"I'm not 'all the other men.' I'm your son." Tyler pouted.

"Tyler, you're almost twenty-four years old and going to be married in a few months. Stop pouting."

Tyler huffed. "I hate the 'no sex 'til you're married' shit."

"Only with April. If you need a fuck, go to the Manor."

"It's a pain in the ass to do that."

“If you don’t stop complaining, I’ll give you a pain in the ass.”

Tyler crossed his arms and frowned, but stopped complaining.

Devin sighed. “You can have her on Sunday before you fly back to school. How does that sound?”

Tyler grinned. “Cool.”

Anna swallowed and stared at the ground. She hated these weekends. It was times like these she especially missed Alex. He would make sure she wasn’t hurt. He wouldn’t allow....

But he wasn’t here to save her anymore.

There was no one to stop Devin from using her as he pleased, both her body and her powers of persuasion. She had to work harder to be persuasive for him; it didn’t come as easily as it used to, which upset Devin. He’d punished her several times since she’d sobered up for not being able to convince a man to do something. Now he rarely bothered to use her in that capacity. He said he could do it fine on his own. But he liked to remind her that he only kept her around because despite her uselessness, she was still a pretty face, and having her with him made him look good.

Devin opened the door to their suite and he and Anna walked inside. Tyler had gone to his own room.

“Thank you for not letting Tyler take me,” Anna said softly.

Devin frowned at her. “You don’t like my son?” he asked with a raised brow.

Anna blinked. “He hurts me.”

“So do I.”

“You’re my Master. And you don’t always hurt me.” Anna looked up at him, hopeful that she hadn’t upset him.

Devin’s frown deepened. “When I am no longer Elder, Tyler will become your Master.”

Anna's mouth opened in surprise.

He laughed. "Didn't think about that, did you?"

Anna shook her head, feeling defeated. She didn't know what she had expected after Devin died, but she hadn't considered the possibility that Tyler would become her Master.

"I think if you fear Tyler more than you fear me, I'm doing something wrong." Devin took a step towards her, his face inscrutable, but his voice was low. "Remove your clothing."

Anna hastily took off her dress and undergarments.

He slapped her hard and she grabbed her stinging cheek, tears in her eyes. "You used to fear me, Anna." He sighed. "Unfortunately, I can't fully remind you why you should fear me until after tomorrow night. I need that baby healthy and alert." He grabbed her chin and held it firm. "But after this weekend, I think we'll take a trip out to the Manor and remind you just how much you should fear me."

"No," Anna pleaded in a shaking voice. "Please, Devin. Don't. I do fear you."

Devin smiled wickedly. "You do now, but I think I need to reinforce it a bit." He stepped back and slapped her again. "That's for calling me by my name." He backhanded her and she fell to the floor. "That's for insulting my son."

He pulled her up by her hair, dragged her into the bedroom, and threw her on the bed. "I can't do everything I'd like to, but I can do some things." He rummaged around in his bag until he produced a syringe.

Anna's eyes widened and she backed up on the bed. "Please...no...," she whispered imploringly, staring at the needle.

"Oh, Anna," he said in a soft voice. "I'm just going to make love to you." He grabbed her hair and pushed the needle into her neck, pressing the

stopper to empty the liquid into her veins. He put the syringe down on the table and undressed, giving the liquid a chance to disperse in her body.

She began shaking a moment later and he lay down next to her and made love to her in the slowest possible manner he could. By the time he was finished, she was hoarse from screaming in pain. He sent her into the shower and turned on the water, which felt like needles hitting her skin.

“Stay in here until it doesn’t hurt anymore.”

By the time she stopped hurting, Anna was exhausted and had no voice. She dragged herself out of the shower, wrapped a towel around her and collapsed onto the bed. The sun had set and she could hear men talking out in the other room. She was about to fall asleep when Devin came in.

“Feeling better?” he asked with a wicked smile.

Anna nodded.

He sat her up and slapped her face. “You got the bed wet, you stupid bitch.”

Anna held her cheek and turned to see that the comforter was slightly damp where she had been laying. She opened her mouth to apologize but no sound came out.

Devin frowned. “If you hadn’t wasted all that energy screaming, you’d still be able to speak. Get dressed and come out to the other room. Dinner will be here soon and then you have men to attend to.”

Anna could barely keep her eyes open and he wanted her to go out and tend to the Elders? She tried to protest but Devin hit her again.

“Do as I say or I will give you another shot.”

Anna took a deep breath, stood on shaky legs, and went to get dressed and brush her hair. She emerged ten minutes later, not noticing the concerned looks on Tom and Brandon's faces, which disappeared as quickly as they had appeared. She kept her head down and went to sit at Devin's feet.

She struggled to keep her eyes open as the men talked around her. When dinner arrived a little while later, Devin had to hit her in the side of the head to get her attention.

She looked up at him with questioning eyes.

"Dinner," he said, pointing to the table.

Anna stood and followed Devin to the table and sat next to him. The men talked around her, but she had a hard time concentrating on any part of the conversation. All she wanted to do was curl up in bed and go to sleep. Her cheeks throbbed from being hit and her body ached from the shot.

"Tommy is eager to see you, Anna," Tom, who was sitting next to her, said.

Anna nodded. She would like to see him again too. She liked him.

"Are you not allowed to speak?" he asked, glancing at Devin.

"She lost her voice this afternoon," Devin explained.

"Ah," Tom said.

Anna ate her dinner, trying to stay awake which became more and more difficult as time went on.

"Devin, she's obviously exhausted. We're fine. Let her sleep." They had moved to the seating area after dinner and Devin had pushed Anna into Tom's arms.

Devin frowned at Tom. “Are you growing soft towards her, Tom?” he said in a nasty voice. “You needn’t concern yourself about her comfort. She’ll be fine.” He looked at Anna with a pointed look. “Won’t you?”

Anna gave him a timid smile and nodded, then turned to Tom and smiled at him, too.

“Just tell her what you want. She can’t ask.”

Tom cradled her cheek and kissed her. “I want to take you to my room,” he murmured against her lips and pulled her into his lap. Her dress pushed up to her hips and he cupped her ass. “No panties?” he asked with a grin.

Anna smiled and shook her head. She reached for his pants and worked at freeing his hardening cock. When it was free, she stroked him up and down and glanced up at him. She raised her eyebrows to ask what he wanted.

“Ride me,” he whispered huskily.

Anna smiled and sat up to take him into her body.

When she had pleased him, she moved onto the other men. Javier and Brandon were gentle with her. The others were not. They held her hair and fucked her from behind. Oscar jabbed his cock unceremoniously into her ass, making her mouth gape open in silent screams.

When they had finished with her, Devin still wouldn’t let her go to sleep. Instead, he made her sit at his feet until the Elders were done talking. By the time the men left, Anna was delirious and could hardly stand. Devin pulled her into the bedroom by her hair, pushed her into the bed, and fucked her hard, but she hardly noticed. When he finished, he pushed her to her side of the bed and she was able to sleep at last.

Anna giggled and stared adoringly at her husband. “Alex, what are you doing?” she asked. She was so unbelievably happy; she could hardly believe it was real. How could someone like him love someone like her?

Alex kissed her, his bare chest muscles flexing as he leaned forward. “Kissing you,” he murmured against her lips. “I want to have a baby with you.”

“I can’t. Alex you know that.” She was sad that they would never have children.

“Oh, Baby, there is a way. I told you that, remember?” He kissed her neck and pressed her down into the bed. “Give yourself to me and we’ll have a child. Just like we always wanted.”

Anna smiled. “I would love to have a baby with you,” she whispered and pulled him close. He entered her body and they moved together, their hips grinding against each other until she cried out in pleasure and felt him empty himself into her body. “Oh, Alex!” she cried. “I love you.”

“I love you, too, sweetheart.” He nuzzled her neck and they drifted off to sleep in each other’s arms.

The next thing she knew, she was several months pregnant. She was so happy. Alex kissed her belly and told her how beautiful she was.

He took her hand and pulled her up on stage. “Look how beautiful my wife is,” he announced to the audience.

Anna blushed and buried her face in his chest. He pulled away and led her to a bench.

“Lay down, Baby,” he said softly. He trailed his fingers up her thighs and caressed her nether lips.

Anna sighed and closed her eyes as he caressed her. He pressed harder and it started to hurt.

“Ow. Oh, please stop.”

Excruciating pain erupted between her legs and Anna opened her eyes to see Devin standing there with a wicked grin on his face.

“Give me your baby, Anna,” he said.

Anna shook her head and screamed. “No!”

She struggled against firm hands that held her in place. She screamed again as Devin reached inside her to take the baby.

She struggled even harder and screamed louder. No, he couldn’t take her baby. It was Alex’s baby. It was her last link to Alex.

“No!” she screamed. “Alex! Alex!” she screamed and sobbed at the same time.

The pain and pressure increased, and Devin moved his hand further in. She continued to struggle and scream but Devin just laughed. She felt a movement inside her and Devin pulled his hand out, holding a bloody mass of tissue. Alex’s baby!

“No!” she screamed again. Anna closed her eyes and turned away, sickened by the sight. She fell back on the table and sobbed. “Alex,” she whispered before the darkness consumed her.

A sharp pain erupted from Anna’s cheek and she opened her eyes. She was outside. The sky above her was dark, but a large eagle glowed in the firelight above her.

“It’s time to wake, Mistress.” Devin walked into her line of vision with a wicked smile. “The men want you.”

Anna blinked and sat up. She was on the platform on a table. She gasped and looked down at her body. Her stomach was flat once again. “Ma—Master?” she asked in a weak voice.

“Did you like your dream?” he asked.

She stared at him for a long moment. “A...a dream?” She could almost still feel Alex’s presence.

Devin pulled her to sit up and then stand. Down in the grass below, men and women were naked and fucking in a giant orgy. She winced when she heard screams of young girls.

“They want you, too,” he murmured and took her down the stairs. She saw the president standing there looking at her. “Especially him.” Devin pushed her into his arms and the president grabbed her by her hair and tossed her down to the ground. “Enjoy.”

She tried to get away, but the president held her by her hair and pushed her face into the ground. She felt him behind her and then a ripping pain in her ass tore through her body and she screamed as he fucked her into the ground.

When he finished he sat her up and pushed her forward into another man’s arms. She was pushed and pulled from man to man all night long.

Near dawn a familiar voice and presence was near and she felt gentle arms around her. “Anna. C’mom.”

Peter.

He pulled her to her feet and led her away on shaky legs from the mass of humanity writhing on the ground. He took her to a pavilion and closed the curtains. He helped her lie down in a soft bed and wrapped his arms around her.

“You’re safe,” he whispered.

Anna smiled weakly and fell asleep.

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“...’s gotten progressively worse each year.” A familiar voice in a hushed tone.

“Why?” Another familiar voice with a slight accent.

“I don’t know. I don’t understand him. He’s changed.” A sigh. “She was such a sweet thing. Dad said he was awful to her on Thursday night. That she was really fucked up. I didn’t get to see her until she was up there. Normally Devin lets me be with her before things start.”

“You fuck her too?” he sounded disgusted.

“No. I make love to her. I make sure she knows how much I care about her. When we were in DC, she begged me to. She said it would be the last gentle touch she’d have.” A pause. “It was true.”

“I wish there was something we could do,” a third voice chimed in.

“How does your dad feel about all this?” the accented voice asked.

There was a long pause. “It’s dangerous to dissent.”

“Why do you ask?” the third voice asked.

“Others have begun to take notice of what he’s doing. Yes, to her, but also politically. Your president literally worships him. That’s not a good thing.”

“There was only one person who could stop him. He’s dead.”

A pause. “He needs to be weakened.”

“She’s where he gets his power.”

“Then she needs to be removed from his hands.”

“She’ll get sick.”

“Maybe.

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying....”

Darkness crept in and captured her once more.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

“Where the hell is she?”

Devin’s angry voice brought her wide-awake at once.

“I brought her in here because she wasn’t well,” Peter said.

“Of course she wasn’t well. She’d been raped all night. It’s not your concern what I do with her. Your concern is to keep her sane the rest of the time.” Devin grabbed Anna by the hair and pulled her out of bed. “Go clean up. I need you in my pavilion in twenty minutes.”

Anna looked up at Devin. “I—I don’t know where to go, Master.”

Devin’s eye narrowed. He pulled her out into the sunlight and across the field to a path. “Go down this path to the dorm. Clean up and come right back. You don’t need clothes to wear, so don’t worry about that.”

Anna hurried to the dorm and did as Devin ordered.

When she returned to the pavilion, the curtains were closed. Anna hesitated at the entrance, wondering if she should go in.

“Come in, Anna,” she heard Devin call.

Anna searched for the opening and entered. The room inside was dimly lit, warm and smelled of sex. It took a moment for Anna’s eyes to adjust, but when they did, she was very surprised to see Devin sitting naked on the couch with the president between his legs, sucking on his cock.

“Ah, there you are,” Devin said with a smile. The president looked up and smiled at Anna as well, his dark hands stroking Devin’s cock. His own dark cock was hard and glistened in the dim light.

The president's hand snaked out and grabbed Anna around the waist, pulling her down to her knees. He grabbed a handful of hair and pushed her face down to his cock. She opened her mouth and he pushed her head down until he was in her throat. He held her head and fucked her mouth as he returned his own mouth to Devin.

"Anna," Devin said. "Use your pussy to lube and stretch his ass for me."

Anna hesitated for a minute, trying to understand what Devin was asking of her, and then understood. She dipped her fingers between her legs and then began working them around and into the other man's tight hole. He groaned as she invaded his body and sucked on his cock. When her fingers dried, she re-moistened them and continued pressing her fingers in and out until he began to relax and moan softly.

Devin stood and the president pulled her back by her hair. Devin led her to the bed and pushed her down on her back. "Open your legs, Anna."

Anna felt a little dizzy as she spread her thighs apart. The president knelt between them and pushed himself in with one swift thrust. Anna gasped. She was still sore from the night before.

She felt the bed move and saw Devin over the other man's shoulder. He was looking down and murmuring to himself, and then the president groaned, his neck muscles bulging as if he were in pain. His dark eyes widened and then rolled back into his head. Devin took Anna's ankles and wrapped her legs around the president's waist, holding them in place as he slowly began to fuck the president's ass.

The weight of both men pressed Anna into the bed and she struggled for breath. The president didn't brace himself for Devin's thrusts and his body moved with Devin's movements. The president groaned and raised his head back. Anna wasn't sure if it was in pain or pleasure. He seemed...out of it.

"Anna," Devin said.

She looked up into Devin's black eyes and felt him inside her mind. She could feel him drawing part of her out and consuming it. She groaned and the room began to spin. Her body stiffened as she physically climaxed, though she didn't really feel it.

Devin grinned maniacally and threw his head back, shouting out "Yes! Yes!"

The president groaned and then gave out a primitive scream as Anna's muscles clenched around his cock, squeezing him tight and milking him dry.

Devin released Anna's legs and stood up. The president collapsed on the bed next to her, eyes open, but unseeing. Anna looked up at Devin with frightened eyes. What had he just done?

"He's completely under my control," Devin said in a low voice, coming to sit next to Anna on the bed. "Thanks to you, my love." He brushed her hair gently away from her face, then leaned forward to kiss her.

What had she done to give him this kind of power? What did she possess that allowed him to control other people? To make them obey him? To make Wilhelm and Kurt walk away from her without a single glance back? She didn't want to help Devin become a scary person. He was already scary enough.

Devin pulled back and looked at her. "You fear me now, don't you?"

Anna nodded slowly. "Yes, Master."

He gave a satisfactory smile. "Good. Don't make me remind you again."

"Yes, Master," she whispered.

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"It's worse than I thought."

“How so?”

“He uses her. He...God, he took her baby. She was pregnant and he took it right on the platform in front of everyone.”

“What did he do with it?”

The younger man hesitated. “He...ate it.”

There was a long pause. “What else?”

“Another girl killed herself for him after first mutilating herself. She laughed and shrieked in pleasure as she died.” He shuddered. “This can’t continue.”

“I agree, but I’m not the one you must convince. He won’t be swayed easily.”

“How can he not...?”

“He’s known Devin since he was a boy. And knew his father before him. He’s hesitant to believe that he’s changed so much.”

“But he tortures her.”

“It’s unfortunate. I know. But her plight isn’t his concern. Even I would be hesitant to step in if it was just a concern about abuse. But what you saw may make him realize there’s more to it than a sweet girl being hurt.” The man sighed. “It might help if he met her. Spent time with her.”

“If he came here, Devin would be suspicious.”

“You could bring her here.”

“I don’t think Devin would like that. She might sense him.”

“They can be...put away while she’s here. I’m sure she would love to see the Mariinsky. Perhaps a dance experience. It’s a month off from dancing in September, yes? Devin wouldn’t want her to become unstable from not dancing, would he?”

“That might work. I’ll have to think about that.”

“If it’s as bad as you say, you need to come up with some sort of excuse.”

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Ian dropped Anna back at the apartment late Monday morning. The apartment was empty because Peter was at the studio. Anna took a long hot shower, trying to soothe her aching body and mind. She didn’t know what Devin did to her mind, but she was exhausted and he was happy. She knew what he did to her body and what he allowed other men to do to her body, and if he was happy what did it matter if she was sore?

She collapsed onto the bed and slept until Peter came home. She woke long enough to eat dinner and then went right back to sleep. Peter woke her to eat breakfast the next morning before he went to the studio. He brought her lunch during break and woke her again. By the time he was home for dinner, Anna was awake and feeling much better.

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Chapter Twenty-Eight

Life progressed without much incident. Class, rehearsals, time with Peter. Fridays she went to the Manor. Peter came sometimes. He said it was to keep an eye on her, though she always spent the night in Devin's room. She spent Monday nights at Devin's house. Tuesdays became long days for Anna because Devin was always rough on her.

In the middle of April, Anna performed as a principal for the first time. She danced with Travis because Peter and Aaron both danced with the more experienced principals. Anna didn't mind. She liked Travis. They flirted and joked around during practice, and Peter would turn around and give Anna a look, but when he turned back around, Anna saw the smile and glint in his eyes in the mirror and knew he wasn't angry. He was happy when she was happy.

Much to Anna's delight and Isaak's satisfaction, her performance received rave reviews. She danced exceedingly well and her friends all said it was clear she would soon be a star of the company. Isaak said she would be dancing as Juliet in the next performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, with Peter and Aaron alternating as Romeo.

In June, both Tommy and Tyler got married. Devin took her to both weddings as his guest. She didn't mind Tyler's wedding. Tommy's was hard. His new wife, Kim, was very sweet and pretty. Anna was happy for him, though a little sad. The way Tommy looked at her didn't help her separate her heart from him, and she missed Alex dreadfully. Anna had a feeling that Kim knew about her, though she was very nice to Anna. She seemed to feel bad for her, especially when Devin was harsh.

Anna helped with both Tyler and Tommy's before-wedding rituals, though they were different. Tyler's was a night of debauchery with as many women he could get his cock into. Tommy's was a night of discipline; Anna stayed with him and teased him all night, but he wasn't allowed any release. Alex hadn't told Anna what his night was like, and wondered which one was more like his. Neither were pleasant to think about.

Anna hadn't dreamed of Alex since the Gathering.

The morning of opening night for *Romeo and Juliet*, Isaak pulled everyone on stage after rehearsal. "I have an announcement to make...a rather bittersweet one at that." Isaak nodded to Aaron, who went to stand next to him.

Aaron had been acting strange all week. He'd hardly spoken to Anna, except when necessary, and wouldn't make eye contact with her. Was he in trouble?

"It is with mixed emotions I inform you that when this run closes, Aaron will be moving to New York to dance there."

There were many gasps and murmurs throughout the company. Anna gaped at Aaron, who was staring at the back of the stage.

"Aaron and I have spoken about this a great deal. I encouraged him to audition and he was accepted into the New York City Ballet Company. I hope you will all be happy for him and wish him well. That is all."

Many of the dancers went to congratulate him, but Anna was hurt and angry and turned to walk off stage without speaking to him. Peter caught up with her.

"Are you okay?" he asked, putting his arm around her.

“No.” Anna shrugged off his arm and walked quickly to her dressing room, shutting the door behind her. She collapsed on the couch and started sobbing.

She didn’t hear the door open, but felt arms around her. They weren’t Peter’s. She looked up to see Aaron sitting next to her with a sorrowful look on his face. “Anna, I—”

“How can you do this to me, Aaron?” she asked in a harsh whisper. “How can you abandon me?” Her voice got louder. “You promised Alex you would watch out for me...and you’re leaving!”

“Anna, please believe me. I...wouldn’t go unless I needed to.” Aaron spoke softly, with earnestness.

“Why? Why do you *need* to go?”

Aaron sighed. “I can’t stay here and not be with you. It’s been eating at me for years.” The sadness in his eyes begged for her understanding.

“You promised,” Anna whispered.

“I’m sorry, Anna,” he said softly. For a moment, Anna thought he would kiss her, but he stood and looked at her. “I’m so sorry, Anna.” He turned and walked out of the dressing room.

Anna stared at the door for a long minute. She couldn’t believe that he would leave her like that. *He’d promised Alex he would take care of her! And he was leaving?* She didn’t know if she wanted to scream or cry. Neither would do any good.

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“*How’d she take it?*”

“*She thinks I’m abandoning her.*”

“*You didn’t tell her...?*”

“Of course not. But I hate hurting her like that.”

“If there were any other way, you know we would.”

“I know.” A sigh. “I’ve been her rock. The one thing that has stayed through all the shit she’s been through.”

“And that’s why you need to go. She’ll need you. It won’t be for very long and then she’ll understand.”

“It doesn’t make it any easier.”

“At least you know you’ll be able to be with her again. I’ll have to leave someday soon and won’t be able to be with her anymore.”

“We have to get her out of here before that happens. She won’t be able to take it.”

“I know. The plans are almost finalized. This is the first step.”

“I hope it works.”

“It has to. We cannot fail.”

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Anna forced herself to act warmly to Aaron on stage, but as soon as she stepped off, she was as cold as ice to him. It was difficult, but she'd had plenty of practice at hiding her true feelings lately. And she refused to let herself feel the pain of his leaving. She decided that if she hated him, it would make it easier.

But it didn't. By the time closing came around, she knew she couldn't let him leave thinking she hated him. He looked so miserable.

After the last performance, she showered and then went to knock on Aaron's dressing room door. Peter was busy, so she knew she had a few minutes to say goodbye. Aaron was leaving in the morning.

"Come in," Aaron called from inside.

Anna walked in and closed the door behind her. Aaron looked surprised and a little wary to see her.

"Aaron...," she whispered. "Why?"

He grimaced. "I told you why," he said in a broken voice.

"Please don't. Don't leave me." Fat tears ran unchecked down her cheeks.

Aaron was on his feet and had her in his arms before the first tear hit her shirt. She leaned her head against his chest, closed her eyes and breathed in his scent. She hadn't been in his arms for so long.

When she looked up at him, his eyes were stormy with emotion. She opened her mouth to speak and he crushed his lips against hers. She moaned softly as his mouth took possession of hers, his arms holding her tightly against his body.

"Anna...," he groaned as she kissed his neck and chest.

“Love me,” she begged softly. “One last time.”

Aaron kissed Anna’s neck as he softened inside her. “I love you, Anna. I will always love you.”

“I love you, t—”

The door opened and Peter stood in the doorway. He closed the door quickly and stood frowning at the two of them, naked together on the couch.

Aaron sat up and looked at him nervously. “Peter, I—”

Peter held his hand up and sighed. “Don’t.” He looked at Anna. “Get dressed.”

Anna quickly stood and retrieved her clothes. Peter’s jaw was clenched and he stared at the wall, not moving.

When Aaron and Anna were dressed, she looked at Peter. “Peter—”

He held up his hand. “Say good-bye. I’ll be in the hallway.” He opened the door and walked out of the room, but left the door open.

Aaron looked at her with true remorse. “I’m going to miss you terribly, Anna,” he said softly.

Anna tried to smile. “Me too. You’ve always been there for me. I don’t know what I’ll do without you.”

He looked towards the doorway. “Peter’s here. He’ll take care of you.”

Anna nodded and looked at the ground.

Aaron took a step forward and hugged her tightly. “Good-bye, Anna,” he said, kissing her on the forehead.

“Goodbye, Aaron,” she said softly. She looked at him one last time and then walked out the door. She glanced back to see him watching her with a

pained expression. When he saw her look at him, he gave her a sad smile and waved. She waved back, then moved so that the wall blocked her view of him before she walked away.

Peter was silent as they drove home. He was leaving in the morning as well to go to St. Petersburg for the week. Anna was not really looking forward to the next week when she had to spend every night with Devin.

“Are you angry?” she asked when they walked into the apartment.

He didn’t answer right away. “I have to leave tomorrow, too, Anna.” He paused. “I didn’t really want sloppy seconds for my last night with you for a week.”

“I’m sorry,” she whispered. She could tell she had hurt him. “I’ll go shower.”

“Don’t bother,” he said softly, but not angrily.

Anna thought she’d rather him be angry at her than hurt.

He went to the fridge, pulled out a bottle of beer, opened it and sat down on the couch. “I think you should go to bed,” he said without looking at her.

Anna nodded and went into the bedroom. She undressed and lay down in the dark, staring at the window out into the dark night. Peter came to bed a while later and got into bed without touching her. After a while, he began snoring. Anna curled up around her pillow and closed her eyes, willing herself to go to sleep.

The room came slowly into view, but it was empty. She looked around the tiny room, willing for him to appear, but it remained empty. The bed was made, the window was open and morning light streamed through the opening. Dust danced in the sunlight, making it look almost solid.

She walked to the window and looked out onto a huge grassy yard. The window was very high from the ground, five stories maybe, and the wall below was smooth. The room seemed to be in a tower at one end of a large, castle-like structure. A high stone wall stood out at a fair distance from where she stood, and seemed to surround the building. At least as far as she could see. In the far distance were high mountains. She wished she could smell the air; it looked so clean and crisp.

A door opened behind her and she turned to see Alex's large frame filling a door. His hair was pulled back in the customary ponytail but his beard was a little shaggier than she'd seen in a long time.

"Anna," he said softly with a smile. He closed the door behind him and sat down on the bed. "You haven't been here in a long time."

Anna nodded. "I don't know why. I don't even know why I keep dreaming of you."

Alex smiled, his eyes crinkling at the corners. Anna realized that if he were still alive, he would be thirty-two years old. "I like that you do. I look forward to seeing you. I've missed you."

"I always miss you, Alex." She smiled. "Devin gave me your ring back. I keep it on the nightstand next to my bed. My wedding rings, too."

Alex nodded. "I'm glad." He studied her. "You look sad."

"Aaron's moving to New York."

"Why?" He frowned.

"He said that he couldn't deal with being near me and not being able to be with me."

Alex's frown deepened, but he said nothing.

"I told him he was breaking his promise to you by leaving, but he said he had to go."

"He wouldn't go without a reason, Schatzi," he said softly, seeming to contemplate his own words. "Trust him."

Anna winced as her head began to hurt and the room spun.

Alex stood and came to kneel next to her. "You need to go, Schatzi."

She shook her head. "I don't want to," she whispered, holding her head. "I just got here."

"Please, Anna. I don't want you to hurt. You'll come again." He reached out to caress her face and she felt the faintest touch before the room dissolved from her vision and she awoke.

Anna sat up in bed. The room was still dark.

"Anna, are you okay?" Peter asked, sitting up and putting his hand on her back.

"I dreamed of Alex," she whispered. She stared into the darkness. "I told him Aaron was leaving."

"How did he respond?"

"He said that I should trust Aaron. That he wouldn't leave without a good reason." Anna shook her head, tears filling her eyes.

Peter didn't say anything, but pulled Anna to him. He lay back down in bed and wrapped his arms around her. "Your dreams are wise, Anna," he said softly. "I'm sorry I was angry at you. I shouldn't have begrimed you saying goodbye to Aaron."

Anna snuggled closer to Peter. "I should have asked. I'm sorry."

“Don’t apologize. I was jealous. I’m sorry.” He kissed her forehead and she closed her eyes, asleep in minutes in his warm embrace.

Peter left the next morning to go to St. Petersburg. Anna drove him to the airport, after they’d made up that morning.

“I will see you Saturday,” he said, kissing her goodbye. “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” she said softly and waved as he walked into the airport. She waited until he was out of sight and then drove back to the city and to Devin’s house.

When she arrived, she parked Alex’s car out front and went to ring the doorbell. Devin wouldn’t be home until evening, but he wanted her there during the day. She was surprised when Tyler answered the door.

“Tyler?” she asked, surprised. He had a condo downtown where he and his wife lived. “What are you doing here?”

He grinned. “April’s job hunting today. Dad suggested I come over and make sure you settled in all right.” He stepped aside to let her in, then slid his hands around her waist, biting her neck. He pressed his hips against her ass. “God, I need a woman who knows what she’s doing.” He reached under her shirt and tweaked her nipples hard.

Anna gasped, followed by a sigh that had nothing to do with pleasure. It would be a long day.

By the time Devin arrived home, Anna was hurting from Tyler’s abuse. She was bruised from his slaps and punches, and her ass was stretched to the limit from his fist. Before he left, he tied her to Devin’s bed. Devin wasn’t especially sympathetic to her situation. They ate dinner and then he used her until she passed out.

She slept the entire next day until Devin came home in the evening and did much the same as the day before. The entire week passed in a similar fashion and when Anna went to get Peter on Saturday afternoon after leaving the Manor, she was exhausted.

“Anna!” Peter exclaimed with concern in his eyes. He held her for a long time when they got home.

She wanted to stay awake and enjoy Peter’s return, but she fell asleep far too soon, and slept all day Sunday, too.

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Chapter Thirty

Before Anna knew it, August had arrived and she was flying to Washington DC with Devin and Tyler. She had asked, humbly, if Devin would allow her to skip it this year because of the opening of Giselle, and was rewarded with a Saturday full of pain from the nerve juice.

“Whatever happens, I will have Kaveh heal you so you are able to dance properly next week,” Devin said as he stood over where she lay, nearly unconscious on the floor of her room at the Manor. “I won’t let you embarrass me.”

“Yes, Master.” she had mumbled through bleeding lips, before crawling into the bathroom to get ready to go home.

When they arrived at the hotel, Tom and Tommy were waiting in the lobby. Tommy walked up quickly to embrace her. She gazed up at him in awe. He had matured into one of the most handsome men she’d ever met. He had the kindest eyes. He reminded her of Alex. Pain clenched her heart as she acknowledged that she would never be with Alex again, and Tommy was now married. Very happily as far as she could tell. Kim was a lucky woman.

Anna entertained a fleeting wish that Devin would give her to Tommy when he died, instead of Tyler.

Tommy greeted Tyler stiffly with his arm around Anna’s waist. Ever since their fight the previous year, their relationship had been strained.

The Elders met that Thursday evening to discuss the events of the weekend and issues in the country. They spoke a lot about the upcoming election, but Devin assured them that the president would be reelected.

Devin brought girls for the Elders to partake of that evening, so he said that Anna could go spend the evening with Tommy. She hurried down the hallway to Tommy's room fearful Devin would change his mind before she got there. He was not sharing a room with Tyler this time, instead he was with his father.

"Anna!" he exclaimed when he opened the door and looked around.
"What are you doing here?"

"Devin said I could stay with you. They have...other girls for the evening."

Tommy pulled her inside and kissed her soundly. She ran her hands down his sculpted arms as she kissed him back, then up to his shoulders and down his muscular chest. A thrill shot through her body as he held her close.

"These last weeks have gone by so slowly," he murmured. "I couldn't wait to see you."

Anna smiled shyly. "How's married life?" she asked as he led her to the bedroom.

He grinned. "I like it."

"Kim seems very nice," Anna said softly, a twinge of jealousy running through her body.

"She is." He turned to look at her. "She's not you, but she's a good wife," he said softly. He caressed her cheek. "I wish...." He sighed. "I wish I could have married you and taken you away from Devin."

Anna's eyes filled with tears and she nodded, but didn't dare speak the words.

He opened his mouth as if he were going to say something else, but closed it and shook his head. He leaned forward to kiss her again and led her to the bed.

“At least we have tonight,” she said softly.
Tommy nodded and laid her down on the bed.

Anna needed healing before she left on Sunday evening to fly home. She wasn't in any shape to travel. Devin had allowed the men to do anything they wanted to her, and her body simply couldn't heal quickly enough.

Peter picked her up at the airport and took her home. He was surprised that she was in such good shape. She told him it was because of Kaveh's healing. The weekend had been tough. Very tough. She was very glad to be back home in Peter's loving embrace.

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Chapter Thirty-One

The next day began dress rehearsals for Giselle and before she knew it, she was warming up for opening night.

She paced *en pointe* backstage as she waited for her cue, and worried that she wouldn't do a good job. That she would lose focus and all sorts of horrible things. But when she stepped into the stage lights, she forgot everything except the dance. She didn't even think about the steps. She was just...Giselle. Happily dancing around the stage in love and then tragically dying because of Duke Albrecht's betrayal.

In the second act, she felt ethereal as she moved across stage in the fog and danced with Duke Albrecht until dawn. When she backed back into the wings and the curtain closed, the round of applause that exploded from the audience was deafening. Isaak beamed at her and Peter picked her up and swung her around in circles. When she and Peter went out for their bows, the audience leapt to their feet and Anna's heart nearly exploded for joy.

*If only Alex were here...*came the sobering thought. Or Wilhelm or Kurt or even Aaron. But there was no one here only for her. There was only Devin.

She hoped her tears would be mistaken for tears of joy as loneliness attacked her at the height of the applause. There were multiple curtain calls and Anna smiled bravely and curtsied humbly, but inside her heart was broken. Alex wasn't here to see her dance. He was the reason she had made it here, and he would never know.

When she was finally able to escape, she managed to avoid the well-wishers and ran to her dressing room. She fell to the floor and wept.

The tears fell in steady streams to form dark spots on the rug beneath her face. “Oh, Alex,” she sobbed. “Why did you leave me here alone?”

The sadness and despair wrung her heart and tears dry until she could cry no more. Then she stood, dried her face with a tissue and began to get ready for the party. She was glad she’d chosen a simple, blue satin dress for the occasion. A more embellished dress would have made her feel over-the-top celebratory, and as much as she knew she should be ecstatic, her demeanor remained sober. She felt so unbelievably lonely she could hardly stand it.

When Peter knocked on her door, she had managed to get rid of her red eyes and appear calm. That didn’t stop Peter from worrying about her.

He stroked her cheek and gave her a loving look. “Why did you run away?” he asked softly.

She didn’t answer right away. “Lonely,” she finally choked out.

Peter murmured something in Russian and pulled her close, holding her tight.

She felt warm and comfortable in his arms. They had been together about a year now, and she couldn’t imagine being without him, even though she knew she would be sooner or later.

Just enjoy the time together now, she told herself.

Together, they walked out to the party and into a swarm of well-wishers, including Peter’s family. For a while, she was distracted enough to forget about her loneliness. At least a little. Even Devin seemed pleased, which was more relieving than a cause joy.

Later, as she lay in Peter’s arms after lovemaking, she stared into the darkness and the loneliness consumed her again.

Anna felt relieved that Alex was in the room when it came into view. He came and sat down on the bed next to where she was standing.

“Hello, Schatzi,” he said in a gentle voice that brought tears to her eyes.

Now, more than ever, she wished this was more than a dream. She gazed into Alex’s loving blue eyes, longing for him to be alive again. She desperately wanted his arms around her. To hold her and tell her that everything would be all right. But it was just a dream. She was alone, no matter how real the dreams felt.

“Schatzi, what’s wrong?”

She smiled weakly as tears began to fall. “I danced Giselle tonight,” she squeaked. She took a deep breath. “And I was so lonely. There was no one there for me. Even Aaron left.”

Tears filled Alex’s eyes as he looked at her, his face filled with such sorrow that Anna could almost imagine him really there with her.

“Mein armer Schatzi,” he murmured. “I’m so sorry. But it won’t be like this forever, Anna. I promise.”

Anna looked at him and swallowed. “Promises of dead men...,” she said softly and shook her head. “Promises that can’t be kept.”

The hurt and sorrow in Alex’s face pained her heart. She could almost imagine that she had hurt him, but it was only her imagination.

“You’ve been dead for three and a half years, Alex. We were only married for three months. Why can’t I let you go?”

“Don’t give up, Anna. I will come for you.”

“Why do you say that?” she exclaimed. “You are dead. You can’t come for me!” She shouted in frustration. “No!” she screamed.

“No!”

Anna sat up in bed. Peter awoke and his arms swiftly wrapped around her and pulled her close. “You were dreaming of Alex, weren’t you?”

She nodded. “How did you know?”

“You were talking in your sleep.”

“He always tells me he will come for me. To not give up hope.” She buried her face in the soft hair on his chest. “Promises of dead men,” she said softly.

Peter didn’t say anything, but lay back down, bringing Anna with him. He stroked her hair and kissed her head.

“Why can’t I let him go?” she whispered.

“The heart has reasons that reason knows not,” Peter quoted softly.
“Maybe you’re not supposed to.”

Anna sniffed. “He’s dead.”

Peter hugged her to himself. “Go to sleep. You have a busy day tomorrow.”

Chapter Thirty-Two

The next week was busy with performances. The newspapers wrote rave reviews of the performances and the shows sold out quickly. Isaak was thrilled and so proud of Anna.

“Your parents would be so proud Anna,” Isaak said after class Sunday morning. The show closed that night after nine days of performances.

“Thank you, Isaak,” Anna said softly. She glanced at Peter, who stood at the side of the stage frowning at his phone.

Devin appeared suddenly on the other side of the stage and walked towards Peter. His face was inscrutable, though when he glanced at Peter, he frowned slightly. Peter looked up with sad eyes and saw Devin. There was a moment of unspoken communication between them then Peter nodded and followed Devin towards Anna.

Anna looked between the two men. Why was Devin here? He never came to rehearsals.

“What’s wrong?” she asked Peter softly. Her heart pounded as she waited for one of them to speak.

Peter glanced at Devin who nodded. “Anna, my grandfather is dead. He died this morning.” He looked at her sadly. “I have to return to St. Petersburg,” he added softly.

“Now?” she asked, trying not to let her voice tremble.

He shook his head. “I’ll fly out in the morning. I won’t leave until we’re done here.” Peter looked at his phone. “I just need to book a flight.”

“We’re taking a flight that leaves at eight-thirty tomorrow and gets in a little before two. If you’d like, I can have Ian book you on the same flight.”

Peter looked at Devin in surprise. “Yes, that would be fine. Thank you.”

"You're going too?" Anna asked Devin softly. She would be alone?

"As are you, Anna. This is...." Devin glanced at Isaak. "A funeral of an important man. And Vitaly was a friend. I don't travel without you, you know that."

Isaak looked at Peter. "I'm so sorry for your loss, Peter."

"Thank you, Isaak. I trust you know what this means?"

Isaak nodded and smiled sadly. "I'm glad you got to dance Giselle with Anna. I couldn't imagine a more perfect pairing. You will be missed." They shook hands and then Isaak left.

Devin looked pointedly at Anna, and then Peter. "We will pick you up at six tomorrow morning." He glanced at Anna. "We will discuss your living arrangements later."

"Yes, Devin," she said softly.

Devin nodded curtly at Peter and then turned and walked away.

Anna looked up at Peter. "I'm so sorry he's gone, Peter."

"*Dedushka* and I were not close, but I will miss him. I regret having to leave you, Anna. I will miss you terribly." He pulled her close. "At least we can travel together. We don't have to say goodbye yet."

Anna danced her very best for Peter. Her death scene and the second act were even more emotional than they had been before. She was saying goodbye with her dance. Her small comfort was that she at least got to say goodbye to Peter and that there would be closure.

"My mom will come up and pack the rest of my stuff," Peter said as they were packing for the trip to St. Petersburg. "You are welcome to stay

here until the lease is up.” They’d just signed another year lease a few weeks ago.

Anna swallowed nervously. “I don’t know what Devin will want me to do. Thank you, though.” She didn’t know if she wanted to stay, but it wasn’t up to her. It was up to Devin.

Anna finished packing her things and sat on the bed, watching Peter.

He looked up at her and gave her a sad smile. “Wilhelm will be there,” he said softly. “And most likely Kurt as well.”

Anna’s eyes lit up. “They will? Why?”

“It’s an Elder funeral. Same reason we were at Alex’s, though this is a bigger deal.”

“Wilhelm,” she breathed. It had been so long. Over a year. “Will I be allowed to speak to him?”

“It would be unwise for Devin to prevent you from speaking to your second Master in front of everyone.”

Anna’s spirits lifted as she thought about being able to see Wilhelm again. And Kurt. Oh, her heart longed to see them both.

Ian knocked on their door at exactly six a.m. the next morning. They were ready to go, as directed; Peter didn’t want Anna getting in trouble and Anna herself didn’t want to get in trouble. Ian was especially nice to her as he carried her suitcases downstairs to the waiting limo. Devin and Tyler were waiting for them. Peter knew how Tyler treated Anna and kept his arm around her in the car. Devin watched, but didn’t say anything.

The flight to St. Petersburg was long. There was a stop in Chicago, where Elder Marcus and his son Joel joined them. Joel eyed Anna while

they were waiting for their flight, but Peter kept her close to him.

“I will keep you safe for as long as I can, Anna,” he whispered as they were getting on the plane.

It was an overnight flight to Frankfurt and then a three-hour flight on to St. Petersburg.

They arrived early afternoon and Vlad met them at the airport, more for Peter’s sake than the Elders’. Peter and Vlad greeted one another affectionately, and then Vlad greeted each of the other travelers. He searched Anna’s eyes when he greeted her and gave her a warm smile, which confused her. He’d never been warm to her before.

“I’ve arranged for a car to take you to your hotel,” Vlad said as their luggage was gathered. “Most of the Elders are staying at the Grand Hotel and there will be a dinner in the ballroom tonight so everyone can greet one another. Tomorrow morning is the church funeral and the next evening we will go to the *pomest'ye*.”

“Have many arrived?” Devin asked.

“Yes, most of the Europeans and Asians have already. I expect the rest this afternoon.” He smiled sadly. “It can be a long flight.”

“Yes.” Devin gave Vlad a look. “I trust that everything has been taken care of?”

“Of course, Devin,” he answered with a touch of defensiveness. “I’m not an idiot.”

“I would never accuse you of that,” Devin said formally. He turned to Anna. “Say good-bye, Anna. We need to go to the hotel and Peter needs to go spend time with his family.”

Peter’s wife. Yes, Peter was no longer Anna’s...not that he ever was. She turned to look up into his warm brown eyes. The eyes she had gazed into almost every day for the last year.

He cupped her cheek. “I love you,” he whispered. “I will do whatever I can to help you.” He leaned down and kissed her deeply. Anna clung to his arms and kissed him with all the love she had for him.

“I love you, too,” she said as quietly as she could, and smiled bravely at him.

“I’ll see you soon.”

Anna nodded. Yes, they would see each other over the next few days, but it wouldn’t be the same. She would be back in Devin’s complete possession and control.

Peter gave her one last loving look and then turned and walked away with his uncle.

Devin put his hand on her back and guided her into the limo waiting to take them to the hotel. “I hope that you have become stable enough that you will not become useless to me while we are here or when we return home,” Devin said softly in her ear as the limo pulled away into the traffic.

“Yes, Master.” Her chest ached, knowing she was now separated from Peter, but if she became an emotional mess, Devin would not be happy and she didn’t want to anger him.

“Good.” He stroked her neck with his fingertip and then kissed it. He took her hand and placed it on his hardening cock. “We have a long drive.”

Anna looked up and he raised his brow. She took that to mean he wanted a blowjob and set to work unfastening his pants. When his cock sprang free, she took it into her mouth and Devin groaned softly and settled back in his seat with his hand on the back of her head.

She heard the men talking as she worked Devin’s cock. They spoke about Vitaly and speculated as to the type of leader Vlad would be.

“He is softer than Vitaly,” Devin remarked. “We’ll have to keep an eye on him.”

Devin's breathing shallowed and he pushed Anna's head down as he came right into her throat. She didn't dare move for fear he would choke her or extend his spikes. When he had finished he pulled her up by her hair and fixed his pants. They were almost to the hotel.

~*~*~*~*~*

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~Hope~

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Chapter Thirty-Three

Wilhelm paced in the hotel lobby. He knew Anna would be here soon; Vlad had texted him to let him know they were on their way. He also knew he couldn't approach her, and it broke his heart to be so close to her and unable to make contact. But at least he would be able to see that she was all right.

Kurt sat nearby with his fingers tented and tapping on his lips. He stared at the hotel doors with an intensity Wilhelm had come to see often in his younger son's eyes. Kurt had done well stepping into Alex's shoes. He had changed from the immature, happy-go-lucky boy into a serious young man whom Wilhelm was confident would lead the country well after his death. Now all he needed was a wife. Unfortunately, Kurt had lost his heart to Anna and no one else would satisfy him. Not that Wilhelm could blame him. He would likely feel the same way in his son's shoes.

Every person that walked through the doors caught the attention of both Wilhelm and Kurt. They had waited in agony for Vlad's text and then had been waiting for an hour downstairs in the lobby.

"Why are you pacing, Wilhelm?" came a question in German. Wilhelm turned around to see his friend, Edwin Reisig, Elder of Bavaria, standing behind him with an amused look on his face. "You are never anxious."

"Anna is on her way."

A look of understanding spread across Edwin's face. "Ah." He glanced down at Kurt. "You are both on pins and needles waiting?"

"It's been over a year and the reports I've received are not good."

"Perhaps you should bring it up to the other Elders. She is yours as much as she is that bastard's. You have a right to see her."

Edwin was right, but Wilhelm didn't want to turn the funeral into a political meeting. Though, he had to admit, it might be the only chance he had to get Anna back. With the other Elders backing him, he might be able to pressure Devin into removing his banishment. The only way it would work is if he had the majority behind him, and even then, with Devin's powers...it still might not be enough.

"Do you think the others would back me?"

"Devin has not been making friends these last few years. Everyone saw how distraught she was at the funeral, which they all found disturbing. Elder-Mistresses aren't supposed to be capable of such emotion. If it is obvious that there has been mistreatment, there is a high likelihood that they will back you. If she's better off...." Edwin trailed off. "You might be on your own."

"So I am to hope she looks terrible?" Wilhelm understood what Edwin was saying, and he was torn between wanting to see that Anna was all right and his desire to have her back in his life.

"It would go a long way in gaining traction for your complaint. Devin's actions haven't gone unnoticed, but they have a right to do as they see fit in their country, as long as it doesn't affect anyone else."

"How can it not? Their economic mess is affecting the entire world."

"Yes, but America has been losing power for many years. It's not as big a deal as it would have been twenty years ago. Some might say Devin's strong hand is the only hope they have."

"Americans are too independent for what he wants."

"Yes, but they are influenced by the media. They paint things very differently than the reality. Things work over here that I doubt would work over there."

"Vati," Kurt exclaimed, leaping to his feet and looking at the door.

A group of men had walked into the hotel with a woman. *Anna*. Wilhelm's heart leapt when he saw her. Her shiny, thick sable-brown hair hung down her back. It had grown longer since he'd seen her last. She wore a black skirt and jacket with heels that showed off her sexy legs. He didn't see a necklace, which concerned Wilhelm. Here, of all places, she should have her Mistress necklace on. Otherwise, she might be mistaken for a common Dirne.

She was calm and walked gracefully next to Devin. But Wilhelm could see the difference in her. She was almost a shadow of what she had been even the last time he saw her. It wasn't that she was pale or thin, though she was. It was her spirit; the Immortal part of her was severely diminished. And when he looked at Devin he understood why.

Devin radiated with Immortal power. It was in his expression and his demeanor. It wasn't tangible, and the average person wouldn't have any idea. But Elders would know. Elders from several countries were seated around the lobby and they all stopped and stared at him.

Devin had become a Chairman; of this there was no doubt. A powerful Elder with amazing powers of persuasion. Chairmen had controlled society using Immortal powers in the distant past; before the Elders and Immortals decided to work together instead of against each other. And if they bothered to look, the others would be able to see where he was getting his power.

Wilhelm caught the expression of longing on Kurt's face and hurt for him.

Anna followed Devin through the lobby to the reception desk. She kept her face and demeanor calm. She would not upset Devin; or at least she'd

try not to. She would be a good slave, get through the few days here, and then go home and face the rest of her life. This time without Peter, though. Of course, she had several weeks off until Nutcracker rehearsals began, so she really had nothing to get back to in San Francisco. Just sleep. Maybe Devin would let her have a few of those pills....

Devin went to check in at the reception desk and Anna took the opportunity to look around the enormous lobby. She felt someone watching her and turned and looked around.

“Wilhelm,” she whispered. “Kurt.”

On the far side of the lobby stood the two men she most wanted to see. They both stood, staring at her, and she at them. The only thing that kept her from running into their arms was the fear of punishment from Devin. Her heart pounded as she fought her desire to run to them.

Tyler suddenly stepped in front of her and grabbed her chin. “I don’t think you’re allowed to see them,” he said in a nasty voice. He leaned down to whisper in her ear. “I can’t wait to have you in a room.” He ran his hand down her hip and pressed her body to his.

“Tyler, can’t you wait....” Devin trailed off as he saw Wilhelm and Kurt across the room. “Ah.” Devin looked down at Anna. “You want to go to them, don’t you?”

Anna nodded, not daring to hope he would let her.

“I don’t think I could allow that, Baby. They might try and take you away from me again.” He turned to look at the bellhop. “Bring her, Tyler,” he said and followed the bellhop to the elevators.

Tyler snaked his arm around her waist and led her to the elevator. She caught a glimpse of Wilhelm over her shoulder as she was steered around the corner, and then he disappeared from her view.

Wilhelm's heart stopped when his eyes locked on Anna's. Her face filled with a desperate longing, but she didn't come to him. She just stood there, looking frightened and sad as she looked between himself and Kurt.

"Anna," Kurt whispered and took a step forward. Wilhelm grabbed hold of Kurt's shoulder.

"We can't, Kurt," he said softly. He watched Anna until a young man stepped between them and grabbed her chin. Wilhelm could tell by the nasty smirk on the man-child's face that this was Devin's son.

Seeing Devin's son handle her so roughly made Wilhelm's hands curl into fists. He'd seen the look on the young man's face and it was enough to make Wilhelm concerned about Anna's safety.

Wilhelm caught Devin's eye from across the room. The man's black eyes narrowed momentarily. Then he smiled at Wilhelm, spoke to his son, and walked away towards the elevators. His son put his arm around Anna's waist and led her away. The look in her eyes when she looked back at Wilhelm broke his heart. She was terrified.

Wilhelm sat heavily in the chair behind him and put his head in his hands.

"Vati, we can't just let him—"

"Kurt, there is little I can do." Wilhelm stared at the floor between his laced fingers.

"You think she is in danger?" Edwin asked softly.

"What are your thoughts?" Wilhelm sat back as Edwin took a chair next to him.

“She’s grown into a beautiful young woman,” Edwin said slowly. “But so sad. There is little life in her.” He motioned to another part of the room where two women sat talking.

The women were as different as night and day, though both were fiercely beautiful and shared an ethereal quality about them. One was tall and slender, with chocolate brown skin and multiple black braids that ended in rows of multi-colored beads in the middle of her back. Her black eyes sparkled as she laughed at something the other woman said. The other was more voluptuous and slightly shorter, with long, golden-blond hair and sky-blue eyes. They sat easily together, talking and laughing and flirting occasionally with the Elders next to them. Other men who walked by them stared, and a few tripped over their own feet. They both wore the same necklace; three concentric diamond circles of the Elder-Mistress. Raissa, Mistress of Brazil and Madison, Mistress of Australia.

They were so different from Anna. The only time Wilhelm had seen Anna so confident and Mistress-like was when she was married to Alex. It was obvious that Devin trampled on Anna’s spirit and had done severe damage.

“What do you think I should do?” Wilhelm didn’t want to cross Devin. That could be dangerous, for him and for Anna. At this point, he would be content simply to be able to speak to her again. Maybe Devin wouldn’t be threatened if he approached it like that. *Little steps.*

“I will talk with some people. You know your countrymen are on your side. She was given to you by her father. That is a more valid claim than Devin stealing her.” Edwin smiled. “Be the upstanding man you always are and I will talk to you at dinner tonight.”

Wilhelm looked at his friend with grateful eyes. “Thank you, Edwin.”

“I know you and Kurt have been miserable since all that happened. Perhaps this is your chance to undo some of it.” Edwin stood. “I’m sure many of the others will be on your side.” He bowed his head slightly and then walked away.

Wilhelm leaned back in his chair and looked at Kurt. “Maybe this is our chance after all.”

Kurt nodded. “I hope so.”

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Chapter Thirty-Four

Anna slowly dressed for dinner. Moving fast hurt too much. Devin had brought a long white chiffon dress for her to wear. It had a crisscross back and a very low v-neckline that showed the inner swell of her breasts. When she walked, her right thigh was exposed. She did her hair and put the dress on. Bruises from the afternoon showed on her arms and lower back. She bit her lip and nervously walked out to the living room where Devin sat with his tablet on his lap.

He looked up at her when she walked in. “Why are you frowning?”

“I...there are bruises that show with this dress.” She pointed to her arms and turned so he could see her back.

Devin cursed and stood. Anna backed away in fear, nearly tripping on the length of the dress. It was meant to be worn with very high heels.

He grabbed her arm and turned her around to examine her back. His hands slid over the bruises and Anna winced. His hand continued up her back and pushed her curls aside so he could kiss her neck. “Maybe you need to wear your hair down.” He yanked on her hair, making her gasp in pain. “A simple fix, don’t you think?” His other hand trailed up her side and under the dress to caress her breast. “If anyone asks, just tell them you like it rough.” He bit the back of her neck. “Don’t you?”

“Y-yes, Devin,” she whispered in fear.

He pushed her forward by her head. “Go fix your hair. We need to go in a few minutes.”

Anna hurried to the bathroom to pull her hair down and brush it until it shined.

“Anna!” Devin yelled. She grabbed her shoes and ran out to the living room.

Tyler stood next to his father and grinned when he saw her. He walked to her and pulled her close, pushing on the bruises he had given her earlier. “Fucking sexy,” he murmured against her neck before biting it and making Anna cry out in pain.

“Let’s go,” Devin growled. “You can fuck her up again later. Just make sure she can walk tomorrow.”

Devin took Anna’s hand and they walked down the hallway to the elevators.

They made their way down to the ballroom. As she walked in, she saw many men that looked familiar, though the only ones she knew by name were the Americans. Every culture in the world was represented in this room. There were tensions between some groups and friendliness between others. A handful of women in white were spread among the more than one hundred and fifty men, mostly wearing dark suits, though some wore clothing more suited to their culture. The other women would come later. Only the Elder-Mistresses were allowed to be in the room during dinner.

As Devin led her to their table, she saw Wilhelm and Kurt across the room. Kurt smiled at her and nodded, as if he were trying to assure her of something, though of what, Anna couldn’t even begin to imagine.

The other American Elders and their sons joined them at the table. Tommy smiled at her warmly and tried to sit next to her, but Tyler quickly took the seat next to her, with Devin on her other side. Tyler looked smug and Tommy grimaced and took a seat next to his father who had sat next to Devin.

Dinner was uneventful for Anna, aside from being leered at by the other men at the table. But no one tried anything and she was able to sit quietly

and look around a little bit. Peter was sitting next to his uncle at a nearby table. Their eyes met and he gave her a warm smile.

After dinner, Vlad stood and spoke to the men in English, thanking them for coming and announcing the itinerary for the next few days.

“Is there any business that needs to be attended to?” he asked when he had finished.

Anna was surprised when Wilhelm stood and waited for Vlad to acknowledge him. She saw a small smile on Vlad’s face before nodding to Wilhelm and sitting down.

“My brothers,” Wilhelm began in English. “You all know that my son, Alex, was killed while performing his duties to the Brotherhood. He left behind a sweet, beautiful wife.” Wilhelm met Anna’s eyes and smiled.

Anna felt Devin stiffen next to her.

“You also know that she is an Elder-Mistress. What you might not know is that she is also a slave. A slave with two Masters.” He paused and there were murmurs around the room.

Devin growled next to her. “What the fuck is he doing?”

“Devin Andersen is one Master. Alex was her second Master and when he died, I took his place. I have not been allowed to see or speak to my daughter-in-law in almost a year and a half because Devin decided I should not have that right. I ask you, my Brothers, to pressure Devin into removing the ban prohibiting my family to contact Anna, and restore my rights as her Master.”

Devin stood and threw his napkin on the ground. “You were trying to steal her away from me,” he shouted in anger.

Wilhelm remained calm. “How can I steal what is rightfully mine? I had my reasons for wanting to take her to Germany.” He didn’t go into details, which seemed to surprise Devin.

A tall man with very dark skin stood. “Why is an Elder-Mistress a slave?” His voice was very deep and resonant. A beautiful dark-skinned woman sat next to him with gold threads running through her braided hair. The man put his hand on the woman’s shoulder. “That is not right.”

Wilhelm didn’t comment and Devin fumed but kept quiet.

A heated discussion ensued about Elder-Mistresses being slaves. The general consensus went against what Devin had done and he became furious.

After a while, Wilhelm raised his hand and the room quieted. “Brothers, I did not bring up the subject to debate the issue of Anna’s slavery. It is done and there is little that can change it. My sole concern is that I am unable to have any contact with her. As you can imagine, I am quite fond of my daughter-in-law and I simply wish to be able to contact her and visit her.”

Devin narrowed his eyes at Wilhelm. “Why isn’t he taking advantage of the discussion to contest what I did?”

“He seems to just want to be able to see Anna,” Tom commented, trying to calm his friend. “Is that so unreasonable? How would you like to not be able to be with her?”

Devin turned his narrowed gaze to Tom and studied him for a long time. Finally, Devin relented and sighed. “You’re right. He only wants contact. That isn’t unreasonable.” Though he didn’t seem happy, Devin stood and held up his hands. The room quieted again.

“Perhaps I was a bit...hasty in forbidding contact with Anna,” Devin admitted slowly through gritted teeth. The room had turned against him and he knew it. “I lift my ban on your contact with Anna.”

Anna looked up at Devin with frightened, but hopeful, eyes.

“And visitations?” Wilhelm asked with an arched brow.

Devin's jaw clenched but he nodded.

Wilhelm smiled broadly and looked at Anna. "I thank you for your willingness to change your mind, Devin."

Devin sat down and looked directly into Anna's eyes. "You may go to him. If you embarrass me or misbehave in any way, I will punish you when we return home."

Anna couldn't hide the happiness in her heart, even in the face of Devin's anger. "Yes, Devin," she said quietly.

"I forbid you from marrying Kurt or from making me look bad in front of any of the Elders. You may not tell anyone what goes on at the Gatherings or in my private meetings. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Devin." Anna tried to sit still, but wanted to run across the room so badly, her legs ached to stand.

"Go."

Anna hesitated for a moment, looking at Devin, but he nodded stiffly and Anna ran as quickly as she could across the room and into Wilhelm's open arms. She could feel Devin's disapproving stare, but she couldn't help herself. Wilhelm held her tightly and kissed her head, stroking her hair and whispering in German to her.

Vlad stood to speak again and Wilhelm sat down, pulling Anna into his lap. She leaned her head against his comforting chest and listened to his heartbeat. She looked up to see Kurt looking at her with longing. She reached out her hand to him and he smiled brightly. Wilhelm pushed her gently up and she went to sit with Kurt.

"Anna," Kurt whispered, stroking her cheek. She rested her head on Kurt's chest and reached behind her for Wilhelm's hand. Anna closed her eyes and sighed. This is where she wanted to be.

When the dinner was over, the plates were cleared and the tables were pushed to the sides of the room. The girls were led in wearing short dresses similar to what they wore at the spring and summer gatherings and the revelry began.

Anna stood nervously and looked at Wilhelm. “How may—”

Wilhelm shook his head. “*Nein, Liebling.* You are not to be used tonight. Kurt and I are going to take you to our room and make up for the last year and a half. We have a lot of catching up to do.” He gave Anna a heart-melting smile and nodded to Kurt.

Kurt took her hand and they followed Wilhelm to where Devin sat with Tom and Oscar.

“I want to thank you for changing your mind, Devin,” Wilhelm said in a humble tone. “I did not want to start any trouble. I just wanted to be with Anna. I hope you can understand that.”

Devin narrowed his eyes and lifted his chin. “She will return to me.”

Wilhelm nodded. “As much as I detest the thought, I will not argue. She cannot stay with me for long periods of time. This I know.” Wilhelm paused. “I was wondering if you would be willing to let her return to Germany with me. I believe she has some time off dancing? I will return her before the end of the month. You have my word.”

“I was looking forward to having her to myself for a few weeks,” Devin protested.

“You have had her for a year and a half without any interference from me.”

“She was with Peter.”

“That is not my problem. I have been forbidden from any sort of contact with her. You owe me.” Wilhelm’s eyes flashed and Anna could sense his

anger. Anna had never seen him fully angry before but knew that he and Alex had similar tempers; she knew enough to be afraid.

Devin's jaw clenched. "Give me a date you'll return her."

"I will let you know before you leave."

They glared at each other for a long minute before Devin nodded. "Fine. But if you try anything—"

"I am not you, Devin. I keep my word." Wilhelm turned and walked away before Devin could say anything else.

Anna stared wide eyed as Devin's face turned red in rage. He turned his gaze onto Anna before Kurt tugged at her hand and led her away.

Chapter Thirty-Five

Kurt opened the hotel room door and Anna walked into a room of gold and blue. She immediately spotted a picture of Anna Pavlova on the far wall.

“Oh!” she exclaimed walking over to it. It was the picture of the famous ballet dancer in her Giselle costume.

“This is the Mariinsky suite,” Kurt explained. “We were hoping you would be able to come and see it.” He moved to stand behind Anna and put his arms around her waist, pulling her close.

Anna turned in his embrace and looked up at him. She stroked his cheek, rough with evening whiskers, and looked into his dear face. “I’ve missed you so much,” she whispered.

Kurt’s gaze intensified as he looked down into her eyes. “And I, you, *mein Engel*. So much.” He leaned down and gently brushed his lips against hers. She pushed up onto her toes and kissed him hard. She wrapped her arms around his neck, determined to show him how much she missed him with her kiss. He backed up until his legs hit the couch and sat down, pulling Anna down to straddle his hips. She pressed her hips forward, making him moan softly against her mouth. Oh, how she had missed him.

Wilhelm knocked softly and opened the door of the adjoining suite. He had called Ilsa and given her the joyful news that Anna would be returning home with them for a few weeks. Ilsa was ecstatic and assured him that all would be ready for their return in a few days.

He looked around the living room and didn't see any sign of his son or Anna, and wandered closer to the bedroom doors when he heard soft moans and gasps.

Wilhelm's heart gave a twinge of jealousy, but he pushed it away. It was right for Kurt to be with her. He was young and unmarried. Kurt would be a good husband to her. Wilhelm needed to accept the fatherly role to her again. That is what she needed, not a fifty-three-year-old lover. Still, her soft moans aroused him and he turned to go back to his room, determined to think with the proper head.

He took a cold shower and lay down in bed, trying to sleep. To have Anna so close and in his son's bed was proper, but painful. The shower hadn't done what he had intended and now his cock was throbbing with desire for her. He wrapped his hand around himself and stroked himself slowly, imagining Anna's sweet body next to him.

He heard a whisper of sound and opened his eyes to see a slender shape in his doorway, illuminated by the moonlight. He sat up on his elbows. "Anna?"

She stepped forward, wrapped in a robe, dark hair streaming around her face. She was a vision of pure beauty.

"Why are you here? Is Kurt all right?"

She smiled timidly and walked slowly toward his bed, untying her robe and letting it fall to the ground. "He is. He thought I should come be with you."

"Anna, he is young and good for you. I am an old man." His voice cracked like a pre-teen as he gazed on her perfect breasts, the circles of her nipple piercings glinting in the moonlight that trickled through the curtains. His eyes trailed down her perfectly toned stomach and the gentle swell of

her hips and thighs. He licked his lips as his eyes strayed to her bare pussy lips.

“You’re not old, Wilhelm,” she said softly, coming to sit next to him on the bed. She reached out and cupped his cheek. “I love you both,” she whispered. “I need both of you.”

His cock throbbed at her words. She trailed her hand down his chest and stomach, pushing aside the blankets and gazed at his cock. Before he could stop her, she bent down and took him into her hot, wet mouth. He fell back on the pillow and moaned low as she sucked on him. His hand came to rest gently on the back of her head, stroking her silky hair and whispering words of encouragement and love. God, he loved her.

“Anna, it is not right that Kurt sleep alone.”

She looked up at him and backed her mouth off his cock. “I’ll go get him when we’re done, if that’s okay. I want to sleep between you two.”

“Anna, you do not have to do this,” he protested, and then groaned as she swallowed him down her throat.

“I want to,” she said after a few minutes. “I’ve missed you both so much.”

Wilhelm fought within himself. She came to him willingly. If he rejected her, she would be hurt. If he allowed her to continue, he would feel that he went back on his decision to remain fatherly. But her throat made it hard to stay determined. Sex was, after all, how she felt things. To reject her sexually would hurt her unlike it would a normal woman. It would hurt her to the core. Sex was her love language.

He tugged on her hair gently and she looked up at him with nervous eyes. “I want to kiss you,” he said in a husky voice and pulled her up his body and pressed his lips to hers. He would show her how much he loved and cared for her. He would show her how much he’d missed her.

Wilhelm rolled her to his side and then onto her back and kissed her and explored her body with his hands. When he reached her pussy, he gently pressed a finger inside her core and she sighed and arched her back.

“Oh, Wilhelm. Please!” she begged, spreading her legs wide.

“Not yet, *Liebling*,” he murmured against her mouth. “I must explore every inch of your body and see where you have changed since we were last together.”

Two hours later, Anna tiptoed back to get Kurt and found him fast asleep in bed. She turned to go tell Wilhelm and found him right behind her.

“We can stay in here,” he whispered. He kissed her and led her into Kurt’s bed and lay down next to her. She curled next to Kurt and Wilhelm curled his body around her, so thankful that he was hers again.

Anna felt herself waking, but desperately clung to her dream. She was safe in Kurt’s embrace. Devin had relented and let her be with them again.

But no, awareness took hold and she sighed unhappily and opened her eyes.

“Why do you sigh so sadly, *Engel*?”

Anna turned her head and laughed in delight when she saw Kurt lying on his side next to her. His head was propped up on his bent arm, his blond hair disheveled from sleep. It hadn’t been a dream; it was real!

She looked behind her, but Wilhelm wasn’t there.

“He had to make a phone call,” Kurt explained when she looked back at him. “Is that why you sighed?” he asked, looking hurt.

Anna shook her head emphatically. “I thought...all this...was just a dream. That I was in Devin’s room and not here.”

Kurt grinned. “*Nein*. You are here, and here you will stay.”

“I’m so glad,” Anna whispered. She reached out to touch his face, now very scratchy, and smiled. Her heart swelled with emotion as she gazed into his eyes.

He curled a piece of her hair around his fingers. “Still so beautiful, *mein Engel*.”

A discreet cough made Anna turn to look at the doorway. Wilhelm stood there wearing only pajama bottoms, no shirt, with a broad smile on his face.

Anna smiled at him.

“We need to get dressed and get breakfast. The service begins at ten.”

Anna bit her lip. “I don’t have my clothes. They’re in Devin’s room.”

Wilhelm smiled. “I spoke with him and he is sending them over. The front desk sent up some toiletries so you could begin getting ready.” He held out a white gift bag and then set it on the dresser near the door.

Kurt grunted as he sat up. “I would rather stay in bed.”

Wilhelm chuckled. “Duties, my son. They are never ending. But at least we have our Anna back.”

Kurt leaned over and kissed Anna. “That is true. The day cannot be bad if she is here.”

Anna blushed and looked down at the bed.

“I will send your clothes in when they come,” Wilhelm said, and turned and walked away.

Anna turned to look at Kurt.

“Shall we shower?” he asked with a glint in his eyes.

“Together?”

“We can save water.” He laughed and pulled her to her feet.

Wilhelm was shrugging on his shirt when he heard the knock on the door. He went to open it and saw Ian standing there, holding a large suitcase.

"I've brought Anna's things," he said in a deep voice, looking around.

Ian wanted to see her? "She is in the adjoining suite getting ready," Wilhelm said slowly, watching the big man's face. He stepped back and allowed the man inside.

The slightest hint of disappointment flashed through his eyes but was gone instantly, and he nodded. "I believe the maid got everything, but if something is missing, let me know." He put the suitcase down and looked at Wilhelm. "She's...okay?" he asked quietly.

Wilhelm was surprised at the question. This was Devin's right hand man. Why would he care about Anna's wellbeing? "I would never hurt her," Wilhelm said, lifting his chin defensively. "Neither would Kurt."

Ian hesitated. "I know," he said quietly, almost gratefully, which again surprised Wilhelm. "She got pretty banged up yesterday afternoon."

Wilhelm raised his brow. "Did you have anything to do with it?"

Ian shook his head. "I would only do so if Devin ordered me to," he said intently, as if trying to convey something unspoken. "He generally prefers to do it himself."

Wilhelm nodded. "I could see that being the case." Maybe Ian wasn't the evil monster he'd always assumed him to be.

"She...doesn't heal like she used to," Ian said. "She had bruises on her back and arms last night."

Wilhelm nodded. He'd seen them this morning. "I will make sure she is all right, and keep her by my side. No harm will come to her while she is with myself or Kurt."

Ian looked like he wanted to say more, but just nodded with a grateful look on his face.

Anna walked into the room and smiled when she saw Ian. “Thank you, Ian,” she said softly.

Ian looked at her, searching her face for something, and then he smiled. “You’re welcome, Mistress.” He glanced at Wilhelm and then back to Anna with a tenderness Wilhelm had never seen in the man’s face. He looked back at Wilhelm. “If you need anything....” He trailed off and then nodded and left the room.

“Did you get your—” Kurt walked into the room and smiled. “Ah, good.” He pulled her suitcase into his room and Anna followed.

She glanced back at Wilhelm. “He’s not a bad man, Wilhelm,” she said motioning to the door. “He only does what Devin tells him to do.”

Wilhelm nodded and she disappeared into the other room. He stood for a moment, thoughtful. Ian’s care for Anna surprised him. Wilhelm tucked the information into his brain to think about another time. Perhaps it would prove useful later.

He returned to the bedroom and finished dressing.

Anna leaned against Kurt as they rode down in the elevator to the main floor. Wilhelm stood on her other side and would occasionally reach out and touch her, as if to assure himself that she was really there. She liked the assurance that he was there as well.

They walked to the ballroom where they would eat breakfast. The tables were back in place and most of them had men sitting around them. The other Elder-Mistresses were there as well, dressed in pale colored dresses

that made them look elegant and aloof. Anna looked down at her black dress and wondered if she'd dressed appropriately.

"Anna, you are not like them," Wilhelm said softly. "It is all right. You look beautiful."

They sat down at the table they'd sat at the night before and within minutes had plates full of delectable breakfast foods in front of them. Anna sat between Wilhelm and Kurt.

Several other men sat at the table. Wilhelm and Kurt introduced them to Anna after greeting them in German. Three of the men were younger. Sons, Anna assumed. She looked at them warily until Kurt put his arm around her and gave assurance that they wouldn't hurt her. She ate quietly while the men spoke around her in German. She might not have understood what they were saying, but she still felt more comfortable at this table than she had at Devin's table.

Anna could feel Devin's gaze from across the room and looked up at him. She gave him a timid smile and he frowned, his eyes cold and disapproving. Tommy sat next to his father and he smiled at her, but she only returned a timid nod. She didn't want to upset Devin any more than he already was.

After breakfast was over, she walked with Wilhelm and Kurt out to a line of waiting limos. The distance was short, just over a river and onto a small island to what Kurt said was a former fortress. The line of cars and limos awaiting their turn to drop off their passengers was long, though, and extended to the bridge, which made Anna nervous.

She stared out the window at the water below and shivered.

Kurt put his arm around her. "I know you do not like bridges, *Engel*. I am sorry." He nuzzled her neck. "We will be moving soon."

Anna leaned her head on his shoulder and traced the blue ribbon that crossed his chest diagonally. The same ribbon Alex had worn to the New Year's Eve party after they were married.

"We should have brought yours, Anna. I am sorry," Wilhelm said softly, remorse evident in his eyes. He wore the same ribbon as Kurt. "Ilsa would have remembered."

"It's not necessary, Wilhelm. I'm not—"

Wilhelm frowned. "Do not even say it Anna," he said in a stern tone. "You are. Your position in our family has not changed. You are still *Herzogin*."

Anna shrank back at his tone and he softened his gaze.

"I should not have said it like that, Anna. Forgive me." Regret filled his eyes as Wilhelm reached out and stroked her cheek. "I hate what he has done to you," he added in a whisper.

Chapter Thirty-Six

Anna walked next to Kurt, their fingers intertwined, across a large courtyard to a huge yellow and white cathedral that sat in the middle of the fortress-island. It felt so right, being with him. Kurt's care diminished the pain of losing Peter.

The courtyard was filled with people: dignitaries, heads of state and, of course, the Elders and their sons. There were very few women; the Elders did not attend events like these with their wives.

"Anna!" She heard a female voice call to her and turned to see Jackie walking quickly to her.

Anna smiled brightly and stepped forward to greet her. The two women hugged and Jackie looked up at Kurt with narrowed eyes and glanced at Wilhelm.

Anna introduced Jackie to both men and she eyed them suspiciously. "Jackie is Peter's mother," Anna explained and Wilhelm nodded. She looked at Jackie. "They are Alex's father and brother."

Jackie looked at the two men again and then at Anna. "So, everything between you and Peter was fake?" she asked with a pained expression.

Anna chewed her lip. "He came to keep an eye on me. I...I care for him a great deal, but we went into it knowing it wasn't real."

Jackie nodded. "He told me a little bit about what went on. I didn't even know he'd gotten married until yesterday." There was hurt in her eyes. "I had hoped...." She smiled grimly. "You're a good girl, Anna. If you ever need anything...." She gave Kurt a fierce look. "If you ever hurt her...." she began in a firm voice.

Anna stopped her and put her hand on his. “They’ve never hurt me, Jackie. Quite the contrary.” Anna swallowed back tears. “They saved me.”

Jackie hugged her again. “Would you mind if we came to see you dance again sometime? We can’t always get out here to see Peter and we loved watching you.”

Anna nodded and smiled. “I would love that,” she said sincerely.

“Be sure to find Peter, if you can. He’s been looking for you. If I see him, I’ll let him know you’re here, if he hasn’t already found you.”

Anna nodded and then watched her walk away.

Kurt kissed her cheek and they made their way slowly to the cathedral. Wilhelm stopped every so often to speak to someone. Kurt held her hand tightly in the increasingly tighter crowd.

Tommy made his way over to them. “Hey, Anna,” he said kissing her cheek and then glancing up at Kurt. “Sorry.”

Kurt grunted.

“It is good to see you, Tommy,” Wilhelm said, extending his hand.

Tommy smiled and shook it. “It’s good to see you, sir. I understand you’re now able to come to the country again.”

Wilhelm nodded. “I plan on doing so often.”

“I hope you do.” He glanced at Anna. “I haven’t seen her smile like this in a while. It’s nice.”

“Your father is around, I assume?” Wilhelm asked with a strange look on his face.

“He is,” Tommy answered solemnly. “He’s trying to keep Devin’s temper at bay. Devin’s not...happy about yesterday’s dinner.”

“Understandable. But necessary.”

“I agree, sir.”

They exchanged looks again and then Tommy said goodbye and walked away.

It was a strange exchange, Anna thought. “Have you met Tommy before, Wilhelm?” she asked, looking up into his thoughtful eyes.

Wilhelm’s face became impassive. “Briefly, at Alex’s funeral. He came to comfort you, remember?”

Anna vaguely remembered Tommy trying to talk to her and her coldness to him. She was thankful he hadn’t held it against her.

They made their way with the crowd towards the building. She saw Vlad and Peter standing near the doorway, greeting people. Their wives stood next to them, looking sad but composed.

Dariya saw her before Peter did and smirked at her, until she noticed Kurt and Wilhelm. Her eyes widened as she looked at the tall men standing like soldiers on either side of her.

Peter saw her and smiled broadly. “Anna,” he said, walking toward her. He seemed to have changed since yesterday, a new dignity overlying his dancer’s grace. He looked like an Elder-Son now. A nice one, though. He kissed her on the cheek, and then greeted Wilhelm and Kurt.

“How are you doing, Peter?” Wilhelm asked in a friendly manner. They appeared to know each other already.

“I’m doing well, sir. As well as I can.” He glanced at Kurt and then Anna. “You okay?” he asked her softly.

She nodded shyly as Kurt put his arm around her. “You?”

He gave her a sad smile. “I miss you already.”

“I miss you.” She looked up when she saw Dariya approach.

“You certainly do not waste time, do you Anna?” Dariya said her low, thickly accented voice, eying Kurt’s hand on Anna’s shoulder.

“Dariya, Anna was married to Kurt’s brother before he died,” Peter explained softly. “She’s an Elder-Mistress.”

Dariya looked at Anna, then looked around the crowd at the other women. “You do not look like one,” she commented coldly.

“She’s not supposed to be one,” Kurt said shortly. “Her father raised Anna as a normal girl until Devin interfered and forced it upon her.” He paused for effect. “She is also a *gertsoginya*.”

Dariya started at the last word and curtsied slightly. “I did not know. I am sorry.”

Anna looked up at Kurt, who smiled at her.

“I didn’t know that,” Peter said. “I suppose it makes sense....”

“Didn’t know what?” Anna asked.

“That you were a duchess. You never told me.” He looked hurt.

“I don’t think about it. I—” She looked up at Wilhelm. “It seems just a part of my past that died with Alex. I’m sorry, Wilhelm.”

Wilhelm gave her a sympathetic smile. “It is all right, Anna. I know it is difficult.”

“Wilhelm,” Vlad said, walking over to the group. He extended his hand in greeting, which Wilhelm took and shook. Nina was with him and gave Anna a sad smile.

“Hello, Vlad. I am sorry for your loss.”

“Thank you, Wilhelm.” Vlad cleared his throat. “I hope that you will not hold my father’s rudeness against me. We...did not see eye to eye on many things these last few years and I hope I can undo some of the things he did.”

“Thank you, Vlad. I would not—”

Wilhelm was interrupted by Devin’s arrival.

“Hello, Vlad,” Devin said, his voice cold with a hint of warning. “I see you are looking to rekindle past friendships?”

Vlad clenched his jaw at Devin's words. "My family and Wilhelm's have been friends for a long time. I hope to undo some of the things my father did."

Devin's eyes narrowed and he arched a brow. "That is an interesting idea," he said slowly. "Your father was a wise man. I hope you can also learn from things he did." There was an air of a threat in Devin's tone and the air grew cold around them.

Anna shivered and Kurt put his arm around her. "Are you all right?" he whispered.

"Cold." She stepped closer to Kurt for his body warmth, but the cold seemed to come from inside her.

Devin looked around the group and stopped his gaze at Anna. His black eyes beckoned her and she tried to step forward, but Kurt held her close and wouldn't let her go.

Devin looked sharply at Kurt. "You only have her for a few weeks."

"And I will cherish every moment and strive for more," Kurt said coldly.

Devin laughed. "So idealistic." He reached out and stroked Anna's cheek with long, cold fingers. "I can't wait to have you home with me, Baby," he said softly, and ran his fingernail down her neck, stopping where he normally gave her the painful injections. He looked around and then gave Vlad a pointed look. "I will see you all inside." He strode away with purpose, people stepping out of his way as he walked.

Vlad looked at her with sadness and then inhaled deeply. He glanced around. "We must return to greeting people." He gave Wilhelm a sad look before turning and leading Nina back to the side of the building.

Peter bowed his head slightly at Wilhelm and smiled apologetically at Anna. "I'll see you later?"

Anna smiled and nodded, and he and Dariya walked away.

Wilhelm and Kurt spoke softly in German above her as Kurt held her close. The coldness had not dissipated when Devin walked away and she stepped even closer to Kurt, pressing her body against his for warmth.

“Anna, you look pale. Are you sick?” Kurt ran his hand over her forehead and frowned. He glanced at Wilhelm. “Does she seem feverish to you?”

Wilhelm leaned down and pressed his lips to her forehead, and then frowned. “That is not right. Devin is still here. She cannot get sick this quickly.”

“I’m okay,” Anna said softly. “I’m just tired and cold.” She giggled softly. “I was up late last night.”

Wilhelm smiled and looked at his watch. “Let us take her into the sunlight. We have a little bit of time.”

They moved and Kurt stood with his arms around her, her head leaning against his chest and the sun’s warmth on her back. It felt good. She closed her eyes and listened to the rumbling in his chest as he and his father talked softly in German.

Wilhelm sat in the large cathedral contemplating the exchange between Vlad and Devin. The service was in Russian, which he spoke fluently, but his thoughts still strayed. What did Vlad want to undo that Vitaly had done, and why did Devin care? He had seen Vitaly and Devin together several times over the years, but Wilhelm couldn’t imagine the stubborn old Russian doing something for Devin.

Anna shivered next to him, despite being wrapped in Kurt's jacket and her own. Her face was pale and a sheen of sweat glistened on her forehead.

How could she be sick? It wasn't supposed to be possible. Was it because of Devin? Should he not have insisted on taking her to Germany? Was it his fault? But Wilhelm loathed the idea of Anna being with Devin any more than she had to. Maybe he and Kurt should take her home to San Francisco and visit with her there. Ilsa was looking forward to seeing Anna, but she would understand if Anna needed to go home.

Maybe he should speak to the other Elders that had Mistresses. Perhaps they could shed some light, though none of the Mistress's were owned like Anna. As far as Wilhelm knew, the bonding ceremony was not practiced anymore, the general consensus being that it was cruel and unnecessary. Wilhelm agreed with the general consensus, especially after seeing what it did to Anna. Well, to be truthful, it wasn't as much the actual bonding as it was to whom she was bonded.

Pain twisted his heart at the remembrance of that time. When Alex was still alive. His beloved son. Not that he didn't love Kurt. He loved all his children with all the fatherly love he could muster. But Alex was to be his heir, the man who followed in his footsteps. Kurt was doing a wonderful job at learning what he needed to know, but it was a struggle for him. Wilhelm admired his tenacity. Tenacity he didn't know that Kurt had.

Oh, Alex. The pain was no longer raw, but it was still pain. He would never stop missing Alex. He often wondered about the dreams Anna had, wondering if they were perhaps real; that Alex was still alive somewhere. It was painful to hope. The dreams of a half-Immortal could be significant. But Anna was also desperately in love with Alex, and perhaps part of her was just loathe to let him go. Even Wilhelm dreamed of Alex sometimes. Dreams were sometimes just dreams

He had come here after the funeral to see the graves, frozen in the ground. There had been eight graves, not nine. Sebastian wouldn't have died, but would have had to act as though he had. And he was forbidden from coming back for a long time. Long after he and Kurt, and even Kurt's children, were gone he could return. But it wouldn't matter then. Wilhelm had hoped that he would send a message, like Anna's father had, but none came. The other Immortals didn't speak of it; it was also forbidden. Times like these made him hate the rules of life. But they were there for a reason. Did he really want to know the details of his son's death?

The service concluded a while later and Wilhelm inhaled sharply when he saw that Anna's face had turned almost gray, with dark circles under her eyes. Something was desperately wrong. He looked around as people began to make their way towards the back of the building.

Devin. He caught the man's eye and motioned for him to come. He hated the man with a passion, but he might know what was going on. Anna was more precious to him than his hatred for Devin.

Kurt held her tightly against his chest as she trembled with half-open, glassy eyes that stared into nothingness.

Devin had that disgusting amused look on his face as he sauntered over, but it disappeared when he saw Anna. "What happened?"

"She complained of being cold and tired when we were outside, and she has grown progressively worse," Wilhelm said. He stood suddenly, glaring down at the man he detested with all his being. "What the fuck did you do to her?"

Devin's eyes widened and he backed away slightly. He looked down at Anna with genuine concern on his face, though the true object of his concern was debatable. "I...I haven't done anything. She's...she shouldn't be sick."

“I know,” Wilhelm growled. “What did you do?”

Devin shook his head. “I didn’t do any—” He looked up suddenly and turned around, searching for someone in the crowd. “I’ll be back.”

Devin strode quickly to Vlad and Wilhelm watched as they had a heated conversation. Vlad repeatedly shook his head and held up his hands. He glanced over at Wilhelm and his face paled when he saw Anna. He turned away and took out his phone to make a phone call.

Devin walked back to where Wilhelm stood glaring at him. “We’ll take her to Vlad’s townhouse. It’s nearby.” He reached for Anna and Kurt pushed his hand away.

“I will carry her,” he growled. Kurt picked her up and she moaned softly, then closed her eyes and trembled.

Wilhelm looked at Devin. “What is wrong with her?”

Devin didn’t answer, but turned and walked toward a side door. Kurt looked at his father, who nodded, and they both followed Devin outside.

Cold. So cold. She couldn’t get warm, no matter how close she pushed herself to the body next to her. She trembled and moaned. She hurt, but not like she usually hurt. The pain came from inside her own body. Her own body was fighting itself. Why? Why did she hurt?

“Go. Go, Anna. Heal.”

Anna tried to open her eyes, but couldn’t. A warm hand touched her forehead and she became dizzy.

“Go.”

Chapter Thirty-Seven

She stood in a dimly lit room. It wasn't the normal room she went to in her dreams. This was more like a cement box. It was cold and damp. This is where the cold inside her originated. This was the source of her hurt. She looked around. Men huddled in blankets while lying on small cots. She couldn't see any faces, but could see them shivering.

A low moan escaped from one man in the corner. She hurried to him. The pain increased as she walked to him, but she knew she had to get to him.

She knelt by the bed and pulled the blanket away from his face. It was gray and damp with sweat. His wet hair was plastered to the side of his head. He trembled and his teeth chattered.

What could she do? If she touched him, she would disappear. But if she didn't touch him, he would die. The fever was so high. She could feel the heat radiating from his body. And yet he shook with cold.

His eyes opened slightly and vaguely focused on her face. His eyes were dull and glassy. "Y-y-you c-c-came," he said with chattering teeth. "They s-s-said you w-w-w-wouldn't, but y-y-you d-d-did." He attempted a smile and then groaned in pain.

She reached out hesitantly. What little healing she possessed, she had to use. He couldn't die. She couldn't let him.

Tentatively, she touched his face and winced, but he didn't disappear. She cried out in relief and stretched out on the bed next to him to give him her warmth. She wondered how much her tiny body could do to his large one, but she closed her eyes and concentrated. She embraced him and felt her healing flow into him as she pulled the sickness from his body.

At first, nothing happened. Then slowly he began to relax. His body cooled and he stopped trembling. She smiled faintly. She was so tired and beginning to feel cold again. But he was safe. That was what mattered.

Suddenly her body exploded in pain and she cried out. She trembled and shivered. She felt a large hand on her cheek and opened her eyes to see the concerned look on his face.

“You can’t get sick. You can’t.”

She felt herself fading and she heard him cry out her name as darkness consumed her.

Wilhelm heard Anna cry out in pain and shook the doorknob. “Devin! Let me in!” he shouted.

Devin had locked himself in the bedroom with her, insisting that he needed to be alone with her. He and Kurt had reluctantly gone into the hallway to let him do what he needed to do. They paced and Wilhelm heard Devin speaking softly to her, though he couldn’t understand the words.

Wilhelm banged on the door. “Devin, open the door!”

He continued banging on the door until Devin opened the door.

“You needn’t be so obnoxious,” Devin said coolly.

“Maybe if we could trust you,” Kurt muttered.

Wilhelm looked past Devin into the room. “She looks worse,” he said pushing Devin out of the way. Her face was so pale and damp. “What did you do?” he demanded, turning to face Devin.

Kurt pushed past him and knelt by her bed, stroking her damp hair back from her face.

“She can be healed now,” Devin said. “Do you know the Immortals here?”

Wilhelm glared at Devin. “You are killing her. She should not even be able to get sick.”

Devin’s face remained impassive. “Sacrifices are necessary sometimes.”

Before he realized what he was doing, Wilhelm had swung back and smashed his fist into Devin’s nose.

Devin spun sideways and fell to his knees, grabbing his face. “Ow, you fucker!” he shouted in a slightly nasal tone.

“Vati!” Kurt exclaimed.

Blood trickled down Devin’s face as he held his nose. Wilhelm’s chest heaved as he stood over Devin, glaring down at him.

Ian appeared in the doorway seconds later and looked around in shock. He saw Devin kneeling on the floor and looked at Wilhelm, confused.

“He might need a doctor,” Wilhelm said calmly, though feeling oddly triumphant.

Devin looked up at Ian. “Get in touch with Vlad. Tell him we need one of his Immortals.” Devin pushed himself to his feet and stalked out of the room.

Wilhelm walked over and stood behind Kurt, staring down at Anna’s pale face.

“I can’t believe you hit him, Vati. It’s something Alex would have done.”

“Except if Alex had done it, Anna would have suffered. I am thankful I don’t have that restriction.” Wilhelm chuckled. “Where do you think Alex got his temper?”

The men were quiet for a few minutes, staring at Anna and remembering Alex. Kurt continued to stroke Anna’s forehead.

“Will she be okay? She’s so feverish.”

“I hope so. The Immortals will heal her...I hope.” Wilhelm gritted his teeth as a great shudder shook Anna’s frail body.

“Alex,” she muttered. “...better....”

Kurt looked up at his father. “Why does she dream of him still?”

Wilhelm saw the hurt in his son’s eyes. In Kurt’s head, he understood the connection between Anna and Alex, but in his heart it hurt. Kurt longed for that same connection between himself and Anna. He was so in love with her.

Wilhelm put his hand on Kurt’s shoulder. “I don’t know.” He had asked the same question hundreds of times since he’d found out. Did the dreams mean anything? Or was it just Anna’s way of coping with her hurt?

Kurt leaned forward and kissed Anna’s pale cheek. “She’s so hot.”

Ian returned a few minutes later. “Vlad will be here in a few minutes.” He walked over and looked down at Anna. He glanced behind him and then looked at Wilhelm. “She will be all right, won’t she?” he asked in a hushed voice.

“I hope so.” Wilhelm hated this feeling of helplessness.

Vlad arrived about twenty minutes later with a large, obvious-Immortal next to him.

“I am Patya,” said the man with golden hair and sapphire eyes.

Elders rarely had contact with the Immortals of other countries. Every country had them, but they did not venture outside the national boundaries unless there was dire need. The Elder’s power was also limited when outside their own country, which was probably why Wilhelm had not been

pulverized. Devin's powers, despite their magnitude, were limited outside his own country.

Wilhelm bowed his head respectfully. "I am Wilhelm of Hesse. This is my son, Kurt."

Patya turned his eyes to look at Kurt. "A younger son?"

"My eldest son was killed three and a half years ago," Wilhelm explained, with a twinge in his heart. He hated saying the words.

Patya looked at Wilhelm for a long time. "I see," he said finally.

Devin walked in a moment later. Wilhelm stared at him. The only hint that he had been hit was the bit of blood on his collar. There was no bruise, no disfigurement. Wilhelm was certain he had broken the man's nose. He'd felt the bones give way as his fist made contact with his face. Wilhelm's blood boiled at the realization that Anna suffered because of Devin. Devin was the reason she couldn't heal herself. Wilhelm clenched his fist and trembled, fighting every instinct within him to keep from hitting Devin again.

Patya turned his gaze on Devin. There was a slight hint of disapproval on his face as he studied him, but he didn't say anything. "Where is the girl?"

Wilhelm motioned to the bed. Patya strode across the room and looked down at Anna. "Who is her Master?"

"I am." Both Wilhelm and Devin answered.

The Immortal turned in surprise. "She has two Masters?"

"Yes." Both men answered in a growl.

Patya studied both men and frowned. He pointed at Devin. "You stay. Everyone else leave."

Wilhelm started to protest, but the Immortal frowned. The men filed out of the room and the door was closed.

“Would you like something to drink?” Vlad asked nervously.

Wilhelm sighed. “Thank you, Vlad. But I don’t want to leave.”

“I understand,” Vlad said. He ran his hand through his thick black hair. “I’m sorry, Wilhelm.”

Wilhelm arched his brow. “Why are you apologizing, Vlad? You didn’t cause Anna’s sickness.”

Vlad smiled weakly and shrugged his shoulders. “If you’ll excuse me for a moment.”

Wilhelm watched Vlad walk away with a frown on his face. Vlad was acting strange. Why would he feel the need to apologize for something he had nothing to do with?

Kurt paced back and forth in the wide hallway. Wilhelm sat in a gilt-edged chair and tried to make sense of everything that had happened today.

When the door opened a half hour later, Wilhelm stood and Kurt froze mid-step. Devin stood in the doorway. “She’s fine. Sleeping.”

Wilhelm pushed past him and sighed in relief when he saw the color in Anna’s face. Kurt went to sit on the bed and held her hand.

Wilhelm turned and stood tall, glaring at Devin. “You should leave. You do not need to be here anymore.”

Devin smirked. “Even Patya recognized my claim to her was more legitimate than yours.”

“You relented when the other Elders pressured you. My claim is as legitimate as yours.”

“For now,” Devin said. He glanced at Anna. “I’ll leave. But you better bring her back to me.”

“I already said I would, as much as it disgusts me to do so.”

Devin shrugged. “The problem with being honorable. Doing things you don’t want to do.” He laughed and walked out of the room.

“I hate that man,” Kurt grumbled.

“You aren’t the only one, son.”

Anna moaned and slowly opened her eyes. She was in Kurt’s hotel room.

“Anna,” Kurt said.

She turned onto her back and saw him sitting next to her in the bed. “Hi,” she said softly.

“How are you feeling?”

Anna thought for a moment. “Good. What happened?” The last thing she remembered was being so cold while she sat in the cathedral.

“You got very sick. You were healed by an Immortal.”

“Oh.” She didn’t remember anything about being sick, though his words triggered a memory of a dark room. She concentrated on the memory but couldn’t decipher anything more than cold and darkness. “How long have I been asleep?”

“All afternoon. It is past dinnertime. Are you hungry?”

She nodded and he stood.

“I will call for some room service.” He left and returned a few minutes later and sat on the bed next to her. “I was so worried about you,” he said tenderly, stroking her hair back from her face.

She looked up into his eyes. She hated that she’d caused him pain. “I’m sorry,” she whispered.

He gave a little half smile. “Do not do it again,” he teased.

Anna giggled softly.

“Vati got so angry at Devin, he punched him in the face.” Kurt looked amused.

Anna gasped and clasped her hand over her face. “Are you serious?”

He nodded. “And the weird thing was that he left the room and returned with his nose completely healed. I saw it before he left. It was definitely broken.”

Anna nodded sadly. “He’s got that from me.”

“How, Anna? How is he taking your power?”

She opened her mouth to speak, but couldn’t. She was forbidden from telling them about what went on in the Gatherings. “I can’t tell you. He forbade me.”

Kurt frowned. “It is not right. You are far too precious to steal life from.”

Anna took his hand and kissed his palm, then looked up at him. Emotion swelled through her heart. He still loved her. She could see it in his eyes. She wanted to love him. Wanted to be with him. Time hadn’t changed that. She wished....

“Have you...met anyone?”

“I have met lots of people, Anna,” he said with a slight smile. “It is part of being a *Sohn*.”

Anna blushed. “I mean...women? A woman. That you like?”

“You are asking if I have fallen in love with another woman?” he asked, smiling.

She nodded.

“*Nein*, Anna. I kept hoping...that I would be able to see you again someday. Yes, I have met lots of women, but none have interested me.” He sighed. “I still love you. I believe I always will.”

Anna smiled. “I’m glad I get to spend time with you again.”

“Me, too.” He leaned down to kiss her and a knock sounded at the door.
“Dinner.” He straightened and went to answer the door.

Anna looked down to see she was wearing a big t-shirt. It must have been Kurt’s. She wiggled out of bed and wandered into the living room.

Kurt looked up. “I would have brought it in there.”

Anna shrugged. “I can get up. It’s easier to eat at a table.”

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Chapter Thirty-Eight

The next day, Anna went sightseeing with Wilhelm and Kurt until they had to go to the Manor, or *pomest'ye*. Anna was taken up to a large room where the other Elder-Mistresses were getting ready. She stood shyly near the door, watching them. They were so elegant; so beautiful; so aloof.

“You are Anna?” a Japanese woman asked her. “I am Sakue. It is wonderful to meet you, Sister.”

Anna smiled shyly. “Hi.”

The other women noticed her and introduced themselves. Raissa from Brazil, Creda from Britain, Madison from Australia, Halima from Egypt, Bisala from India, Yalda from Iran, and Irina from Moscow.

Anna felt so out of place among these confident half-Immortals. Other women scurried around the room, helping them get ready. Anna stayed quiet and listened to them gossip as she got ready. They seemed to find Anna amusing and didn’t quite know what to do with her shyness. They asked about being married and were amazed that she still missed Alex.

“Aren’t there other interesting men around you?” Creda asked. “Why would you want to settle for just one man, when you can have any man you want?”

“I loved Alex,” Anna said softly. “My heart aches every time I think about him.”

Yalda looked at her. “You are so different from us. Perhaps it is we who are missing out. That kind of love sounds wonderful.”

“And painful,” Halima said coolly. “Do you regret it?”

“Regret what?” Anna asked, stepping into a white gown that a girl held out for her.

“Regret marrying. The hurt? “

Anna shook her head. “Alex was the most wonderful man I’d ever met.” She sighed. “I am fortunate to have been with him the short time I had. Sometimes, yes, I regret it, but only because of the pain of losing him.”

“He was very handsome. I remember him.” Irina smiled. “He came with his father to visit sometimes. A very good lover.”

Anna flushed and looked away. She didn’t want to think about other women being with Alex. Yes, she knew it happened. Obviously. But she wanted to remember Alex as hers and hers only. She didn’t want to share her memories.

The girl helping her adjusted her dress and finished her hair.

“You arrived in St. Petersburg with an American Elder, but are now with the German Elder?” Irina asked. “I didn’t think Americans shared.”

“They are both my Masters,” Anna answered quietly.

“Both? How can you have two masters?” Irina asked.

“I—” Anna began.

“Did I hear that you are actually a slave?” Halima asked, her gold-threaded braids catching the overhead light as she gazed disapprovingly at Anna.

“You’re not slaves?” Anna asked in awe

“Immortals are not slaves,” Halima snapped. She looked at Madison, who also watched Anna with a similar expression of disdain on her face. “That is an insult.”

“I highly doubt she did it on purpose, Halima,” Yalda scolded.

“But you have Masters,” Anna said confused.

“Of course,” Madison said in a haughty voice. “But we serve them willingly. By our own choice. We are not like the other girls who are mindless bodies for sex.”

“She is hardly mindless, Maddy,” Sakue defended. “She has a depth of emotion we could never hope to have. I envy her.” Sakue smiled kindly at Anna, who flushed uncontrollably at the harshness of some of the women.

Anna rallied and smiled timidly back.

Madison rolled her eyes. “Why would you want to be subject to such human emotion?”

“Why would you not?” Sakue asked with an arched brow. “It might be nice to feel love for once instead of just watching it.”

“You don’t feel love?” Anna asked in awe.

“There’s no need,” Irina answered. “Why waste the energy? You certainly don’t seem to have benefited from it. An excellent example of why we stay how we are.” She studied Anna carefully. “You are not like us, and yet you claim to be one of us. Why?”

Anna’s eyes widened. “I never asked to be. I didn’t even know until...until I met Alex. He told me.”

“How could you not know?” Creda asked. “How can you be so human?”

“Alex said I shouldn’t be one,” Anna said softly. “I wasn’t raised to be one.” Tears filled her eyes but she wiped them away. “I don’t know anything about it.”

She stood there, staring at the floor, wishing she could disappear into it. She didn’t belong among her ‘own kind.’ She almost wished she was back in Devin’s manor, but she would miss Kurt and Wilhelm desperately.

Disgust mixed with sympathy filled the room and Anna was at a complete loss. She had no idea what to do. She saw a couch in the corner and went to sit on it, hands clasped in her lap, head down. The other women began chatting again and Anna was forgotten.

A few minutes later, someone sat next to her. She glanced sideways to see Sakue smiling at her, a sympathetic look on her face.

“They just do not understand, Anna. Do not be ashamed of who you are.” She put her hand on Anna’s and squeezed. “I was honest when I said I envy you. I would like to know what it is to love a man and to be loved back.” She sighed. “Well, I suppose we all know what it is like to be loved, but we simply don’t know how to return the emotion.”

The Elder Mistresses were led out of the dressing room and into the main hall. The hall was very much like Devin’s, with the Eagle in the corner and the platform in front. But the room had an older feel. The walls were made of gray stone, as was the floor, though it was covered in thick red carpets. Three huge iron chandeliers hanging from the ceiling held hundreds of candles that lit the room. Windows at the very top let in the golden light from the setting sun. Iron sconces around the walls were being lit as the sunlight faded.

Men in white robes filled the room, making it appear lighter than it really was. The Mistresses all walked with grace and confidence. Some of the men even bowed slightly as they walked by. This was such an unfamiliar setting, to be held in high respect. She had felt it briefly, when she was at Wilhelm’s *Schloss*, but that all disappeared when Alex died.

Anna was the last in line and felt very out of place. Walking gracefully, she could do. But being confident in a Manor was so far removed from her thought pattern, she didn’t even know where to begin. So she walked as she always did, with her head down and eyes averted. She could feel Devin watching her and gave a sideways glance in his direction. He jerked his

chin upwards, which Anna took to mean to look up, not at the floor. She lifted her head, keeping her eyes on him and he nodded even while he frowned.

Oh, she just wanted to run away and hide. She didn't belong here. She should just be with the common girls. She was no Elder-Mistress. At least not as the others were. She just happened to be a half-Immortal prostitute. That was all. If only Devin had told her she would be participating in...whatever was going on.

The other Mistresses had talked about it. They speculated on who would be chosen. Chosen for what, she didn't know, but Irina was certain she would be the one. After all, this was her country.

Anna watched as the women took their place at the edge of the platform and knelt with their hands in prayer position. When Anna assumed the same position they all bowed as one, with Anna a split second behind them. She could feel Devin's anger as she stared at the floor and trembled. She was embarrassing him. But no one had told her what to do or what would happen. She had no idea what was going on.

Sakue, who was next to her, touched her arm lightly and she looked to see the other women sitting up. Anna followed suit and put her hands on her thighs as the others did. A man began speaking in Russian, and Anna stared at the diamonds sparkling on the backs of her hands.

She had been adorned in her normal diamonds, save the necklace. Devin hadn't returned hers yet. The other Mistresses were dressed in white, though of different styles, suited to their culture. Anna's dress was the sheerest. They also were draped in diamonds, Irina's headdress being the most elaborate and the most beautiful thing she'd ever seen. It was in the style of the Russian crowns and sparkled like the summer sun on San Francisco Bay. In fact, Anna's entire outfit was very simple compared to the

other girls. Anna sighed internally, realizing how silly she had been, thinking that Devin had been overly generous with her jewelry. If the jewelry was a sign of how much their masters cared for them, Anna was severely neglected.

Not that she cared that she had less “sparkle” than the other girls. It was just a strong realization of the differences between their relationships with their Masters. But then again, Anna was a slave. That was the fundamental difference.

Patya, the Immortal, came and stood before them. He pointed at Irina and Halima, and they stood and followed him to where Vlad was kneeling, naked, in the center of the platform. His chest heaved and he looked slightly dazed. Peter stood to one side, watching him. He glanced up and saw Anna looking at him and smiled tenderly at her. Anna smiled back, though nervously.

The two Mistresses undressed and knelt next to Vlad. They began kissing him and stroking his body and cock, which quickly hardened and stood erect. Each of the women took turns sucking on him until he groaned, in what almost sounded in pain. His cock was purple and throbbing. His hands were clenched into fists and his face was strained.

Patya knelt in front of him and wrapped his hand around Vlad’s cock, making him groan loudly. He stroked him a few times and then nodded to a man in a white robe that Anna believed was another Elder. In his hand, he held a piercing gun. The Mistresses stood aside as two other men came to stand next to him, holding his arms to the side. Another man knelt behind him and held his hair in his fist and put another hand under his jaw. He whispered something in Vlad’s ear and Vlad nodded and closed his eyes.

The man with the gun knelt and took Vlad’s cock in his hand and pressed the gun to the side. She heard two clicks and Vlad grunted, but

otherwise made no sound. Another man took the gun and pierced the other side, and then a third man pierced the underside of Vlad's cock. Vlad's body was visibly shaking, and his jaw was clenched so tightly Anna wouldn't have been surprised if he broke his teeth. The third man put his hand on Vlad's shoulder and Vlad opened his eyes, watery with pain.

The Mistresses returned and began kissing him again. Vlad kissed them with a fervor and pushed Irina down on the ground. He kissed her deeply as Halima moved to lie down with her hip next to Irina's head. Without ceremony, Vlad pushed himself into Irina and a look of relief crossed his face. He tugged at Halima and spread her legs, lifting Irina's head to lay back on Halima's thigh. He kissed Irina once more and then buried his mouth into Halima's pussy, eating with a fervor Anna wouldn't expect after he had been in so much pain.

Anna wondered about what was going on when she saw Patya kneel behind Vlad, his huge cock golden in the candlelight. He positioned himself at Vlad's asshole and pressed in with one thrust. Vlad grunted in Halima's pussy and Anna saw his knuckles whiten, but Vlad made no other noise.

Patya began great long thrusts in and out of Vlad's body. His biceps bulged as he held himself above Vlad. He moved to hold Vlad's chest so he wouldn't move. Every movement pushed Vlad's cock in and out of Irina and Anna could see Halima's dark, wet pussy when he was pulled backwards.

The movements continued for what seemed like an eternity. Anna watched in fascination as Vlad leaned his head back and Irina pushed his mouth back onto Halima and held him there. Patya's movements quickened and suddenly he roared and stiffened as he came. Vlad let out a primal scream, his back arching and face looking almost straight up, despite Irina's hand in his hair.

They stayed in that position until Patya relaxed and slowly slid out of Vlad, kneeling behind him with his head hanging down for a moment. Vlad resumed his feast on Halima and thrusting in and out of Irina until both women screamed out their release.

Patya stood and spoke loudly in Russian. He pulled Vlad to his feet and seemed to make some sort of declaration to which everyone in the room applauded.

Vlad spoke a bit, and then motioned for Peter to come forward. Peter undressed and knelt in front of Vlad. Vlad's still hard cock disappeared slowly into Peter, who stiffened and panted but didn't cry out. Peter's cock was hard and Anna licked her lips as she watched it bob up and down as he moved. Vlad released himself with a cry into Peter and then stood and pulled Peter to his feet. He put his arm around Peter and made a declaration and the room broke out into applause again. Vlad grinned and put his hands in the air. He motioned to the Elder-Mistresses and then around the room. He shouted and the other men shouted and cheered.

Anna was shocked to see the room break out into a great orgy. The only women in the room were the Elder Mistresses, but that didn't seem to matter. The men seemed to like each other as much as they liked women. Anna turned to look at Sakue but just saw her disappearing into the crowd. Anna felt a hand on her shoulder and turned to see Peter standing next to her.

"Peter," she sighed in relief. "What...?"

He shrugged. "It is how these things end. Bonding and brotherhood and the like." He pulled her close and kissed her. "I want you, though." Peter kissed her and pulled her to the ground.

He kissed his way down to her breasts and her eyes fluttered open and saw Kurt looking at her with hurt in his eyes. She opened her mouth to

speak, but he turned around and walked away. Tears stung her eyes, but she wiped them away quickly and pushed the emotion aside. The only thing she was good at as a Mistress was sex. This was the duty she knew and could perform well. She clutched at Peter's hair and sighed as he made love to her.

"I didn't think I'd get another night with you," Anna said softly as she and Peter lay in his new bedroom at his uncle's Manor. She traced his bare chest along his pectorals and then lightly ran her fingertips over his nipples, turning them hard and dark. He'd brought her here after they'd made love on the floor of the Hall. Everyone else was occupied and he told her he wanted time with her again. One last night.

"Me either," Peter said, shivering under her touch. He caught her hand and pulled her on top of him, her hands propping up her chin on his chest. He put his hand behind his head to look at her and smile. "I wish you didn't have to go back."

Anna smiled sadly. "I'm sure Dariya's happy," she said changing the subject. She didn't want to leave either. She'd been with him for so long, it hurt to think about not being with him every day.

His smile was wry. "Yeah. She is."

"I'm going to miss dancing with you."

"I'm going to miss everything about you, Anna. I wish...things were different."

"I've wished that so many times about so many things. It never does any good." She spoke softly, but the bitterness still came through.

“Don’t be bitter, Anna. It will just make you miserable. You’ve had enough misery.” He smiled. “At least you can see Wilhelm and Kurt again.”

Her heart pained at the mention of Kurt’s name. The hurt in his eyes last night still haunted her. He had told her long ago that he didn’t want to share her with anyone. But that was long ago. Did he still feel that way? He had sent her over to be with Wilhelm their first night together, so what did that mean? She had her duties. Devin would never allow her to stop. Surely Kurt knew that.

“You like him, don’t you?”

Peter’s voice snapped her out of her thoughts. “What?”

“Kurt. You like him.”

Anna shrugged. “I think I hurt him last night.”

“It takes a while to get used to the sexual aspects of the Brotherhood.” He smiled. “It’s not easy being in love with an Elder-Mistress.”

“Peter, you shouldn’t—” A knock on the door interrupted her.

Peter called something in Russian and the door opened. Wilhelm stood there with a frown on his face.

“Wilhelm!” Anna exclaimed, blushing slightly. She didn’t know why she was embarrassed to be caught in bed with Peter, but she was.

“We need to leave soon, Anna,” he said in a gruff voice, and looked at Peter. “Will you please bring her down to the entrance when she is dressed?”

“Yes, sir,” Peter answered hesitantly.

Wilhelm turned and left the room without another word, closing the door behind him.

Anna looked nervously at Peter. “He’s upset with me. What did I do?”

“I doubt he’s upset with *you*, Anna,” he said, but didn’t look especially confident.

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Chapter Thirty-Nine

Fifteen minutes later, Peter walked Anna downstairs to the main entry hall. Wilhelm, Kurt and Devin all sat there and none of them looked happy. Devin stood when she entered and walked over to her, slapping her on the cheek. She clutched her cheek and fell to her knees in abject submission, scrambling to avoid further punishment.

Peter began to protest, but Devin turned his glare on him. “This is none of your concern, Peter. Go home to your wife.”

“Devin....” Peter began.

“Go, Peter,” Wilhelm said from his seat. “Devin is right.”

Peter looked between the two men and lifted his chin. “I will not leave if you intend to hurt her.”

“She is no longer yours to worry about,” Devin growled. “You are a Son, not an Elder, and would be wise to listen to your superiors.”

Peter knelt next to Anna. “I will take you with me, Anna. Just tell me and we will leave together.”

Anna shook her head with tears in her eyes. She wouldn’t let Peter get into trouble because of her. “I’m okay, Peter,” she whispered. “Please go.”

Peter sighed. He kissed her on the temple, then stood and left. With him left all the warmth in the room. She trembled at the coolness, especially from Wilhelm and Kurt.

Devin pulled her to her feet by her hair and glared at her.

“You do not need to get violent, Devin,” Wilhelm said coolly.

“I warned her if she misbehaved or embarrassed me, I would punish her,” Devin said in a low voice.

Anna looked up at him. “What did I do?” she whispered desperately. She didn’t understand why he was so angry.

“You acted completely inappropriate last night.”

“I did?” Anna was in shock. “What did I do?” She normally didn’t ask questions about her punishments, but she honestly didn’t know what she had done to upset him. Or Wilhelm. She tried to look at Kurt. “Was it because of Peter?” she asked softly.

Kurt looked away.

“That and everything else,” Devin spat. “Your behavior the entire time was an embarrassment. You looked and acted like a foolish girl who didn’t belong there.”

Tears came unbidden. “I didn’t know what was going on. I had no idea what to do or how to act.” She started to cry. “I didn’t know.”

Devin hit her again, but he still held her hair, which made her take the full impact of the blow. She shrieked and tried to get away, but he held her tight.

“I tried, Devin, I promise I did.”

Devin growled and pulled his hand back to hit her again, but Wilhelm grabbed his hand. “What do you mean you did not know what was going on?”

“I didn’t know,” she cried. “I was sent up to a room full of women and dressed and sent down to a room full of men. I didn’t know what to do. I couldn’t understand what anyone was saying.” She was blubbering, but she had become so afraid of Devin’s punishments, she would try anything to avoid them. “Please don’t punish me, Devin,” she begged.

He frowned. “That’s the second time you’ve called me by name in this place. If nothing else, that deserves punishment.”

“She is terrified, Devin,” Wilhelm said calmly. “Let her go.”

“Of course she’s terrified,” Devin said. “That’s the point.” But Devin let her go and she fell back to the floor.

“Nobody told you what would happen yesterday evening?” Wilhelm asked, crouching next to her.

Anna shook her head.

“You should have known not to sneak out of a Gathering, Anna,” Devin said. “Even you’re not *that* stupid.”

“I wasn’t trying to sneak. Peter said it—”

“Peter isn’t your Master!” Devin shouted, his voice reverberating throughout the room. “I am! You don’t listen to him. You listen to me!”

Anna winced and huddled on the floor. “I’m sorry, Master. I didn’t know.”

“Anna, you should have at least realized that leaving was not a good idea,” Wilhelm said. Though his words were soft, his rebuke was ten times more terrifying than Devin’s shouting. He *was* angry with her.

She looked up at him with frightened tears on her cheeks. “I’m sorry, Master. I’m so sorry.”

“She must be punished,” Devin said firmly.

Wilhelm sighed and Anna held her breath as she waited for him to speak. “If one of my *Dirne* had left a gathering without permission, she would be disciplined.”

The air rushed out of Anna’s lungs at his words and she gasped for air. Wilhelm was going to give her back to Devin.

“If she is to be disciplined, I will do it,” Wilhelm said, straightening.

“You?” Devin scoffed. “You think yourself capable of punishing her?”

“I do not think it takes as much as you think it will. I will not have her tortured for a mistake in judgment. I will discipline her and then it will be

over.” Wilhelm’s voice was firm and Anna held back a sob. He would punish her.

Devin grunted, but nodded.

“I will return her to San Francisco the last Wednesday of the month.”

“That’s almost a month!” Devin exclaimed.

“I have not seen her for a year and a half. I think I deserve much more, but I know she has rehearsals to get back to.”

“You can’t keep her away from me that long,” Devin growled.

“If she becomes unwell, then we will return to San Francisco. But I will not relinquish her until that day.” Wilhelm frowned at Devin. “She should be able to be here a month without becoming ill.”

Devin didn’t answer and Wilhelm’s frown increased. “*Mein Gott,* Devin. Why do you want to hurt her?”

“It’s not a matter of wanting to hurt her. It’s simply a byproduct of what I must do.” He smirked. “I expect I’ll see you sooner rather than later,” he said as he walked out of the room.

Anna hunched down on the ground and waited for Wilhelm to begin.

“*Kommen Sie,* Anna. Let us go back to the hotel.”

Anna looked up in surprise. “The hotel? But...” She shouldn’t press it. “Isn’t this place more conducive to punishment?”

“*Ja,*” Wilhelm agreed. “But I am going to discipline you, not punish you.”

“What’s the difference?” Anna asked as he helped her to her feet.

“Discipline seeks to correct a behavior. Punishment...well, punishment just hurts.”

She glanced at Kurt, who stared at the floor, and then back at Wilhelm. She didn’t understand. Devin punished her to change her behaviors.

Wilhelm said something quietly to Kurt, who stood and followed them out of the building. The drive to the hotel was long and silent. Anna stared at her hands and tried not to tremble. The waiting was horrible. She was beginning to wish he'd taken her to the dungeons at the Manor.

When they arrived at the hotel and went up to the hotel rooms, Kurt went to his own room and closed the door, still without speaking to her. Anna's heart broke. He hated her and wanted nothing to do with her.

Wilhelm took her into his bedroom and sat her down on the bed. "Anna, do you know why I am disciplining you?"

"Because I embarrassed you and acted like a fool," Anna said softly.

"*Nein*, Anna. You did not embarrass me. Do you know you are not allowed to leave the Gatherings without permission?"

Anna nodded.

"Then why did you?" Wilhelm sounded sad.

She glanced up at him and back at her hands. "I didn't want to be there," she said without thinking, and then realized it was true. She would have done anything to get out of that room. Not because she didn't want to do her duties, but because she was ashamed. "I felt...like I didn't belong."

Wilhelm was quiet. "That was quite selfish of you, Anna. I am disappointed."

Anna's heart ached and her shoulders drooped. She never wanted to disappoint Wilhelm. Ever. He was so kind to her. And now he had to punish...er, discipline her.

"Remove your skirt and panties, Anna," Wilhelm said solemnly.

Anna did so as quickly as she could and stood before Wilhelm. He looked up at her with sad eyes and then took her hand and lay her across his lap. "Count."

He smacked her bare ass with such force she jumped and cried out in surprise. He was strong.

“Count, Anna,” he said in a low voice.

“One, Master,” she whispered. She was so humiliated that Wilhelm had to do this.

Smack!

“Two, Master.” Oh, his hand was big and strong!

Smack! Smack! The blows continued until she reached fifteen. By that time, she was crying, knowing she’d made Wilhelm hit her. When he promised he would never do it. But he had to, or else Devin would have punished her. She had failed him. Not to mention her bottom was on fire.

When she had announced the last count, he turned her over and held her close. He was trembling.

“I’m sorry, Master,” she whispered, truly ashamed and sad.

He kissed her head and held her tightly. “I am sorry too, Anna.”

They were quiet and Anna’s tears slowly dried.

“You wounded Kurt by leaving with Peter.”

Anna’s head snapped up. “I...I never wanted to hurt Kurt,” she whispered, wide-eyed. “I...I’m sorry, Master,” she said softly. “I truly failed you.” She felt horrible. Much worse than angering Devin.

“Anna, I failed you as well. I should have made sure you knew what would happen. I assumed....” He sighed. “I assumed Devin had talked to you about it.”

She shook her head. “The Elder-Mistresses...I’m not like them. I don’t think they like me.”

“They do not understand you. There is a difference. But that was still no reason to leave. You neglected to do your duties.” He sighed. “But you

understand that now and we will speak of it no more. You have had your discipline and the matter is closed.”

“Yes, Master,” she said quietly.

“No more ‘Master,’ *Liebling*. We are not at the *Schloss*.” He tipped her head up and gazed into her eyes. “I like the sound of my name on your lips,” he said, his voice husky.

He brushed his lips against hers and she sighed. “Wilhelm,” she whispered. His lips pressed harder and she was made breathless by the passion in his kiss.

“I wanted you last night too, *Liebling*,” he said breathlessly against her lips. She could feel his cock hardening against her hip and moved against him, making him gasp and then moan.

She worked at the buttons on his shirt and pushed it off his shoulders and onto the floor. When she reached for his pants he groaned and murmured in German.

Quickly, they removed each other’s clothing and fell back onto the bed. He sucked on her neck and nibbled his way down to her breasts, taking a nipple in his mouth and sucking on it as she moaned loudly. The passion in his touch and his eyes lit her on fire and made her desire him more than anything in a very long time.

“Wilhelm!” she cried as he kissed his way down to her pussy and sucked her into his mouth. She moaned loudly and buried her hands in his thick hair as he licked and sucked her intimate place. “Oh! Oh!” she cried and then screamed out his name as he brought her to her release. She held his head against her tightly and flexed her hips against him.

When the waves of pleasure subsided he slid up her body and thrust into her with one smooth movement. They both sighed at the sensation of being joined together.

“*Mein Anna*,” he murmured. He lifted his face and gazed deeply into her eyes. They were full of such passion it overwhelmed her. “Open yourself to me, *mein Liebling*,” he whispered, almost hypnotically.

He kissed her and began moving. His movements were long and languid and she did what he asked. She felt herself opening up to his body, allowing him in deeper than any other man, except Alex. Immediately, she felt light headed and felt as if he were melting into her body and she into his. She was no longer accepting him into her body; there was only one body. One body and one mind.

A rush of sensation that she hadn’t experienced in a very long time tingled in her body and slowly built as Wilhelm’s movements quickened. She heard him groan and thrust very hard and she screamed out his name again and floated in mid-air as he emptied himself into her.

“Yes!” she cried out, though she didn’t know why. She wanted him, all of him, inside her. She wanted him to own her, to take possession of her body like Alex had long ago.

They floated together as he throbbed inside her and she accepted him deep inside. When he had emptied himself he shuddered slightly and then rolled to his side, pulling her with him.

She snuggled close to him and fell into a deep, peaceful sleep.

Chapter Forty

Kurt barely spoke to Anna during the rest of their time in St. Petersburg, and she didn't blame him one bit. She'd resigned herself to his coldness as the limo approached the driveway to the *Gutshaus*. But when the home that Alex had grown up in came into view, tears started running down her cheeks and she couldn't stop the sobs from wracking her entire body. Kurt practically leapt across the distance he'd put between himself and Anna in the vehicle and wrapped his long arms around her. She sobbed into his chest while he held her tightly, kissing her head and apologizing for being so cold to her.

He rarely left her side after that and doted on her as much as any woman could hope for.

They walked around the gardens most afternoons, talking and just being together. Derek and Sofie walked with them most of the time. Anna couldn't believe how much the children had grown. Derek was now eight and Sofie, who had been a toddler when she'd first met her, was now five. Derek spoke fluent English and he loved showing it off in front of his father and Anna. Although Sofie was still learning the second language, she eagerly showed Anna all the pretty flowers that were still blooming.

Three weeks into her stay, Anna was relieved to find she could walk the halls of the *Gutshaus* without bursting into tears with every turn of the corner. Yes, she missed Alex terribly, but she finally felt at peace with his death. Perhaps it was because of Kurt's loving presence. She stayed with Kurt in Alex's old room, which he had moved into shortly after Alex had died.

One particularly fine day, Kurt and Anna sat on a bench in one of the gardens while Derek chased Sofie around, both giggling and shouting.

Kurt held her close. “I still love you, Anna,” he said softly. He turned to her. “Do you know that?”

Anna nodded. “I do.” She smiled tenderly at him.

“You are so different than the girl I met at Devin’s place all those years ago. You have turned into a beautiful woman.”

She smiled at the memory of their first meeting. She would have never in a million years imagined she would end up here. She looked up into his eyes, bright blue and kind. He was a very different man now, too.

“Anna, I...my feelings...from when I visited you in California...they are the same. Or perhaps stronger.”

Anna nodded. She could see that. She still adored him as well.

He took a deep breath and took her hand. “Anna, would you do me the honor of becoming my wife?”

Anna inhaled sharply and stared at him. She opened her mouth but nothing came out. Oh, how she wanted to say yes! To stay here forever in the peace that surrounded them. But Devin had forbidden it and she couldn’t disobey.

“Kurt...,” she said, tears coming to her eyes. “There is nothing in the world I would like more than to be your wife.” His eyes lit up and he smiled broadly. “But I can’t.” His face fell, breaking Anna’s heart.

“I see,” he said softly. He swallowed and stared out at the trees across the path.

“No, Kurt, you don’t understand.” She cupped his cheek and turned his face back to hers. “Devin forbade me. Before he let me go to you that night at Vitaly’s funeral.” Anna’s heart ached for the sadness in his face. “He

forbade me from marrying you. That is the only reason I can't accept. I promise."

Kurt looked at her doubtfully and then sighed sadly. "I know you would not lie about something like that."

Anna shook her head. "There's nothing else I could imagine wanting more," she said softly. "But I can't do what is forbidden." She didn't want to find out what would happen if she even attempted to do so.

He took her hand and entwined his fingers with hers. "He cannot stop me from loving you, though."

"No, he can't," she said with a soft smile. "Nor me from loving you."

They were silent for a few minutes. "Maybe he will change his mind." But they both knew that would never happen.

A few days later, Wilhelm took Anna to the *Schloss*.

Anna heard Kurt and Wilhelm arguing in Wilhelm's office before they left. She didn't know what was said because they were speaking German, but she could tell by their tones that Kurt was very angry.

Anna was waiting in the sitting room near the office and looked up when the door opened. Kurt's face was red and he glared at his father.

He stopped short when he saw Anna and his eyes softened. "I am sorry you had to hear that, *Engel*," he said stooping and kissing her on the temple. "I will see you tonight." He turned and frowned at Wilhelm and then quickly made his way up the circular staircase to the third floor.

Wilhelm watched Kurt with a sad expression. She stood and walked to him. "Is everything okay?"

Wilhelm absently stroked her hair. “*Ja, Liebling.* I told him he could not come and he became angry. He accused me of not trusting him and thinking less of him than I thought of Alex.” Wilhelm looked at her. “It is not true, Anna. I think him very capable. He has worked so hard these last few years. I am so proud of him.” His face flinched and Anna guessed that he was thinking about Alex.

She wrapped her arms around his waist and he hugged her. “I know you are, Wilhelm. I can see it. He knows too.” She leaned her head against his chest. “Why can’t he come along?”

“Because it is a matter for Elders. If Alex were here...well, he would not be there either.” Wilhelm sighed. He stared into nothing for a few moments and then shook his head. “We must go. They will be waiting.”

Anna was taken to a room to prepare when she arrived. Her hair was brushed and she was given a simple white silk gown to wear. She looked down and noticed her breasts looked fuller, or was it just her imagination? It was almost as if...but, no. She hadn’t been with Kaveh and she’d been apart from Devin for almost a month. She rubbed her face, worried. What was going on? She couldn’t be pregnant. Who would have...?

Her mind drifted back to the last time she’d been with Wilhelm. After he had disciplined her and they’d had a very, very passionate lovemaking session. He had said years ago that a pregnancy could happen if she was particularly emotionally attached. She had felt Wilhelm and herself floating together; becoming one body. Had she inadvertently opened herself up to get pregnant? Oh! What would Wilhelm say? What would Ilsa say? What would Kurt say? Oh, God! Devin would be furious!

But she hadn't meant to do anything like that. It had just happened. She

"Mistress?"

Anna jumped at the male voice that interrupted her disturbing thoughts. She looked up and saw an Immortal standing in the doorway. She couldn't remember his name, but he had been here the night of her wedding to Alex.

"I am Gavin," the Immortal said with a gentle smile and a deep, resonating voice. He had no accent, which surprised Anna. "I will take you to the Elders."

Anna stood nervously and smoothed her dress, conscious of how her breasts strained against the fabric. Gavin's eyes flickered down her body briefly and he smiled when he looked back at her face.

"You are with child?"

"H-how did you know?" she asked softly, crossing her arms across her stomach, which was still as flat as it normally was.

Gavin smiled. "You look as you did when you married Alex, though you are not as far along. A few weeks maybe."

"I didn't know. I didn't mean to!" She blinked back tears of fright.

"Mistress, no one would be upset here. They are not your other Master."

Gavin motioned to the hallway and Anna walked with him down the dim hall.

Anna stared at the ground as they walked. An Immortal wouldn't gain anything by lying to her, but she still didn't think anyone would be happy with it.

Gavin led her into the same chamber where her marriage to Alex had been confirmed and consummated. She glanced over at the fireplace where she and Alex had become one person. It was cold and dark.

She bit her lip and blinked away the tears as she tore her eyes away and looked at the ground. When Gavin stopped, she looked up to see all seven of the German Elders in front of her. What had she done to bring them all together?

She knelt quickly and lowered herself into a bow.

“You may sit up, Anna,” Wilhelm said softly after just a few seconds.

Anna sat up and stared at the ground with her hands resting lightly on her thighs. She was ashamed to look at Wilhelm.

“Anna, we gathered today to speak to you about your dreams.”

Anna looked up in shock. “My dreams?” she asked without thinking and then clapped her hand over her mouth. She had spoken without being given permission. Frightened tears welled up in her eyes as she stared, terrified, at Wilhelm.

Wilhelm smiled tenderly at her. “You may speak freely here, Anna,” he said gently, glancing around at the other Elders. They all looked at her kindly and nodded. “And be at ease. We just ask that you be respectful.”

“Yes, *mein Herr*,” she said softly, looking back at the ground.

Wilhelm introduced the other Elders to her: Edwin, Gerhard, Justin, Juergen, Hansjoerg, and Oswin.

“How long have you been having dreams about Alex?” Wilhelm asked.

“Since I was twelve,” she answered to the ground.

“Please look at who is addressing you, Anna,” Wilhelm rebuked lightly.

She looked up, ashamed. “Yes, *mein Herr*.”

“And they began after your parents died?”

Anna nodded. “Yes, *mein Herr*.”

“Tell us about it,” Hansjoerg said.

Anna told them about seeing Wilhelm and Alex fighting, and then appearing in Alex’s room. The memories were sad, but not as painful as

they had been.

“And this was what really happened?” Hansjoerg asked Wilhelm.

Wilhelm nodded. “Ja. Alex saw her that night. We didn’t see her in my office but....” He gave a wry smile. “It was a heated argument.”

“Did you have other dreams?” Edwin asked.

Anna nodded and told them about seeing Alex throughout the years, including the few days before they met in real life.

“Did you dream of him once you met?” Oswin asked.

“A few times,” she answered. “When he left to come back here, I dreamed of him, but they weren’t dreams. They were real. He called me after one because he was worried about me.” Anna swallowed back tears. It was getting difficult to maintain her composure.

“And then you began to dream of him once...you learned he was dead?” Wilhelm asked in a very gentle voice.

Anna nodded. “I started dreaming of an empty room for several nights and then....” She looked at the ground. “I went home and...wasn’t in touch with reality for a while.”

The Elders continued to ask questions and Anna tried her best not to get upset. But when they started asking for more details about what Alex did and said, she broke down and sobbed. A woman came in a few minutes later and took Anna back to her room to rest and eat lunch. She lay on the bed for a while after she ate.

Wilhelm came in a while later and sat behind her on her bed. He stroked her hip. “Are you all right, Anna?”

Anna rolled to her back and looked at him. “I’m sorry, Wil...Master,” she said softly. “I tried not to cry.”

He nodded and smiled sadly. “I know, Anna. I know. It is all right.” He stroked her hair. “I know the questions are difficult, but they are necessary.

We are not trying to hurt you. Do you understand that?"

She nodded. There was no sign of malice in their faces as they asked their questions. If anything, they looked very sympathetic. "May I ask why you are asking?"

Wilhelm grimaced. "You may ask, Anna, but I do not have an answer to give you. Your dreams are...intriguing." He sighed. "We just need to know about them. Does Devin know you dream of him?"

"No. I've never told him. He's never asked."

"*Gut.*" Wilhelm looked pleased. "I would ask you to keep it that way."

"Yes, Master."

He studied her face carefully and then his eyes traveled down her body. She was reminded of her pregnancy. Should she tell him? He had a right to know, but would he be angry?

"Master?" she whispered.

"*Ja, mein Liebling?*" he responded, a strange, passionate, look in his eyes.

"I...." Anna bit her lip. Her stomach churned as she imagined his disappointment. "Do you...remember the last time we made love?"

Wilhelm smiled. "Of course. It was wonderful."

A brief smile fluttered across her face and then she bit her lip again. "Master, I'm so sorry," she said with a broken voice. "I'm so sorry!"

Wilhelm pulled her to a sitting position and held her close. "Anna, what are you apologizing for?"

She pulled away slightly. "I—I did something and...." She took in a shaky breath. "I'm pregnant."

Wilhelm inhaled sharply and froze. "How do you know?"

"I've been pregnant enough to know my body, and Gavin confirmed it." The tears rolled down her cheeks. "I'm sorry."

“Why are you apologizing?”

“I didn’t mean to, Master. But when we...I guess I did that trigger thing and...I mean, I think it’s yours.” She trembled. “Will Ilsa hate me?”

“Anna, you did nothing except what I asked you to.”

“What?” She blinked at him several times. “What you asked me to?”

“*Liebling*, I made love to you with the intention of conceiving a child. Perhaps I should have spoken to you first, but I did not want Devin to think you complicit in the act.”

She could do nothing but stare at him.

“Anna, I know this is near the time Devin gets you pregnant, and hurts you and increases his powers through it. If you are already pregnant, he cannot fulfill his plans. It may weaken him enough to...to help.” He stroked her cheek. “It will also give me an heir to follow Kurt.”

“You know it’s a boy?” She was still trying to recover from her shock. He knew! *He* had done it! She was carrying his child and he wanted her to do so.

“There is a very high likelihood. Elders can...do that sort of thing in certain circumstances.”

“But what about Ilsa? Won’t she be angry?”

“She knows already. I told her when we returned home.”

Anna paused and looked at him, his beloved face that looked so much like Alex. And she would likely bear him a child that looked exactly like him. “Oh, Wilhelm!” she cried softly and leaned forward into his arms.

He held her for a long time. “You and Kurt can marry and raise the child here and he will become Elder after Kurt, as is proper.”

Anna shook her head. “I can’t marry Kurt,” she whispered. “Devin forbade me.”

“There are ways around that, Anna. Do not worry about it. We will find a way.”

Anna slumped into his arms and sighed. Wilhelm would take care of it. She could be sure of that.

“I promised I would look after you, Anna, and I will.”

“Does Kurt know?”

“Ja, I told him after he told me what you said when he asked you to marry him.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because the longer you did not know about it, the safer you would be from Devin. Your ignorance would keep him from learning about it. But,” he chuckled. “You are too smart.”

Anna giggled softly and Wilhelm hugged her tightly and kissed the top of her head. “I love you, *Liebling*.”

“I love you, Wilhelm.”

They sat together for a few minutes in silence.

“Anna, will you do something for me?”

“Anything.”

“I want to try and induce a dream when we go back downstairs. Will you allow that?”

“Why?” Her stomach churned at the idea of her dreams.

“I just...need to. Will you trust me?”

After a pause, Anna nodded. “I trust you.”

Chapter Forty-One

Down in the Elders' Chambers, Anna sat on her heels with Gavin behind her, his body pressed against hers, his arms around her waist. She looked up, scared, at Wilhelm.

"Gavin will be able to guide you, Anna. Listen for his voice and do as he says. We will be able to hear you when you speak."

Anna trembled and nodded.

"Close your eyes," Gavin said softly.

Anna obeyed and she felt his hand on her forehead. Slowly the sensation faded and she knew nothing.

It was the same room she always saw. She looked around for Alex but he was nowhere to be seen.

"Do you see him, Anna?" Gavin asked in her head.

"No, he's not here."

"Tell me what you see."

She described the room in detail, from the bed to the bookshelves.

"Is there a window?"

"Yes."

"Look outside and tell me what you see."

She described the mountains and what she could see of the house and the yard.

"Have you even been outside this room?"

"No. He's always been here."

"Go out into the hallway."

Anna walked to the door and looked at it. She reached for the doorknob, but her hand went right through it. “I can’t open the door.”

“You do not need to. Walk through it.”

Anna stared at the door and put her hand to it. To her surprise, it went right through like the doorknob. She squeezed her eyes and walked forward. She felt a brush against her skin and opened her eyes to see herself in a large, rectangular room with a wooden staircase in the middle of it going down. Several doors lined the area and it was lit by wall sconces and a ceiling light. Gavin asked what she saw and she told him.

“Go down the stairs.”

She did as she was told and made her way slowly down the wooden steps. Her feet made no sound as she wound her way around and around, down several flights. There were no more doors, only open, empty rooms below. When she came to the stone floor she saw two wooden doors, one on either side of the room.

She told Gavin what she saw.

There was a pause. “Go through the west door.”

Anna looked around. West door? But something told her that the door right in front of her was the proper door and she walked to it, squeezed her eyes shut and walked through. There was resistance and she groaned as she pushed through, but at last she was free and opened her eyes to look around.

She stood in a long, very wide hallway with thick blue carpeting on the floor. The walls were made from rich wooden paneling and chandeliers hung from the ceiling at intermittent distances. Tall doors lined both sides of the hallway.

“What do you see?”

Anna spoke of what she saw as she moved forward. At last she came to what looked like an entryway, where the carpeting ended in a large, round room with a marble floor and a huge wooden door with beautiful decorative ironwork along the back of it. A marble staircase circled the room and led to the upper floor. Windows and glass doors along the back of the wall let in the afternoon sun, and she could see a large, grassy yard outside.

“Keep going.”

She walked across the entryway and then jumped when the door to her right opened. Vlad stood there looking at her, or at least she thought he was looking at her. She froze and stared.

He looked troubled as he looked at her. “Why are you here?” he asked softly.

“I....” She swallowed nervously. “Wilhelm...he wanted....”

“Wilhelm? He knows you dream?” Vlad looked around. “You cannot be here. Devin will...Devin is here. You must leave.”

“Devin?” she said softly.

She heard a voice calling in the room behind Vlad.

“Please Anna, go!” he whispered urgently. He reached out and touched her shoulder and the image faded.

Anna collapsed forward onto the floor. What had just happened? Why hadn't she seen Alex? Where was he? Why did she dream of Vlad?

“Anna?” She felt a gentle hand on the back of her head. She looked up to see Wilhelm crouching next to her. “Anna, what did you see?”

“Vlad...Vlad was there and he said that Devin was there and that I had to go. He looked upset.”

Wilhelm frowned. “I spoke with Devin yesterday. He is in San Francisco, awaiting your return.” His shoulders slumped and he ran his

hand through his hair. “I am sorry, Anna. You did well. Thank you.” He helped her to her feet. “Let me take you back to your room and I will have someone take you to the *Gutshaus*.”

“You’re not coming?”

“*Nein*, I need to speak with the other Elders for a while.”

Wilhelm didn’t return for dinner that night. As far as Anna knew he wasn’t home before she and Kurt went to bed either. He had returned sometime that night, because he was at breakfast the next morning. His face was very pale and he looked as if he hadn’t slept. Ilsa kept looking at him with a worried expression on her face.

He was like that for the next few days. He stayed in his study and his eyes were red as if he’d been crying, though Anna had a hard time imagining Wilhelm crying.

The night before they were to fly her home, she knocked on his study door. He responded in a sharp voice, but in German. She opened the door slowly and poked her head in.

He growled and threw something at the door that shattered. She gave a little cry, closed the door quickly and ran down the hallway to the back staircase that led to the library. She sat on the bottom step and stared at the ground. Wilhelm upset like that frightened her. She’d never seen him lose his composure, and he had been upset for four days now. What had happened?

A few minutes later she heard footsteps behind her and someone sat behind her.

“I am sorry, Anna. That was you at the door, *ja*?”

Wilhelm. "Yes, Wilhelm. I'm sorry I disturbed you." She stood and turned around. His face was etched in grief, his eyes were bloodshot. She'd never imagined he could look so miserable. "Wilhelm, what's wrong? Did I do something to upset you?"

"*Nein, Liebling.* I did it to myself." He sighed. "Anna...your dreams...." He looked up at her with tremendously sad eyes. "Your dreams had given me hope that Alex might still be alive somewhere."

Anna's jaw dropped at his words and her heart lightened. "Oh, Wilhelm!" she said, hope bubbling to the surface. "I hated to dream, but they kept coming and I couldn't stop them...." She spoke quickly, but stopped when he held up his hand and shook his head.

"It was a false hope, *Liebling.*"

Anna's heart stung at the look on his face.

"I am sorry, Anna. I had hoped that maybe...maybe he was still alive and that you were able to keep in communication with him." He paused. "That is why I took you to the *Schloss*. To find out if it was true." He shook his head sadly. "I was wrong. So wrong, Anna." His face contorted into deep grief. "I had held onto the hope for so long, and now...." Tears began rolling down his cheeks and his great shoulders shook as he began to sob. "I was wrong, Anna. He is gone." He buried his face in his hands. "He is gone."

The grief consumed him and Anna wrapped her arms around him as he sobbed. Anna wanted so desperately to help him...to heal him of his hurts. She had finally come to some semblance of acceptance of Alex's death. The hope that had kept Wilhelm going had been ripped away and his heart was raw once again.

She felt something inside her start to grow warm. She could heal his heart.

“Wilhelm,” she said softly next to his ear. “Wilhelm, come with me.” She took his hand and led him upstairs and into the room she had stayed in the night before her wedding. She closed the door and led him to the bed. “Sit,” she said softly.

He sat and she began to unbutton her sweater. He stared blankly at her hands as they moved swiftly down her torso and then pulled the sweater off her shoulders and let it fall to the ground. His eyes moved to her swollen breasts and he gazed at them like a hungry man.

“I will heal you, Wilhelm,” she whispered, reaching behind her and unfastening her bra, letting it fall to the ground as well. “I will take away your pain.” She quickly removed her jeans and panties and then moved forward to capture his lips with hers. He kissed her desperately, running his hands over her body. Anna continued to whisper to him, telling him everything would be all right. She felt the warmth inside her radiate out and spread to him.

She slowly undressed him and he groaned softly as she lay down and pulled him on top of her. She kissed him again, trailing her hands down his back to his buttocks and caressed them, then moved around and stroked his hardening cock slowly. When he was fully erect, she guided him into her body and the warmth spread from her body to his. He moaned as he began to move inside her.

“Oh, Wilhelm!” she cried softly as he filled her over and over again. He wrapped his arms around her and held her tightly as he thrust harder and harder into her. Deeper and deeper he went until they both exploded into a hot fireball, the heat consuming their flesh and melting their separate souls into one. Her heart reached out to touch his, the searing heat healing the wounds gently and making him whole again. They were one body, one soul. Everything she was, she gave to him.

Anna awoke later, shivering in the cool room. Wilhelm was sound asleep next to her. The sun had set and the room was lit by bright moonlight that snuck in through the open curtains.

She turned on her side and ran her fingers through his hair, now more white than gold. He had aged these last years. She could see it in his face. But the grief that had consumed him earlier was gone and he slept peacefully. She hated to wake him.

She should tell Ilsa where he was. Ilsa had been so worried about him the last few days. And Kurt would be wondering where she was.

Anna slipped out of bed and dressed quietly. She saw a blanket on a chair near the window, and she covered him as best as she could. He was a large man and it was a small blanket. She kissed his cheek and then slipped out of the room silently and went in search of Ilsa.

In the dimly lit sitting room where Ilsa normally spent her evenings, the clock over the mantle said it was after midnight. Ilsa was nowhere to be seen. She glanced at the double doors that led to their chambers and hesitated. What would Ilsa think? He was lying naked in a guest room. They couldn't hide what they'd done. Anna had just wanted to help.

Anna took a deep breath and walked to the bedroom doors and knocked. A few minutes later, a sleepy Ilsa answered the door.

“Anna? Is everything all right?”

Anna bit her lip and nodded. “Wilhelm is....” She flushed and looked at the ground. “He was in so much pain....” She looked back up at the woman she thought of as a mother. “I wanted to help. To heal him.” She spoke, ashamed at what she had to tell her.

Ilsa looked at her for a long moment without speaking.

“I’m sorry, Ilsa. I never wanted to violate your home.”

“I know he loves you, Anna,” she said softly. “He has never denied that.” She sighed. “Did he tell you what was troubling him? I have been so worried. He has not acted this way in so long.”

Anna nodded and told her what Wilhelm had told her. “He was hurting so badly and I knew I could help him.”

“Did you help him?” Ilsa’s question was gentle.

“I think so. He’s sleeping peacefully.”

“That is more than he has done in several days. Where is he?”

“In the room I was in before Alex and I married.”

Ilsa nodded slowly. “Thank you for telling me, Anna. You should go to Kurt. He was worried about you.”

Anna made her way upstairs to Kurt’s room. She went in as quietly as she could and saw the light by the bed was still on.

“Anna!” Kurt jumped out of bed and walked quickly to her. He hugged her. “Where have you been?”

“With your father. He...was very upset.”

Kurt’s face fell. “You helped him feel better?” he asked in a low voice.

She looked up at him. “He is my Master, Kurt. It is my duty to aid him where I can.”

“You fucked him?” He backed away a step.

“I healed him,” Anna said softly.

“By fucking him.”

Anna hated how crudely he put it. “Yes.”

Kurt looked at her for a long moment. "I love you, Anna. More than any other woman I have ever known." He shook his head. "But I cannot deal with you fucking my father. It...." He sighed. "Gretchen wanted him."

"I love your father. I love you. He is my Master. I can't *not* be with him. It's part of my duties."

"Duties," he snarled and Anna jumped. "*Mein Gott*, Alex, why did you have to die!" It was a wailing question shouted into the night air. He fell to his knees. "I cannot do this, Anna. I am not my brother." His eyes were wild and sad at the same time. "I am not meant to be an Elder. I am meant to be the irresponsible little brother who drives his family crazy with his antics."

Anna's heart went out to him. She felt the same way sometimes. "I understand, Kurt," she said softly, walking slowly to him and kneeling next to him. She lifted her hand to his rough cheek. "I'm not meant to be an Elder-Mistress. But I am, and it's terrible." She smiled gently at him. "Wilhelm is so proud of you," she said earnestly. "You have done so well. Don't give up."

"He is proud of me?" His voice was strained.

"Yes. I see it in his eyes when he looks at you. And he's told me so. You have made him so happy."

Kurt pressed his lips together and shook his head. "I want to make Vati proud. I want to do right. But it is so against my nature." He stroked her cheek. "I do not want to share you with anyone," he whispered. "It breaks my heart thinking of you with other men. Even men who love you."

"I'm sorry, Kurt. I don't want to hurt you. I love you." The warmth began to grow inside her again and she looked at him. She could help him too. Take away his ache. Make him strong. Make him...let her go. The thought pained her, but it would help him. She could never stop being what

she was. But she could make it so he could find a good wife to make him happy. And let her go. She leaned up to kiss him.

“Let me heal your pain,” she whispered hypnotically. “Come.” She stood and led him to bed and healed him as she had healed his father.

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Chapter Forty-Two

She flew back home with only Wilhelm. Kurt had decided to stay home. Anna could see in his eyes that he had let her go, and now he would be able to find a suitable wife. One he didn't have to share.

Anna stared out the window and ached for Kurt. But this was for the best. He deserved to be happy. Genuinely happy. He was a kind, strong man and would make any woman proud to be his wife. It just wouldn't be her. It couldn't be her.

Wilhelm came and sat behind her on the couch and nuzzled her neck. His grief was gone and he was once again the strong, confident man she knew. Ilsa had thanked her before she left.

"We will be landing soon," he said softly, running his hand down her thigh. They had made love many times on the jet. She would miss his gentle touch. He kissed her neck and she closed her eyes and sighed. "I will miss you."

"I'll miss you too, Wilhelm," she said softly, leaning back against him.

It was Tuesday afternoon in San Francisco when they landed. Wilhelm would take her to Devin tomorrow and maybe stay a few more days, depending on what Devin had planned. They would spend today getting settled back into the house. Anna was at peace with living there now, content with the memories of Alex in her heart. He would have wanted her to be there.

Her phone rang Devin's ring as they were driving into the city from the airport. Wilhelm frowned but nodded when Anna told him who was calling.

"Hello, Devin."

"Hello, Baby. I see you're back in town."

Anna frowned. "How did you...?"

"Anna, I know where you are at all times. Did you enjoy your time with Wilhelm and his family?"

"Yes. I did."

"Good. I hope you've gotten them out of your system for a while. Where are you heading now?"

"To the house. Alex's...er, my house. I didn't know what had happened to the apartment and thought I might like to stay at the house for a while."

"You thought you would like?" Devin repeated coldly. "Oh, Anna. You have grown far too independent for your own good. Stay where you'd like tonight, but as of tomorrow, you are living with me at my house."

Anna gasped. "At your *house*?"

"Yes, Anna. I don't think I get the full benefit of our relationship when you live on your own. The kids are all grown now, Sandy is...gone and I have an empty house to come home to every night. I don't like it. You will live with me. I expect to see you at my house tomorrow before lunch."

"Yes, Devin," she said softly and he hung up. She looked up at Wilhelm. "Devin wants me to live with him."

"With him? What about his wife?"

"He said she's gone."

"Gone?"

Anna shrugged. "She's been having...issues since she lost a baby a few years ago." Anna didn't mention that it was Devin who took the baby. "She's been unwell. Maybe she finally left him."

Wilhelm frowned. "That is not good. Elders are supposed to be above reproach and respectable."

"But what about Chairmen?"

He sighed. "There are reasons that we outlawed those ways long ago. The Chairman can do as he pleases and be blunt about it. He is manipulative enough to be cheered on by the people he is supposed to be serving. But the Chairman does not serve. He takes and demands."

That sounded like Devin, all right. "That is why the old ways were outlawed?"

Wilhelm nodded. "We decided...or rather, our ancestors decided hundreds of years ago that the way to move civilization along was to encourage its development rather than pushing it. People are more easily led if they respect their leaders, not fear them. We have seen examples of what happens when Elders strive for more power than is natural. The dictators in the past who have killed their own countrymen. It was not that they hated people, but that the people tried to stand up to them and were punished. We in Germany are very aware of our past and know not to go down that road again."

"What will Devin do?"

"He seeks power. That is obvious. I do not know what he hopes to accomplish with his power grab, but it inevitably leads to world problems. They have started already because of him. He put into place poor leaders and your country is suffering for it."

"It is?" Anna knew very little of what happened outside her very limited world.

"Your country is collapsing economically. Devin puts into place weak leaders that he can control, but they are also selfish and seek their own gain. As long as they do what Devin wants, he does not care what else they do. If

the economy collapses...Devin is in a very good position to take total control of the country. Your democracy may become a thing of the past.”

“Oh.” Anna shivered. “And I...help him, don’t I?”

Wilhelm took her hand. “Ja, Anna. You do.” He gave her a sad smile. “You cannot help but do so.”

Anna’s eyes welled up. “But...but, I don’t want that to happen! What can I do? Can you kill me? Would that help?”

Wilhelm stilled himself at her question, but he did not do her the disservice of downplaying her willingness to sacrifice herself. “It is not easy to kill an Elder-Mistress. If I tried, your Immortals would be here within minutes to stop me. Devin’s power is still limited. Until he is completely in control of you, he is limited in what he can do.”

“Until?”

“On your twenty-sixth birthday, there is another ritual to be performed. A finalizing of the bonding ceremony, if you will. Alex...will not be there to stop him. He will take total control of you and then it will be impossible to stop him. You know what he did to me when he banished me and my family.”

“Oh, Wilhelm! What can I do? I don’t want that!” Anna remembered the sight of Devin that night. It was truly terrifying.

“I do not know, Anna.” Wilhelm looked at her with such sorrow she could hardly stand it. “I do not know. Perhaps there is someone else who can step into Alex’s shoes. Perhaps it is even Kurt.” He shook his head. “Or someone we do not even know. But there is always a chance to stop it, Anna. Always. We just have to be on the lookout to seize the opportunity before it is too late.”

Anna leaned into his arms and wept. She would be the downfall of her own country. “Tell me what I can do,” she said earnestly when she had

finished crying. “Wilhelm, please. There must be something.”

Wilhelm cupped her cheek. “The best thing you can do right now, Anna, is to forget what I told you. If Devin suspects you know....” He sighed. “I should not have told you anything. If Devin suspects, he would lock you away for the next year and a half. We cannot let that happen.”

The town car pulled into the driveway of Anna’s house and Wilhelm looked out the window. “*Kommen Sie*, let me help you forget.”

He led her into the house, and after greeting the new housekeeper, took her upstairs and used everything within him to bind up the knowledge and tuck it away, deep into her mind so that Devin wouldn’t know what she knew. It was the only thing he could do as an Elder to protect her.

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Chapter Forty-Three

Anna had been dreading this moment, and it had finally come. They were driving to Devin's house for Wilhelm to drop her off. She'd had such a wonderful time in Germany. She had felt so at peace and now it was back to the harsh reality. She tried to hide it from Wilhelm, but he knew she was nervous. To be living with Devin frightened her. A few years ago she wouldn't have said that, but now...he had been getting progressively crueler as time went on.

"I will be out for opening night, Anna," Wilhelm promised as they pulled up to Devin's house. "I cannot wait to see you dance again."

"I will be counting the days until I can see you again, Wilhelm," she said, trying to hide the fear from him.

"I will do what I can for you, Anna. Call me if you need anything. The house is yours, Anna. It will always be available to you."

Anna nodded and leaned forward to kiss him. "Thank you, Wilhelm."

He patted her hand. "I will walk you to the door."

The driver removed her suitcase from the trunk and Wilhelm pulled it up to the front door. Anna rang the doorbell and the housekeeper answered it. They walked inside and Anna huddled next to Wilhelm while they waited for Devin.

He came downstairs a few minutes later, wearing snug jeans, a black polo shirt and an arrogant smile on his face. "Anna, I've missed you," he said, fisting her hair and kissing her hard. He pulled back to study her face and frowned. He turned to Wilhelm and gave him a curt nod. "You may go now. Thank you for returning her to me."

Wilhelm set his jaw. “I will be out for opening night of Nutcracker. I expect to find her healthy and whole.”

Devin grinned. “Of course, Wilhelm. I wouldn’t destroy my prime asset, would I?”

Wilhelm’s eyes narrowed. “I expect to be able to call her as well.”

Devin shrugged. “Go ahead.”

Wilhelm held his arms open to her and she ran to him and hugged him. “I love you, *Liebling*,” he whispered. “Call me. Anytime. Do not worry about the time difference.”

Anna blinked at the tears that were blinding her and nodded. “I love you, Wilhelm,” she whispered and gave him a brave smile.

He leaned forward, kissed her on the cheek once more and then turned and walked to the door. The housekeeper had obviously been instructed to wait for his departure, and she opened the door for him. He glanced back with a smile to Anna and then left.

Anna’s shoulders slumped as he disappeared from sight and Devin came up behind her and sucked on her neck. She moaned softly as he bit the tender skin gently and then harder. “Ah!” she cried out in pain.

“Come upstairs. We need to get reacquainted.” He took her hand and led her up to the master suite on the third floor. “If I don’t want you in my bed, you will sleep in Sandy’s old room. Your things have been put in there, including your things from the apartment.”

“Thank you, Master.”

“Your time, when you are not dancing, will be devoted to me. You will not go anywhere without asking me for permission. You will not date anyone. You will not let anyone inside your body without my permission.” They walked into the second bedroom of the master suite. “Your pussy is mine and it will only be used by me and men I designate. If I find you

fucking someone I've not given you permission to fuck...well, I will make sure to remind you of the consequences of that action." He was talking about Ben. "Do you understand?"

"Yes, Master," she said softly, looking around to hide the tears that threatened to start in her eyes. The room had large picture windows that looked out onto the bay, making it light and airy. French doors led out onto a terrace that had Devin's bedroom on the other side. It was a nice room.

"The general public will know that you are my mistress. Your fellow dancers will know that you are my mistress. Everything you do will reflect on me, so you'd better learn to behave properly." He left the threat hanging in the cool air of the room.

"Yes, Master."

"I would have you change your name back to Perkins, but you are too well known to do that." He tapped his fingers on the marble mantle of the fireplace that stood across from the bed. "Men will come here to fuck you, as they did in the other places you lived. You know how to deal with that. We may travel more, though I will take your dancing schedule into consideration. Your dancing is quite captivating and I will use it to my advantage."

"Yes, Master."

He turned and walked out of the room. Anna ran to catch up with him as he walked into his bedroom. "I get home around six every evening. I expect you to be here," he pointed to the bottom corner of the bed. "Naked and on your knees, prepared to satisfy my needs. Then we will eat dinner."

"Yes, Master."

"I may occasionally have you meet me downtown for a dinner meeting. In that case, I will tell you what to wear and you will show up on time and ready to do whatever I ask of you."

“Yes, Master.”

He walked across the room to her and lifted her chin. “Do you know why an Elder-Mistress is so alluring?” he asked, his voice suddenly softer.

Anna blinked. Did he want her to answer that? “B-because we’re half-Immortal?”

Devin smiled. “Yes. Partially. Your mere presence is alluring and seductive and can be used to manipulate and control, as you’ve seen.” He trailed his fingers down her throat. “Your body gives me that power and for that I am grateful.” He traced around her breasts with his index finger and then brushed against her nipple, making it harden instantly. He smiled and grasped it between his knuckles and squeezed.

Anna cried out in pain and he smiled at the tears in her eyes.

“I like it when you’re in pain, Baby,” he said quietly. “It turns me on.” He released her nipple and she took in a shaky breath. “Of course, I also like watching you come.” He turned and walked to the bed. “Remove your clothing and lay down on the bed.”

Anna quickly undressed and lay her clothes on a chair next to her.

“Did you also know that an Immortal’s cum has the same qualities that you have? By taking it into my body, it gives me an...infusion...of Immortality and the powers associated with it. That’s why Elders are fucked by the Immortals when they become Elders. They all have an element of the Immortal in them. I happen to have more because....” He laughed. “Well, because I wanted it and I took it.” He sat on the bed next to her. “When you combine an Immortal and an Elder-Mistress, it becomes even more powerful. That’s why the pregnancy every year. That’s why I can do the things I do. But,” Devin traced circles around her breasts. “Being with the Elders made me realize how limited my powers are outside the country, and I can’t have that. Eventually, I will need to manipulate the world Elders and

I can't do all that from here." He looked deeply into her eyes. "I need more of you, more of your essence and the essence of the Immortals."

Anna became more and more frightened as she listened to him speak. "Will you kill me again?" Not that death seemed like a bad thing.

"Oh, no. That wouldn't do any good. The powers wear off after a while, which is why I need you here with me and why the spring ritual must be performed each year. But I need more than that if I am to succeed. I don't want to have to fly to DC every time the fucking president decides he doesn't want to listen to me. My very words need the power, not just my body." He smiled and slid his fingers down her thighs and then up again, then slid a finger inside her body and pulled it out, holding up his wet finger. "This is your essence, Anna. Your power in liquid form." He sucked on his finger. "By itself, it can make men want to do what you want them to do. It can reinforce my own manipulative skills for a time. But combined with an Immortal's cum, it's almost as good as your dead babies."

Anna forced herself not to react to his words, but the way he spoke so callously both broke her heart and terrified her.

He chuckled. "I didn't fully understand that until my trip to Vitaly's funeral. He has some very interesting books at his disposal. Books that aren't supposed to exist. I have a few of the same, but his collection is truly amazing. One spoke of a man who had multiple Elder-Mistresses and Immortals under his control. By using their own powers against them, he was able to control the Immortals and everyone around him." He sighed. "I can never hope to have multiple Elder-Mistresses, but I can use the one I have and suck her dry...literally."

He leaned down and licked at her pussy for a few minutes. Anna squirmed and moaned. He sat up and licked his lips.

“Mmm. So sweet.” He leaned his head against her knee and pulled at her rings. “It won’t be all unpleasant, Baby. Orgasms create more juices. I think you might begin to enjoy yourself. And,” He grinned. “Kaveh will be a common bedmate.” He smiled with wicked eyes. “Kaveh likes a good chase, though. Your passiveness bores him. So, from now on, you will fight him like mad and he will get off on subduing you. Feel free to do whatever you’d like to avoid him. I’m sure he can give you motivations if you don’t fight hard enough.”

Anna looked at him with sad eyes. “Is this all I’ve ever been to you, Master?” she whispered, not knowing where the question came from.

His eyes narrowed. “What are you talking about?”

“When I was younger, I thought you adored me.” She swallowed. “Was it all a lie?”

She saw a flicker of emotion in his eyes and then it was gone. “I did care for you, Anna. More than I should have. But, this was my ultimate purpose. Why I claimed you at birth. Why I....” He paused and studied her. “Why I killed your parents.”

Anna's eyes widened and filled with tears. Her mouth moved in shock until she strangulated out her words. “You..? You..? But....” She shook her head. “No, they crashed. Off the bridge.”

Devin grinned. “Of course they did. A huge SUV slammed into them and helped them off.”

Tears filled her eyes and she trembled. “Why?”

“Because your father was beginning to get suspicious. I couldn’t allow him to take you from me. My plans were already in motion. That, and it was time to start turning you into a sex addict. Your whole life has been in my hands, Anna. From the moment I met your mother I knew she was special. When she met your father and married, I knew I had to take

advantage of the opportunity.” He gave her a wicked grin. “Don’t feel bad. I killed my own parents as well.”

Anna stared at him in horror. Why was she horrified? He had killed Ben in front of her. Why should it surprise her to learn that he had killed her parents? He would kill and do whatever it took to...do whatever he wanted to do. “Why?” she asked again. “Why do you need so much power?”

Devin laughed. “You want me to soliloquize like an evil villain? Tell you how horrible my father was? How my mother neglected me? No, my mother loved me and my father was good to me. But he was weak. The other Elders manipulated him into doing things he knew were weak decisions, which would diminish the role of the Elder. I detest weakness.” He looked at her. “You would have been a strong woman, which is why it pleases me to see you beg and plead and cry. To see you terrified when you look at me.” He stood and rolled his eyes. “Fuck, I do sound like an evil villain.” He turned her over and knelt between her legs. “Oh, well. Might as well enjoy the moment.” She heard him unzip his pants and felt his hard cock press against her ass hole.

“Please, Master. Don’t.”

He laughed and thrust forward, ripping her open. Anna screamed in pain. He held her hair, pulling her head back and ramming himself over and over into her bleeding hole, and he didn’t stop until he shouted out his climax. He fell to her side and lay on his back.

“Fuck that felt good,” he murmured and caressed her ass cheek, making her wince in pain. “Go clean yourself up,” he said, smacking her ass hard enough to leave a red mark.

Anna limped to the bathroom and found a washcloth, wet it, and pressed it against her torn opening. She leaned forward and put her head down on the vanity and cried. How quickly things changed.

Devin yelled to her from the bedroom. “Bring a towel. I don’t want you bleeding on the bed.”

She grabbed a hand towel and limped back into the bedroom. Anna saw Devin’s cock had drying blood on it. From her. Was this what it would be like from now on?

He pulled her onto the bed with the towel under her hips and then lay down between her legs. “Kaveh will be here later, but I want a taste now.” He began eating her with a fervor. He bit and sucked and licked. Occasionally he would bring a finger down and tap at her sore hole, making her cry out in pain. She struggled to get free and he held her arms down over her thighs to hold her in place. He licked her until her skin was raw. Then he stood and went into the bathroom.

He came out a few minutes later dressed in a suit and tie. “I have to go into work for a few hours. Kaveh will be here sometime to fuck you. Be in position on your knees when I get home.” He turned and strode out of the room. She stared at the empty doorway for a minute and then began to sob.

She cried for her parents, for Wilhelm and Kurt, for Alex. She always thought things couldn’t possibly get any worse, but they always did. She was tempted to call Wilhelm, but didn’t want to bother him with her troubles. It would just make him feel terrible that he couldn’t do anything to help. So she just lay there and cried until she fell asleep.

Chapter Forty-Four

“Wake up, Daughter.”

Anna’s eyes snapped open at the unfamiliar voice. She looked up to see Kaveh standing at the foot of the bed wearing white linen pants and no shirt. His broad chest gleamed bronze as he stood there, watching her with his golden eyes.

“K-Kaveh,” she stuttered, afraid at the way he was looking at her.

He grinned. “I am here to play.”

“Play?”

“Yes. You fight me and I end up with my cock in your pussy after I subdue you.”

“Oh,” she said softly. She looked up at him, saw the impatience in his eyes, and scooted off the bed, keeping her eyes on him the whole time.

“If you fight me well, I will keep my cock a normal man’s size. If you don’t, I will make sex with me very painful in many ways.”

“I don’t know how to fight,” she said softly.

Kaveh frowned. “You start by running, trying to stay away from me. When I catch you, you try to get away using all your strength.”

“It seems a rather pointless exercise,” she commented.

“For you, maybe, except to keep the sex less painful than it could be. For me, it is play. I like to play.”

Anna glanced at the door. “Run?”

Kaveh nodded.

Anna took a breath and ran out of the room. She heard Kaveh laugh and then his footsteps behind her a few minutes later. She ran down the stairs and into the family room, hiding behind a couch and catching her breath.

“Oh, hiding. Very good.” He laughed again. She saw him in the reflection of the window coming closer. When he stepped around the back of the couch, she leapt up and ran around the other side and out of the room.

He chased her for an hour, all through the house. He caught her a few times and then let her go. Finally, Anna collapsed in the entryway, exhausted. She lay her head on the cool floor and waited for Kaveh to find her. She couldn’t run any longer.

He picked her up and carried her, over his shoulder, back upstairs and into “her” bedroom. He flopped her onto her back on the bed and looked down at her.

“Good playing. I may even allow you to enjoy yourself.”

He pulled his pants off and Anna stared, exhausted, at his hard cock. So thick and long. She was so tired, she couldn’t think of anything except sleep, but he didn’t care. He turned her over onto her hands and knees. His fingers brushed her tender hole.

“Looks like Devin had some fun with you already today.”

Anna hung her head, but didn’t say anything.

He grabbed hold of her hips and rammed himself inside her with one strong thrust. Anna’s head came up and she grunted as he pounded himself into her. She was still raw from Devin’s tongue. He reached around her and played with her clit and she moaned.

“Come, Daughter,” Kaveh commanded.

Anna strained and then felt her orgasm crash over her. Kaveh pulled at her hair and she lifted up her upper body. He held her against him as she squirmed and cried out a long, drawn-out orgasm. He let her fall forward and pumped himself deep inside her and then shouted out as he came. She could feel him pulsing inside her, emptying his cum deep into her body.

When he was done he pulled out and she collapsed onto the bed. He didn't say anything before he walked away and out of the room. Anna glanced up at the clock. It was five-thirty. Devin would be home soon. She could close her eyes for a few minutes....

Anna's eyes snapped open as she heard footsteps on the stairs. *Devin!!*

She jumped off the bed and sprinted into the other room, skidding to her knees on the carpet seconds before Devin walked in. Her chest heaved from the exertion and he came to stand in front of her. He unzipped his pants and pulled her up by her hair so she could take his cock into her mouth. He held her head still and moved his hips to slowly fuck her mouth. He groaned as he hit her throat and pushed down into it.

Anna swallowed, trying not to choke, and he moaned loudly. His movements quickened, fucking her throat hard and hurting her, but she just squeezed her eyes shut and took it. What else could she do? Finally he groaned loudly and came in her mouth, and she swallowed his cum then licked him clean.

"Good girl," he murmured. "Did she please you?" Devin asked to the room.

"Yes, and I rewarded her." It was Kaveh. She hadn't realized he was there. Did he know she was late? "Her pussy is delightful."

Devin pulled her by her hair to her feet. "Yes, it is, isn't it?"

He pushed her back onto the bed and spread her thighs apart. "Beautiful," he murmured, tracing his finger along the tender lips. He leaned down and licked slowly from her slit to her clit, making her shudder.

He straightened and smiled. “Put a robe on and come to dinner. I’ll have dessert after.” He glanced at Kaveh. “Dinner?”

Kaveh shook his head. “I’ll see you tomorrow.” And he disappeared.

Anna stood in shock, still not used to Immortals and their disappearing. Devin slapped her face. “Robe. Dinner. Or you won’t eat.”

“Yes, Master,” she said softly and walked quickly into the other room for her robe.

They ate in the kitchen. Devin read on his iPad and Anna stared at her food. She needed to eat. For strength and for the baby. Wilhelm’s baby. She allowed herself a tiny smile and felt her appetite return. She carried Wilhelm’s precious child. That would keep her going.

When they went upstairs, Devin lay her down on the bed and licked at her pussy for what seemed like hours. When she started struggling against him because it was hurting, he tied her ankles to her wrists and held her down. He fucked her hard when he was done and then allowed her to go to sleep in his bed. He left the room and she was asleep instantly with her hand on her stomach as a reminder of the happiness she’d had only that morning.

The next morning, Devin woke her by pulling her head down to his cock by her hair. She sucked him off, swallowed and then he left to get ready for work. She fell back to sleep and he woke her before he left.

“You are not to go anywhere or talk to anyone. Kaveh will come sometime this afternoon. Please him well.”

“Yes, Master,” she said softly and he turned and left the room. She put her head back on the pillow and fell back to sleep.

She woke early afternoon and went downstairs to find something to eat. Julie, the housekeeper, made her a sandwich and a salad and Anna ate it silently at the table. When she was done, she went upstairs to take a shower and then lay back down in Devin's bed to await Kaveh.

When he arrived, he immediately got on the bed and went after her, but wouldn't let her escape. She fought him as best as she could and he just laughed at her, like he was having a good time. She didn't have the strength to fight for long and it angered him. He turned her over and pressed an enormous cock inside her sore pussy. She screamed in pain and tried to get away as he stretched her wide and delved slowly into her body.

"You're going to feel me in your throat, Daughter," he growled and pressed in until she cried out in shock as he hit something. "What the...?" he pulled out and thrust in and was stopped at a point. He repeated the motion, each time with incredible pain to Anna.

He grabbed her shoulder and turned her over, eyes flashing golden fire. "You may not refuse me entry," he snarled.

"I'm not," she whimpered.

He spread her legs and pushed in to the point where it hurt. Anna tried to wiggle away, but he held her still. "Stop."

He put his hand on her stomach and then glared at her. "You are with child. Your body is protecting him."

"It's a him?" she asked with a faint smile.

"You knew?" he snapped

Anna stared at him in fright and then slowly nodded.

A sickening grin spread over his face. "Devin will not be pleased. You will be punished." He put his hand in the air and a golden chain appeared. He wrapped it around her wrist and then around the bedpost. "You cannot run away, so do not bother trying." He stood and disappeared.

Anna reached for the covers and huddled beneath them, awaiting her fate. What would Devin say? He would be angry, of course. But he couldn't do anything about it. It was done, and obviously well protected. "Wilhelm," she breathed, and closed her eyes.

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Chapter Forty-Five

Wilhelm grumbled as he heard his phone ringing. He looked at the clock. Who the hell would be calling at two o'clock in the morning? *Anna!* He reached quickly for his phone. It was her. And a video call?

Ilsa stirred as he pushed the button. "Anna? Is everything okay?" he asked, worry filling him.

He saw her pale face and then the picture blurred and Devin appeared. "Hello, Wilhelm," he said with a wicked smile.

Ilsa sat up next to him. "Why are you calling me from her phone, Devin?" Wilhelm demanded.

"Because I wanted to make sure you woke for an important event." The picture jiggled again and Wilhelm could see Anna restrained on a large bed. Her wrists and ankles were tied to the bedposts and her eyes were closed.

Devin appeared again, but further away. Someone else was holding the phone. "You thought you could get her pregnant to what? Have an heir? Prevent me from getting her pregnant?"

"The baby is well protected, Devin. Let things be."

"Oh, no. I can't do that. I need her baby, Wilhelm. But in order to do that, I need to get rid of yours."

A sickening feeling spread through Wilhelm's stomach as he saw Devin walk to the bed. "Anna, say hello to Wilhelm."

Anna's eyes opened and he could see the terror in them. "Wilhelm," she whispered, tugging at her bonds.

"Ian, move so he can see everything," Devin instructed.

The picture moved so he could see Anna's pussy. It was red and swollen. What had been going on?

“You are so naïve, Wilhelm. You think a pregnancy would really stop me from doing what I need to do?”

“No, Devin. Don’t!” Wilhelm shouted as Devin’s hand moved towards Anna’s slit.

Devin grinned back at him and began working his hand into Anna’s body. She writhed and groaned as his fingers disappeared. Wilhelm watched and listened in horror as his hand disappeared into her body and Anna began to groan in pain.

Wilhelm felt so helpless, watching from a distance. He couldn’t believe what he was seeing. Devin was going to take her baby with his bare hands. He knew he’d done it at the Gatherings from Aaron’s reports, but to see it firsthand...it was revolting.

Anna sobbed and begged Devin to stop and Wilhelm’s eyes filled with tears. He wanted to turn it off, to hang up the phone. But he couldn’t. He could only sit and watch this disgusting person take his child from Anna’s womb.

Suddenly Devin frowned. He pushed forward and Anna screamed in pain. His lips pressed together. “I can’t get in.”

Wilhelm saw his forearm muscles flexing and Anna try and jerk away from him.

“Fuck.” He removed his hand and frowned.

Relief spread through Wilhelm’s body. Anna’s body was protecting the baby. He was about to say something when Devin spoke again.

“Get the knife.”

Both Anna’s and Wilhelm’s eyes widened. He heard Ilsa gasp next to him.

“Ilsa,” he said very quietly in German. “Don’t. You shouldn’t watch.”

She crawled behind him and wrapped her arms around his waist, leaning her head and naked breasts against his back. He knew by her movements that she was trying not to cry.

Anna was moaning in pain and Devin sat between her legs and looked at him. "Wilhelm. You should know better than to cross me. Especially in my own territory. Now, Anna will suffer because of your arrogance."

"Her body is protecting itself. Let the baby be, Devin." He spoke in a commanding tone.

Devin laughed. "You'd like that, wouldn't you? That's what you were counting on?" he laughed again. "No, Wilhelm. I need that womb in a few weeks and your DNA is in my way. It must be removed."

"You said yourself, you can't get in. You'll kill her if you use a knife."

"That's why I have Immortals with me. If she dies, they'll bring her back. Or just prevent her from dying in the first place. That's better. Less energy wasted." His cavalier attitude sickened Wilhelm.

His poor Anna. She was already in so much pain. He could hear her still moaning. God, had it really been in arrogance that he got her pregnant? His own pride over her well-being?

"Please don't," Wilhelm said softly. "Please Devin, have mercy on her. For once."

"Mercy is for weak men, Wilhelm. I am not weak."

"It takes a strong man to offer mercy."

Devin laughed. "You keep telling yourself that."

A man walked into the room and handed Devin a knife. He held it up for Wilhelm to see. It looked like a ceremonial knife. Its blade was long and thin with a jeweled handle.

"Say goodbye to your son," Devin said and knelt between Anna's spread legs. He flicked her clit as he inserted the thin blade between her

swollen folds. She jumped and jerked with every flick and cried out in pain as her body moved around the blade.

Ilsa whimpered behind Wilhelm's back.

Suddenly Anna let out an ear-piercing scream and her body stiffened. "No!" she screamed.

The blade was almost all the way in and Devin gave it a final thrust, making Anna scream again. He thrust in and out several times and blood began to trickle out of her body. Anna kept screaming and moving, making the blade cut her even more than it already was. Devin pulled it out and the trickle became a stream.

Wilhelm swallowed back vomit as he watched Devin, once again, push his hand inside Anna's body and she screamed even louder. Her screams pushed the limits of the phone's speaker and echoed in his dark bedroom. He wanted to turn the volume down, but couldn't bring himself to. It would be denying Anna's suffering. He couldn't imagine the pain she was in. Her screams and struggle became stronger and her body stiffened and Devin grinned. He pulled his arm out, holding a bloody mass.

"God, no," Wilhelm pleaded uselessly.

"Here is your son, Wilhelm," Devin said holding up his bloody hand to the phone. Anna was sobbing in the background, blood streaming out of her. She strained against the cuffs, though with less energy than before.

Wilhelm couldn't hold himself back. He dropped the phone onto the bed and fell to the floor on his hands and knees and vomited multiple times. He could hear Ilsa sniffling and Devin laughing while Anna sobbed. He had failed Anna. God, the poor girl.

"Turn off the phone, Ilsa," he pleaded in a soft voice. "Please." He stared at the black floor, surrounded by the sour smell of the contents of his

stomach. There was movement on the bed and the room became silent. The blue glow of the phone faded and then the room went dark.

“Wilhelm....” Ilsa said softly. She turned on the bedside light and knelt beside him. “Oh, Wilhelm.” She stroked his head for a few moments and then stood and went into the bathroom.

He heard the water running and she returned a few minutes later and ran a cool cloth on his forehead and over his face. He sat up and leaned back against the bed, his heart shredded. Ilsa spoke softly on the phone, telling Lukas that Wilhelm had been ill.

Wilhelm couldn’t push the horrible images from his mind. Anna. His precious baby. He had even been thinking of names this morning. Tears ran down his cheeks and onto his bare chest.

Ilsa left again and returned with his robe. “Come, let’s sleep in another room.” He stood absently and let her help him into his robe. She took his hand and led him out of the bedroom into a nearby guest room.

He sat down hard on the bed and stared at the ground, utterly in shock at what had happened. He rarely used the word evil, but that was the only word he could come up with to describe what he had just seen. Devin was evil. To reach into a woman’s body and abort a baby with his own hands? Only an evil man could do such a thing.

“Poor Anna,” he whispered. “My poor, poor Anna.” He looked bleary-eyed at his wife.

Ilsa sat next to him and held him tightly. “He really...did that to her?”

“Yes. He’s a monster and must be stopped.”

“But how? Alex is....”

“I know, *Mausi*. But there is always a way. We just have to find it.” He would avenge his son’s death. It would be Wilhelm’s pleasure to kill Devin

with his bare hands. Once again, he was thankful that Anna wasn't bonded to him. Maybe they needed to call in the assassins.

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Chapter Forty-Six

Anna huddled in her bed at the Manor, eyes blankly staring out the window as the sun rose. *Her baby...Wilhelm's baby...gone.* Her pillow was wet from her tears. Her hair was a tangled mess around her face. Though the Immortals had healed physically, her mind and heart were a pulpy mess.

Her baby...Wilhelm's baby....

She hugged her knees into her chest, wishing she could die.

But as she lay there, her anger toward Devin grew. He had taken away everything good in her life. *Everything!* In a sudden fit of rage, she stood and looked around for something to throw. She picked up the lamp next to her bed and threw it across the room. The sound as the ceramic shattered against the marble fireplace was fiercely satisfying. She smiled as she pulled trinkets off the shelves and threw them across the room, filling the air with the sounds of wreckage. She threw a metal statue and hit the mirror, and it exploded into tiny pieces that caught the light as they fell to the ground.

Anything she could pick up, she threw. The wooden clock on the mantle went through one of the windows. The brass vase on the table made a satisfying *clang* as it hit the fireplace, but she liked the sound of glass hitting the masonry, and went into the bathroom to find more items to throw. She gathered up a bunch of glass bottles, dumped them on her bed and hurled them one at a time at the fireplace. The room filled with the scents of roses and musk and vanilla.

Midway through the arc with one of the larger bottles in her hand, her forearm hit a barrier. She whirled around to see Ian holding her arm in the air with a tight grip.

“Let me go,” she growled through gritted teeth, struggling like a wild animal against him.

She gave him a ferocious glare and yanked with all her might and was shocked when she pulled loose. Stepping back, she hurled the bottle at Ian’s face, missing him by millimeters as he ducked out of the way. She gave a vicious roar and grabbed another bottle to hurl at him when he lunged for her, pushing her to the ground and holding her hands above her head.

She cursed and yelled and screamed at him, using all her strength to escape. She had almost slipped away when two other men ran in and grabbed her. Each held her by an arm and Ian held her legs, panting. There was a bruise on Ian’s face where she had gotten in a swing.

She continued to struggle, once again almost freeing herself when more men came in and put cuffs on her wrists and ankles and chained her, spread eagle, to her bed. She continued to curse and scream, yanking at the chains, making them dig into the wood of the bed.

Ian stood over her with a bewildered look on his face as she pulled and cursed at him. He looked in alarm as a crack was developing at the bottom bedpost and shouted something at one of the men who ran out of the room.

Anna heard the crack and looked down at her feet. She grinned maniacally and gave a great yank with her leg, and the bedpost cracked and fell over. Ian leapt forward and kept it from falling on her. She continued to kick and scream. The other post was cracking and he lay down on her legs, but her rage consumed her, making her stronger than she’d ever been before and she kicked him off.

Her arms weren’t nearly as strong as her legs and all she could do was pull at them. A searing pain shot through her arm from her right elbow at one yank and she screamed in pain and frustration when her right arm wouldn’t work anymore.

The man Ian had yelled at rushed back in with a syringe. Anna saw it and screamed in primal frustration. Three men held her down as Ian pushed it into her neck. A moment later she felt dizzy and her eyelids drooped.

Thirty seconds later, she was still.

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Chapter Forty-Seven

Devin looked around the destroyed room. Glass lay everywhere. One bedpost lay diagonally on the bed, another one had a thick crack running halfway up the post. The wood was worn away at the top where her arms had been cuffed.

He turned to Ian and looked at the bruises on his face and arms. “She did all this?” he asked, bemused.

Ian nodded. “She was like a wild animal. I’d never seen anything like it.”

It had taken multiple men as strong as Ian to subdue her. A twinge of fear ran through Devin’s body and he quickly pushed it aside. He would fear no woman. He needed to subdue Anna and subdue her quickly, before she realized what she had done.

“Have the room cleaned up and put back together as best as can be,” Devin said, looking at the shattered mirror and window. He shuddered. This hadn’t been expected. He needed to stop it before it got out of hand. “Where is she?”

“Shackled in the dungeon. She was still passed out when you arrived, but it won’t last for much longer.”

Devin nodded. “Make sure the gossip isn’t spread. I don’t need the other girls getting unhealthy ideas in their head.”

“Yes, sir.”

“She’s healed?”

“Her arm? No, sir. I didn’t want to do that without your permission.”

“Her arm? What happened to her arm?”

“I believe she dislocated it when she was pulling against the chains.”

Devin frowned. “No. Leave it be for now. But the rest of her? From the abortion?”

“Yes, sir. She’s fine as far as that goes. Physically.”

Devin nodded. “Good. Give orders for the room and then meet me in the dungeon with the juice. I will not allow her to think that what she did is okay.” He turned on his heel and walked out of the room, heading down to the dungeon.

Devin took a deep breath before opening the heavy wooden door to the dungeon. It was dimly lit, with stone walls and sconces that gave a dull yellow light. It was good for setting the mood for torture.

Anna lay on the floor across the room. She was naked, lying on her side with one arm stretched upward to cushion her head. One leg curled up towards her chest and the other stretched out below. Her wrists and ankles were shackled and attached to thick chains coming out of the wall. Her arms and upper body were covered in bruises and cuts.

She was sleeping, or at least he thought she was. Her chest rose and fell with deep breaths and her eyes were closed. But as he walked forward, he saw her body tense slightly. Maybe she wasn’t asleep. He paused and watched, but she didn’t relax again.

He eyed the chains and shackles again. They were made from thick metal, not often used anymore, but Devin was glad to have them. He’d used them on Alex. Devin smiled at the irony.

“Anna?” he said softly.

Her eyes snapped open and he could see the wildness in them. They glowed green in the dim room as she stared at him with such hate it almost

gave him chills. Almost. Devin lifted his chin in defiance. He would not be intimidated by a little girl. He moved to the side of the room and pulled a bullwhip from the wall. She watched his movements and gave a small shudder when he turned around, whip in hand.

Devin smiled. Her sweet, human nature was still there; she still feared the bite of the whip. For a moment, he saw the fear in her eyes and then she shook her head and it disappeared, replaced with the glowing, green rage. She sat up slowly, her chest heaving beneath her perfect breasts. Her nipples were tight and dark and the thought of subduing her made Devin's cock twitch. Yes, he would subdue her and then rape her. How satisfying would that be? Make her cry out in passion as he took her body back as his own against her will. The corners of his mouth lifted slightly at the thought.

He took a few steps forward and he heard her growl. His brow arched. He had never imagined seeing her like this. Perhaps he should invite Kaveh. He would certainly enjoy watching. Maybe helping. It would be interesting to see Immortal battle Immortal.

He loosened the whip in his hand, preparing to use it, and stepped forward. She bared her teeth at him and growled again. Suddenly she lunged at him and only the heavy chains stopped her from grabbing him. He didn't leap back. He wouldn't give her that satisfaction. She looked behind her in bewilderment and pulled at the chains while glaring at him and growling.

"Down girl," he said, snapping the whip and catching her across her stomach.

She didn't flinch and her eyes flashed with more anger.

Fuck.

He snapped the whip several more times, hitting her breasts and belly and thighs. The only flinch he was rewarded with was when he hit her

across the cheek. He was very good at using his whip and knew exactly how to hit what he aimed at. He could snap her head off if he wanted to, but that would be counterproductive.

Her cheek split open and she fell to her knees and held it. He looked her over with satisfaction. She looked up at him, the glow softer and seductive. Such beautiful eyes. So sad. So alluring....

“No!” he shouted, startled to realize he was being sucked into her seduction. He stepped back and whipped her several times, cutting into her skin. She howled and pushed back against the wall, huddling there like a cornered tigress. She didn’t seem to notice her dislocated shoulder.

He leaned against a heavy wooden table, arms crossed, and watched her. She was fascinating like this. Wild beauty. Wild rage. God, he wanted to fuck her right now. But he had to subdue her first, or he might lose his cock when he tried. He wasn’t stupid.

She growled, eyes glowing with rage again. He lifted the whip but before he could strike, the door opened and Ian walked in. He stopped short when he saw Anna, and stared with his mouth open.

“Holy shit,” Ian mumbled, and looked at Devin with wide eyes. “Did you know this could happen?”

Devin smiled, amused. “No, but it’s quite intriguing, isn’t it? Go find Kaveh and invite him to watch. He might like it.”

Ian handed him a leather case and bowed his head slightly. He glanced once more at Anna’s wild form and then backed out of the room.

Devin opened the case to find four syringes. Three were his ‘nerve juice’ and one was something to knock her out in case things got out of hand.

He held the case up so Anna could see. “Do you see these, Anna? You recognize these syringes, don’t you?”

Anna's head jerked as she stared, wide-eyed at him. Her pupils were non-existent and her irises were like two emeralds. Her dark, tangled hair stood out at odd angles, making her look inhuman, which she was at the moment. She glanced at the leather case and bared her teeth again, chest heaving.

He would give her the shot, but first he had to figure out how to get close enough to do it. He watched her as he walked to the wall and hung up the whip. She didn't blink, but stared at him with her disturbing eyes. He picked up a cat-o-nine-tails and walked back to Anna. This would make him get closer to her, but would also cause more pain.

She lunged at him again and he whipped the cat at her, catching her breasts with the knots at the end. She howled and pulled against the restraints, but didn't back down. He whipped her again and again until her body was a mass of welts and cuts. She let out a last scream and then fell to her knees, panting and whimpering.

Devin quickly pulled out a syringe and jabbed it into her neck. She screamed and reared up, but fell backwards and lay still on the ground, staring up at the ceiling, afraid to move.

"I'm impressed, Devin." Kaveh came to stand next to him and looked down. "Not many humans can subdue them when they're like that."

"It happens often?" Devin asked, staring at the shivering form beneath him.

"No. Not anymore. It used to. She will respect you for subduing her."

"I'm not done with her yet." He chuckled. "Oh, no. we've only just begun." He glanced at Kaveh with a wicked smile. "Would you care to join me?"

Kaveh grinned. "Of course."

When they left her, hours later, Anna lay on the ground of the dungeon in a puddle of her own blood. She was still alive, but barely. She had been raped repeatedly and beaten mercilessly. There were few places on her body that weren't red or bloodied. Her jaw was dislocated and her pussy and ass were torn and bleeding. She had cuts across her belly and legs. They had whipped the bottoms of her feet and dislocated a hip as well. Her nipples were bleeding from being pulled and squeezed and stuck with needles. She had three puncture wounds at her neck from Devin's syringes. He had used all three injections on her at once and even breathing hurt. The blood trickling down her body hurt. Not to mention the pain of the wounds he'd inflicted.

She stared up at the black ceiling, unmoving. She couldn't move even if she wanted to. Her limbs wouldn't work. She didn't remember what had caused Devin's anger, but knew it was severe. She'd come to her senses with severe pain coursing through her body to find herself fighting against Devin. She'd stopped fighting instantly, but he continued to punish her. Kaveh and the other Immortals had raped her over and over again until she bled. And oh, the pain! Incredible pain that had been far worse than anything before.

But they had left, finally. Left her here to die. At least she hoped so. She wanted to cry, but it would do no good.

She had a vague memory of anger and rage. Fighting against Devin and Ian. And she had won! And then she had lost. Devin had won in the end. He would always win. There was no hope.

Once again, she resolved, if she lived, that she would be a good slave and try not to anger him.

She hoped she would die though.

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Chapter Forty-Eight

Anna lay on the cold floor in pain. The blood had dried and stuck to her skin. When the nerve juice had worn off, she was able to sleep fitfully, but the pain of her joints made it difficult. She couldn't turn onto her side; she couldn't call for help. Would she die? Would she get her wish? Maybe she would be reunited with Alex in death. The thought warmed her and she let the darkness consume her.

He looked up as she appeared in the room, a book in his hands.

He smiled, his white teeth peeking out from beneath his thick golden beard. Did she remember what he looked like without his beard?

“Anna...” he said softly, closing the book and putting it on the table next to him. He walked to her and sat on the bed near her.

She didn’t speak, but just looked at him. She didn’t know if she could speak, her body felt so mangled.

“What’s wrong, Schatzi?” he asked softly.

“I got angry,” she said, not knowing why or where the words were coming from. “I got angry and frightened Devin. And he punished me.”

His eyes widened in surprise. “You frightened Devin?”

She spoke as if she were in a trance, staring into his eyes. She didn’t know if what she was saying was true, but she spoke the words anyways. “I was carrying your father’s child and Devin took it. He told me he had killed my parents.” She closed her eyes. “I got angry. I became inhuman. I attacked Ian. He couldn’t hold me and I almost got away.” She opened her eyes and gave him a faint smile. “I was so strong I broke the bedposts on my bed. Three men had to hold me down.” She shuddered. “They chained

me to the wall and Devin punished me. I fought him, but he punished me. And won.” She fell to the floor on her knees. “There is no hope. I cannot fight him again. He won. My body lies in the dungeon, broken and bleeding.” She looked up. “Am I dead with you?” she asked with hope in her eyes.

Alex looked into her eyes with such sadness it brought tears to her eyes. He slid off the bed and went to his knees in front of her.

He reached out hesitantly. “You are with me,” he whispered.

He brushed her cheek with his hand and his eyes widened when she didn’t disappear.

He leaned forward and pressed his lips to hers, kissing her with abandon. His hands tangled in her hair and he held her close to him. His heart pounded in his chest and she could feel it. She could feel his arms around her and she wept with joy.

“Alex,” she sobbed. “Oh, Alex...”

Chapter Forty-Nine

Anna screamed as her body was lifted from the floor. The sound of the dried blood being torn from her back was sickening. Her eyes opened and she saw Ian's face, his handsome face marred by a bruise on his cheek. She lost strength and her head lolled back. He lifted his elbow to bring her head to rest against his chest.

He carried her like a limp ragdoll up several flights of stairs to her room. It had been cleaned and the bed and window replaced. The mirror was still gone and the shelves were bare. He carried her into the bathroom and put her in the bathtub that filled with warm water. Maggie was there and she held Anna upright as Ian removed his jacket and shirt and then took her from Maggie.

The maid gently washed Anna as Ian held her head above the water. Maggie scrubbed the blood off Anna's body and soon the water was littered with brown dots. Maggie emptied the tub and refilled it with clean water before Anna was completely clean. When Anna's hair had been washed, Maggie held a towel open and Ian lifted her from the water and carried her to the bed in the other room.

Anna tried to speak, but her jaw wouldn't move.

"Don't try to speak, Anna. Your jaw is dislocated. Can you swallow?"

Anna's eyes widened, frightened of what he wanted from her.

"I was going to have Maggie get you some soup, but if you can't swallow, I won't."

Anna closed her eyes in relief. She swallowed several times and gave a shallow nod. Ian looked behind him and nodded.

"I gave you a shot of painkiller before I picked you up. Are you in pain?"

She shook her head slightly. Her mouth lagged open.

Ian smiled sadly. "I had no idea you were so strong."

Anna frowned with her eyebrows, the only part of her face she seemed to have control over.

"Do you remember fighting me?"

Anna shook her head. She didn't remember anything after Devin...tears filled her eyes when she remembered the lost baby. *Wilhelm!*

Something stirred inside her. A red-hot heat. But she quickly doused it. She didn't know what it was, but knew it was dangerous.

Ian watched her carefully. "Devin said if you had...reformed...he would have Kaveh heal you this afternoon. He'll be here in a little while."

Anna closed her eyes, thankful not to be in pain anymore. She didn't remember what exactly had happened, but she remembered the pain. Severe pain and chaos.

Maggie returned a few minutes later and Ian fed Anna soup, one spoonful at a time. He made sure it was cool, put the spoon into her mouth and held her jaw so she could swallow. It was slow going, and Anna looked at him repeatedly with gratefulness in her eyes.

She had eaten half of the soup when Devin walked in. Maggie quickly grabbed the tray and left the room. Ian stood and walked to the other side of the room while Devin looked down at her and frowned. He gazed deeply into her eyes, reading her thoughts. Anna trembled and tried not to look away. Finally he nodded. "Are you in pain?"

She shook her head.

He looked back at Ian. "How long will the pain medicine last?"

"Another hour or two."

“When she’s hurting again, call for Kaveh.” Devin turned back to Anna. “I want her to remember what it feels like to have a broken body. Then he can heal her.” He turned to leave. “Bring her back to my house this evening.”

“Yes, sir.”

Devin left the room and Ian came back to sit next to her. “Do you want to rest?”

Anna nodded. It felt so nice being in a bed.

He carefully lifted her and put her under the covers. “Sleep. I’ll be back in a little bit.”

The pain returned fiercely, waking Anna in an instant and making her cry out in a pathetic mewling whimper. Everything hurt. Her feet were on fire, her jaw, arm and hip throbbed. Her ribs felt like they were disjoined and even her insides hurt as if they had been jostled around. She strained against the pain and shifted her position, trying to find one that didn’t hurt, but there was none.

Ian was by her side a moment later. “I will get Kaveh.”

Anna’s eyes watered as she lay there, desperate for release from the pain.

Kaveh came a while later and stared down at her. Anna cowered under his glare. He reached out to touch her jaw and the pain subsided and she could move it again. Slowly he worked his way down her body until there was no more pain and she relaxed.

“You will repay me for healing you,” Kaveh stated.

“How?” Anna asked softly.

“I will fuck you now. Turn over.”

Anna turned onto her belly and Kaveh knelt behind her. “I can go fully into your body now that there is no child.”

He shuddered in ecstasy and nudged her legs apart. He stretched out on top of her and she felt his cock at her entrance. He held her hands above her head and held her body down with his as he slowly pushed himself inside of her.

She sighed at first. His girth felt good and she wiggled her hips beneath him. But he kept pushing in, deeper and deeper, like when he would impregnate her. Anna gasped in pain as he pushed deeper.

“Oh, yes,” Kaveh moaned. “That feels good.”

Her stomach cramped and she groaned in pain. “Please,” she gasped. “It hurts.”

“It hurts you. To me it feels...heavenly.” He began to move inside her and she groaned. “There are no female Immortals. If we want sex with a female, we must come here and find a human woman.” He bit the back of her neck. “You half-Immortals are the most desirable.” He thrust forward. “You can take us fully and recover. If I did to a human woman what I do to you, I would kill her. Not that killing a woman with sex now and then isn’t appealing.” He chuckled and Anna shivered. “But it’s not repeatable. I can use you over and over again. Devin promised me I could use you as I liked. And I intend to.”

Chapter Fifty

Ian drove her back to Devin's house that evening. Devin met her at the door and dismissed Ian.

"Have you eaten dinner?" he asked.

She wondered at the question. "No, Master."

He took her into the kitchen and Julie brought them dinner.

Anna ate silently and Devin watched her.

"I trust there will be no more problems between us?" he asked as she was finishing.

Anna looked up into his obsidian eyes. "No, Master," she said softly.

He nodded in approval. "Good. Because if I ever see a hint of you acting like that again, I will make your life even more miserable."

"How is that possible?" she asked softly and then looked up at Devin, afraid that she'd angered him, but he merely smiled at her.

"You have friends, Anna. I know I can do little more to you, but I can go after your friends. Jenna was quite the treat all those years ago. Perhaps I would rape and kill her in front of you. You know I would have no qualms about doing so." He spoke so matter-of-factly, it made Anna shiver.

"I will be good, Master," she said hurriedly. "I promise."

He narrowed his eyes. "I hope so."

He took her upstairs and Anna was surprised to see cuffs hanging from the ceiling above a table that wasn't there before. Chains hung from the table and a chair was next to it.

Devin grinned. "Do you like it? You moved too much the last time I ate you, and my shoulders grew sore laying between your legs, so I came up with this. Undress and crawl on up there."

Anna did as he told her to and clambered up onto the table. He reached up and cuffed her wrists above her head and adjusted her height so she had just a little bit of weight on her knees, which were spread apart and chained down to the table. Devin sat down in the chair and smiled. “Perfect. It’s much more proper to eat at a table than in bed, don’t you think?”

Anna didn’t answer and he leaned forward and began licking at her. Despite her discomfort, she found herself moaning as he flicked at her clit with his tongue.

“Stop wiggling, or I will shove a stick up your ass to keep you still,” Devin growled against her.

She held as still as she could, but found herself leaning into him, desiring release even as he ate her raw. But whenever she was close, he would move his tongue away. She grunted in frustration when he continued to deny her.

“Your orgasms are mine to give you, Anna. Your pussy is mine, remember? You don’t get an orgasm unless I say so.” He looked up at her with his mouth wet with her juices. He licked his lips and smiled. “You are delicious.”

He continued to lick and suck at her and her eyes filled with tears as it began to hurt. She grew tired and hung limply from her wrists. It felt like he was sucking the life out of her. Maybe he was. Her eyes closed and her head fell backwards.

When he finally uncuffed her, she fell backwards and would have hit her head, but Devin caught her and carried her to the bed. He undressed and fucked her as she lay limp on the bed.

Kaveh showed up a while later and looked at her. “You got it all out of her,” he commented.

Anna looked up at him with hooded eyes. She felt...empty. Not dead or sick just...like a part of her was missing.

“You do know she needs some of it to survive,” Kaveh said, frowning at Devin.

“So, give her some. What you give her, I want. I can’t help it if I drain her dry.”

Kaveh grunted in disapproval, but sat next to Anna and lowered his pants to reveal his cock. Anna’s eyes lit up as she saw him and reached for it with a heavy hand.

Devin laughed. “She knows what she needs. Just like a baby for its mother’s tit.”

Kaveh moved Anna down and lay next to her, his cock at mouth level. She pushed herself forward and lay her head on his muscular thigh and sucked eagerly on his massive cock. She was surprised when she tasted his cum almost immediately. He groaned and put his hand on her head as she sucked him eagerly, like a baby nurses his mother.

She felt her energy returning as she sucked him. Kaveh’s hand tightened on her head and he fucked her mouth and exploded in her mouth. She eagerly swallowed every drop he offered and then rolled onto her back. Was she glowing?

Devin looked at her hungrily and lunged at her, but Kaveh put out his hand. “If you want her to survive this, especially long term, you need to let her rest. Fuck her all you want, but don’t take anymore of her essence. She needs to replenish.”

Devin growled but sat back. “Fine.”

Kaveh looked at her. “Sleep, Daughter.”

She lay down and heard Devin and Kaveh arguing as she drifted off to sleep.

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“How am I supposed to get her out of there? She’s living with him.”

“When did that happen?”

“As I understand it, when she came home.”

“Fuck.” A pause. “You have to try. We only have a few weeks before he gets her pregnant. We can’t let that happen. He won’t be able to protect her if she’s pregnant. His powers are limited and we need them to be able to last. He can’t hide both.”

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Chapter Fifty-One

Devin nudged Anna's legs apart as she slept and thrust inside her. She opened her eyes in surprise as he held her hands by her head and fucked her hard and fast. She moved her hips, feeling the build inside her but he came before she found release. She hissed in frustration and he slapped her face.

"They are mine to give, Anna. Don't forget that." He rolled off her and stood. "Your car is in the garage. Your ballet things are in the other room. Use your *family* credit cards for lunch and whatever else you need. You will come home immediately after rehearsal, clean up and be ready for Kaveh when he arrives. Then you will wait for me in here as instructed previously." He looked her up and down. "Make sure you eat properly. I don't want you losing weight again." He turned and walked away.

Anna stood shakily next to the bed for a moment. It was seven. She had an hour and a half before she needed to get to the studio. "Shower," she whispered to herself, and headed into the other room.

She stood in the large shower and watched the glass steam up. So much had changed since she'd left a month ago. Could life become so completely different in so short a time? She'd lost Peter and a baby, but gained Wilhelm and Kurt. She made Kurt let go of her so he could find someone and be happy. And now she was in the prison of Devin's life and home. Would this be the rest of her life?

With Peter, she'd had some semblance of happiness, albeit not "real," even though it felt real most of the time. If only Devin were kinder, it would make this so much easier. Maybe if she was good, he would become nice again. Yes, that's what she would do. Be perfect for him and not give him a reason to be angry.

With that resolve, she finished her shower, got dressed and went downstairs to eat. Devin had already left for the day, but the housekeeper fixed Anna breakfast and then disappeared.

Anna drove Alex's car to the studio and went over Devin's rules in her head. Eat properly. Go home immediately after rehearsal. Behave. Let Kaveh chase her to please him. Don't go anywhere without permission. Don't fuck anyone. She sighed. She thought she could do it, but how often she had failed in the past!

Her phone beeped as she turned off the car. She pulled it out of her bag and looked. "Holy shit," she murmured. Thirty missed calls. Fifteen messages. Twenty texts?

She read through the texts. Most were from Wilhelm, wanting to know if she was okay. There were a few from Travis, also wanting to know if she was okay. She listened to the messages. Travis and Wilhelm again. Each message from Wilhelm's got more urgent. She hated that she'd caused him anxiety and quickly called him.

"Anna!" he exclaimed. "It is you, right?"

"Yes, Wilhelm. It's me. I'm sorry I didn't call. I just checked my phone and saw all your calls. I'm so sorry," she repeated.

"It is all right, Anna. I was just so worried about you." He sighed and said something in German off the phone. "Ilsa and Kurt are glad you are all right. Well, as all right as you can be."

"Yeah, I'm okay. Are you?" She blinked back tears at the loss of their baby. The events of the last few days had made her forget, but she remembered now and wanted to sob.

“I am much better now have heard your voice,” he said tenderly. “What he did, Anna...it is inexcusable...barbaric.”

“It’s Devin,” she said by way of explanation. It was what Devin did.

“Yes. It is.” Something in his voice gave her chills.

“Wilhelm, please don’t cross him. He’ll kill you. You know he will.”

Wilhelm didn’t answer and it frightened her.

“Wilhelm? Please. Promise me.”

“I cannot promise you, Anna.”

Her heart froze. “What did you do?”

“I will not tell you that, Anna. Please do not ask.”

“Please,” she begged. “Please Wilhelm. Don’t. Whatever you did, don’t. Undo it. Please, he’ll kill you. I can’t lose someone else I love. Think of your family.”

“I am thinking of my family, Anna,” he said in a low tone. “I am thinking about my son who was ripped out of your body. I am thinking about you, at his mercy and tortured for years.”

“Please undo it, Wilhelm,” she whispered.

“I am sorry, Anna. I cannot do that.”

Anna stared at her steering wheel. “I love you, Wilhelm,” she said softly. “Please be careful.”

“I love you, *Liebling*. So much.”

She looked at the clock in the dash. It was after eight thirty. “I have to go. Please...reconsider whatever it is you did, Wilhelm.”

“I will talk to you soon, Anna.” He disconnected before she could say anything else.

Anna walked into the dance room and sat down next to her customary place at the *barre*, blinking back tears. She had to get her mind off whatever Wilhelm had done or she would go crazy.

Nutcracker. Yes, she could think about that. Rehearsals began today. Who would dance the Nutcracker Prince now that Peter was gone? Travis maybe? He had been Snow King. Maybe Isaak would bump him up. She looked around at the other principles. They were all capable men, but they weren't Peter. Or Aaron for that matter. Both Peter and Aaron had that extra special "something" that made Anna wonder if there was Immortal blood running through their veins.

Her eyes caught on Justin. He was a very good dancer. He had been with the company for several years, but joined after Alex had died so he hadn't known her as she was before Alex's death. He seemed friendly enough but, because Peter hadn't been friends with him, they'd interacted very little.

He looked up from a stretch and saw her looking at him and smiled. His long brown hair flopped into his gray eyes and he brushed it away. Anna flushed and looked away. That was the last thing she needed, the attention of another man.

Travis arrived a few minutes later and dropped his bag next to her.
"Anna! You're here. Why didn't you call me?"

"I just got your messages this morning. I'm sorry." She didn't look up at him.

"Are you okay?"

Anna shrugged. "Yeah." And a host of other things.

"I'm so sorry, Anna." He squeezed her hand. "Wilhelm was so worried about you. He called and asked if I could get in touch with you, since he couldn't."

“I was...busy,” she said evasively. She still didn’t remember everything that happened. The memories were so fuzzy.

Travis made a face at her. “You missing Peter, too?”

Anna grimaced. “You know the whole thing was fake, right? I mean, we were together because Devin wanted it to be that way.”

“Yeah, I know. But I also know you guys ended up falling in love. You can’t fake that.”

She shrugged. “Story of my life. I wish I could stop these stupid feelings and be like a real Elder-Mistress,” she said softly.

“Oh, Anna. I’m so glad you’re not like them. I would hate to see you like that. So cold and distant.”

“I’ve tried that, haven’t I?” she laughed bitterly. “Never could pull it off. Too emotional.”

“Emotions make you human, Anna.”

“But I’m not supposed to be human.”

Travis looked at her sadly. “Anna, it’ll turn out all right, okay? Just...stay sweet. It’ll be okay.”

Anna gave him a bewildered look. How could he say that? There was no hope. There was only Devin. She shook her head and went back to stretching.

Chapter Fifty-Two

It happened in slow motion. Something told him to move and Devin pushed his chair back and bent down just as his window shattered and something hit his desk, sending splinters flying everywhere.

He looked up to see a bullet hole at the edge of his desk, the trajectory suggesting that it would have hit his head if he hadn't moved. He backed away quickly from the window. "Holy Fuck," was all he could say.

His secretary opened the door and gasped when she saw the shattered window. "Mr. Andersen, are you all right?" she asked in a frightened voice.

Devin looked at his desk and the window and began to laugh. Oh, this was rich. Someone had called out a hit on him.

Madison looked at him as if he were a madman. "I'll call the police," she said in a shaky voice and backed out of the office.

He nodded absently, but knew the police would never find the shooter. The Elders never gave up their assassins. They only did what they were told to do. Whoever the shooter was might even have done a job for him once before. If Devin hadn't moved, he would be dead.

He knew better than to go to the window and look out. Most likely the shooter was still there, so he went out and sat in the waiting area near Madison's desk.

He watched as she hung up the phone and looked at him nervously. "May I get you something, sir?"

His eyes trailed down her curves and back up to her blond hair. Nothing like an attempt on one's life to get the blood flowing. She was a fair fuck, though getting a little old for his taste. He'd been more interested in her

before Anna came along, though when Anna was doped up, he'd used Madison when the need came.

"Sir?" she said with a strange look on her face.

He stood and motioned to the private bathroom near his office.

He emerged a few minutes later to find dozens of people in the waiting area.

Trenton rushed up to him. "God, Devin, what happened? And where were you?"

Devin motioned to the bathroom where Madison was coming out of, limping slightly. He'd taken her hard and fast in the ass, but she wouldn't complain; she never did.

Trenton looked at him. "Really? At a time like this? You were shot at. I saw the hole in your desk."

"There's never a bad time for sex. It calms me." He smiled. "Yes, someone tried to kill me. And I believe I know who." He had thought about it as he was fucking Maddy. The only person who would be stupid enough to cross him would be Wilhelm. "I think the Kunze's are going to lose yet another family member."

Trenton put his hand on his arm. "Dev. Think about it before you make the call. You've said yourself you're starting to make enemies. Be sure it's Kunze before you do anything."

Devin frowned, but Trent was right. Assassinating an Elder was a huge deal and had to be approached carefully. He had to admire the balls on Wilhelm; he would have never guessed him to be the one to call the shot. Literally.

"You're right, Trent." A mistake like this could cost him more than he was willing to give up. Besides, he had no doubt Wilhelm would admit to

making the call. Then Devin would make his own call and Germany would have a new Elder.

Devin scoffed at the thought of Kurt as an Elder.

After the police had interviewed him, Devin went home. His anger had been simmering below the surface and he wanted to call the mother-fucker and find out the truth.

Kaveh was waiting for him when he walked into the lower living area. “Your imburement of Immortality saved your life,” the golden man commented.

“It was Wilhelm. I know it.”

Kaveh nodded. “Most likely. You did kill his son.”

They looked at each other for a moment, amusement filling Devin’s eyes. “I never thought Wilhelm would be so ballsy. It will give me great pleasure to return the favor.”

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” Kaveh warned.

Devin whirled around and glared at him. “What the fuck are you talking about? I have every right—”

Kaveh held up his hand. “Yes, but you’re forgetting an important person.”

“Who?”

“Anna. She won’t take it well if you kill Wilhelm.”

“She’ll get over it,” Devin scoffed. “She got over Alex.”

“She didn’t know that was you. This she will know and you will be unlikely to subdue her again.” Kaveh shook his head. “If you want to continue using her, let Wilhelm alone.”

Devin clenched his jaw. “I’m supposed to just let this go? Like he didn’t try to kill me?”

“You’ve already meted out enough grief in his life. Consider it...paying it forward. Once Anna is fully bonded to you, then you can get even if you so desire. But I warn you, if you do anything else to Anna, she will change permanently and you will not be able to contain the beast.”

Kaveh was right, though Devin hated to admit it. If Anna hadn’t been chained to the wall, she would have killed him on Thursday. He had never seen anything so feral, so primal, as Anna in a wild rage. It had given him such pleasure to conquer her. But he couldn’t leave her chained to the wall all day long. He needed her free. He would have to let Wilhelm alone.

Fuck.

Wilhelm raised his brow at the name flashing on his phone. He wasn’t supposed to be alive. “Hello.”

“He missed,” came Devin’s voice.

Wilhelm stood and clenched his fist. Why was this man still alive? He knew the assassin. He was very, very good at his job, second only to Alex. “How?”

Devin laughed. “I chalk it up to my Immortality. Something just told me to duck and I did. And I’m so glad.”

Wilhelm closed his eyes, expecting a bullet to come crashing through the window and into his skull. Only that would dull the pain in his heart. “So when can I expect mine?”

“Oh, we’ll just call it even, as long as you don’t try again.”

Wilhelm's mouth dropped open and it took him a minute to recover. "What is your angle, Devin? Please, if you are going to do it, just tell me so I can prepare my family."

"Aren't you so diplomatic?" Devin sighed. "No, I won't be making any calls. It occurs to me that Anna has had enough tragedy for the month and I need her coherent. Killing you would make that impossible. She loves you for some fucking reason and that would send her over the edge."

Yes, it would. Wilhelm let out the breath he was holding and slumped in his chair.

"So, let's leave her out of this, shall we?"

"She knows."

"What!"

"She knows I did something, but she does not know what. Do not punish her, she tried to call me off, but I would not listen."

"She's a wise woman."

"Amazing, considering her childhood," Wilhelm said dryly.

Devin laughed again. "Well, I won't detain you any longer. I just wanted to share the good news that I'm still alive."

Wilhelm growled and disconnected the call. He ran his hands through his hair. Anna had saved his life, and he wouldn't risk it again.

Devin was waiting for Anna when she got home that evening. She saw him in the living room and froze. "M-Master?" she looked at her watch. "Am I late?"

Devin stood and put his iPad on the table in front of him. "No, you're not late. I came home from work early." He made his way around the couch

and walked toward her. “Someone tried to kill me this morning.”

Anna’s eyes widened and watered. “Oh, no.”

Devin knew better than to think the tears were for him. “I spoke to Wilhelm and he admitted to sending the assassins.”

Anna shook her head. “No, please. Don’t kill him, please!” She fell to the floor on her knees and bowed low.

“I’m not going to kill him, Anna, though nothing would make me happier than to see his bloody skull in a picture.” He sighed. “He is alive and will remain so.”

Anna looked up, relief evident in her face. “Oh, Master!” She hugged his legs. “Oh, Devin. Thank you!”

He was so shocked when she bent over and kissed his feet that he didn’t think to reprimand her for using his name.

She looked up at him with wide, innocent, eager eyes. “How may I please you, Master?”

Devin arched his brow. This was unexpected. Perhaps the decision to let Wilhelm live was a good one after all.

Anna walked quickly upstairs to shower, incredible relief in her heart. She didn’t know what she would have done if Devin had killed Wilhelm. She wouldn’t have handled it well. Anna would do everything in her power to show how grateful she was to Devin.

She wanted to call Wilhelm, but it was late and she didn’t think Devin would approve. Maybe tomorrow before she went into the studio.

She took a deep breath as she reflected on her day. Isaak had selected Justin to dance with her. Anna had been hoping that it would be Travis. He

knew her and understood her. If she was having a bad day, he knew how to deal with her. Justin didn't know anything about her.

But maybe that was a good thing. He was an excellent dancer and she liked dancing with him. He was very nice and considerate, not to mention handsome. But she didn't need to think about that. He stayed professional with her, but friendly. She was actually a little confused about that. She didn't know what to do with men who didn't want her. She couldn't even remember the last time she'd been around a man who didn't want something from her.

She had watched him carefully as he danced. Was he gay? But no, she'd seen him with women the few times she'd gone to the clubs with Peter.

Anna came back to the present and finished her shower. Would Kaveh be waiting for her? Would he let her orgasm? Would Devin let him let her orgasm? She needed one so badly, but she wanted to please Devin. What if he changed his mind about not killing Wilhelm because of her? She couldn't bear the thought.

She dried herself off, braided her hair and went out into the bedroom with her robe on. Kaveh was sitting on the bed, naked, and stroking his massive cock absently. He smiled when he saw her.

She smiled nervously back. "I-I'm ready to play, Kaveh," she said softly.

"Good," he grinned. "Robe off." She slipped it off her shoulders and it fell to the floor. "Go."

"She is eager to please," Kaveh commented as he looked at the sleeping woman between them.

Anna had been exceedingly obedient this evening. She barely moved as she hung from the ceiling, even though Devin could tell she wanted to. He'd rewarded her with an orgasm.

"That was unexpected," Devin agreed. "But pleasant." He stroked Anna's soft skin that glowed faintly in the low lighting. "I'm glad I listened to you."

"We are here for guidance. I only want to help you succeed." He glanced back at Anna. "She is most satisfactory."

"Mmm. She is." He looked at Kaveh. "Worth the shit I put you through?"

"Yes. I haven't fucked a half-Immortal in centuries. It is very pleasing. Human women are weak. She is very strong."

"As I found out the other day. I will have to be careful from now on."

"You must treat them carefully. I tried to warn you."

"You did. I didn't think she had anything left to lose."

"Perhaps you should make her the willing sacrifice? I think if you treat her right and train her properly, she would willingly give you her child."

Devin narrowed his eyes thoughtfully. "You think so?"

"You have to get her to care for you. I think it will be difficult for you, but the results would be worth it. Kill off one of the younger girls for the unwilling." Kaveh grinned. "Or kidnap someone. That would get a fight for sure. Your girls are too well trained to put up much of a fight."

Devin was quiet while he contemplated the Immortal's words. He had pretended to be loving to her before. It really wasn't that hard. She was easy to please. He chuckled to himself. Wouldn't it just kill Wilhelm if he saw her in love with him? Wilhelm would shit bricks.

"It would also help with the bonding ceremony. Her bond with you needs to be very strong in order for it to work."

“That’s still years away.”

“True, but bonds are not easily formed and broken. Her heart is still tied to Alex.”

Devin frowned. *Damn Alex!*

“But when that is done, you will be able to treat her as you’d like.”

The thought had merit. Devin needed to think about it more. Anna had proven more difficult than he’d expected. What made her so strong was her capacity for emotion. What was so difficult to handle was her capacity for emotion. She was as bad as other women, with the years of abuse piled on top. But the abuse made her vulnerable. A wound that would never heal. She was desperate for love and would do anything for it. He had tried to push that emotional capacity off onto others because the burden of being that focus annoyed Devin. But she was under his control and she feared him sufficiently. He could make her think he loved her without her demanding much. A few acts of kindness here and there and she would do anything for him, as demonstrated tonight.

He needed to think about this more.

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Chapter Fifty-Three

Anna felt light kisses down her back, waking her gently. Her eyes slowly opened and she saw Devin sitting over her, kissing her back and stroking her skin softly.

“Good morning, Baby,” he said with a gentle smile.

“Good morning, Master,” she whispered, confused and scared at his demeanor.

She turned on her side when he lay down beside her and twirled a piece of her hair around his finger. “You pleased me immensely last night, Anna. I am very happy.”

She smiled nervously. “Thank you, Master. I tried my best.”

“You did very good, Baby.” He leaned forward and kissed her gently on the lips. “Perhaps I’ve been too harsh on you in the past. All you want to do is please me, right?”

“Oh, yes,” she said with growing enthusiasm.

He pulled her close, pressing her body against his, and kissed her again, this time with more passion. When he pulled away again she swallowed nervously and looked into his eyes. They were still black as night, but there was a hint of warmth that radiated throughout her whole body. He studied her eyes for a moment, smiled and kissed her again.

She kissed him eagerly, warming to his approval and affection. His kisses became more insistent, but not in a cruel way, as Anna expected. She couldn’t remember the last time he’d kissed her.

His hand slid up her side and caressed the side of her breast as he continued kissing her, nibbling on her lower lip and sucking on it gently. She felt a rush of warmth and hesitantly touched his chest.

“Yes, Baby,” he whispered. “You can touch me. I like it.”

She ran her hands gently across his chest. He was still lean and well built, but the black hair on his chest had strands of silver dotted here and there. She noticed the same thing with his hair as she ran her fingers through it. It was still thick and soft, but tiny bits of silver caught the morning light. Anna guessed him to be forty-six or forty-seven now.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” he asked with a smile.

She pulled her hand away. “I’m sorry, Master.” He caught her hand and kissed her palm.

“Don’t apologize. I was just wondering what was going on in that pretty little head of yours.”

Anna bit her lip and looked up at him. He didn’t look angry. Was he vain enough to get upset if she told him? “I was noticing the silver in your hair,” she said softly and carefully.

He gave a boyish half-smile. “I am getting older, aren’t I? Time seems to go fast at this age.”

Anna smiled shyly. “There’s not that much. It looks...debonair.”

He laughed. “Thank you, Baby. You have changed too. You’re definitely not a girl any longer.” He slid his hand down her waist to her hip. “Definitely a woman now,” he murmured, rolling on top of her and kissing her again. He moved down to her neck and sucked on it until she squirmed and moaned. “Though just as sweet.” He nudged her legs apart and groaned as he buried himself slowly in her body.

Anna arched her back and gasped as he filled her. “Master...,” she sighed.

“My name, Anna. Call me by my name.”

“Devin....”

Anna smiled to herself as she showered later. Devin had changed since last night. He was kind and gentle again. It was...frightening in some aspects, but she liked it. Maybe he would be nice for a while. She liked him when he was nice. She would continue pleasing him as best she could, and try and keep him happy. Then maybe he wouldn't get angry anymore.

He came into her bathroom as she was stepping out of the shower. "I'll see you tonight, Baby." He kissed her. "At the foot of the bed when I get home, right?"

Anna nodded and smiled. "Yes, Devin."

He gave her an affectionate grin and then left.

He was happy with her! He was her Devin back again. She would do whatever she could to keep him that way.

She drove downtown later, still smiling and happy. She would still be careful to behave properly. Eat properly. Dance well. Everything that would make Devin happy. Then everything would be okay.

"Hey, Anna." Travis greeted her as she walked to the *barre*.

"Good morning, Travis," she said softly and sat on the floor. She felt him looking at her and glanced up. "What? Why are you looking at me like that?"

"You looked so upset yesterday, but today you seem really happy. What happened?"

Anna flushed, remembering Devin's lovemaking and her multiple orgasms. "Devin's nice again. I've pleased him."

Travis frowned. "He's being nice?"

"You don't believe me?"

"No, I believe you. I just wonder why."

Anna frowned, hurt. "I pleased him. He's happy with me."

Travis clenched his jaw but didn't say anything else. Justin arrived a few minutes later.

"Hey, you look happy. Come to terms with dancing with me?"

"I was never upset at dancing with you."

"Did ya win the lottery?"

"Lottery? What's that?"

Justin looked at her like she was crazy. "You're kidding, right?"

"Not likely, Justin," Travis interjected. "I wouldn't be surprised if she didn't know what it was."

Justin studied her and shook his head. "So, why're you so happy?" he laughed. "You got a new boyfriend. That must be it."

"He's not my boyfriend," she mumbled and turned away to stretch.

Travis sighed. "We'll see how long that lasts."

Justin looked confused.

"Her *lover*." Travis rolled his eyes. "Asshole."

"Travis, please don't say such things," Anna said, looking up with a horrified expression on her face. "Please. You're the only one I have left. You and Jenna."

Travis frowned and continued stretching, muttering under his breath.

The room was dark, but she knew where she was. There were dying embers in the fireplace by which, after her eyes adjusted, she could see a little. She saw the shadow in the bed and walked to it.

She smiled at his sleeping form. She wanted nothing more than to run her fingers through his hair. But...hadn't she had a dream where they did touch? She sat down carefully on the bed and reached out to touch him when his hand snaked out and grabbed her wrist.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in surprise at his touch. It was firm and warm.

His eyes snapped open and he looked just as surprised as she felt. "Anna?" He sat up, not letting go of her wrist.

She stared at his hand and then looked up in amazement. He was staring at his hand and then slowly brought her hand to his cheek.

"Alex," she sighed as her palm grazed his beard. It was scratchy, but she didn't care. She didn't care that the dreams weren't real anymore. His phantom touch was better than anything in real life.

He let go of her wrist and tangled his hand in her hair, as he had last time, and pressed his lips to hers. They were the same lips she had kissed so many times, only now they were surrounded by tickling hairs. If the kiss hadn't been so desperate, she would have giggled at the sensation. As it was, all she could think of was his lips against hers, his hand in her hair, her hand on his face.

"I love you, Anna." It was the cry of his heart, spoken in desperation.

"I love you, Alex," Anna whispered with the same level of desperation.

They gazed into each other's eyes, their foreheads resting against each other. He looked like he wanted to say something, but hesitated.

"What is it, Alex?" she asked, stroking his cheek.

"I will be free soon. I will come for you."

Anna backed away. “Why do you say such things?” she asked with tears in her eyes. “You will never return, Alex. I’m okay with that now...I think.” She didn’t feel so okay with that at the moment. “I miss you,” she whispered.

He grimaced and closed his eyes for a moment. “You’re right, Schatzi. I shouldn’t say such things. I’m sorry.”

A pain seared her head and she grabbed it and bent over.

“You need to go, Anna. Dream of me again.”

She looked up and was filled with all his love. “I love you,” she whispered as the room faded.

Anna opened her eyes and rolled onto her back. Rehearsals had finished early, but she was still tired. She had decided to take a nap before Kaveh arrived.

She stared at the ceiling and thought about Alex. It was true she was more at peace with his death, but she still missed him. Would the ache ever totally go away? Part of her wanted it to disappear. Part of her was afraid of it going away. She didn’t want to lose him totally. She liked dreaming of him now; it was like returning to a favorite book.

She allowed herself the luxury of thinking about Alex for a little bit. Her memories of him. She still wore her wedding band and twisted it around her finger. She didn’t know why Devin allowed her to, but she was thankful he hadn’t asked her to remove it. Maybe it really was “better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.” Maybe.

She heard Devin's car and hurried down to his bedroom, undressed and got herself into position. He came in a few minutes later.

"Hello, Baby. What a good girl you are."

Anna smiled slightly, keeping her head down. She was thankful he was pleased. He disappeared into the closet and returned a bit later in casual clothes to stand in front of her.

"You know what to do, Baby," he said in a gentle voice.

She reached for his jeans and unzipped him and sucked his cock with enthusiasm. He was still happy with her. She wouldn't do anything to change that. Even though her body ached, she ignored it and did everything she could to make sure he enjoyed himself. His hand rested on her head, but he, surprisingly, let her control the movements. She was even more thankful and swallowed him eagerly when he came in her mouth. She licked him clean and then looked up at him adoringly.

"Good girl," he murmured, petting her hair. "Get dressed and we'll go have dinner."

At dinner, Devin asked how her day was. She looked at him in shock before answering nervously. Was she supposed to have done something that she had forgotten? Why did he want to know about her day?

He smiled at her. "Next time, if you are done early, call me. I may have you come visit me."

"Should I have done that today?" Her voice was shaky.

"There's no reason you would have thought about it, Anna. I hadn't said anything to you about it. I didn't realize your rehearsals were shorter sometimes."

"Justin had to rehearse first act. Nutcracker rehearsals tend to be shorter than others. At least for the second act."

Devin nodded. "That makes sense."

He would have seen enough Nutcrackers to know about it. Ballet was one of the *things* that the respectable people did in the city to be seen. It harkened back to before the technology era and stuck. Opera, Ballet, Symphony. They were all important aspects of the city culture.

Anna looked at him. “Did your office get fixed?” she asked hesitantly. He had asked about her day. She should ask about his.

He looked pleased that she asked. “It will be tomorrow. The window was being fixed today and they delivered the new desk this afternoon. I was working out of an extra office today.” He made a face. “Makes me appreciate my own office. The windows were small and had no view.”

She studied him for a while. He didn’t seem upset about the situation and assumed Wilhelm was still safe. “I’ve been having lunch with Jenna every day. Is that all right?”

Devin looked up. “Of course. As long as I don’t ask you to come down and see me or some other task.”

She sighed in relief. “Thank you, Devin.”

“Has your partner, Justin is it? Has he been treating you well?”

“Yes. He...well, he doesn’t seem interested in me. It’s...unusual.”

Devin chuckled. “It is. Is he gay?”

“I don’t think so. I’ve seen him with women.”

“Maybe he’s just a smart man. He’s a good dancer?”

“Oh, yes. Very much so.”

“Good. I wouldn’t want you dancing with someone not worthy of you.”

They ate quietly for a while. In some ways, Anna felt more at ease than she had since she moved in a week ago. But she kept glancing up at him, wondering if he would change again.

“Why do you keep looking at me?”

She looked down at her plate for a moment while she thought about how to answer that. He waited quietly.

“I want to please you, Devin. I don’t want to make you angry. I...I like it when you’re nice.”

He stared at her for a long minute and she wanted to fidget under his gaze but was afraid to move.

“I know I’ve been hard on you in the past, Anna. I know you only want to please me. I will...try to be more patient.”

“I will continue to do my best, Devin.”

He reached over and patted her hand. “I know you will.”

When they were finished eating, Anna hurried up to the bedroom, undressed and was waiting for him on the table when he arrived. He smiled at her enthusiasm.

“What a good girl,” he said, walking over and cuffing her wrists. He kissed her on the mouth as he attached the chains to the table. He sucked on her nipples on his way to his seated position. When he sat down in the chair, he opened her folds with his thumbs and leaned forward to lick her.

“Mmm,” he exclaimed. “Kaveh seems to have been...enthusiastic today.”

“Yes, Master. He said I pleased him immensely.”

“Good girl,” he murmured against her pussy and resumed his task.

She was sensitive and enjoyed every flick of his tongue, but didn’t dare move or make a sound. She wanted to come so badly, but didn’t let herself. She wanted to make him happy. When he had licked and sucked her raw and she began to fade he gave her permission to come and locked his lips around her clit. She came for him and then, as she had the previous night, hung limply. Once again, he uncuffed her and carried her to the bed, but he

didn't fuck her. He lay down next to her and stroked her skin and told her what a good girl she was.

She looked at him with lifeless eyes, vaguely wondering why he was being so kind. He kissed her cheek and neck, but she barely felt it.

"You don't feel that, do you?" he asked softly.

"I'm sorry, Master," she said in a weak voice.

"You have done well, tonight, Baby. I am pleased."

"You need release," she whispered.

"When you're ready. Wait until Kaveh has restored you."

Anna closed her eyes and wondered at his kindness.

Kaveh came a while later and she rested her head, as before, on his thigh as he gave her life back. Devin scooted behind her after a few minutes and penetrated her as she lay on her side. It took her a few minutes before she felt him. Kaveh leaned forward and she felt his mouth on her clit as Devin fucked her slowly and gently.

"God that feels good," Devin mumbled, cupping her breast.

Kaveh chuckled. "You like me playing with your balls?"

"Mmm," Devin muttered.

She saw Devin's hand next to her face as she continued to nurse at Kaveh's cock. He massaged and tugged gently at the Immortal's sac. Both men moaned and quickened their movements. Anna felt the rush of cum in her mouth as Kaveh groaned and sucked very hard on her clit. She cried out against his cock in her throat and nearly choked. Devin groaned loudly a moment later and she felt him throb inside her.

Devin chuckled lazily. "I could get used to this."

Kaveh gave a last lick, sending a shudder through Anna's body, and then sat up on his elbow and looked at Devin. "Your cock is very nice, Devin. As

is your ass. I have nothing more to offer you, but if you would like some additional pleasure, I would be happy to oblige.”

Devin was quiet for a moment. “I would only let an Immortal fuck me.”

Kaveh grinned. “Of course. Anyone else would be...degrading.”

Anna’s eyes widened as Kaveh’s cock hardened once again and he crawled to the back of the bed. Devin moved away from her and she turned to watch as Devin moved onto all fours and groaned loudly as Kaveh pushed into his body.

“Just let me fill you, Chairman. Let me pleasure you.” He looked up and met Anna’s eyes. “You allow me such pleasure with my Daughter, it’s the least I can do.”

Devin’s head hung limply as Kaveh held his hips and began moving.

“Yes,” he moaned. To Anna’s amazement, Devin’s cock hardened again as well.

She tried to keep her eyes open, but they were so heavy. She didn’t hear them cry out in intense pleasure a few minutes later.

Chapter Fifty-Four

The next morning, after rehearsal, Anna found a message from Devin on her phone. He sounded angry and wanted her to come to his office at lunchtime. She quickly changed shoes and ran out of the studio, shouting to Jenna that she couldn't have lunch with her that day.

It was only a few minute drive to Devin's office and Anna tried to figure out why he was upset. He had been very...loving...to her this morning, waking her with gentle kisses again and making love to her slowly and gently. What had happened this morning? She parked Alex's silver sports car in the guest parking and tried to remember how to get to his office. She'd only been here a few times, and it had been over two years since the previous time. She texted Devin as she walked into the building, letting him know she was here and making her way to his office.

When Anna stopped at the security desk to ask for directions, she was given a strange look. She must have looked very out of place wearing spandex short-shorts and a loose t-shirt and flip-flops. Very out of place for an office building, especially in October. But when she told the security guard her name, his demeanor changed to more respectful and he gave her directions to Devin's office.

She emerged from the elevator and saw that Madison was still Devin's secretary. The woman's eyes narrowed as Anna approached.

"Is Devin in?" she asked, slightly breathless. More from nerves than exertion though.

"Miss Perkins?" Madison asked in a disapproving tone.

"Kunze, actually," she said, lifting her chin. Madison had no right to act condescendingly to her. She wasn't Devin's Mistress.

“You changed your name?”

Anna smiled. “Yes. And became a duchess, but that’s not important. Is Devin in or not?”

Madison frowned at her and then pressed a button on her phone. “Miss Per...er, Kunze is here.” She looked back up at Anna. “You can go in.”

Anna bit her lip and walked to the large, double wooden doors and pushed the nickel-plated handle to open the door.

Devin was standing at the window with his hands behind his back, legs apart in a strong stance.

“Devin?” she said tentatively.

He turned and she could see his eyes blazing. She took a step back in fear without thinking about it. He looked her up and down and then pointed to the table in the corner. She dropped her purse on the couch and walked to the table, afraid. He took large strides as he crossed the room and turned her around, pressing her chest firmly into the table. He pulled her shorts down and rammed himself into her pussy a moment later.

She gasped in pain and surprise, but kept quiet as he fucked her hard. What had she done to anger him? She dug her fingernails into the wood to keep from crying out and prayed that he wouldn’t use his spikes. She had hours of rehearsal left this afternoon...if he let her go.

He grunted loudly as he came, and then was still. She could hear him panting heavily behind her as he flexed and relaxed his fingers on her hips.

After a long pause, he put his hands on the table on either side of her head and leaned down to kiss the back of her neck. “I’m sorry if I hurt you, Baby.”

Anna froze in shock. He pulled out slowly and pulled her shorts back into place. She didn’t move for fear of upsetting him, but he took her hand and led her to the couch. He sat down heavily and pulled her into his lap,

cradling her head against his chest. She trembled, not knowing what to expect.

“I’m not angry at you, Anna. I’m sorry if I made you think that.” He lifted her chin with his index finger and kissed her gently. “Thank you for helping me calm down.” He kissed her again, stroking her cheek with his thumb.

When he pulled away she could see his eyes were no longer blazing. She gave him a nervous smile. “What happened?”

He frowned. “Fucking Jerry. He vetoed a bill he was supposed to sign.”

“Jerry?”

“The fucking president. I told him I needed the banking bill signed and he gave into peer pressure and vetoed it. Fucking idiot.” Devin ran his hand through his hair. “We need to go to DC on Friday. I need to see him face to face. And with your help,” he smiled gently. “We will be able to show him his wrongs.”

“Oh.” Whenever they went to DC, she inevitably ended up hurting. “Do I need to take time off of rehearsals?”

“See if you can get out of there after lunch. It’s a long flight and the time difference is a bitch.”

“Yes, Devin,” she said softly.

“Are you hungry?” he asked, changing the subject.

She nodded. He pushed her gently off his lap and stood. “Let’s go eat. I’m starving.” Before they walked out of the office, he pulled her close and kissed her again. “Don’t let Maddy intimidate you. She’s just jealous.”

“Jealous?”

“I’ve fucked her in the past, but she doesn’t arouse me like you do. And you can take my anger. She gets pissy when I fuck her like I just fucked you.” He kissed Anna’s neck. “You know me and help me feel better,” he

murmured against her neck. “You can take what I give you.” He chuckled. “Feel free to make her jealous.” He opened the door and let Anna go out first. “Maddy, is Trent in his office?”

“I haven’t seen him leave, sir,” she said, giving Anna a wary look.

Devin led Anna down a wide hallway. “Let’s see if Trent wants to come.” He stopped at a desk where a pretty redhead sat with a headset on her perfectly styled hair. “Hey, Hailey. Has Trent gone to lunch yet?”

Hailey shook her head and looked at Anna with a raised brow. “He just got back from a meeting.”

“Okay. Hailey, this is Anna. Anna, Hailey, Trenton’s secretary.”

“Hello,” Hailey said, still looking at her with slight disdain. Devin kissed Anna’s neck and then nudged her towards a set of double doors like his own. He opened the door and guided Anna inside.

“What the f— Anna?” Trenton looked at her with surprise until Devin walked in behind her. “Devin. You fucker. You know I don’t like being barged in on.”

“Ah, but I bring gifts,” he laughed.

Trenton smiled and pushed back from his desk. “Hey, Anna. What are you doing here?”

“I had her come. Did you hear about the bill?”

Trenton growled. “Yeah.”

“I’ll take care of it this weekend. Anna and I are flying out on Friday to...have a discussion.”

Trenton chuckled. “If that’s what you call it.”

“It’s PC.”

Trenton stood and walked around to the front of his desk. He looked down Anna’s bare legs. “You in the middle of rehearsals?”

She could feel his arousal. “Yes.”

Devin pushed her toward him and he opened his arms. She smiled. She liked Trenton.

"I can't say I haven't imagined having you bent over my desk," he murmured, running his hands down her ass.

"Feel free," Devin said, sitting down on the black leather couch across the room. "Maybe you can make her feel better than I did. I had to release some steam."

Trenton looked down at her. "Was he rough with you?"

"It's okay. He needed to."

Trenton kissed her and ran his hands down her neck and cupped her breast. Anna sighed at the gentle touch as he massaged it and pressed her hips against his erection with his other hand.

"God knows I could use some release too," he said quietly. "But I'll be gentle." He tugged at her shorts and Anna pushed them down her hips. After moving some items around on his desk, he guided her chest onto the hard surface and took a step back. "That is a beautiful sight, isn't it?"

Anna clenched at his words, knowing both men were looking at her wet pussy. She heard a zipper and Trenton slid into her.

"Oh, yeah," he murmured. "Fuck." He held her hips and gently thrust in and out.

She moaned softly and pressed her hips towards him.

"Feel good, hon?" he asked softly.

She nodded and scratched at his desk as she felt tingling deep inside. "Please, may I come?"

Trenton chuckled. "Absolutely. Just keep it quiet."

She pressed her lips together and moaned, scratching at his desk as the orgasm overtook her. He grunted and quickened his movements. She squeaked as he rammed himself deep inside.

There was a beep and then. “Mr. Needham?”

Trenton gave a hard thrust and Anna held her breath.

“Yes, Hailey?” he asked in a very strained voice.

His fingers dug into Anna’s hips and he throbbed inside her. He was coming as his secretary called him. Something about that aroused Anna and her eyes rolled back into her head as another orgasm overtook her. She bit her lip and tasted blood as she tried to keep silent.

There was a pause. “Um, your wife is on line one.”

“Thank you,” he said, his voice still strained. There was another beep and Trenton groaned. “Fuck!” he exclaimed softly. “Did you come again, Anna?”

“Yes,” she said nervously.

“I could tell. Damn that was erotic.” He bent forward. “Your lip is bleeding.” He kissed her cheek and then pressed a button on his phone. “Hey, love,” he said loudly.

Anna’s eyes widened. He was talking to Maki while his cock was still semi-hard inside her now very wet and swollen pussy.

“Hello, dear. How are things?”

Trenton smiled and grunted softly as he pulled out of Anna. “Good, now.” He caressed her ass. “Devin brought Anna over to see me.”

Maki laughed lightly. “Ooh, should I be jealous?”

“Never, love.”

“Hello, Maki,” Devin said, walking up to the desk.

“Devin, how are you?” Anna could hear the smile in her tone.

“Better than I was. I have to go out of town this weekend.”

“I heard about the bill. That’s not the way it was supposed to go, is it?”

“No. But I’ll deal with it.”

Trenton caressed Anna's pussy and slipped a finger inside. She was still bent over his desk and she arched towards him. She buried her face in her hands to keep silent.

"Is Anna still there? I don't hear her."

"She's trying very hard to be quiet, love, and I'm making it very difficult for her."

Maki laughed again. "Lucky girl, Anna. Devin, we need to get together again soon. I haven't had the pleasure of tasting Anna in a long while. Is she still as sweet, Trent?"

Trenton knelt down and licked at Anna's pussy. "Oh, yes," he said, and licked her again.

Anna gasped in surprise and pleasure. She desperately tried not to moan, but one escaped anyways at Trenton's insistent tongue.

"Let me hear you, Anna," Maki said. "You make the most beautiful sounds when you come."

Anna looked up at Devin and he nodded. She allowed a soft moan as Trenton sucked on her clit. "Oh!" she cried. Knowing Maki was listening turned her on even more. She mewed and moaned as Trenton sucked and lapped gently at her pussy and then kept her cries as quiet as she could as another orgasm exploded in her body.

Devin petted her hair. "Good girl, Anna."

She panted, her sweat-damp forehead pressed against the desk as Trenton continued to kiss her pussy.

"How was that, love?" he asked between kisses.

The sound of panting and moaning came through the phone and then Maki cried out loudly as she came, but how, Anna didn't know.

"I think she liked it," Devin commented with a smile. "Was that by yourself or with your assistant?"

“Myself. Brady’s gone to lunch. I was hoping for some phone sex,” she giggled. “Thank you, Trent.”

“Always my pleasure.”

“So, Devin,” Maki said, and Anna could picture her composing herself behind a desk somewhere. ‘What is your schedule like? I want a turn to play with Anna.’”

Devin laughed. “We’re leaving Friday afternoon, so either before or after that.”

“Tonight?” she asked.

“I love your eagerness, Maki,” Devin said. He glanced at Trenton, who was still teasing Anna with his tongue. Trenton nodded. “Sounds good. Your place or mine? Anna’s living with me now.”

“How wonderful. Either is fine. Discuss it with Trent and let me know.”

“Sounds good. I think he’s having lunch without me.”

“Lucky man. I will see you all tonight.”

The call ended and Devin looked at Trenton. “Care to join us for lunch?”

Trenton gave Anna’s wet pussy one last kiss. “Sure.”

“I’m going to lunch, Hailey,” Trenton said as the three of them walked out of his office a few minutes later. Anna felt a little weak-kneed.

“Yes, Mr. Needham.” She narrowed her eyes slightly at Anna, making Anna wonder if she had heard anything.

Devin put his arm around Anna and the three of them walked to the elevator. “How about Shea’s?”

“Devin, I’m not exactly dressed for that place.” Anna had been to the upscale restaurant a few times and knew a certain level of dress was expected.

He looked her up and down. “Hmm. Yes. You need to keep a change of clothes in your car for situations like this.”

“I will from now on. I promise.” She looked up at him earnestly.

“I know you will,” he smiled.

“But if you two want to go without me, it’s okay. I can grab a sandwich on the way back to the studio. I don’t want to ruin your lunch”

Devin was quiet as they stepped into the elevator. “You probably need to get back to rehearsal soon as well?”

Anna glanced at her watch and nodded. “I’m sorry, Devin.”

He kissed her head. “It’s all right. You helped me feel better. I can let you go. But make sure you eat.”

“I will.”

They exited into the lobby.

“I’ll call you and give you the details about tonight,” Devin said as he kissed Anna goodbye.

“Why the change of attitude?” Trent asked as the two men walked out the front door of the office building.

“It makes her happy.”

Trenton arched a brow. “You care about making her happy now?”

Devin shrugged. “It’s a means to an end. When I told her I wouldn’t have Wilhelm killed, she literally kissed my feet and was incredibly obedient the rest of the night. Kaveh pointed out that, if I treat her right, she might become my willing sacrifice.”

“You’re going to kill her?” Trent exclaimed a little too loudly.

Devin frowned. “Of course not. The child, you dumbass.”

Trent sighed in relief. “You scared me for a minute. You’ve put so much work into her.”

“And I need her. No. You’ve seen how happy she is. By just...being nice to her, she’s willing to do anything. I suppose there is something to be said about a happy slave. And I only have to do it....” He sighed, “...until the bonding ceremony. God, can I last that long?”

“Is it really that difficult to keep her happy? She glowed when you told her she was a good girl after I fucked her.”

“No, I suppose not. But if she starts getting demanding it will be.”

“She’s not that type, Devin, and you know it. She wants to please you. It’s written all over her face.”

Devin sighed again. “Yeah. I can always apologize if I use her too hard like I did today. I just bent her over my table and fucked her like there was no tomorrow. I think she was terrified that she had done something to upset me. I just needed some release.”

“See? It’s not that hard.” Trent grinned as he opened the door to the restaurant. “Being nice to her won’t ruin your reputation. It might actually help it.”

Devin walked in the door and looked back at his friend. “It needs helping?”

Trent shrugged. “You can do whatever you want. But you might find you actually like the girl.”

Devin frowned. Anna was a slave and nothing more. A conduit for his powers. But she wasn’t unpleasant to have around. “Maybe.”

Chapter Fifty-Five

Anna saw that Devin had left a message and listened to it during break. “Hey, Baby. Trent and Maki are coming to our house tonight, so be ready for them when I get home. I’ll be bringing Trent from the office. Be downstairs in the living room in something sexy. See you then.”

Our house? Anna thought, as she put the phone down. The thought made her feel funny. She wasn’t sure if it was good or bad. It made her smile, albeit nervously. She still wasn’t sure about his new attitude, but she did like it.

She smiled to herself as she returned to the back of the studio for the beginning of the dance.

“Something made you happy,” Justin said looking curious.

“Oh...just...a message.”

“Your new boyfriend?”

Justin had been trying to figure out her relationship status in a roundabout way, though it didn’t seem that he wanted to date her. He was just...curious.

Anna shook her head. “Not a boyfriend.”

Justin grinned. “Why are you so secretive about this guy?”

Anna flushed. Why was she secretive about Devin? It’s not like Justin wouldn’t figure it out when opening night came around; Devin was a well-known figure in the city.

Was she ashamed of Devin? No, that wasn’t right. It seemed okay to have a boyfriend. But to be a mistress? It seemed...antiquated. Wouldn’t he be just a lover? But, she would be his lover, but he wasn’t necessarily her lover, though she was...oh, it was so confusing!

She was his slave, but she couldn't say that. Slavery wasn't a real thing in today's world, even though it was. But the girls at the Manor were slaves. They had no identification, they didn't exist to the outside world. Anna was a slave because Devin took her. There was no escaping, no changing her life. There had been a chance with Alex...but he was gone.

She looked down at her wedding ring. *Alex*.

Justin reached out and touched her hand. "Hey, I'm not trying to judge you or anything. I'm just trying to get to know you."

Anna looked up at him. His gray eyes were sincere and looked sad for her. She gave him a small smile. "Do you know who Devin Andersen is?" She didn't know if he'd been here long enough to know who he was.

"Who doesn't?"

"He's...the one I...spend time with." Somehow just coming out and saying she was his mistress seemed weird.

Justin nodded. "Ah." He tilted his head. "Isn't he old?"

Anna shrugged. "I think he's in his mid-forties."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-four."

"Guys your own age aren't interesting enough?"

"I was with Peter for over a year," she pointed out, a bit defensively.

"And then you jump into a relationship with one of the richest men in the city?"

Anna opened her mouth but didn't know how to respond to that. "I've known Devin my whole life," she finally said.

Justin raised his eyebrows in shock. "That doesn't make it sound any better."

Anna looked back down at her ring and didn't respond. It wasn't like she had a choice, and he was unlikely to understand that. Fortunately, Isaak

came in at that moment and she didn't have to continue the conversation. She tried not to feel awkward and deliberately pushed Justin's comments to the back of her mind.

When they were done with rehearsing, Justin sat next to Anna as she hurried to get her pointe shoes off.

"I wasn't trying to make you feel bad, Anna."

She looked at him skeptically but didn't say anything. Her ribbon was knotted and being stubborn.

"You're just a really sweet, pretty girl and I don't get why you're...I dunno. You seemed really happy with Peter. It sucks he had to move away."

"Yeah," she mumbled.

"But then you jump into...whatever...with Andersen?" He shook his head. "It's okay to be single for a while, ya know. Play the field or something."

Anna stared at him for a long minute. He genuinely felt bad for her.

"Travis doesn't think very highly of him," he added.

Anna shrugged. What could she say? Travis knew what Devin did to her.

"Did he give you that?"

Anna looked up and saw him looking at her ring that she was fidgeting with. She hadn't even realized she was doing it. She blinked back tears.

"No," she said softly. "It's my wedding ring."

Justin stared. "You're married?"

"Was," she said just as softly. "He died almost four years ago."

"I'm sorry. I think I remember people talking about that."

Her knot finally gave way. "I kinda lost my mental capabilities after that." She pulled her shoes off and put them in her bag.

"How long were you married?"

“Three months...well, not even.” She stood up and slipped her flip-flops on. “I need to go. I’ll see you tomorrow.” She felt him watching her as she walked away.

Anna looked at herself in the mirror before she went downstairs to wait for Devin when he came home from work. She was wearing a short, dark-green dress that flared around her hips. Thong, garter and stockings, push-up bra and heels completed the outfit. She hoped Devin would be pleased. The clock on the vanity said it was almost six so she made her way downstairs to the living room. Looking around, she contemplated how she should present herself. Kneeling would probably be the safest course of action, but where?

She settled onto her heels by the door just as she heard male voices in the stairway. Hands on thighs, head down, she waited for the men to appear. Devin took two steps into the room and looked around. Trenton sat down on one of the couches.

“There’s my girl,” Devin said in a pleased tone.

Anna relaxed just a bit.

“Let me see you.”

She stood carefully and looked straight ahead as he examined her. He didn’t say anything, but walked out of the room. Anna blinked rapidly. She had displeased him. She had tried so hard, and she had displeased him. She lowered her head so Trenton wouldn’t see her eyes watering. She wanted to fidget, but was determined to stay still. Nothing else to displease her Master.

Devin returned a few minutes later and stood in front of her. “Anna,” he said softly.

She looked up cautiously and was surprised to see him smiling at her. “Did I displease you, Master?” she asked softly.

“No. Not in the least.”

He held up a silver-colored chain with a pendent. Her Elder-Mistress necklace! She looked up into his eyes in shock. “Master?”

He walked behind her. “Hold up your hair,” he said softly. She did so and he clasped the necklace around her neck and then kissed her neck at the clasp. “I am very proud of you, Baby. You deserve this back.”

She hadn’t worn this since Wilhelm had been banished. She reached up to touch it softly. “Thank you, Master,” she said and then swallowed. She *had* pleased him!

He turned her around and traced the circle. “My Mistress,” he said quietly and kissed her. He pulled her close and her hands slid over his shoulders.

Chapter Fifty-Six

“Turn over, Anna.”

Anna turned over onto her stomach, still half-asleep. She had been sleeping hard, but woke at Devin’s voice. He stretched out on top of her and pressed his cock inside her.

Anna moaned softly as he moved inside her. He held her hands above her head and his body was heavy above her.

“You were a naughty girl last night, Anna,” he murmured in her ear.

Anna’s eyes snapped open and she was wide awake. What had she done? “I’m sorry Master,” she whimpered.

He thrust in deeply and Anna stiffened and cried out as she felt the pinch inside her body. Devin had extended his spikes. She kept her breathing shallow and froze. He didn’t move either.

He sucked on her neck, but kept still. “Do I belong to you, or do you belong to me?”

“I belong to you, Master.”

“I know what you were doing when you made Maki come last night. After we’d finished fucking.”

Anna swallowed nervously and tried desperately to remember what happened the previous evening. Her memories were fuzzy from the drugs, but she had a vague remembrance of feeling possessive of Devin’s cum inside Maki’s pussy. Yes, Devin had fucked Maki and Anna had not liked the idea of Devin leaving any part of himself inside the other woman, so she had eaten the cum out of Maki’s pussy without his permission.

“I do not belong to you, Anna. I can stick my cock in whatever woman I damn well please. I can come inside of any fucking woman I want. Do you

understand?” His voice was soft but insistent.

“Yes, Master,” she whimpered.

“You took what didn’t belong to you, Anna. That’s a very bad girl.” He moved a fraction of an inch and Anna cried out in pain. “You were aggressive when I hadn’t told you to be.” He moved again and tears began running down her cheeks.

“I’m sorry, Master! I’m sorry!”

Devin retracted his spikes. “I don’t want to punish you, Anna,” he said quietly. “I want things to be good between us.” He began moving slowly, which felt good except for the cuts that he rubbed against. “Give me your pain, Anna.”

Anna closed her eyes and concentrated. He rubbed the sore area and she cried.

His movements increased. “Give it to me, Anna!” he demanded.

She tried. She tried so hard, but it wouldn’t work. She arched her back and screamed in pain and frustration.

“Give it to me!” Devin yelled, pushing up away from her and pressing her wrists down deeper into the mattress and bruising them as he squeezed. He thrust hard over and over again. Anna’s body jerked with his movements. Finally, she felt something tingle within the pain and the next moment her mind and body exploded into tiny shards. She screamed in painful ecstasy as Devin drove himself deeper and deeper inside her. He gave a last hard thrust and screamed out above her.

Anna panted as she lay with her face buried in the sheets below her. Devin had collapsed on top of her and the weight of his body made it hard to breath. He didn’t move and she wondered for a second if he was asleep. But just as she worried she would pass out from lack of oxygen, he groaned and rolled to his side.

He looked at her and brushed her hair back away from her face. She turned to look at him, her face still wet from tears. “I’m sorry, Master,” she whispered, unable to keep a frightened quiver from her voice.

Devin pulled her close. “You took your punishment well, Baby. All is forgiven.”

She rested her head on his chest and wanted to go back to sleep, but knew she had to get up and get to the studio. “I’ll do better next time, Master. I promise.”

“I know, Baby. I know.”

Anna didn’t notice the bruises until she got into the car. Her pussy hurt too. She wasn’t bleeding but the cuts Devin had given her hadn’t healed yet. *Stupid, stupid girl!* She always ended up doing something wrong and making Devin punish her. No matter her resolve, she always failed.

Anna plopped down on the floor next to Travis. He immediately saw the bruises on her arms.

Travis frowned at her. “What happened?”

“Devin had to punish me,” she said quietly.

Travis let out a low growl and muttered something about “fucking bastard.”

“I misbehaved, Travis. What else is he supposed to do?”

“You’re justifying it now?”

Anna shrugged. “He doesn’t usually hurt me just for the fun of it. He always has a reason.”

Travis snorted. “Yeah, you tell him you don’t like his shirt and he tortures you for the rest of the afternoon.”

“He’s never punished me for that.”

“Yet.”

“What is he supposed to do, Travis? I misbehave. I don’t mean to, but I do.” She sighed. “Even Wilhelm had to punish me when I was in Russia.”

Travis’ jaw dropped open. “Wilhelm punished you?”

“Well, he called it discipline....” Anna thought back to the spanking. “I guess it was different. But Devin was nice afterwards this time.”

“This time....,” he muttered. “Dammit, Anna. Don’t you ever wish you could just...run away?”

Anna looked at him in bewilderment. “Run away? He’d find me. He always finds me.” She shuddered. “You don’t know what he did to me when I tried to kill myself when I was younger. I can’t imagine what he would do if I tried to run away.”

Travis took her hand and looked at her with incredible seriousness. “What if there was a way? If you could get out of here and be somewhere safe?”

Anna laughed. “That doesn’t exist, Travis. He knows everything. He always knows where I am and what I’m doing. He’d know if I was at the airport or out of the city.”

Travis glanced down at her wrists. “You don’t deserve this life, Anna.”

“Deserving or not, it is my life. If Alex was still alive there might be hope. But he’s dead and has been for many years. He was the only one Devin couldn’t hurt and he’s gone. And Devin’s...more powerful now. I don’t know if Alex could even get me away from him now, if he were still alive.” She shook her head and played with the ribbons of her pointe shoes. “No, Travis. I just need to concentrate on being a better, obedient slave. He doesn’t hurt me if I’m good.”

Something moved next to her and she looked up to see Justin standing over her with a disturbed look on his face. “Who hurts you?”

“No one.”

Justin knelt down and took hold of her hand. “Who did this?” he demanded.

Anna shook her head. “Don’t get involved, Justin.”

“Was it Andersen?”

Anna pulled her hand away from him. “Please, Justin. Stay out of it. I don’t want you to get hurt.” She turned to Travis. “Travis, tell him. Please.”

Travis frowned. “Yeah, man. You can’t do anything about it.”

Justin’s face turned red and he clenched his jaw. “I thought you were her friend,” he growled. “This doesn’t bother you?” He held up Anna’s arm again.

“Fuck yeah, it bothers me. I’ve been watching it for years. You don’t understand though. There’s nothing you can do and you’ll only end up hurt...or worse.”

“I can’t fucking believe this, Travis. What kind of fucking friend are you?” Justin glared at Travis and balled his fist.

Anna jumped up and ran out of the studio and up to Isaak’s office. Isaak could make Justin understand...she hoped.

The secretary wasn’t at her desk so Anna went to Isaak’s door and knocked.

“Anna?” Isaak stood and walked around his desk. “What’s wrong? Why are you upset?”

“Justin...he’s...he saw my bruises and he’s pissed at Travis because he told him not to get involved.”

Isaak looked down at Anna’s wrists. “Devin?”

She nodded. “Justin’s really angry, Isaak. I’m afraid—”

There was a commotion in the hallway and Anna heard yelling from downstairs.

Isaak walked out and looked down. “Wait here,” he said, then disappeared around the corner.

He returned a few minutes later with Justin and Travis. Travis had a bruise on his cheek and Justin was huffing and glaring at him.

“Oh, no!” Anna exclaimed staring at the two dancers. “What—”

“Anna, go back downstairs,” Isaak said calmly. “Delia will start class if I’m not back.”

Anna nodded and went back to the studio. One of the dancers told her that Justin and Travis’ argument escalated and Justin hit Travis, explaining the bruise. She appreciated Justin’s caring, but if he wasn’t careful he was going to get Devin’s attention. That wouldn’t be good.

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“*We might have someone new to help us.*”

“*New? How the hell did that happen?*”

“*She showed up with bruises on her wrists this morning and Justin got really defensive of her. Was fucking pissed that I wouldn’t do anything about it. He hit me.*”

“*He hit you?*”

“*He had a friend whose dad was really abusive and his friend ended up dead. Justin knew about the abuse but was afraid of doing anything about it. He swore he’d never let that happen to anyone again.*”

A sigh. “*I know the feeling.*”

“*Did you know he’s from New York?*”

“I think I must have at some point. I think he mentioned something about dancing out here but wanted to get away from his family. That could be convenient.”

“Devin would never suspect him and he’s her partner now.”

“You trust him?”

“Yeah, I do.”

“What does he know?”

“Not much. Isaak convinced him that people are trying to help her, but that it’s a delicate process and if he wanted to stay alive, he should stay out of it. That didn’t make him happy but hearing it from Isaak helped. I...mentioned leaving to her this morning. She laughed at me. Not that I blame her. But she won’t come willingly.”

Another sigh and then a curse. “God, I don’t know what to do. Her living with him really fucked up the plans.” A pause. “What’s Justin’s last name again? I’ll see if anyone knows him around here.”

“Sawyer.”

“Sawyer? Fuck.”

“What? Why?”

“I think there’s a Deacon with that last name.”

“Is that good or bad?”

“I don’t know. I guess we’ll find out.”

Chapter Fifty-Seven

Early Friday afternoon, Anna rode in a limo with Devin on their way to the airport. She hadn't told him about the fight between Justin and Travis. She didn't want to get Justin in trouble.

Her wrists were still a little sore, but were healing. Devin had been back to his "nice" self since he punished her, though she was still scared of him. Right now she was leaning against him and he was nibbling on her neck.

Anna sighed and squirmed, trying to control herself. His hand slipped up under her silk shirt and cupped her lace-covered breast. He massaged it gently and then reached in and tugged on her nipple ring.

"Oh, Devin," she sighed. They were almost to the airport and she wanted him so badly. He'd been teasing her the whole time and she was going crazy with desire. "Please...," she whispered.

"Please what, Baby," he asked, chuckling.

"Please fuck me," she moaned as he pinched her nipple painfully. But good pain that made her clench her pussy.

"We're almost there, Baby. There's no time."

She squirmed in her seat again. He hadn't seemed upset that she was doing it and so she had continued showing him her frustration that way.

His hand moved to her leg and he lightly trailed his fingertips up her inner thigh. "Your legs are wet," he remarked, and kissed her ear. "I imagine your panties are soaking." His hand moved up a few inches more and he skimmed his fingers over her swollen sex. She moaned loudly and he chuckled. "Very wet. So wet for me, Baby?"

"Yes," she said breathlessly. He continued to skim his fingers over her panties and she cried out in frustration.

“Mmm, I can’t wait to dive into your hot body, Anna, though you might burn my cock off.”

He continued to tease her until Anna noticed that they had passed the terminal. “Where are we going?”

“A private hangar. I finally broke down and got a private jet. I didn’t have a need before now. I liked fucking the flight attendants. But since you are with me now....” He bit her neck. “I find a need for more privacy.” He removed his hand from between her legs. “And, I didn’t want to be pinned to a schedule.”

Anna watched out the window as they pulled up to a small jet. Well, small compared to the monstrosity of the Kunze family jet. That was the size of a regular airliner. This was smaller, more like the conventional idea one would have thinking about private jets. There was a ‘G’ on the back tail followed by a number, but Anna couldn’t read it from this angle.

“Kaveh will be joining us and I promise you, Baby,” Devin turned her around to look at her. “You will not be screaming in frustration when we land.”

The limo stopped near the base of the stairs and Ian appeared at the entrance of the jet. He hurried down the stairs as the driver got out and opened their door. Devin took her hand and led her up the stairs and into the spacious passenger compartment.

The floor was carpeted in royal blue, and windows lined the entire length of the enclosure. There were two small tables with light-brown, leather chairs flanking them, two leather couches in the middle and a larger table behind that with four seats around it. In the back was a wall and a partially-opened door.

“Bathroom and bedroom,” Devin explained. “Do you like it?”

“Oh, Devin,” she said, running her hands over the leather chairs. “It’s wonderful.”

A petite woman with red hair tied up in a neat bun walked up to them. She wore a crisp white blouse and navy blue pencil skirt and heels. “Hello Mr. Andersen. Ms. Kunze. The captain is ready to leave whenever you are.”

“Thank you, Vanessa,” Devin said. “I see Kaveh’s not here yet. We can take off after he arrives.”

“Yes, sir,” she said with a slight curtsy.

Devin led Anna to the couch and they stashed their bags nearby. Their suitcases were being loaded by Ian and the driver.

A shadow darkened the entryway of the jet and Anna looked up to see Kaveh stooping as he walked down the aisle. He sat down on the couch across from them wearing khaki pants and a white linen shirt. Anna had never seen him in regular clothes and stared. He looked like...a human. A very large, incredibly sexy human, but human nonetheless.

“Hello, Anna,” he said with a smile.

Anna blinked at his use of her name. He’d never called her that before. “Hello, Kaveh.”

Devin and Kaveh engaged in small talk and Anna looked out the window. She fidgeted and hoped that her arousal would be taken care of soon. Ian came in a few minutes later, the doors closed, and soon they were soaring through the air.

“You’re going straight to the White House?” Kaveh asked.

Devin nodded. “Less people around in the evening.”

“Good.”

Vanessa came by to let them know lunch was ready and the four of them moved to the table to eat.

“Is the bed set up?” Devin asked as they were finishing up their meal. A hint of surprise flickered through the redhead’s eyes, but she nodded. “Yes, sir.”

“Good. Thank you. After you clean up you may stay in your quarters. I will ring you if we need anything.”

“Yes, sir.” She took the pile of plates away to the front of the jet. Devin stood and pulled Anna to her feet, kissing her. He glanced at Ian. “You can have her when we’re done, if you’d like.”

Ian glanced at Anna and smiled. “Thanks.”

Anna nervously followed Devin to the back of the plane to the small bedroom.

“Undress, Anna,” he said, unbuttoning his shirt.

She did as she was told, looking between Devin and Kaveh nervously. What was going to happen?

As soon as they were both naked, Devin pulled her close and kissed her, pushing her gently to the bed. He kissed her neck and breasts and belly, slowly making his way down to lap at her pussy.

“Devin....” She gasped as he began sucking on the swollen folds.

“I’m not taking all of you, Baby. Just some and then I will replenish you.”

Anna closed her eyes and enjoyed his touch.

Devin worked his mouth and tongue hungrily over Anna's pussy, sucking and licking her and making her moan. God, she was so sweet. He needed to empty her enough that he could replace her essence with his own, so that they could work in synergy with Jerry tonight. As well as the people they met with the rest of the weekend.

"Enough, Devin," Kaveh said, looking up at Anna's face. It was slightly pale, but not as pale as she got when he took everything.

He sat up. "Is she awake?"

Anna's eyes fluttered open, but they were dull and couldn't quite focus.

"It is enough. You will fill her and bring her life back." Kaveh stood next to the bed. "Are you ready?"

Devin would take Kaveh's essence directly into his own body. It was too much for his human body to take on a regular basis, which is why he used Anna as a conduit, but he needed the full strength this weekend. Jerry needed to be reminded who was in charge.

He moved onto his hands and knees and Kaveh knelt behind him.

"My balls are heavy for you, Devin. It is the amount I usually use for impregnating Anna. It will serve you well." The Immortal pressed his large cock against Devin's hole and slid inside.

"Fuck!" Devin groaned as the massive rod invaded his ass. He was long and wide, a mix of pleasure and pain and his cock throbbed even more than it had been as the head pressed against the sweet spot.

"You need to contain your orgasm and keep it for Anna."

"I know," Devin growled between gritted teeth. Fuck! It hurt and felt incredible at the same time. Is this how Anna felt every night? He'd die if he had to take it every night. It was honey right out of the hive, the purest cocaine from Colombia, a lightning bolt straight through his ass and out the top of his head....

“Argh!” he groaned as Kaveh flexed his fingers into his hips and began thrusting in and out. He was getting high on the sensations. The Immortal essence was beginning to seep into his body and he leaned his head back in painful ecstasy. Tears came to his eyes as the feelings intensified with every thrust. God, could he keep himself from coming? “Fuck, can’t I fuck her now?” he groaned.

“Your body needs time to absorb it,” Kaveh said, intensifying his thrusts. He pounded into Devin’s body and then gave a great shout as he exploded.

Devin screeched as he felt the cum shoot into his body so hard it was painful. His fingers dug into the sheets and he gasped for breath. Kaveh pulled out and Devin fell to his side, groaning as his body tried to absorb the offering. He curled into a ball and shook uncontrollably.

The Immortal put a hand on his hip. “It will subside soon. This is why we use Anna, yes?”

Devin nodded, unable to speak. His heart raced as his blood grew golden with Immortality.

Anna watched as Devin shook on the bed next to her. She had never seen him so weak. He looked...ill. His skin was pink and slick and his neck muscles bulged. She looked at Kaveh, who watched him without concern.

Finally, Devin took a deep breath and relaxed, the fire inside him gone. He opened his eyes and they locked on hers. Golden flecks dotted his normally black eyes.

“You must give her life, Devin. Your body can’t contain everything I gave you.”

Devin nodded and rolled on top of Anna, crushing his lips to hers. His tongue slipped between her lips and she could taste something different in him. Spicy like cinnamon and rich like cream. It was intoxicating. She kissed him back hungrily, sliding her hands around his neck and into his hair. Her tongue caressed his and she sucked on it, making him groan, sending shivers down her spine.

His hands trailed down her body, caressing the side of her breast and thumbing her nipple. He pulled his mouth away to trail his kisses down her neck and she gasped in pleasure. Every kiss branded her skin with his passion. He nipped at her collarbone and slid his tongue down to her breast, taking a nipple into his hot mouth.

“Devin!” she cried out as he suckled the peak, harder and harder until she felt like he was going to suck the rest of the life out of her through her breast. Her mind whirled in incomprehensible colors, coherent thought impossible as long as his mouth was on her. He sucked on her other nipple, making her cry out in pleasure and pain as he positioned himself at her entrance.

“Please,” she begged softly, wiggling beneath him. She needed him so badly she could hardly breathe.

He pressed into her hot wetness and she screamed in pleasure. Every thrust sent waves of pleasure coursing through her body. Her fingernails dug into his back and she arched up to him, meeting every thrust, wanting to take everything he had to give her.

“Yes!” she cried. “Oh, Devin. Yes! Deeper! Deeper!” She wrapped her legs around him, wanting more.

He stopped moving for a moment and his golden-flecked eyes met hers. She whimpered and writhed beneath him.

“Mine,” he said in a deep voice and thrust forward.

“Yes!” she screamed.

He stopped again, looking intently at her. Why did he stop?

“No!” she screamed as he pulled out, but when he flipped her onto her stomach and pulled her hips up she understood. *Deeper*.

With one solid thrust, he rammed himself deeper than he had been. He pressed against her cervix and she screamed in pain and pleasure. Over and over and over he pounded her. The colors whirled in her mind and then everything was blinding white as Devin gave one last painful thrust. She couldn’t even scream as her body shattered in pleasure. She heard Devin yelling and felt his fingers dig into her hips, but the overwhelming light of the explosion in her body overtook everything else and she soared out of consciousness.

Devin slowly regained awareness of his surroundings and looked down to see Anna fall to the bed below him. She shuddered and then was still. He pulled himself away from her and leaned forward, concerned that he had killed her.

He saw her breathing and relaxed.

“What the fuck happened?” he asked, turning to Kaveh, who had watched everything from a chair at the foot of the bed. The Immortal’s eyes were wide, which gave Devin a tremor of concern.

“You took her,” Kaveh said softly, not taking his eyes off the fallen form. “You took possession of her.” He turned his golden eyes to Devin. “You may have broken her bond to Alex.”

Devin looked back down at Anna’s limp body. “How will I know?”

“You will see it in her eyes when she awakes. If it isn’t broken, it is at the least covered over and buried.”

Devin smiled. “Did you know it was possible?”

“I have heard of such things, but they are rare. You...have become very powerful, Devin.”

Devin’s smile turned into a grin. “That makes me very happy to hear you say that, Kaveh.”

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Chapter Fifty-Eight

Wilhelm sat in the dark theater in San Francisco, restless for the Nutcracker performance to progress. The second act had begun and it seemed that the dancing slowed more and more as he anticipated Justin and Anna's *Grande Pas de deux*. He hadn't spoken to Anna since the assassination attempt over a month ago. He had assumed that Devin had been keeping her on a tight rein, though she still should have been able to call him. When he and Kurt had arrived in town on Wednesday, they had hoped to have time with her before the performance as they usually did, but she hadn't returned his calls. He was concerned.

He had called Travis to make sure she was all right, though Wilhelm was fairly certain that Devin would have called if something was severely wrong. Then again, the two men had different ideas about when something was 'wrong' with Anna. Travis said that Anna seemed okay, but distant and sometimes confused. She kept to herself and seemed content. Travis hadn't seen any sign of abuse in several weeks, which was very relieving. She was just...quiet. He did mention that he had tried to take Anna out one afternoon and she flipped out, screaming about not leaving Devin. Violently flipped out and nearly made Travis crash his car.

Mood swings with Anna weren't unusual, though Wilhelm couldn't imagine Anna getting violent. He would have to see her for himself.

Wilhelm leaned forward as the long awaited music began and Anna stepped out of the oversized music box and took Justin's hand. The delicate dance began, and she was beautiful. He smiled and leaned back in his seat to enjoy being closer to her than he had been in months. She and Justin danced well together and he couldn't help but smile broadly as he watched.

When the dance was over, he applauded loudly, as did the rest of the audience.

He saw Devin a few boxes away nodding in approval. Jack sat next to him with a sickening grin on his face. Wilhelm had nodded politely at intermission, but hadn't spoken to them. He would avoid Devin as much as possible. He hated the man with a passion, but he knew he would have to speak with him about spending time with Anna while he was in town.

When the performance concluded, he and Kurt slowly made their way down to the marble lobby.

"She was wonderful, wasn't she, Vati?"

Wilhelm looked over at his son and smiled. Was he still harboring feelings for her? "She's always wonderful."

"I still don't understand why she didn't call you back. It's so unlike her."

"Yes, it is." Wilhelm frowned as he thought about it. Something wasn't right and he would make sure he discovered what it was before he left town.

Kurt and Wilhelm milled around the lobby, chatting with people they knew while they waited for Anna to appear. She and Justin had received a very long standing ovation and were the talk of the lobby. The dancers slowly started trickling in and Wilhelm kept a close eye on the door they walked through. He saw Jenna and she came and said hello with her husband, Matt.

"Have you spoken to Anna?" she asked.

Wilhelm shook his head. "No. I called but have not heard from her. Why?"

Jenna looked around the room. "She's...different, and I was hoping her seeing you would...help."

He frowned at her words. "Different how?"

Jenna squinted as she thought for a moment. “Nothing obvious, really. I mean, depending on what’s going on in her life, she reacts differently, but, well, she’s...not herself. We’d been eating together every day for two weeks and really, I don’t know, becoming friends again. She didn’t share a lot of what went on with Devin, but she was...willing to be friendly. But she went out of town with Devin and...she came home and just said she didn’t want to go anymore. She wasn’t angry or upset, just...uninterested. And she’s just...God, I don’t know. It’s hard to explain.” She looked up into his eyes intently. “I think Devin did something to her, but I don’t know what. You’ll have to see her. Or maybe I’m just paranoid.”

Matt shook his head. “No, something’s different,” he agreed. “Just...off.”

Wilhelm looked up to see Justin and Anna walking into the lobby. She wore a beautiful, green silk, strapless gown that made her eyes glow. She paused for a moment, looking around the room. She looked in his direction, but didn’t seem to see him.

A big smile spread across her face and she walked quickly towards...Devin? He opened his arms and embraced her. He said something to her and then kissed her on the lips, and stroked her cheek. She smiled at Jack and kissed him on the cheek, then leaned her head against Devin’s chest.

“What the...,” Kurt muttered.

“Holy shit,” Jenna exclaimed.

Wilhelm’s stomach tied up in knots. What had Devin done to her? That was not normal. Jenna was right.

“Excuse me,” Wilhelm said, and walked as calmly as he could to the trio.

Devin looked up and saw Wilhelm approaching. The smile on his face did nothing to reassure Wilhelm that Anna was all right.

“Hello, Wilhelm,” Devin said politely.

They shook hands and then Wilhelm looked at Anna. His beloved Anna.

She looked up at him and smiled, but there was no warmth in her eyes. “Hello, Wilhelm,” she said softly. Her voice had a seductive, yet sweet, tone that was very alluring and made his blood tingle. She didn’t reach out to him or do anything that would indicate that he meant anything to her.

“Hello, Anna,” he said after a moment. His eyes flickered to Devin, who was watching the exchange carefully. “Might I have a word with Anna alone?” he asked Devin.

Devin smiled. “Of course.” He lifted Anna’s chin and looked into her eyes. “Go spend time with Wilhelm.”

“Yes, Devin,” she said softly.

Wilhelm took her to a bench across the lobby and sat down next to her. “Anna, are you all right?”

“I’m fine, Wilhelm. How are you?”

He saw a vacancy in her eyes that hadn’t been there before. “I am worried about you.”

She laughed. “Why would you be worried about me? Everything is fine.” She smiled. “Is there anything I can do for you?”

He could tell by her tone she was asking about sex. God, what had happened to her?

Devin watched Wilhelm’s face as he spoke with Anna. He was worried about her. How touching. And unsurprising.

“Can he undo it?” Jack asked.

Devin took a sip of his wine. “It is unlikely that he knows how. And he risks hurting her if he forces her.”

After the mind-blowing sex in the jet on the way to DC, Anna had changed. She had turned into the perfect little slave he’d been hoping for at the bonding ceremony. They’d gone to the White House that night and gotten the president back under control, and several other rogue politicians as well. She followed his orders perfectly now. No more crying or emotional bullshit that he’d dealt with for four years. She was perfectly content.

He kept her at his home because he liked having her there. He’d brought a few women home, just to test her reaction, and she went happily into her own bedroom while he fucked the women in the place she normally slept. She had no emotional reaction to it. But to be honest, he didn’t crave any woman but her. She pleased him sexually more than any other woman had in his life. She anticipated what he wanted and sought to please him in every area.

When it came time to impregnate her, he didn’t even have to use the serum to force her body to conceive. Kaveh spoke to her as he fucked her and she did it all by herself, and now there was a healthy little sacrifice growing inside that sexy body of hers. The only problem with her pregnancy was his limitation on how much life he could take from her. Kaveh said it would turn sour when he needed to stop, and it did. But, he told himself, that just meant the baby would have everything that he would need when he took it.

They had bonded in the way that he had desired for years. It wasn’t permanent; it had to be maintained, but he wasn’t complaining. He fucked

her every night anyways. Kaveh had said this bond would last for several months before they needed to repeat what happened in the jet.

It would become permanent when the final ceremony had been performed. But this was a nice taste of the future.

“How would you like to stay with me tonight?”

Anna blinked and looked around. Where was she? Theater. Nutcracker. Yes, she remembered now. At least she thought she did. She was so confused these days. She vacillated from dream to dream, never certain of what was real or not. She found herself in the middle of activities, unaware of how she got there. It was always that way when she danced. She ‘woke’ every morning at the studio, feeling as if she had dreamed her way there. It was very disconcerting, but as soon as she stopped dancing she started dreaming again. Or was she dreaming that she danced and her dreams were the reality?

“Anna? Did you hear me?”

The familiar gentle voice made her heart pound. She looked up to see a worried Wilhelm looking down at her. “Wilhelm,” she exclaimed. She wanted to reach out to him, but her body wouldn’t obey her thoughts.

His eyes widened in surprise. “Anna?”

She clasped her hands together and clenched her fingers. Why couldn’t she reach out to him? She wanted to touch him, but she couldn’t make her body obey him. She looked up with tears in her eyes. “Wilhelm,” she pleaded softly.

Wilhelm watched Anna carefully. She had looked at him the way she normally did and his heart leapt. He waited to see what she would do next but she only wrung her hands together as if battling within herself.

“Wilhelm.” She said his name so softly he could barely hear it, but the despair in her eyes was very evident.

“Anna, what is wrong? Why are you so distant?” He reached out to cradle her cheek. “What did he do to you?”

She leaned into his cheek and closed her eyes. “I dream. I dream all the time. I don’t even know if this is real, but I like it.” She opened her eyes. He could see the internal battle rage within her. “Help me,” she whispered and then closed her eyes again as if she were in pain.

He looked up to see Devin walking to them, his face inscrutable. “Anna,” he said in a firm tone.

She opened her eyes and they were distant again. Wilhelm dropped his hand and she stood and went to Devin’s side.

Wilhelm stood and glared at Devin. “What did you do to her?”

Devin grinned. “I finally made her into who she is supposed to be. And she’s much happier now, don’t you think?”

“Who she is supposed to be?”

“Yes, the way she would have been had your son not interfered in the bonding ritual.”

Wilhelm stared. How was this possible?

“She’s much happier now, Wilhelm. Why don’t you just let her be?”

The irony of the question wasn’t lost on Wilhelm. Devin hadn’t let her alone; did he really expect Wilhelm to do the same? It occurred to Wilhelm that Devin might not have seen Anna’s internal struggle. Maybe there was still hope. He calmed his features.

“I would like to spend time with her while I am here.” He glanced at Anna, who was watching him with a pleasant though vacant look in her eyes.

“You are still technically her Master. I suppose you still have a right to be with her.” He paused. “She needs to rest between performances. I will have her come to your hotel Sunday night after the evening performance. I am establishing her place in society tonight, and I don’t want anyone to be confused as to who she belongs to.”

“She still belongs to me.”

“Technically, yes. But she won’t likely respond to you as she does me. I am her sole Master and she does as I want her to.”

Wilhelm saw that was true. Everything in her demeanor spoke of devotion and loyalty to Devin. They gave the appearance of being a couple, but Wilhelm knew better. Devin had gotten his mindless slave. But Wilhelm had also seen that Anna was still in there. Maybe, with enough time, he could bring her out again.

Devin having control over her was dangerous. If Devin was wielding that much power, the stories he’d been hearing from other Elders and on the news made a lot more sense now. Even the slightly vacant look in their president’s eyes made more sense now.

He had to get Anna away from him.

“We are staying at the Ritz presidential suite. I expect her there immediately after the performance.”

Devin smiled. “Of course.” He turned and walked away with his arm around Anna.

Kurt rushed over. “Vati, what’s going on?”

Wilhelm shook his head as he watched Anna walk away with her head inclined to Devin. “He’s...made her his puppet.” He looked at Kurt. “But

she's still in there. I saw it for a short moment. She asked me to help her." Wilhelm turned to look at the wall, his heart aching at the pain he'd seen in her eyes. He ran his hands through his hair. "I don't know what to do."

"She's still there?"

Wilhelm turned to see Travis standing casually next to him with Justin. He looked as if he had just asked about the weather, except for the intensity in his eyes. "She's not completely gone?"

"What do you know about it?" Wilhelm asked.

"He's taken control of her. She doesn't act like herself. I don't know how he did it, but he did."

"Why did you not tell me before now?"

"Because we thought she'd be gone by now," Travis sighed. "And we didn't want to risk...others...finding out."

"Gone?" Wilhelm frowned.

Travis looked around. "Out of the city," he said in a very soft tone.

Wilhelm's eyes widened. "What? How?" How could he do that without Devin knowing?

Travis and Justin looked at each other. "Have you ever been to O'Brien's Pub on Market?" Justin asked.

Wilhelm shook his head, not understanding what a pub had to do with Anna.

"We like to go there for a late breakfast after morning rehearsals." Justin gave him a pointed look.

"Irish, eh?" Wilhelm commented, forcing a smile. "I have an Irish son-in-law. Good food." He glanced at Kurt. "Sounds like a good place for breakfast."

Kurt nodded in agreement.

Justin nodded. "You should try it."

“We might just do that.”

“Good.” Travis said. He looked at Justin. “We should go.”

The two dancers walked away, walking almost shoulder to shoulder. Travis leaned over and whispered something to Justin, who laughed and put his hand on Travis’ shoulder in a rather intimate way. Were they a couple?

Wilhelm watched Anna the rest of the evening as he socialized in the elegant lobby. She gave all appearances that she was in love with Devin and if he hadn’t seen her up close, Wilhelm would have been devastated. But he knew something was wrong. Anna was still in there, fighting to survive. He had to help her, but how?

She smiled and flirted with the men Devin spoke with and the men were smitten with her. A few times she walked away with a man and disappeared. Wilhelm hated to think what she was doing.

Kurt growled next to him.

“What’s wrong?”

“That man Anna is talking to? That’s the senator that hurts her.”

Wilhelm looked across the room to see Anna smiling at a man about Kurt’s age with dark blond hair and a politician’s smile. The way he looked at her sent shivers down Wilhelm’s spine. No wonder Devin liked him.

“I don’t know how much more of this I can stand,” Wilhelm muttered, and looked at Kurt. “Should we be relieved that she probably doesn’t know what’s going on?”

“You think it’s that bad?”

“Her eyes are almost vacant. She said she dreamed all the time.” Wilhelm shook his head. “I feel so helpless.” He looked at the ceiling. “I

feel like I've failed Alex. He entrusted me with her and she's suffered so much while she has supposedly been under my care."

"Vati, there's little you can do. Alex was the one who was supposed to be able to deal with Devin. I spoke with Travis and Justin a bit more." He shrugged when Wilhelm arched a brow at him. "I'm their age. It's not as obvious as you talking with them." He looked across the room at Anna. "She hasn't shown up with bruises or anything that would indicate he's abusing her. Aside from the distance, she seems okay. We need to go to breakfast tomorrow."

"Yes, Kurt. I understood that." He smiled to let Kurt know he wasn't rebuking him. He was just anxious. "It's painful being in the same room with her and yet...not."

"I know the feeling."

Chapter Fifty-Nine

Devin stroked his cock slowly as he watched Anna hang from the cuffs in the ceiling of his room later that night. It was late, but Kaveh would be here soon to nurse her back to health. It was an odd cycle, but one that worked. Kaveh gave her his essence, which Devin then took from her, and then took every ounce she had managed to replenish since the night before. Then Kaveh gave her enough to awaken her and Devin finished revitalizing her with a hard fuck. Odd, but not unpleasant for any of them. By Kaveh only partially reviving her, Devin was able to keep her under his control using her own life-force, or essence, against her. It was no hardship to fuck her nightly. He had to be gentler in the mornings, but even then, he could get away with not being overly loving.

She obeyed him exquisitely. He knew she wouldn't move if he lay her on the bed while he consumed his nightly 'meal,' but he loved watching her hang there when he was finished, pale and limp with bright red pussy lips raw from his mouth. Most times her eyes weren't even open and he wondered how much she knew of what went on. Did she pass out, or was she just so spent that she couldn't respond, yet felt everything?

He had a feeling it was the latter because he had used a riding crop on her a few times to see if she reacted. She jumped slightly and her eyes opened just enough for him to see the pain in them. She never said anything about it, though. Momentary pain all but forgotten a few minutes later. The thought was appealing.

He reached out and pinched her nipples between his knuckles, a move that would normally make her cry out in pain. Her body jerked slightly and her eyes fluttered, but no other reaction. His cock throbbed at the idea of

ramming himself into her ass to see what happened, but he needed to keep himself ready for later.

He looked around his room and spotted an empty beer bottle on the table next to the fireplace. He had finished it while Anna sucked him off earlier in the day. That had potential. He picked it up and walked back to Anna.

“I think you have fond memories of beer bottles, don’t you Baby?”

Her eyes fluttered slightly and filled with fear. So she was conscious.

He grinned wickedly as he spread open her ass cheeks and began working the bottle into the tiny hole. It went in surprisingly easy. She couldn’t move her body and likely wouldn’t be able to tighten these muscles either.

Anna saw Devin hold the brown bottle up in front of her. After his ‘feeding’ times, she was surprisingly lucid, even though she couldn’t move her body. She knew the difference between reality and dreams when she hung from Devin’s ceiling. This was certainly reality, but it looked like it was going to turn into a nightmare.

No, Devin. Don’t! She struggled to make her body move, to show him she was afraid. Why did he want to hurt her? She loved him. What had she done to make him want to inflict pain on her?

The cool glass breached the ring easily and her body put up no resistance, but it was dry and the friction burned. He continued to push inside, placing a hand on her hip when she began to move forward from the pressure.

Oh, the fire! The burn! The tapered neck of the bottle gave way to the wider body and she screamed in her head. She tried to scream out loud, but couldn't. It surprised her, when she felt tears running down her cheeks at the fiery pain. Deeper and deeper he pushed and then stopped at the widest part. The most painful part and there was nothing she could do about it but hang there in agonizing pain.

"Does that hurt, Baby?" he asked with a wicked smile, tapping the bottle with his fingernail.

Her eyes fluttered and her body jerked. It was the only thing she could do. What had she done to anger him?

She watched him through hooded eyelids as he studied her. "It hurts, doesn't it?"

Yes, it hurts so much.

He smacked her ass several times, her body swaying from her wrists. The bottle jerked against the stretched ring, increasing the burn. He laughed in delight.

"Are you punishing her?" Kaveh's deep voice interrupted the silent torture.

"No," Devin answered. "I was just curious if she could feel anything."

Kaveh came into her line of sight and studied her. "Yes, she is in an incredible amount of pain." He moved away. "Is that what you want?"

"The tears make my cock throb with desire."

Kaveh chuckled. "You are a sick man to torture one who cannot scream."

"Then maybe we should make it so she can scream." Devin uncuffed her wrists and carried her to the bed where Kaveh offered her his cock.

She lay on her side, drinking in Kaveh's offering and Devin tapped on the bottle and twisted it, causing agonizing pain. Finally, she pulled back

from Kaveh and screamed.

“There she is.”

“You want to torture her while she’s half revived?”

“She won’t react if she’s fully revived, will she?”

“No.”

“Then yes. It’s been a while since I’ve heard her scream in pain.”

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Chapter Sixty

Wilhelm watched Kurt tap the table with his fingertips and stare out the window of the Irish pub. Kurt still cared for Anna a lot, though his feelings weren't as strong as they had been. Wilhelm suspected that Anna had more to do with his faded feelings than a natural decline on Kurt's part. At one point, Kurt had even asked him if he could somehow step into Alex's shoes and fight Devin himself.

Wilhelm had honestly been shocked at the question. Kurt was a good man. A very good man, but he wasn't a fighter like Alex had been. To be willing to risk his life to fight for someone else was a new trait that Kurt was picking up. Wilhelm didn't know if it was possible, but they had begun looking through the old books that Alex had used, and Alex's notes to see if they could find a way. Kurt was making progress but Wilhelm was afraid to hope too much, although he would never discourage Kurt in his endeavor. He was so proud of his son.

They had ordered their breakfast, since he had a feeling the meeting was supposed to look like a chance encounter, and it arrived a few minutes later. A few bites into their meals, Justin and Travis walked through the doorway holding hands. They looked around casually and greeted the hostess as if they frequented the establishment. She gave them a big toothy grin and led them towards a table near Wilhelm and Kurt's.

"Kurt!" Travis grinned and they walked over. "Took our advice, huh?"

Wilhelm smiled and wondered what he would learn that necessitated such subterfuge.

"It is good food," Kurt grinned. "Care to join us?"

The two dancers glanced at each other and nodded. They smiled at the waitress and she handed them their menus and walked away. Kurt moved to the seat next to Wilhelm and the other two men sat down and opened their menus.

They chatted causally until the waitress came over. The waitress seemed to know them as well and flirted while she wrote down their order.

Wilhelm thought it best to let Travis and Justin take the lead on the other topic and didn't have to wait long before the subject of Anna was brought up.

"She wasn't well this morning," Justin commented. "She didn't complain of anything, but she seemed to be...." He glanced at Travis. "Uncomfortable?"

Travis nodded. "Like she was in pain, but didn't know it, if that makes any sense."

"Yeah. I lifted her onto my shoulder and she whimpered, but when I asked her about it, she seemed completely unaware that she had done it."

Wilhelm took a sip of his coffee and considered their words.

"Has she acted like this before?" Kurt asked.

"Not in a really long time," Travis said. "The reason I assume pain is because of when she had obviously been abused, she acted in a similar manner, though tried to hide it better. This time...." He shook his head. "It's like her mind's disconnected from her body."

"I would not be surprised. Did either of you know about her relationship with Devin?"

Justin frowned and Travis grimaced. "We knew she was living with him," Travis said. "But we didn't know she'd fallen in love with him."

"I have a feeling it is more of an induced feeling than actual love," Wilhelm said. "Devin claims to have—" He stopped and looked at Justin.

“Are you a Brother?”

“Not technically, though I’ve learned quite a bit about it. My father is a Deacon in New York. I just learned about all this a few weeks ago.” He shook his head. “Things make so much more sense now.” He gave a grim laugh.

Wilhelm frowned. “New York?” He knew that Tom was Devin’s best friend. Tommy had shown concern about Anna, but what about his father?

Travis nodded. “It’s okay, Wilhelm. Loyalties have...shifted.”

Wilhelm tilted his head. Tom was no longer loyal to Devin? By Travis’ reaction, it would appear so, but perhaps unwise to vocalize it. Wilhelm looked at Justin. “You have an older brother?”

Justin nodded. “Two.”

“Ah, and Devin does not make the connection?”

“Not that we can tell,” Travis commented. “Justin’s been out here for several years and rarely goes home. Sawyer’s not that uncommon of a name.” Travis grinned. “He’s our ‘outside’ man.”

Their food arrived and they began eating.

Wilhelm leaned forward after a few minutes. “Please tell me what is going on.”

Travis nodded. “I’m going to leave out names because it’s better that way. And I want to tell you up front, the reason we haven’t told you about anything was because we knew Devin watched you because of your relationship with Anna. He pays us little mind.”

Wilhelm nodded. It made sense.

Travis glanced at Justin, who nodded. “There are...people...that have been concerned about Devin’s treatment of Anna. At first it was just concern over the abuse, but when he started....” He shuddered, “...the whole pregnancy thing and Devin started getting more powerful, it became more

evident that she needed to get away from him.” Travis frowned. “There were plans to get her out of the city in September, but when Peter’s grandfather died and she moved in with Devin, things got complicated. Remember how I told you I tried to get her to go out with me and she flipped out?”

Wilhelm nodded.

“I was going to take her and leave, but her bond to him is so...strong, I couldn’t. She was screaming and crying. I couldn’t get her onto public transportation like that. And then he called her, wanting to know where she was. For some reason she didn’t tell him she was with me, but...shit,” Travis frowned. “I had taken off that bracelet and her necklace. They both have trackers in them. I think he can sense her or he’s put something inside her.”

“He has trackers in her jewelry?”

Travis nodded. “That gold bracelet at least. I took the necklace off just to be sure.”

“How do you know about the bracelet?” Kurt asked.

“Someone who knows told me.” He sighed. “The next weekend he got her pregnant and we can’t move her when she’s pregnant. The...person who is helping us can only shield one person from Devin’s eyes. Devin would be able to find her because of the baby.”

It had to be an Elder who was helping them. No one else would be able to provide a shield except an Elder. “Where are you trying to get her?”

“New York. Vincent already said he’d happily take her into his Company. She needs to keep dancing, especially if she’s away from Devin. It will keep her from going insane.”

Wilhelm nodded. Tom *was* helping them. Interesting. “But if she is gone from him for too long, she will begin to get ill.”

Justin nodded. "We know, but we've been assured that will be taken care of."

"How?" Kurt interjected.

They both shrugged their shoulders. "No idea," Travis said. "But I trust the person who told me."

Wilhelm thought for a moment. "Is that why Aaron left?"

Travis nodded. "He wanted to be there when she got there. It was only supposed to be a few months, but now...I don't know. The 'powers that be' are discussing it and trying to come up with a new plan. We're just waiting and will do what we're told."

"Is it only you two?" Kurt asked. "Here, I mean."

Travis shook his head. "There are two others here that are helping. One is...sometimes able to distract Devin and can keep us posted on what's going on, but the communication is limited because of his position."

"Ian." Wilhelm spoke without thinking.

Travis nodded. "How did you know?"

"When we were in St. Petersburg, he said some things that made me think he might not be totally loyal to Devin anymore." Wilhelm frowned. "Devin will kill him if he ever finds out."

"If she disappears, Devin will very likely know Ian helped. He's prepared to die if it means she can get free. He says it's the least thing he can do after what he's done to her."

"He is a brave man." Kurt remarked.

"Yeah," Justin agreed.

"Is there anything I can do?" Wilhelm asked earnestly. More than anything else, he wanted Anna to be free and Devin taken out. The only way Devin would be able to be taken out was if Anna were away from him. She was the source of his power.

“Actually, you’ve helped already,” Travis said. “Knowing she’s still ‘in there’ is really helpful. I made a call last night and was told that they could work with that.”

“Other than that, just play ignorant,” Justin said. “We knew you were concerned last night and wanted to let you know that there are others who feel the same way. Of course, we’ll let you know when she’s...away.”

“Thank you. Both of you. My heart is a little bit more at ease knowing I am not the only one concerned. And please let me know if there is anything I can do.”

Justin smiled. “She’ll need a new name for her new life. Maybe you can come up with something.”

Wilhelm looked at Kurt. “I think we could manage that.”

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“She’s lucid when she’s out of range of Devin’s influence.”

“How do you know that?”

“Wilhelm did...something to his hotel room to keep Devin from spying when she came to visit him last night. As soon as she walked into the suite, she apparently woke up.”

There was a long pause. “That is good. That is very good. He is not completely in control of her yet.”

“She seems to react to Wilhelm unlike anyone else.”

“That’s not unexpected. He is Alex’s father. Same blood. And he is still her Master, even though she may be unaware of it most of the time. I think he needs to be there when she arrives.”

Chapter Sixty-One

Moments of clarity were rare. Half the time when Anna was aware of her surroundings, she was in excruciating pain. The other half of the time she felt so happy she could hardly stand it. The schizophrenia of her life confused her to no end. But then the pain became less frequent and then disappeared altogether, replaced with kind words and loving touch.

He told her he loved her. That he was so proud of her, that he needed her so much. That she made him feel good.

He loved her! Finally, after all these years, he loved her. Truly loved her.

Dreams and reality melded together even more now, but neither were bad. A few times she saw the other man. The man with the cobalt blue eyes. But those times were rare. She felt comfort in the black eyes with the golden specks. They loved her. They cherished her. They didn't hurt her anymore.

Anna felt the warm breeze on her face lift a few stray tendrils of hair and tickle her nose. She scrunched her face and rubbed her nose. Was this a dream? Was this reality? She wasn't even sure she could tell the difference anymore. Did it really matter anyways?

A warm hand brushed her hair away from her face. She opened her eyes and saw Devin crouching next to her wearing a white linen tunic.

“Hello, love,” he said in a soft voice.

A smile crept across her face as she gazed at him. “Hi,” she whispered. He smiled, his eyes crinkling at the edges. “How are you feeling?”

“Tired.”

He chuckled gently. “That’s to be expected. You usually are this time of year.”

This time of year? She looked down and saw him rubbing her protruding stomach. The baby. She had forgotten.

“But it will be over soon, love. Remember?”

Anna smiled and nodded. “A gift for you,” she said softly, remembering.

“Yes, love. A beautiful gift for me.” He leaned forward and kissed her tenderly on the lips. “I love you so much.”

Warmth spread throughout her body. “I love you, too.”

“Kaveh is here. He wants to be with you and help make your gift to me extra special.”

“Yes, Devin,” she said softly. “I want your gift to be very special.”

“Good girl,” he said kissing her cheek. “I will see you soon.” He stood and disappeared from view.

A moment later the mattress she lay on shook. She looked behind her to see the large, golden Immortal sitting on the bed, his cock jutting out from his hips like a giant steel rod.

“Hello, Daughter,” he said rubbing her hip over the soft blankets that covered her naked body.

She turned onto her back. “Hello,” she said softly.

He leaned forward to kiss her neck. She sighed and lifted her chin, exposing more of her neck for him to suck on. He pulled the blanket down and stretched out beside her.

Kaveh sat up slightly to take a taut peak into his mouth, swirling his tongue around her nipple. She moaned softly and kicked off the rest of the

blanket. His hand strayed down her belly and between her legs. “You are ready for me?”

Her body tingled as she nodded. Being with Kaveh was unlike any other sexual partner she’d had. He made her feel things that no one else could.

He pulled her to her hands and knees and slowly slipped inside her silken folds. She arched her back more as his girth stretched her open.

“Open your womb to me, Daughter, so I can give my offering to your daughter.”

Anna didn’t know how she knew to do as he asked, but she closed her eyes and concentrated. She felt an ache as his cock pressed in deep and groaned. “You won’t hurt her, will you?”

Kaveh chuckled. “No. Not at all.” He began moving slowly in and out and Anna pressed her head down into the pillow as pleasure engulfed her.

“Yes,” she breathed, raising her hips up to take more of him in.

Kaveh leaned down and nuzzled her neck. “Let me do the moving, Daughter. I will bring you great pleasure.”

Anna relaxed and tried to keep still, but her hips moved slightly in pleasure. She sighed and moaned, grasping the pillow as he gently pumped himself over and over inside of her.

The tingling increased. “Please, may I come?” she said breathlessly.

“Yes, Daughter. She will like that.”

The waves increased and increased until she exploded into a million pieces, arching her back and screaming out Kaveh’s name. She felt him press in and release himself deep inside her.

She cried out as the room began to spin and she grabbed her head.

“Shhh,” Kaveh whispered soothingly. “Close your eyes and let yourself relax. Everything is fine.”

Anna felt a void as Kaveh pulled out and pulled the blankets back up.
“Sleep, Daughter.”

Anna stood next to the platform wearing a long white dress. Ian stood behind her, his hands heavy on her shoulders. Devin spoke to the crowd of men in the grass and Anna watched him with adoration. He looked so handsome in his white robe with his black hair and tan skin such a contrast. He glanced over a few times to her and winked, making her flush with emotion. He normally didn’t pay her much special attention during the Gatherings, but he had been very attentive all afternoon.

Ian pushed her forward gently as Devin looked at her and smiled. He extended his hand to her and she reached for it, feeling dizzy, but Devin supported her as she walked. He spoke again to the men sitting on the grass, but his words sounded muddy in her ears. The men cheered and Devin led her to a short stone table, where the Immortals stood watching her with golden fire in their eyes.

Kaveh smiled as he helped her onto the table and then moved behind her, acting as a backrest. His hands spread out over her stomach and she felt his chest rumble as he spoke in a language she didn’t understand.

Suddenly a shooting pain shot through her stomach and she whimpered.

Devin stood in front of her and took her hand. “It’s all right, love. He’s helping you give me your gift.”

She squeezed her eyes shut as her lower belly cramped. Devin knelt down between her legs and pushed her feet back to her thighs, her dress falling aside and exposing her naked pussy to him.

“Anna, it’s time to give me your gift.” He looked at her intently and she nodded and tried to give him a brave smile.

Kaveh held her knees near her shoulders as another pain erupted in her belly and she groaned. Devin thumbed open her pussy and leaned forward to lick her. The pain of the cramps mixed with the pleasure of his mouth and she could hardly tell up from down.

“Close your eyes, Daughter,” Kaveh said. “Close your eyes and give it to him. Give him your daughter.”

Oh, the pain was excruciating. Only the feel of Devin’s mouth on her kept her from screaming. But this was for him. He needed her baby and she wanted to give it to him.

The pain grew along with the pleasure. She opened her eyes and they met Devin’s. He nodded his head at her and she closed her eyes and released everything to him. Her orgasm. Her pain. Her child.

“Yes, Anna,” Devin said in a low, excited voice.

A few moments later, the pain subsided and Anna opened her eyes to see him stand with a bloody mass in his hands. He dropped it into the bowl on the brazier as he did each year. She could hardly keep her eyes open as she felt her life, her essence, diminished significantly. Everything she had, she’d given to the child that Devin had taken from her.

Anna’s eyes fluttered closed and the world spun around her. She felt mouths on her pussy again, licking and sucking on her until she writhed in pain. There was no pleasure in this touch. She tried to open her eyes, but they felt glued shut. She had no idea what was going on. The little essence that was left in her body was taken and she lay limply in Kaveh’s arms, hoping he wouldn’t let go.

She felt herself lifted and carried for a few moments before she was in a large lap and something was forced between her lips. Kaveh. She knew his

taste. She eagerly sucked at him as he rubbed the back of her head.

“Devin wants you healed, but you don’t have to participate in the orgy tonight,” Kaveh said after she had finished. He didn’t come, but she felt revived as she looked up at him.

Anna was about to speak when she heard a blood curdling scream from the platform. She looked up to see a teenage girl tied between two pillars, naked. Devin was in front of her with a long knife with a jeweled handle. There was a bloody streak across her belly and the girl struggled to escape from her bonds.

Anna watched in horrified fascination as Devin drew the knife across her body in strange patterns. It must have been a very sharp knife because he wasn’t pressing very hard and blood came quickly after his movements. The girl continued screaming, but it was being drowned out by the men’s shouts and cheers.

Anna looked down at the ground, nauseous. She kept herself calm because she knew Devin would be disappointed in her if she made any sort of movement that would be seen as disapproval.

The girl’s screams continued, some higher and louder than others. Finally, a last scream was cut short by a gurgling sound and Anna looked up. The girl’s head hung backwards, blood streaming from a gash across her neck. Blood flowed freely from her nipples, below her breasts and down her inner thighs. Devin bent to suck on a bloody nipple and then invited several of the men to come up and “partake of the sacrifice,” including the president.

Anna swallowed hard to keep from throwing up. The look in Devin’s eyes was powerful and frightening. He looked at her with fierce eyes; the warmth that had been there earlier was gone. Anna dropped her gaze and blinked back tears.

When the other men returned to their places, the president didn't. Instead, he knelt before Devin and took Devin's cock into his mouth. Devin put his hands on the dark man's head and leaned his head back in ecstasy. Anna could see Devin's cock in the man's throat. After a time, Devin leaned his head back and gave a primal scream as he held the man's lips against his hips and pumped hard into his mouth.

The orgasm seemed to last forever and the man looked up at Devin with dazed adoration.

Devin made some sort of declaration and all the men bowed to him as he held his hands up in the air and smiled in triumph.

"Now go and celebrate," he said. The women made their way into the crowd and the orgy began.

Ian came to her. "Anna, come. I will take you where you can sleep peacefully tonight."

Anna looked up at Kaveh who smiled and nodded. "Sleep. Rest, Daughter. You did well."

Chapter Sixty-Two

Anna walked on shaky legs as Ian led her along the outskirts of the crowd to the opposite side of the field from hers and Devin's pavilion. It was much quieter over here.

He opened the curtain of a small pavilion in the far corner and let her pass through first. The curtain dropped back into place and Anna jumped as two men walked out of the dark corner.

Travis and Tommy.

"What are you doing here?" she asked nervously. They had always been her friends. Were they after her now?

"Anna, there's not much time," Tommy said, stepping to her and holding out a bundle of clothes. "Put these on."

Anna took it. "Why?"

He gave her a tender smile. "Please, Anna. It will be explained later. Do you trust me?"

"Of course."

Anna pulled off her gown and dressed in the jeans and black long sleeved t-shirt. Travis handed her a pair of socks and black boots.

"I don't understand," she said.

"You're leaving," Ian said from behind her.

"Here, get her jewelry off," Travis said. "I'll do her boots." Travis knelt down and tied her boots as Ian stepped closer.

"What do you mean, leaving?" Anna said looking up into Ian's hazel eyes. "I can't leave...I don't want to leave," she added, though not very convincingly.

Ian looked at her intently. “He’s not going to stop hurting you, Anna, or controlling you. Do you even remember the last few months?”

Anna looked away. Hazy memories from the last few months flitted through her mind. “He told me he loved me.”

“And he tortured you for the fun of it.”

Anna winced. “Not at the end.”

“Because he needed you to voluntarily give him....” Ian trailed off. “Do you want to live like that? Do you want to keep being beaten and raped at his whims? Do you want him to take your powers so he can control you and everyone around you?”

Anna shook her head slowly as he produced a key and unlocked her bracelet. He quickly pulled it off her wrist and re-locked it.

Ian looked at her with pained eyes and then reached out to stroke her cheek. “You deserve a better life, Anna. And Devin...needs to be stopped. We can’t stop him if you are with him.”

“We?”

“Don’t ask too many questions right now, Anna,” Tommy said, handing her a ponytail holder. “Ian’s been helping us. He’ll make sure Devin doesn’t realize you’re gone until at least tomorrow afternoon, and by then you’ll be out of the state. Hopefully he’ll be able to buy you more time, but that’s what we’re working on.”

Anna looked back at Ian. “He’ll kill you if he finds out.” She looked around. “All of you.”

“He won’t know any of them were involved Anna. Only me.” He held up the key to her bracelet. “I’m the only one with a key besides him.”

“He’ll kill you,” she whispered again, tears in her eyes.

“Probably.” He stepped forward and cradled her cheek, brushing away a tear with his thumb. “Anna, I have done horrible, terrible things to you. If

you getting free means I have to die, then so be it.” His warm hazel eyes glistened with moisture. “I hope you can forgive me,” he said in a broken voice. “Knowing that will allow me to die in peace.”

“Oh, Ian!” Anna threw her arms around his neck and hugged him tightly. “Of course I forgive you. I don’t hold anything against you. I know you wouldn’t have done it on your own.”

He hugged her back for a moment and then released her. He removed her necklace. “You are empty of him right now. He won’t be able to trace you,”

Travis and Tommy both hugged her.

“Go, Anna. I’ll see you in a few days,” Tommy said, pushing her towards Ian. “You need to get moving.”

Few days?

“Ian’s gonna take you to the road where Justin is waiting for you. He’s gonna take you to your destination.” Travis grinned. “I’ll come visit you.”

Her two friends disappeared through a back panel and Ian took her hand. “We have to hurry.”

Ian led her slowly and quietly through the dark woods. The sounds of the Gathering quickly faded as they climbed down a hill and up another one. When they were far enough away, he pulled out a flashlight and they were able to move easier. After about twenty minutes, they came to the end of the woods and Anna saw a black sedan parked a few feet away. The door opened and Justin stepped out.

“Any problems?” Justin asked

“Nope, it all went as planned,” Ian answered.

Justin extended his hand. “Thank you, Ian. For everything.”

The two men shook hands and then Ian turned to Anna, whose eyes filled with tears. “Anna, it’s all right. It will be okay. I’m ready to be free of

him.”

Anna swallowed and nodded. She reached up onto her toes and kissed him. “You’re a good friend, Ian.”

Ian stepped back and nodded. “Be free, Anna.” He gave her a last smile and then disappeared back into the dark woods.

Justin opened the passenger side door. “Get in, Anna. We have a long drive and not much time.”

She stared into the shadows for a moment more, heart full of thankfulness for Ian, and then turned and got into the car. Justin pulled onto the road and accelerated quickly.

Anna stared out the window as the trees sped by. “Where are we going?”

“Martinez, California, to catch a train.” He reached over and took her hand. “It’s okay, Anna. Everything has been taken care of. We’re catching a train tonight to Portland and Devin will have no idea where you went.”

“We’re going to Portland?”

“Only to catch another train to Chicago and then New York.”

Anna’s heart pounded. “We’re going to New York? You’re taking me?”

Justin nodded. “Tommy’s dad can protect you there. And yes, I’m taking you. We wouldn’t let you travel alone.”

Anna looked out at the stars. “I still don’t understand what’s going on. Devin will find me. He always knows where I am.”

“Not now. Your bracelet and necklace had a GPS tracker in it, and they’re back at the field making it look like you’re sleeping. Devin would

never imagine that you'd take a train. No one takes trains anymore and the security on them is minimal at best. Especially out here."

Anna doubted he wouldn't be able to know where she was and she felt queasy with nerves. "Why are you doing this, Justin? You're not a Brother, are you?"

He shook his head. "I've learned a lot about it though. My dad's a Deacon under Tom. By not being part of it, Devin doesn't pay any attention to me. At least, as long as I'm not trying to flirt with you."

"Flirt? Why would you flirt with me? You're gay."

Justin laughed. "Because of Travis?"

"Yeah."

"No, Anna. I'm not gay. Bi-curious maybe, but I like women."

Anna stared at him. "But you and Travis are dating."

He shook his head. "We made it look that way so we could plan without making Devin suspicious."

"I've seen you kiss him."

"A few times. But really, Anna. He's a very good friend. We got really close, but it was all for appearances." He gave her a sideways glance. "You know how that goes."

Anna sighed, her head swimming. "You did all that for me?"

"Hon, that day you walked in with the bruises on your wrists just set me off. Travis took me aside a few days later and told me about the Brotherhood and Devin, and how he used you to control people. I didn't totally understand it, but I did understand the abuse he's put you through for years. I guess the powers that be decided Devin was finally getting out of control sufficiently enough to get involved with your abuse. But Anna...." He glanced at her. "Tommy and his dad and Travis' dad...they've all been concerned about you for years. They care a lot about you. They

just...couldn't do anything about it. They didn't have the right to, as much as it disgusted them."

"Tom? But he's Devin's best friend."

Justin shrugged. "As far as I know, Tom hasn't been comfortable with what Devin's been doing for a while, but was afraid to do anything about it. When Tommy met Peter, the two of them, and Aaron, started—"

"Aaron? He's involved?"

"He was the first one. He found in Tommy a kindred spirit in their disgust with how Devin treated you. Then Tommy started talking with his dad and it went from there."

"But Aaron left."

"Only so that he could be in New York when you got there. Peter was going to take you in September, but then his grandfather died and the plans fell apart. Travis tried to take you in December, but you flipped out on him."

"I did?" She didn't remember that.

Justin chuckled. "We had a feeling you didn't know what was going on. Yeah, you almost made him crash his car."

"Oh, no!"

"Yeah...do you even remember Nutcracker? Or any of the February programs?"

Anna shook her head and looked out the window. "I have vague memories of dancing, but nothing else." What had happened to her? She remembered only bits of dancing and pain.

"Wilhelm said your eyes looked vacant when he saw you at Nutcracker, but the real you asked for help."

A memory flashed into her mind of the lobby after opening night. One of the rare moments of clarity. "Does he know what you guys have been

doing?"

"A little. We told him that there were people helping you but didn't want to tell him that much because Devin keeps pretty close tabs on him. He'll be in New York when you get there."

Anna's heart leapt. The idea of being near Wilhelm filled her with joy. "Wilhelm...." she whispered.

"He said that Devin had turned you into his puppet."

"Puppet?" She had heard that term before. Tears filled her eyes as she remembered the talk with Alex the night after the bonding ceremony.

"The ritual from last night, it was a bonding ceremony. A uniting of a master and a slave. If I hadn't interfered...Anna, your mind would have been completely his. You would have lost...you." Alex grimaced. "You would have become his puppet."

"...your mind would have been completely his," she whispered. "But...why am I not...I mean, I don't remember a lot since before Nutcracker, but I know what's going on now."

"Wilhelm wasn't sure either. He said something about a final ceremony and it might not fully take hold until then. Tommy said because of what happened tonight, you would be more yourself now than any other time recently." He glanced at her again. "Seems right. I haven't heard you speak this much since...well, since you went to DC."

"Devin and Kaveh...." Anna said. "They did something on the plane. Devin consumed me...." She shook her head. "I don't know. But, yes. Those are the last clear memories I have, too. Everything else seems like a dream."

She used to wish Alex hadn't interfered, but did she really want to live her life like she had been these last months? It was March. She'd gone to DC in October. She'd lost five months of her life. Like when she'd been on

drugs for two years. Did she want to just exist for Devin and nothing else? Yes, there had been a tremendous amount of pain, but good things, too. Friends like Jenna and Aaron and Travis. Ben. The glorious precious months being Alex's wife.

Anna burst into tears. For the first time, she felt thankful for what Alex had done that night; for saving her. But she would never be able to thank him. Did she dream of him still?

Justin put his hand on her leg for comfort while she cried. He turned onto a highway and quickly accelerated to eighty miles an hour. When they drove through a town he had to slow down, but as soon as they were out he sped up again.

"The train leaves at a quarter to eleven. We're gonna cut it close, but we'll make it."

"You're gonna leave your car at a train station?"

"It's a rental. Travis will pick it up."

"Oh." She leaned her head back and looked out the window. "Devin will kill Tom," she said softly.

"Maybe. Tom's been keeping up appearances for several years, though. He has help from several other Elders, though. Including Peter's uncle."

"Vlad?"

Justin nodded. "When Peter came into the picture and realized that Devin had fed him a bunch of lies about you, he started working with Aaron and the others," Justin continued. "His uncle was concerned about a bunch of stuff, too, and was helping. Peter's grandfather died and the plan to get you out got scrapped, but Peter said it was the best thing that could happen. His uncle could help Tom protect you. We just had to figure out how to get you out. You living at Devin's made things hard, so Tom suggested this weekend. Devin and everyone else are very distracted and you're yourself."

He shrugged. “So, we catch a train to Portland and head out to New York. We’ll be there Tuesday evening.”

“What about...What ballet were we practicing?”

“Rite of Spring.”

“You’re going to miss a bunch of rehearsals.”

“I’m not going back. You and I are the newest members of the New York City Ballet Company.”

Anna stared. “How did that happen?”

“I forgot to mention, Isaak’s been involved too. He talked with Vincent and he’s very excited to have you coming out. Me...well, hopefully he’s forgiven me for being young and stupid.”

“What did you do?”

Justin shook his head. “I don’t want to talk about it. But, I guess bringing you out has redeemed me a bit.”

“You danced in New York?”

“I went to the School of American Ballet and was in the Corps for a couple years before...well, before I came out to San Francisco.”

“Do you know Nate?”

“Nate Devereaux? Yeah, great dancer. Why?”

“He was my partner during the summer intensives.” Oh, sweet Nate.

“He left you to go to New York?”

“I told him to. Devin would have...it was safer if he left. Devin threatened him.”

“Ah.”

“The Ballet Master wanted both of us, but Devin wouldn’t let me go. Devin probably would have killed Nate if he had stayed.” Like he had killed Ben.

They were quiet for a while. Anna stared out at the sky. *Freedom.* Away from Devin. Was it really possible? Could she really be her own person like Alex always wanted her to be? It seemed too good to be real.

After a while, Justin turned onto a larger highway and picked up even more speed.

“I went to your house and packed up some of your clothes. I also packed up your...what did Wilhelm call it? Your memories box?”

Anna gasped in joy. “Oh, Justin! You’re wonderful!”

He smiled sheepishly. “Wasn’t my idea, but I’m glad you’re happy. I put everything in a backpack so it’d be easier to take.” He glanced at her.

She leaned her head back and looked out the window again, still holding Justin’s hand. Though he hardly knew her, he was still willing to do all this for her. They’d danced together for months, but...she didn’t even know his last name.

“Thank you, Justin,” she said sincerely.

He glanced at her and then looked back at the road. “You’re welcome, Anna. I’m glad I could help.”

They arrived in Martinez about fifteen minutes before the train was due to leave. Justin pulled two suitcases and two backpacks out of the trunk. He handed one of the backpacks to Anna. “You have a new ID. I couldn’t get to your current stuff because it was in Devin’s house, so I bought you a new wallet. It has a New York driver’s license and new Kunze family credit cards, though with your new name on them.”

“I thought Devin couldn’t find me.”

“He can still track your name and figure out where you are. Devin’s abilities are far more pronounced than Tom’s and he might be able to break the protections Tom’s put in place. But first he has to find you.” Justin closed the trunk and locked the keys in the car. “Hence, the new name.”

“What is it?”

“Katrina Engel. Wilhelm picked it out.”

Anna smiled. Kurt must have had something to do with it as well. “I like it.”

“C’mom. The train’ll be here soon and we need to check in.”

Anna nervously followed Justin into the building, thankful to be indoors, away from where she could almost feel Devin’s eyes.

Justin walked up to a kiosk and swiped a credit card and pushed some buttons on the screen. A few moments later several tickets printed out and Justin handed them to Anna.

Anna and Justin sat down on a hard wooden bench. She tried to grasp all the changes that were about to take place. Her mind was whirring a million miles an hour and she wasn’t even sure what questions to ask.

A few minutes later, a loud horn blew and then there was a very loud rumbling sound.

“Train,” Justin said standing. “Stay close.”

They headed for the front of the train as it drew up alongside the platform. Anna looked from one end to the other. The silver sides gleamed in the orange light of the station. A few people got off, but there were more lining up to get on.

A man in a uniform walked up to them. “Tickets?”

Anna handed them the stack. He looked at her curiously, flipped through them and took out the ones he needed before handing them back to her. She

stared at him, afraid he would somehow know she was running away, and felt herself influencing him without meaning to.

He stared at her for a moment before swallowing. “Uh, s-second car all the way to the f-front,” he stuttered.

She gave him a bright smile and he practically melted in front of her. He handed her tickets back to her and they walked down the platform.

“Holy fuck, An-Katrina,” Justin mumbled under his breath. “Is that what you do? Make men melt?”

Anna’s head cleared and she glanced at him. “Sometimes.” She stared at the ground as they walked.

“Remind me never to try and make you do something you don’t want to do.” He grinned. “Or maybe I *should* try.”

Anna smiled and then giggled at the face he made at her.

Chapter Sixty-Three

Devin woke mid-morning in his pavilion with a cool morning breeze on his face and smiled. Last night had gone exceedingly well. Fucking the president's face in front of everyone made it very clear who was in charge now. At last he was where he wanted to be. For now. 'Ruling' the country would work for now. When he had sufficient power, he would expand.

Anna's 'gift' to him had been extremely gratifying. It was much more powerful than simply taking it. He could feel the Immortal powers from it coursing through his blood. He needed to make sure Anna was back under his control before they left tomorrow, but it could wait. She had been very useful to him these last months and he hadn't had to deal with the shit that he'd had to deal with for years with her. The emotions, the crying, the need for love. No, she was content to do whatever he told her to do, be it seducing the Mayor or bending over so he could fist her ass and make her scream in pain. He loved hearing her scream.

His cock stirred at the thought of it. Maybe he should go find her. But no, he needed her in shape to be fuckable and suck cock today. He could make men do what he wanted them to do, but Anna's influence helped ease them into it and the memories lasted longer. Who could forget the feel of her lips around his cock?

Devin opened his eyes and saw one of his girls asleep next to him. A brunette named Cecilia. She was barely eighteen and extremely talented. He pulled down the blanket to look at her full breasts, and she stirred and opened her brown eyes.

"Good morning, Master," she said with a seductive smile. "How may I please you?"

Devin grinned. Anna didn't wake up asking that, but she didn't need to. She knew what he wanted.

"Turn over," he said, and she immediately obeyed.

He nudged her legs apart and spread open her ass cheeks, exposing her tight hole. It would stretch open easily for him but remain snug. Going in dry would make it hurt. Did he feel benevolent? No, not really. He leaned forward and pressed his throbbing cock against her hole and she whimpered.

"I want to hear how much it hurts," he said in a raspy voice as he pressed forward.

She whimpered again and then screeched as he thrust forward, ripping her open with a single movement. He leaned back, his cock slipping out so he could look at the damage. Yes, this would do nicely. He thrust back in, making the girl scream again.

Devin cleaned up and then went to have lunch. He joined Tom and their sons at a table under a tree.

Tom grinned at him. "I have heard good comments about last night. They're all very impressed with what you did with the Prez."

Devin grinned. "Good." He inhaled deeply. "Things are very good. All my planning has paid off."

After lunch, he wandered around talking to people, making sure they understood what he expected from them. Mid-afternoon he was to meet

with the Elders and so made his way back to his Pavilion.

“Ian,” he said sitting down on the couch. “Is Anna up?”

“I don’t know, sir, I haven’t seen her yet.” Ian looked up from his tablet.
“Do you want me to go find her?”

“Yes, please. The Elders will be here soon and I want her here.”

“Yes, sir.”

Devin sat back and people-watched as Ian wandered off in search of Anna. It wasn’t unusual to see a girl walking across the grass and a man grab her and fuck her on the grass right there. He loved how...uncouth the men were becoming.

Half an hour later, the Elders had gathered, but Anna wasn’t there. Devin was getting irritated. She should know better than to keep him waiting, no matter how well she did last night. He looked around and caught Ian’s eye as the big man strode back to the Pavilion.

“Where is she?” he growled.

“I don’t know, sir. I’ve been looking. Perhaps the president took her?”

Devin shrugged. It was possible. Jerry was still a bit too arrogant. He would have to continue to work on that. “Go find him and bring her here. You might warn her I am not happy.”

“Yes, sir.”

Forty-five minutes later, Ian returned, but no Anna.

“Where the fuck is she?” he yelled.

Ian looked at him evenly and remained silent. Devin stopped short of yelling again and stared at his lifelong friend. He narrowed his eyes. Ian had never looked at him so...defiantly. His hazel eyes were firm and cold. Ian looked at other people like that, not him.

“What’s going on, Ian?” he asked in a low voice, rising to his feet to face Ian. His anger was simmering just below the surface. Ian knew

something.

“She’s not here,” he answered simply.

“What do you mean she’s not here?”

“Just what I said. She’s. Not. Here.”

Rage lit in his body, but he kept it contained so he could find out precisely what was going on. “Where is she?”

“I don’t know.”

Ian’s calm was pissing him off. “Stop playing fucking games with me!” he growled. He had told himself he would not lose control, but it was dangling by a very thin thread.

Ian gave him a defiant smile. “She’s gone. Away from you. Safely far from you.”

The thread dissolved as his blood boiled. “You betrayed me?” he asked slowly through clenched teeth.

The Elders stared, afraid to move and catch Devin’s attention. But there was no need to be afraid. Devin knew exactly who had betrayed him.

Devin shook with rage and his hands balled into fists. “Tom, go get me the knife,” he growled from behind clenched teeth.

Ian’s eyes never left Devin’s as Tom got up and walked away. He was so calm and sure of himself. Devin would make sure he suffered for betraying him. Very, very slowly.

“After all I’ve done for you, you dare cross me? Send Anna away from me? Where did you take her?”

“I only helped her out of the camp. She was on her own after that.”

Devin let out a scream of rage and the entire gathering turned to look. Ian backed out of the Pavilion and into the sunlight. Devin followed.

“She needed to be free. You had no right to have her and treat her as you did.” Ian’s eyes narrowed. “You made me do horrible things to her because

of your arrogance. She is gone and there is nothing you can do. You will grow weak and be defeated.” He put his hand to his mouth, then dropped it to his side. “I’ll see you in Hell, Devin.” His mouth began to foam and he dropped to the grass on his side, dead.

Devin screamed out again, rage consuming him. Tom knew better than to go near him, and dropped the requested knife nearby.

He picked it up and turned to his Elders. “Find her,” he growled.

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Marissa Honeycutt

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About Marissa Honeycutt

Marissa's story of Anna began with a dream about being kidnapped with Adam Savage from the *Mythbusters* (Yes, really). Over the next year and a half, it morphed into the story you just read. She has several other stories in progress, one of which is based on her kidnapped dream.

When she's not writing or editing, Marissa is taking care of two young boys, training to be an astronaut, running her household, wrestling with gorillas, playing around on Facebook, promoting whirled peas, and busting her tush for her accounting degree. She enjoys chocolate, air conditioning in the desert's summer heat, really good strawberry margaritas, sleeping, and shopping.

Stalk Marissa:

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Reader's discussion & support group for Part 4:
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Deleted scenes coming soon to Marissa's blog:
<http://marissahoneycutt.wordpress.com/>

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