

A DARK CAPTIVE ROMANCE



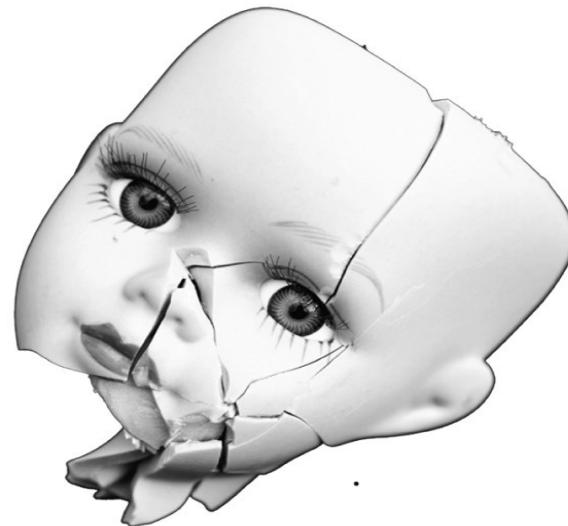
# DEPRAVITY

- ELLIE SANDERS -

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A DARK CAPTIVE ROMANCE

THE BRETHREN LORDS  
BOOK 2



ELLIE SANDERS

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# CONTENT WARNING

This is an extremely dark romance book. I wouldn't even class this as 'romance'.

The things I have had to research have made me question myself but, then what's a good story if you don't push the boundaries, right?

As with the first, the main male lead is not a hero. He's not morally grey. He is 100% a piece of shit. But you can't fault the man for fighting for what he wants. I mean, he's committed alright?

There are numerous and detailed non-consensual scenes, sexual assault, physical assault, etc... If you do not like books with this type of content, then this one is absolutely not meant for you, so please walk away now.

I can't put the full list of triggers here because, well, the bots... but the main ones are listed below. For the full list, please see my website – [www.hotsteamywriter.com](http://www.hotsteamywriter.com)

Other triggers include:

- Ableist language / behaviour
- Abduction / kidnapping
- Abortion (mentions of this but not detailed)
- Abuse
- Anal sex (forced)
- Branding of skin
- Breast slapping
- Body mutilation
- Bondage

- Blood play
- Blow jobs (both consensual and non-consensual)
- Bullying
- Clit slapping / pinching /abuse
- Cult themes / ideology
- Degradation
- Deprivation of Liberty
- Detailed, explicit, & graphic rape scenes
- Dollification
- Drugging
- Dubious Consent
- Electrocution as a form of punishment
- Familial Abuse
- Forced breeding themes
- Forced exhibitionism
- Forced marriage
- Forced orgasms
- Gaslighting
- Grooming of children (historical mentions but not detailed / or on page)
- Gang rape
- Hitting
- Historical grooming of a child (teenager). This is mentioned, but not in lots of detail.
- Humiliation
- The big ‘I’...
- Imprisonment
- Lobotomy
- Manipulation
- Murder
- Misogyny
- Organised crime
- Orgasm denial
- Pregnancy / Forced Pregnancy themes
- Psychological abuse and torture
- Physical disabilities
- PTSD

- Rape
- Religious themes / ideology
- Self-mutilation
- Sexual torture
- Secret Societies / cultish and or/ religious themes
- Somnophilia
- Shibari (non-consensual)
- Spanking
- Spinal injuries
- Stockholm syndrome
- Torture
- Trauma
- Violence
- Whipping

Your mental health matters. Reader discretion really is advised.

Do not read this book if you will find any of the above triggering. This book is just as dark as the first in this series and I don't say that lightly. No book is worth fucking up your mental health.

This MMC, like the MMC in the first book, is an absolute piece of shit and does not deserve redemption. I don't class this as a HEA and when you read this, you'll see why.

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*For all those readers who dream about a man who's so obsessed he would do literally anything to have you.... Tell me, how do you like him now, darling?*

*There's no salvation, no escape —just a man willing to do literally anything, to make you his.*

*And when he's done? He'll make sure you belong to him in ways you can never escape from.*

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# CHAPTER ONE



*Brynn*

We're outside a chapel. It's old. Creepy. The kind of building you'd imagine would be the perfect setting for a horror movie. All those beautiful sparkling lights of the city are long since gone and there's nothing here but an eerie looking gardens and trees that look so mangled with time that they could have been turned to stone.

"Where... where are we?" I whisper, not that I'll have any clue if he does say. It's not like geography was high on my list of studies.

Conrad doesn't reply beyond hauling me forward and because I'm not wearing any shoes, my feet are instantly met with sharp, nasty little stones that force me to walk on tiptoes to try to limit the pain.

Ahead, there's two arched, solid oak doors and they creak open as we approach.

A man in robes stands watching us in silence, and in both fear and stupidity I cling to Conrad while my head tells me that this man, this priest

is from the Brethren. Are they going to condemn me? Is that what this is, is this my judgement? Will I be shipped off to Oblivion now because I wouldn't shut up and be a good girl for my captor?

Conrad pulls me in closer. His arm wraps around my body, and it's a stark reminder that I have no good options here. No good choices.

Inside, the flagstone floor is freezing. And dirty. It's like the place has never been swept. Crispy old leaves are scattered across the floor, and all over are what look like markers for people buried beneath.

This place can't be a chapel, it's more of a crypt. Somewhere you bury nasty little secrets you don't want to ever get out.

Candles flicker in the windows, providing the only form of lighting.

The altar is the one thing that looks maintained, and laid across it is a thick black velvet fabric adorned with the Brethren crest, stitched in a bright gold thread.

But that's not what gets my attention. It's the red ribbon, the knife, and the two rings that make my heart literally stop.

My tormentor fixed a veil onto my head, smiling at me like this moment is the best damn one of his life.

"Noooo," I gasp, stepping back and trying to pull myself free from Conrad's grip.

The Priest frowns, glancing at him, but he doesn't make any attempts to do anything as Conrad grabs me by the throat and all but throws me down the last part of the aisle where I land in a heap, giving them both an eyeful.

"You have a choice." Conrad says, not even bothering to lower his voice. "Marry me, or go to Oblivion and be fucked every which way until your body gives out, and you're used up entirely."

I try to argue, to fight, but my words get lost in my mouth. My fear overrides everything, and all that comes out is a pathetic wail. I hate him. I hate that there is no choice. No reprieve. No escape.

If I were braver, I'd say screw him and take my chances, but I know if I go to Oblivion, he can find me there. All my aunt's hateful friends will also find me there. And what they will do, how they will make me suffer...

No, I don't have a choice. I don't have anything now. I am lost. Ruined.

This man ruined me the night he raped me, and he's destroyed every last piece of my liberty since then.

"I will be a good husband." He says, as if I believe a word of it. "I will treat you well. I will take care of you."

“Like you have up until now?” I snarl. He’s not shown any care whatsoever, he’s manipulated me, coerced me, manoeuvred me into this position where I’m staring down the barrel of a gun, and he wants to pretend that he’s done that from a place of consideration? What a hypocrite.

His eyes flash and his hand tightens around my arm, but he already knows that he’s won.

“We can do this the easy way or the hard way,” He states, “but either way, you are becoming my wife. Tonight.”

I shake my head, even as the blow of his hand hits me and my face falls back, slamming into the marble altar.

“I don’t want, I don’t want...” My words are silenced by another blow to the mouth that splits my lip.

Clearly, Conrad thinks that’s enough, that he’s won, because he waves his hand for the Priest to start the ritual. If he thinks I’ll just give in, if he thinks a few smacks are enough to subdue me then he clearly hasn’t been paying attention.

“Please,” I say, turning my eyes to the man standing watching us both. He’s a Brethren Priest. Surely, he won’t allow this? Conrad might be a Blake, but I’m not a nobody. “I don’t want to marry him. I don’t...”

“That’s enough of that.” Conrad says cutting across me.

“I’m a Mon, Mon, Monclere.” I say as forcefully as I can. “My grandfather is Lord...”

“Your grandfather doesn’t give a fuck about you.” Conrad retorts, and I hate how true those words are. “He thinks you ran away, just like your whore of a mother did. When he realises that that’s not the case, he’ll be relieved that you haven’t tarnished the family name further.”

I shake my head even though I know he’s right.

“I’m still a Brethren Lady...” I gasp and Conrad reaches down, gripping my arm so punishingly I think he might just snap the bone in half.

“This priest doesn’t give a fuck who you are or what you want.” He states, hauling me to my feet.

I shouldn’t cry. It’s useless to cry, but those tears fall anyway, and all I can do is let my helplessness consume me.

The Priest steps up to me, his eyes finding mine, but there’s no compassion there. No empathy.

“Lay her on the altar.” He orders. “So she can be examined.”

More fear strikes me because I don't know what those words mean exactly, but I can certainly imagine. There's only one expectation for a Brethren Bride. One test we must all pass. And I know I've already failed it.

"No need." Conrad replies. "I've claimed her already."

The Priest pauses, and for one pitiful moment I pray that statement might be enough to halt this entire nightmare. But then he just grunts, as if he's disappointed that he won't be able to do whatever he had planned.

"This is most untoward." He murmurs. "A Lady cannot be married unless she is proven to be pure."

"And she was. She bled all over my cock." Conrad says, obviously more than proud of that fact.

I screw my face up and shut my eyes, but my cheeks still burn with the shame of that admission.

"As you wish." The Priest replies, moving to pick up the red ribbon and as he starts chanting, he begins wrapping my left wrist up, binding it with Conrad's.

With horror, I watch as he ties the knot and then reaches for the knife.

"No," I whisper as he wrenches my fingers back, forces my hand open, and as he drags that blade right down the centre of my palm. Bright red, livid blood bubbles up while I hiss at the pain.

He drags that same knife over Conrad's hand and then he clasps our hands together, entwining our fingers so our palms and blood mingle.

"Ashes to Ashes. Blood to Blood." The Priest says loudly. "This ribbon represents the tie your souls now have to one another. The wound on your palm is a reminder of what sacrifices Christ made for you and in turn, what you will make for one another. The mingling of your blood means you are now one person in the eyes of God."

The ring is pushed onto my finger. It's tight, enough so that I can feel the pressure, and it makes me wonder if that too was intentional. Did Conrad ensure mine was a size too small so that it would be a constant reminder, a form of slow torture for me?

"What God has put together, no man can put aside."

Those words echo in my head, and I hear the lie in them. That I am bound to my now husband, that we are united under God's gaze. But overstep, piss him off, push too hard and I know, as a Brethren Lord, he can toss me aside. He can break this marriage and have me condemned.

A crucifix is held in front of my face. It's solid gold, covered in what must be priceless jewels and all those years of training, of conditioning, of brainwashing make me act on instinct. I shut my eyes, and let my lips find the cold surface, planting a chaste kiss right in the middle.

Conrad follows, his lips landing right where mine had left a mark.

"And now the consummation." The Priest says, announcing it as if a whole congregation were here, sat in the pews, and ordinarily they would be. I guess I should count myself lucky that only he is here to witness this further degradation.

Conrad steps behind me. Our hands are still bound, so my left arm is pulled to an angle and in one foul motion, one far too quick motion, he rips the dress off me, shredding it right down the back.

I scream, even though I don't want to. Even though I told myself I wouldn't, that I'd be brave, that I'd make a point of showing him that I'm not as weak and pathetic as he clearly thinks I am.

My free hand clutches at the ruined fabric like it might grant me some dignity.

He shoves me down onto the altar face first. Evidently while I was being stripped naked the priest laid a white sheet, and though its purpose has already been rendered redundant by my now husband's earlier abuses, I guess there must still be some ritual significance to it.

Conrad doesn't strip, he doesn't even undo his shirt. While I practically freeze from the chilled air, he simply undoes his belt and loosens his trousers enough to pull his dick out.

I know there's no way out of this. I know he's already overpowered me, outplayed me, beaten me in every conceivable way and yet it still feels like I'm the one to blame, I'm the one that failed. That I should have done something, should have been smarter, tougher, braver.

He holds my left arm far above my head, moving my right to join it and I'm pinned down, held in place while he yanks my leg wide enough that he can angle himself.

And, as he forces himself into me, I shatter completely.

Because it's over. All of it.

My futile attempt to fight, my dreams of freedom, my life too. It's all gone now. Everything is gone. Stolen by the man I'm now bound to as my husband.

He's not gentle, not even in this moment when he's getting everything he apparently wanted. He takes me like I'm a piece of meat, like I really am just a thing for him to fuck. I'm bent over, sprawled over the altar and he starts picking up speed, fucking me harder, causing the knife that was barely centimetres from us to crash to the floor.

I turn my face, wishing there was something, anything that could distract me from the agony of what's happening to my body, from my complete and utter violation. Only I see the Priest, standing, staring, clearly watching every brutal second of this play out like he can't get enough.

He holds my gaze and doesn't even blink as Conrad slams into me over and over, making my body physically jolt forward a few inches while I cry out in agony. It feels like he's tearing up my insides. I'm not even sure how much pain I can take, considering he's already brutally raped me God knows how many times in the last twenty-four hours.

His shirt presses into my back, and his weight overwhelms me. I can hear every breath he takes, every groan, every gasp as he brings himself closer and closer to his climax. Even in this moment, he's obviously taking pleasure from this.

Can he not feel how much he's damaging me, or does he not care?

"As your bodies unite, as your husband claims you on this holy altar, remember your duty, remember your place. You are a Brethren Lady, and your only salvation is through your husband. His will is God's will. His wishes are God's wishes. You live to serve him. You live to obey."

Serve. Obey. All things I now have to do. All things I must do if I wish to see heaven one day.

But how can I do such a thing? How can God allow such a thing?

I don't realise I'm sobbing until my vision blurs.

Only, my dear husband is too busy chasing his end to give a shit what my reaction is, and as his thrusts become more merciless, I know he's close. I know he's there.

He groans out, collapsing on top of me and those last awful breaths in my lungs seem to escape.

The Priest bends down, untying our hands and as if I would treasure it, he twirls the ribbon up and places it in my still bleeding palm.

Conrad pulls out of me and does his trousers up. Only, I don't move. I just lay there as if I'm already defeated.

He takes his jacket off, wraps it around me and picks me up as if he's suddenly the hero in this story and not the villain.

But as he goes to carry me out, the Priest calls him back, holding up that awful white sheet he'd laid beneath me where my virtue would be stained if I'd had any left.

“You forgot this.” He says.

Conrad pauses, glancing down at the now stained sheet.

“I thought you said you’d already claimed her.” The Priest murmurs.

We can all see the blood. My blood. I know it’s not my virginity, I know he’s already stolen that, but it still makes me feel physically sick to see that he’s spilt more. That he’s hurt me *that* badly.

Conrad’s eyes seem to illuminate as if this is a new prize, a second prize, another trophy for his damned cabinet. He takes the sheet before planting a kiss on my forehead and he whispers in my ear what a good girl I’ve been.

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# BEFORE



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# CHAPTER TWO



*Brynn*

H is hand sends me flying across the room.

I slam into the polished floor of our Great Hall, smashing my head into the tiles while the faces of all our ancestors seem to spin above my head.

“You stupid little whore.” My grandfather spits. “Have you learnt nothing?”

I don’t know what crime it is I’ve committed today but as I try to get to my feet, a shoe slams into my back, pinning me back down. I can feel from the pressure of it that it’s a high heel. A stiletto, and I know already before she speaks that it belongs to my aunt, Giselle.

“Filthy little slut.” My aunt sneers. “Just like your mother.”

“And you’ll end up like her too.” My grandfather states, shoving her off, yanking me up by my hair. “You’ll end up dead in a ditch or, if you continue to shame this family, we’ll have you shipped off. Have you sent to

Oblivion, where you can spend the rest of your days being used like the beast that you are.”

I shouldn’t react. I shouldn’t give in. I’ve told myself so many times that I’ll stand up to them, that I’ll be strong, courageous even. But all that shatters beneath my grandfather’s furious face. All that courage fractures. I whimper, my legs give out, and I can feel the trickle of blood seeping from my nose.

“I’m ser, ser, sorry.” I sob. “I’ll do- do better. I’ll *beee* better.”

I know I’m on a precipice, caught between my hateful grandfather and my jealous aunt. I’m the piece of cannon fodder they bat between them. I’m the punching bag when they’ve had a shit day. All it will take is one comment, one tiny push and they will pack me up, they will pack me off and I’ll be condemned forever because no one escapes Oblivion.

I know that.

Everyone knows that.

That’s why they use that threat, why it’s so effective. No one wants to end up there. It’s a cross between a prison and a sex dungeon. The Lords, the ones in favour, get to go there and indulge while whoever is incarcerated there is forced to cater to their perverted desires as if we’re not a religious sect, as if God above doesn’t judge us for it. No, we call it penance instead. We call it justification for sins. It’s bullshit and we all know it, but the Lords hold the power and there’s nothing we can do to stop it.

As my grandfather drops his grip and I slump further onto the floor, he starts reiterating the rules. My rules. That I’m not allowed out unsupervised and without a good reason. That I am not allowed to wear anything but the clothes he provides. That I’m not allowed to visit anyone without his consent beyond attending services at the Chapel itself. And then he turns on his heel and storms out like he’s had enough to deal with already.

But my aunt stays where she is. She stands there in that tight, sexy little dress that is in such stark contrast to my own nun-like outfit and she taps her heel in irritation while tossing her bleached white hair over her shoulder.

She’s only seven years older than me. In truth, we look far more like sisters than aunt and niece, and I think that’s half the problem. She despised my mother, absolutely loathed her, while my grandfather used to dote on her. In his eyes he only had one child, and he spoiled my mother, favoured

her in everything until she did the unforgivable; she got pregnant. And at sixteen years of age. No one knows who my father is. The shame it brought our family was enough for everyone to close ranks. My mother ran away, fled before anyone knew the truth and for years, no one knew where she was. I was handed over by social services when I was five, passed back to her only living relatives, and they've made my life a living hell ever since.

It was a tragic accident that killed her. An unfortunate mistake. Wrong place, wrong time. She just happened to be travelling on that road when the ice was too thick, and she didn't stand a chance when the truck crashed into her rusty old car. At least that's what I tell myself, because my aunt and my grandfather call it divine intervention. God's will. He punishes the wicked, doesn't he? And who could be more wicked than a woman who had sex outside of wedlock?

As my aunt's hand stings my face, I yelp.

"Pay attention when I'm talking to you." She hisses.

I glare back. It's reckless, especially given the circumstances but I know she made some shit up. I know all of this drama right now is because she woke up this morning and decided to stir the pot. No doubt she's got her reasons.

"You're to go to your room and stay there. I don't want to even see a glimpse of you for the remainder of the day. And if I hear from the servants that you've been out, I'll have you beaten properly, do you hear me?"

I nod, biting my tongue. It's not like what she's asking is a hardship. I like my room, as basic as it is. I like my peace. I like my solitary existence. I have enough books stashed in there that I can hold up there for weeks if necessary and besides, why would I want to be around people that hate everything about me?

As she jerks her head for me to go, I scramble to the door as happy to be away from her as she is me.

But she's clearly not out of her foul mood. She starts bellowing orders, demanding that the floor is clean because apparently, I had the audacity to bleed on it.

"My fiancé is coming for dinner." She declares. "This house has to be immaculate..."

And there it is. I can't help but smile. That's the reason right there. Conrad Blake. Her fiancé. He's the reason she's stitched me up, the reason I

just took a beating, the reason I will now be under house arrest for the remainder of the week.

I should have seen it coming, should have known.

Theirs is an arranged marriage. He's meant to be one of the most eligible bachelors this Chapter has. He's also an arrogant piece of shit in my opinion, and he regards my aunt as he does the whole notion of matrimony; a tick box exercise. A means to an end. He's never once shown her any affection, barely pays her any attention from the little I've witnessed. But then, that is the norm for our type of marriages. We don't marry for love. We don't marry who we want. We marry who our parents tell us to, and to whom will most elevate our family name and fortune.

It's generational trauma, inflicted from one generation to the next. Our grandparent's weren't happy in their marriage so they ensured our parents weren't, and in turn our parents ensured we aren't. The cycle just continues on and on. Except, I have no intention of continuing it.

No, as soon as I can, as soon as I'm able to, I fully intend to get away from this place. To escape. I won't live my life shackled to rules intended to keep me quiet, keep me subservient and submissive. Oh, I know the Brethren rule everything. I know they control everything, every election, every politician, every piece of this world that matters, but I intend to do what my mother did. I intend to disappear entirely. To go somewhere so remote that it won't matter that they're in charge, because I'll be free of them.

# CHAPTER THREE



*Conrad*

Another day, another torturous event with my damned fiancé. Only this time, it's not just a few precious hours of my time that she's stealing. No, my brother and her father have decided a nice little stay over would help us get to know each other better, and seal this god-awful deal. It's all chaperoned, of course, though I don't doubt the damned witch will do her best to sink her claws into me any chance she gets. Oh, she thinks I don't know. She thinks I can't see it, that under that beautiful, immaculate exterior is an ugly, spiteful little bitch who will do anything to get what she wants.

I should admire that, really. The Blake in me should recognise that as a strength, and yet she's such a conniving bitch that I find everything she does detestable.

As my car pulls up to their monstrosity of a house, it's hard not to hide my sneer. Sure, their family is as respectable as mine, has as much history and heritage as mine, but I'm a Blake. My brother is going to be Chapter Lord. My ancestors were Chapter Lords and members of the Senate, dating

right back to the very first. We outrank them in every way, and nothing makes it more of an obvious show of new money than this building.

Our own ancestral home is Jacobean, standing on the ruins of a Norman fortress. This was clearly a knock down and rebuild. Maybe they had woodworm, maybe the whole damned house fell down in the night from the shoddy workmanship but instead of admitting that fact, they've rebuilt it piece by piece. Turning what was once a majestic piece of architecture into a farce. Gone is the character, gone is the history, replaced by pretence and forgery. Even the gargoyles have lost their muster.

As I stare up, I catch a glimpse of *her* - the only thing that makes this experience worth getting out of bed for.

She's on the fifth floor, tucked away, half obscured by the thick curtains.

In my head, I'd like to think she's done this on purpose, that this is her silent way of acknowledging my presence and welcoming me here. But that's ridiculous. We've never even exchanged a word. Sure I watch her, but even those times have been fleeting, stolen. The girl is more of a mirage than an actual human being.

Perhaps that's what makes her so appealing though, better a fantasy than the horrid reality that is her aunt.

I run my hand through my hair, hoping the movement might catch her eye, but it does nothing. She can't see me. She hasn't noticed me standing here practically gawping, but I always notice her. I have every single time she's scuttered by, every time she's crept from room to offensive room. She's like a mouse, creeping about, hoping to go unnoticed. And that's how they all treat her too; an unwanted pest they'd clearly like to rid their home of.

If I had my way, she'd be the one I'd be hauling up the aisle. She'd be the one tethered to me. She's far more to my tastes, far more - malleable. Unlike her aunt she knows not to play games, she's too innocent for that - and she's also clearly learned to keep her mouth shut, which is another attribute I admire.

“Conrad.”

My teeth clench, and my jaw tightens, as that screechy-welcome rings out across the drive.

She's there, standing in a tight dress she no doubt thinks is alluring, and she's got her arms spread wide, as wide as the stupid welcoming grin on her heavily dolled up face.

“Giselle.” I say tightly. There’s no use in pretence. I’m not going to fawn all over her, I’m not going to make a show of acting like I want this woman. No, she can do all the leg work because as far as I’m concerned, this entire marriage is an affront to everything I am.

Behind her, her father comes to the door. He tilts his head, giving a gesture that I reciprocate. Him at least I respect on some level. He’s a formidable man. Tall, lithe, and no doubt could gut you as readily as give you a smile. In many ways he reminds me of my own dear brother, Magnus, though I wouldn’t trust him as far as I could throw him.

The servants come flittering about, grabbing my bags, making a show of this family’s simpering hospitality. I stalk over from the car, glancing one final time up to where my doll was, and a pang almost hits me when I see the space is empty.

Has she seen me, then? Did she slip away while her wretched aunt was screeching like a banshee? Or was it after? Did she sense danger, sense discovery and decide it best to lay low, just like always? I guess I’ll not know that answer, at least not until I can hunt her down.

And that’s exactly what I intend to do. If these seven days give me nothing else, they will give me that, a few moments, a few conversations with Brynn. I will corner her where I must, trap her if she’s unwilling, but this family will give me that one thing.



DINNER IS SET. A FANCY DINNER. FINE SILVERWARE AND THE BEST CHINA they have, all laid out like this is a state banquet.

Quinn sits at the head, his young wife to the left of him. A few of the cousins and lesser relatives fill the dozens of spaces and Giselle is next to me, her leg touching mine just often enough for me to know it’s not by some accident.

I made my excuses after arriving. Made a lie about an urgent business call and I stayed in my suite, laying low, reminding myself of all the reasons why I should be grateful for this match. I could practically hear my brother’s voice echoing in my head about the fact that I’m pushing forty. I’m technically a Reaper, but have no record to show for it beyond my

impressive bloodline, I'm a fuckup. A playboy. I know I've spent my youth indulging too much, but I also knew what my future would be, and why would anyone not take the good days before the bad ones rolled in?

The servants trail in, all in neat little suits that echo the ones worn by my own family's help. They keep their eyes down, mouths shut and silently lay out the copious dishes before us.

Quinn makes a nice show of saying grace, of thanking our Senate for their guidance and God for every blessing he has bestowed on his family.

Only, there's someone missing. One very obvious member who is a no show.

At first, I think it's because of me that my little doll has played ill and stayed away but as the dishes are served, I realise that there's more at play here.

"Where is your niece?" I ask Giselle, cutting across whatever bullshit she's jabbering on about, though I intentionally don't say Brynn's name. I don't want to reveal any more cards than I have to.

She stops abruptly, her cheeks going slightly red with the obvious insult and a micro-expression of a scowl covers her pretty features.

"Why do you ask?" She says, straightening her spine like an insect about the attack.

"Is this not meant to be a family meal?" I reply. "Surely that would mean *all* family are present?"

She lets out a huff, turning her head to glance at all the other faces who are clearly listening into our conversation.

"Brynn was waylaid." Quinn says, as if that explains it. "She will eat in her room."

Of course she was. No doubt Giselle is behind that. Jealous, conniving bitch. It's more than apparent that her absence was intentional because there's no setting for her, no empty glass and unused cutlery. No, they knew before this dinner was even being prepared that she wouldn't be attending it.

I pick up my wine, take a sip and then act as nonchalantly as I can about it, but I'm done with this meal. Done with the schmoozing. I was never much of a wine drinker and though this vintage is nice, I'd give anything for a large glass of whiskey to help me through this.

Thankfully the talk resumes. My hateful bride-to-be titters on, and I smile as best I can, pretending to give a shit for more hours than I can

possibly count.

My eyes land on Paige, Quinn's wife. She's young, barely older than Giselle. She's wearing a dress that swamps her body and she's careful to keep her eyes downcast. By all definitions, she's the perfect Brethren Lady, silent, obedient. But I know she hasn't given him any children. Not one.

I glance back at her husband and wonder if the fault is with him. Perhaps he's sterile, but then he had two daughters, didn't he? Or maybe he doesn't care for more heirs, maybe he put all his hopes into the one he had left, maybe that's why he's so invested in this damned union.

When the meal is done, the ladies retire, and I follow the few men into the drawing room. Cigars are handed out, smoke fills the air and the much sought after scotch is poured out for us.

Without his daughter hanging off his every word, Quinn is far more entertaining, far better of a conversationalist. I'd even go so far as to say I enjoy his company, and I'm surprised to realise my evening isn't a complete write off.

It's only as we say our goodnights and we all retire to our rooms that I finally get a glimpse of my real interest.

She slips down what can only be one of the servant's stairs and tiptoes past the sombre looking portraits, barely making more sound than a ghost would.

Of course I follow her. I'd be a fool not to.

Opportunity has presented itself so nicely that it's almost as if it's a sign from God.

She doesn't seem to realise she's being tailed though, and I'm smart enough to keep my distance until I realise where she's headed. At first, I thought she was sneaking out, making a real break for it. I wouldn't have blamed her if she was, if she was seeking more thrills than these turgid walls could grant. But no, angel that she is, she isn't looking for cheap thrills and cheap entertainment; I could almost laugh out loud when I realise where she is headed. What a contrast she is to her aunt, to her entire family.

She opens only the left of the massive double doors, pausing for just a moment before she slips inside.

And now I know that I have her trapped. I pick up my own pace, cross the polished parquet and step into the cavernous room beyond.

It's a marvel. I'll give them that. Clearly some past relative curated this collection, because I know neither Quinn nor any of his immediate family

members would have the knowledge, nor the taste, nor the ability to collect such a plethora of books.

It's not just a library, it's a monument. Dusty tomes cover the walls from floor to ceiling. I can practically breathe in the words seeping out from the pages. They must employ someone full time just to maintain this collection and though I'm not much of a booklover myself, I can appreciate the knowledge that is here.

A shadow flickers ahead, and my prize takes timid steps, as if she's afraid one of these books might just come to life and fly off the shelves at her.

But it's also clear that she knows exactly where she's headed. I don't doubt she's spent hours perusing every shelf, learning where her favourite genres and authors are. My lips curl up into a smirk.

*She's such a darling, isn't she? So sweet, so innocent.*

I can imagine how we would be if we were a couple; me off seeing to the demands of the Brethren, her tucked up at home, waiting contentedly for my return while she wiles away her days with one book and then another.

It's a nice image, a nice idea.

And sadly, one that will never come into fruition.

No, I must take the precious few moments I have before all that freedom and happiness is shut away.

So I step forward, not caring that my own steps may carry. After all I'm an honoured guest here, and more than that, I'm a Blake.

Her hands falter, her breath hitches, and the book she was cradling so carefully crashes to the floor with a thud. Those big brown eyes widen to an astronomical size as she stares up at me in horror.

“Caught you.” I murmur, letting her hear the taunt in my voice.

She gulps, scooping down to hastily grab the book that's fallen into a heap of crumpled pages and bent spine, only, I don't let her get to it. Instead I pick it up, holding it just beyond her reach, more curious with what book had her so desperate to find it that she left the safety of her room in the middle of the night.

“Please...” She whispers.

“What?” I don't lower my voice, I don't keep quiet, though common sense tells me I should. The louder I am, the more likely we are to be discovered, and the less time I will get with her.

Her lip trembles as she clearly considers her next move carefully and it makes me wonder, do I scare her that much?

“Is it that good of a book?” I ask.

She draws in her breath, her eyes darting over my shoulder like she expects her entire family to be there, judging us both.

I don’t know what I expected, I don’t know why I thought she’d behave differently, why she would respond differently if we were alone. In truth, I’m almost disappointed by her standoffishness. Then I remind myself, I’m almost twice her age, I’m a Brethren Lord, and I’m a Blake. Those facts alone should be enough to put the fear of God into anyone. And little Brynn here has never been bold, has never been courageous. Her family has brought her up to be obedient, to bend, to be the perfect submissive. I can hardly fault her for that. I can hardly hold it against her, when those very traits are what make her so very attractive in the first place.

“Don’t be afraid.” I state, “You’re safe with me.”

That’s not exactly true. But if it makes her feel better, then so be it. I’ll whisper whatever niceties I have to, if it means I can make her more amenable.

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# CHAPTER FOUR



*Brynn*

“**Y**ou’re safe with me.”

Those words don’t ease my fear in the slightest. Besides, I know it’s a lie. I know this man is not safe. That he is a selfish, conceited, arrogant piece of shit that considers his own wants far more than he considers anyone else’s. That’s shown by the way he behaves, by the way he treats my aunt. Sure, she’s a bitch but if he had any manners, he would at least give her the decency of being respectful in public instead of showing the world how much he does not want this marriage to take place.

As his hand reaches up to touch me I jerk back, pushing my body back, and my spine connects with the hard surface of a hundred-year-old bookcase.

“You’re a flighty little thing, aren’t you?” He teases, as if this is a game. As this is some sort of joke.

Only, I know the consequences if this goes wrong, if I’m caught here alone with him. He’ll walk away scott-free and me, I’ll be carted off, sent to Oblivion on a one-way ticket.

“I, you, we shouldn’t be here.” I stammer, trying to sound far more in control of this situation than I feel. My heart is already slamming into my chest. My pulse is already erratic. And in my head, I’m already chastising myself. Lamenting my stupidity. Because I was safe in my room. I was fine. I had enough books. I should have been content with what I had stashed away. But I was greedy, reckless, I wanted *this* book, this one damned book, and now look where I am.

I’m teetering on a cliff edge, about to be ruined and all because I couldn’t wait a few days for Wuthering bloody Heights.

He tuts, as if my words mean nothing, as if my fear is nothing. And he flicks through the book like he thinks it’ll be full of silly pictures instead of actual words.

“You like reading romance?” He questions.

“It’s not, not romance.” I reply. “It’s not a love story. It’s about ha-ate. Anyone that’s really read that book, that really unnnnderstands it, knows that that is the real plottt.”

He arches a brow, and those stupidly full lips of his curl up into a grin. Does he find my speech impediment amusing, is that it? He’s acting like if I’m flirting with him. Christ, does the man have no sense whatsoever? Does he really have such little regard for anyone else’s life but his own?

He places the book above my head, too high for me to reach. I feel like a child being tormented by a school bully. Only I’ve spent my life with bullies, I’ve grown up in a nest of them, and if he thinks he can intimidate me that easily then he has another thing coming.

Fuck Bronte, fuck Heathcliff, none of this is worth the risk.

As I push past to leave, he yanks me back. Wrapping a hand around my throat, he pins me right back against that unforgiving shelf once more.

“Whatttt are you doing?” I gasp.

“You want the book? I’ll make you a deal.”

My eyes narrow. Suspicion fills my stomach. I don’t give a fuck about anything anymore, I just know that I need to get out of here, need to escape before all this escalates even further.

“Let me go.” I say as forcefully as I can. *Please just let me go.*

“For a price.”

*No.* I shake my head. *No price. No deal.*

He lets out a little laugh. God, he really does see this entire thing as a joke. For a second, I wonder what it would be like, to be a Lord and not a

Lady. To know that the rules are different, to know that I can do whatever I want, and the repercussions won't be utterly catastrophic.

His spare hand skims up my body, coming to a rest on my arse. I jerk more, shock and something else quickly replacing the suspicion that was there before. The problem is that he's so much bigger than me, he towers over me, and I already feel like I've lost this fight before it's even begun.

But my leg comes up anyway. I jam it into his crotch and he groans, falling forward, pinning me further in place.

"That was rude." He states, regaining his composure far quicker than I would have liked. Clearly, I didn't knee him hard enough.

"Let. Me. Go." It takes all I have to enunciate every word, but it still makes no difference.

His hand grips my throat tighter and tuts with obvious annoyance. "You just hurt me." He says like I'm a child, like I didn't do it on purpose. "I'm a guest in your home." He says like I don't know it, like it needs to be stated. The air seems to grow more tense. My head screams bloody murder, and I jerk uselessly in his grip. "I think you should kiss it better." He adds with a smirk that makes my heart stop.

"Ex-excuse me?"

He undoes his belt, pulls his actual dick out and I stare, dumbfounded at it.

*This can't be happening. This can't possibly be real.*

I can barely wrap my head around the fact that *that* is what they look like when he yanks my neck hard.

"Kiss it better." He orders. "Or I'll tell your aunt what a naughty thing you've been, up after hours when you should have been tucked away in your bed asleep."

My eyes fill with tears. I don't want to cry, I don't want to give in either, but I also know that's not an idle threat.

"She'll send me away." I state, revealing my hand, as if I think he might just realise how awful this place is, as if he might just have mercy on me, apologise and let me go. No harm, no foul. "If, if you do that, she'll send me to Oblivion."

We both know the truth of my words, just as we both know it's his family that runs Oblivion. The horrors of that place don't need to be spoken about out loud. Everyone knows exactly what goes on there, what the Blakes allow to happen in the name of 'penance and redemption'.

He raises an eyebrow, that cocky look back on his damned face. “So, what’s one cock versus the hundreds you’d have to endure there?”

He’s right. On a certain level he *is* right, but I still refuse to give in. I still refuse to let him beat me.

He wiggles his dick. It’s hard, growing harder. No doubt the bastard is turned on by this prospect. Does he do this regularly? Does he get off on trapping and assaulting girls? Is that some sort of kink that he has, some sort of powerplay?

“Kiss it.” He says.

I gulp, hating myself but hating him more as I drop my knees, shuffling down enough that I can bend down and kiss him right where he wants. There’s a bead of something wet right at the tip - I don’t want to think about where it came from. As my lips make contact with the very head of him, he rocks his hips and my head screams out to lock my jaw, to clench my teeth, to not let him force his way into my mouth under any circumstances.

I might be a virgin, I might have zero experience when it comes to the opposite sex, but we’re taught in school all about *this* and with a family like mine, I’ve seen enough demonstrations of how women are expected to comply, to know what he really wants.

He receives little more than a peck, but it’s enough to make me feel utterly disgusted all the same.

He tangles his hand into my hair, and I know from that action that he does want more. That he’s going to take it too.

But as his other hand moves to grab his dick better, I seize my moment. I scramble away, crash onto my knees and then I’m up, running for the door. Not caring about the noise, not caring that he’s got a whole handful of my hair snatched up in his grasp.

It’s only when I get to my room, it’s only after I secure my door so I know he can’t get to me, that I let out the last breaths of panicked air as I let devastation take over.

He’s here for six more days. Six days in which I won’t relax, I will barely sleep.

I thought my life here was bad enough before he came to stay. Now, I realise how blessed I really was.

# CHAPTER

## FIVE



*Brynn*

I'm up with the dawn. Not that I stood a chance of sleeping.

What little I did get was peppered with nightmares, my mind going into overdrive about what happened last night, imagining that my grandfather had walked in and caught us. That he'd had me shipped off somewhere, that I was condemned, that everything he has threatened since the day I came to live with him is actually coming true.

My hands wrap around my body, giving myself a hug I so desperately need.

*No one knows. No one saw a thing.*

I know that's the case, because if they did, then I wouldn't be here. My family would have dragged me from my bed, and I'd already be in hell.

It's a small comfort to know that. I feel like I'm on eggshells, that there's a great glass pane beneath my feet and any second it's going to crack in half, and I'll fall into the abyss far below.

Conrad is here, in this house somewhere. All it will take is one more incident, one moment, where he is reckless, and it'll be me who suffers the

consequences.

I shake my head, forcing cold water onto my face to try and banish those awful thoughts. I've survived so far, haven't I? I've lived here for fifteen awful years. I just need to hold my nerve, keep my head down, and wait. Once this marriage is done, once Giselle is gone, then I know I will have my chance. I know that every watchful gaze on me will ease off enough for me to escape.

And escape I will.

I have my bag packed already. I have it put aside, stashed away. When the moment is here, I will run and I will not look back.

But the moment is not today. The moment is not soon.

I pull out the diary, using those familiar entries to soothe myself. It was my mother's. Within these pages, it's like she's still alive, still here. I've read the thing so many times that I can practically recite it word for word. I don't know how it wasn't destroyed, I don't know how it evaded the destruction that my grandfather unleashed upon everything else she'd left behind. But I found it, hidden amongst the books in the library and now, it's more precious than all the tea in China.

A light tap at my door makes me freeze. As quickly as I can, I stash the little black book away. I don't trust anyone knowing about it. I know my father would happily destroy this the first moment he gets.

Light pours in as it opens and I see a maid walk inside with a tray.

I kept the curtains drawn, hiding in the darkness, pretending that I didn't exist.

She glances around, trying to find some surface and then puts the tray down like there might be something nasty lingering in the air. Something contagious.

I can't blame her. Not really.

They used to be nice to me, friendly. And then Giselle caught one of them laughing and joking, and that was enough to earn the poor girl a beating, to earn us both one because she should know her place, that she is here to work and not have fun.

And me? Well, I'm a Monclere, I'm not meant to fraternise with people far beneath me. Even if I am a bastard, even if I am the lowest of the low. It's still noble blood in my veins, isn't it?

The maid nods her head politely at me, then exits like she can't get away from me fast enough.

As the door shuts, the smell of toast wafts into the room. So they brought me breakfast. I guess that's my aunt's doing too. She wouldn't want me in the dining room, wouldn't want me anywhere near her precious fiancé.

For the first time in my life, I'm actually grateful to her. I figured I'd be going hungry, would have to steal food from the kitchens and pray I wasn't caught. But if she's seeing to this, then at least my confinement won't be quite as miserable as I anticipated.

I shuffle across the room, perching on the stool and scoff down the slices, only realising how ravenous I am once the taste of melted butter hits my tongue. If I were smart I'd keep some back, put it somewhere for later because there is no guarantee this isn't my only meal of the day.

But I'm too hungry to care.

I practically lick the plate clean, picking up all the crumbs with the tips of my fingers, and I'm dying for a drink too. I guess a scoop full of water from the bathroom tap will have the suffice.

I don't know how long I have, but I know I'm running out of time. The car is waiting for me. I need to get going, but the thought of leaving this room, this refuge makes me feel physically sick.

"Brynn."

My grandfather's voice makes me freeze.

He rarely comes to this part of the house, and especially not to my bedroom. So, this can't be good.

"Why is it so dark in here?" He snaps, crossing the space, yanking the heavy curtains apart, and a brightness I was not prepared for fills the room.

I throw my arm up, trying to shade my eyes and he spots the movement, grabbing hold of me.

"When you're done skulking." He says, dragging me out.

My heart seems to leap. I don't know where we're headed, I don't know where he's taking me, but every step sends more panic through me.

I try to speak, to ask him but my words catch in my throat and I can't get a single syllable out. I hate the effect he has on me. I hate the way my fear manifests itself in this way, rendering me mute.

We go down a flight of stairs, then another, when we get outside the cool morning air hits me like a tidal wave.

"The car has been waiting for over ten minutes." He states and with relief I realise that's all this is. I'm late for school.

He narrows his eyes before grabbing my chin. “You think you’re the only one who needs it?” He snarls. Like he doesn’t have a dozen other cars he can use, like he doesn’t have a helicopter too, and a private jet. “You think this entire house revolves around you?”

“Nuh nuh nnnoo.” I stammer, forcing out a gasp.

He rolls his eyes before shoving me on.

“I’ll be speaking to the school. Ensuring they understand your tardiness is not because I had any need of you.”

I wince, hearing the unspoken words. That I’ll be punished for this. Beaten. As a Monclere, I’m allowed to be late to class if my family has some urgent business, if there’s a legitimate reason for it. Only, my grandfather is ensuring they know that’s not the case this time.

It’s my own stupid fault. My own failure for letting my fear take over and for not paying better attention.

“And I’ll be having another word about your damned speech.” He says as he pushes me into the back so hard that my face smacks into the leather.

I don’t have time to reply, not that he wants one. He likes me seen and not heard. No, he likes me not seen and not heard. Better he pretend I don’t exist at all than have to look at me and see the sins of my mother. To be reminded of the daughter he believed was perfect, until she wasn’t.

I lift my hand, rubbing at my throat like that might be the magic fix, like that might somehow sort my speech impediment.

The car shoots off, slamming me back once more. My eyes meet the drivers through the rear-view mirror and there’s a hint of sympathy, but he makes sure he doesn’t say anything. We’re being watched. Every inch of this driveway has security cameras pointed at it. It’s another reason I need to plan my escape very, very carefully. I can’t simply grab my bag and wander off.

Once we make it out past the massive wrought iron gates and onto the country lane, I let out a sigh of relief. No, I’m not exactly free but it feels freeing to be just out of that oppressive house and away from them, if only for a few hours.

“I’ll go as fast as I can.” He says.

“Don’t bother.” I reply. Although I’m grateful for this one act of kindness, it’s not worth the risk. “They’ll be watching still. They’ll know when I turn up. And besides, my grandfather is probably on the phone to the headmaster this very second.”

I've never had an issue speaking with the servants, at least, speaking with those who I know are friendly. It's my family I struggle with. My family who put the fear of God into me. Whenever I see them, whenever they're tormenting me, it's like my entire body locks up.

Perhaps it's a survival thing.

If I could actually form words I'd probably fight back, argue more, and we all know where that would get me. Thank God for small mercies then. Being selectively mute means I'm alive, being mute means that I'm not there, not locked away in Oblivion.

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# CHAPTER

## SIX



*Brynn*

**B**y the time I get to class, I've already missed the first one. It's physical education so I'm not complaining that much, and it's the only silver lining I'll get.

I shuffle in and take my seat, wincing at the pain on my buttocks. Our headmaster delights in handing out corporate punishments, and I could practically see him salivating as he stood waiting for my arrival.

I know I'm bruised, that my flesh is covered in welts, and I wouldn't be surprised if he drew blood.

I think he gets off on it, forcing us to drop our skirts and bare our flesh. Of course, he's not allowed to be alone with us. At least, not with someone of my status. The School Matron stood, sour-faced, watching as I took each and every lash. She even had the nerve to tut when I yelped in pain.

I don't want to think of what the lower ranking girls have to endure, they have no family name to protect them. I know most of them are being groomed for a far less desirable life than the rest of us, that they're going to

the whorehouses, to the pleasure houses. Or worse, that they'll be used for breeding for those high-ranking ladies unlucky enough to be infertile.

"Nice of you to show up, Brynn." Ms Doone says, staring at me over her thick, round spectacles.

I give a weak smile back because I'm done being on the receiving end of everyone's wrath today.

On the desk, on all our desks are solid, banana like objects. They're nailed into the wood so that no matter what we do to them, they won't budge.

My nose wrinkles as I take mine in. Matrimony is the worst of all our classes. And it's also the one we spend the most hours studying for.

This entire school's purpose is to brainwash us, to mould us, to have us believe that our sole purpose is to provide for our soon-to-be husbands. That God intended for us to be vassals and nothing much beyond it. We're not meant to have opinions. We're not meant to have any thoughts of our own.

A perfect wife can cook and clean, is beautiful from sunrise to sunset, and she's ready at any given moment to satisfy her husband's every wish.

"Today, we're going to practice deep-throat again." Ms Doone says, "Now I know some of you were able to master it quickly, but others..." She fixes her disapproving eyes right on me and Clara, the girl next to me, "... were clearly not trying hard enough."

It's hard not to roll my eyes.

I'm twenty-one years of age, well past what would be classed as school-age by normal standards. Only, I know the Brethren make their own rules. That we exist within the tight confines of what they deem to be right and wrong. They like to keep us here, confined, sequestered. Like little lambs being prepared for the slaughter.

"Now, slip your covers on." She says brightly.

I reach forward, grabbing the foil packet and tear it open. On good days, these are flavoured. On the not so good days they're ribbed, or textured, or something else just as nasty.

As the rubber thing inside slips out, I can feel the weird liquid covering it, making it feel slimy. Officially, we're only using these because the wooden models might give us splinters. In real life, with our future husbands, we won't have need for such a device. Ms. Doone stated proudly

before that once we try our husband's cock, we'll love it so much we'll never want to stop sucking on it.

The thought makes my stomach turn.

As if that would be the case. As if we'd be so stupid as to believe that.

Only, most of the class does. The fact that I don't is simply because I've read too many illegal books, and have snuck them out of my grandfather's library.

The rubber thing slides down over the fake cock, catching the bright fluorescent lights above our heads.

"Right, lips apart, throats open..." She instructs before starting a timer.

I'm quick to follow everyone else, to open my mouth and put the thing in. I know better than to fight this. I know better than to object.

We'll be here for hours, 'training' as they put it.

The teacher flits between the tables, advising on technique. There's thirty of us here, and she makes a point of focusing on her favourites, whispering into their ears about something she does that her husband apparently likes.

"This is such bullshit."

My eyes dart to Clara and I flash a warning as best I can. She's my best friend, my only friend. And she's on very thin ice.

I pull off, feeling a trail saliva clinging to the rubber.

"Careful." I murmur, my eyes darting around. We just need one girl, one of the bitchy ones to spot us.

"It is though." Clara hisses, pushing her auburn hair back from her face. She's plumper than me. With a great smattering of freckles on her cheeks. "This has nothing to do with actual marriage, does it?" She continues, narrowing her eyes.

I can't answer that. It's not like I have any experience of being married, but I do find it more than interesting that all the books I've read that are set in a school talk about things like biology, chemistry, history - and we've not learnt any of those topics.

We learn about the bible. About sins. And most of all, we learn every way we can please our husband, every way to pleasure him and ensure he is satisfied.

Self-pleasure might be a sin, lust absolutely is. But as Brethren Ladies, our role is to worship our husbands as if they were God incarnate. And that is what we spend the majority of our time learning to do.

“Clara Goldsmith.”

We all freeze at the sound of his voice. Erasmus Jude. The headmaster.

I don’t know when he came into the room, when he showed up, but my heart seems to pound in my chest and my face heats with the shame at what he did to me barely an hour ago.

“Is there a problem, Professor Jude?” Ms Doone asks, and we can all hear the nervousness in her voice too. Oh, we know he’s not above beating the staff either, that his punishments don’t just extend to the pupils. No, he rules us all, rules every single one of us as if he were a tyrant and this is his personal torture chamber.

“Ms Goldsmith here clearly thinks making idle gossip is worth more than learning how to please her husband.” He states, folding his arms over his chest.

“I, I, please...” Clara begins before she hangs her head in silence.

“You think you know so much,” Professor Jude sneers, “why don’t you come up front and demonstrate to the whole class?”

My breath hitches. I can’t even look at her as she’s all but dragged to the front.

If she were a legacy family, if her name meant something, then she wouldn’t have to endure what she’s about to. No one would dare treat me the way they treat her. Oh sure, I get a beating often enough, but no one would abuse me in a way that would harm my reputation. Nobody would abuse me in a way that would affect my marriage prospects.

No, my family might hate everything about me, but I still have worth. I still have to be kept pure.

Clara is not so lucky. Sure, they can’t cross certain lines, but Professor Jude likes to single her out, likes to pull her aside for any punishment he thinks he can get away with.

He’s a bastard. A nasty piece of work. What I wouldn’t give to pick this awful bit of wood and launch it at his head and crack his skull right open.

But I don’t dare.

I just hang my own head, clench my fists and try to block out the sounds as she’s forced to ‘show off’ her skills while he holds a model, right there, over where his real cock is.

“Come on,” He growls as he rams the thing down her throat. “We all know you can suck it better than that.”

He grabs at her hair, forcing her to take more, to swallow all of it, while he rocks his hips.

She starts grasping, scratching at the air. Her face turns red, too red.

“She’s choking.” I scream, getting to my feet. He’s going to kill her.

Professor Jude rolls his eyes like I’m the one overreacting here. “Sit down, Brynn, maybe you could learn a thing if you paid attention for a change.”

I take a step forward and Ms Doone is there, grabbing my arm. “Don’t even think about it.”

“He’s suffocating her.” I hiss.

“One day soon, when you are lucky enough to be married, you will realise how good it feels. How good it is to have your husband’s cock down your throat.”

I blink back, shaking my head. The bitch is crazy. They’re all fucking crazy.

Clara spurts out, finally pushing the professor off her as she lands on all fours, heaving like she’d just been held underwater.

“Pitiful.” The headmaster sneers. “If that were my actual cock, I’d expect far better.”

I don’t think any of us know what to say. We all just stay there, watching as Clara struggles to get her breath back and the Professor murmurs with our teacher like there’s some sort of conspiracy.

“Well, what are you all gawping for?” Ms Doone says, “Get back to practising.”

It takes everything I have to turn back, to return to my desk. Clara is still gasping for breath, but she too is scrambling away.

As we sit back down in our seats, the sounds of sucking fills the air.

“Don’t forget to moan.” Ms Doone chirps. “Your husband wants to hear how much you enjoy this.”

As if on cue a dozen girls start moaning, gasping, like they can’t get enough of the thing down their throat.

# CHAPTER SEVEN



*Conrad*

From the minute the sun rose and I had to leave my room, that damned woman had practically clung to me.

It wouldn't be so bad if she wasn't so damned desperate.

Every word she speaks seems calculated, deliberate, carefully considered to gain my attention. The way she moves, the way she bends, it's like she's trying to give away glimpses of herself, of her body beneath that tight little dress.

I finally get a reprieve when Quinn suggests we go hunting. And for those few precious hours I can breathe, I can think.

Our prey is good. Whoever their beaters are, they sure know what they're doing. I'm riding a dapple grey, fifteen hands, nice and sturdy. Quinn's on his ex-racer, but mine is easily able to keep up.

The forest is managed well enough that we can ride through the brambles with ease. We barely get a few furlongs up before I spot a chancer trying to loop behind us.

"On the right," Quinn shouts, like I'm too stupid to notice.

My horse crashes through the undergrowth as I give it a good enough kick to ensure I'm ahead.

The girl spots us almost immediately and screams out, picking up her pace, but she doesn't stand a chance.

Her bare feet flash on the path as she runs ahead of me. Her bare arse taunts me. I wonder what her tits look like, if they're plump or saggy. It's always hard to tell from behind. Sometimes these bitches can have the nicest arses, and yet the front does not match at all.

Her matted hair streams behind her. I reach forward, giving it a good yank and she screams more.

Quinn laughs out, calling her a name I don't catch.

I let my hand loosen, let her get away as I pull up the reins. The fun is in the chase. If I run her down too quickly, what would be the point? I want her to think she stands a chance. I want her to believe that she might just reach the safe zone.

To our right, another girl pops up. She darts ahead then makes a full-face somersault into the brambles, screaming as she goes. I leave her for Quinn to deal with, and keep my attention on the ginger.

She's got a good few metres ahead. Her arms are pumping fast as she runs for her life.

My lips curl as I watch her muscles work, as I watch her glutes flex.

Without taking my eyes off her, I hook an arrow into the crossbow and take aim.

She's not stupid, I'll give her that. She's zigzagging enough to tell me she knows what's coming. But she's also too predictable with her movements. She darts to the left just as I release my arrow, and I hear the shriek as it embeds itself right into her shoulder blade.

She falls over, landing hard on the ground, and for a moment she's clearly dazed.

I'm almost disappointed by how easy it is. I swing my leg over, jumping from the horse and as I approach her, she springs up, running once more.

*You wanna play, bitch? Then I'll play.*

My riding boots make it hard to run, but the girl is no match for me.

I race after her, again, letting her believe that she stands a chance of winning.

I can hear her desperate, ragged breathing; I can practically hear the pounding of her chest as she tries to flee. She turns off, jumping into a ditch

and I'm quick to follow her. The mud swirls around my boots, and the dirt pisses me off.

She falls to her knees, crawling through it, like her body is about to give out.

“You can’t outrun me.” I taunt.

She turns her head, staring in horror at how close I am.

“Fuck you,” She hisses.

I can't help but laugh at that. If she'd been smarter, she would have kept her mouth shut, she would have remembered her place. It was her choices that got her here.

She crawls along further, desperation forcing her on. And then we both hear the sound of horses.

She shakes her head, coming to a stop as Quinn and the others ride right up to here. One of his stewards is thankfully bringing my horse, so that spares me a walk.

“I see you caught the bitch.” He remarks. Behind his own horse, the brunette is tied off with rope. There's an arrow right through her right eye. It's one hell of a shot.

“Not quite.” I reply.

The girl stumbles to her feet, her hands clasped together as she faces me. “Please,” She begs. “Please, grant me mercy. I have a child, I have...”

An arrow to her throat silences that annoying wail.

Her eyes widen, her knees give way, and she falls back down onto them before me.

“Should have thought about your child before you betrayed us,” I state. Stupid fool, running a railroad, trying to help people who want to escape the Brethren. She should have realised there was no escape. There is no life outside us.

Her child will go to an orphanage, they will be trained there until they're old enough to go to Oblivion.

A tear streaks down her cheek.

I crouch down, admiring her body as she takes one heavy breath after another. Blood trails from her neck, looking like a winding snake down her centre.

“Pity,” I mutter, taking the full weight of her breast in my hand. She had a good figure after all.

Quinn tosses a rope to me. I wrap it around her wrists, ensuring it's tight enough to keep her secure. Keeping the end in my hand, I get back in the saddle.

"Shall we?" Quinn says, gesturing forward. I know he's got a nice spread for lunch at the lodge, and then there's a fresh set of birds for the afternoon.

I nod back, giving my horse a good enough kick to get moving and behind me, the bird falls over, she kicks out, trying to fight with the last bit of life she has.



#### LUNCH IS A FINE THING, AS IS THE SECOND HUNT.

By the time we return for the evening, I'm more than desperate for a wash. My jodhpurs stick to my thighs, and I can feel the trail of sweat trickling under my jacket.

We leave the horses to the stableboys.

Quinn walks on ahead, murmuring about needing to see to some business. He technically operates one of the largest manufacturing plants in the country, but I know he's not exactly 'hands on'. No, he prefers to leave the day-to-day operations to more capable hands, not that I can blame him. The company brings in almost a billion pounds in revenue, so why tinker with the system when it's working so well.

I let out a sigh, heading up to my room, realising that soon enough the old codger will be dead and if he and Magnus have their way, then that entire thing falls on my shoulders. As if I don't have enough to manage with Oblivion.

As I round the corner, I come to an abrupt stop.

*She's here. Right in front of me.*

Her eyes widen. She takes a step back and I'm quick to reach out, to grab her, to ensure she can't escape.

She's wearing a uniform, her school uniform. Christ, does she look so innocent in it. She's got a plaid skirt that stops just above her knees, and the crisp white collar of her shirt sits on top of her dark woolly jumper. Her brown hair is pulled back into a high ponytail, and I can imagine exactly

how it would feel to grab a hold and yank her head right down to where I want it.

“Yyyyyou...” She stammers.

“Did you miss me?” I murmur, catching her chin between my thumb and forefinger. Her skin is soft, delicate – everything about her is delicate, really. Like fine china that needs to be handled with care, but also needs to be moulded, shaped while it’s still malleable.

Her cheeks flame, and I’m curious; is it embarrassment or anger that makes her react like that?

“You, you, you can’t...” She trails off, glancing around. “You can’t beeee here.”

Her voice sounds off, her words sound almost slurred. Last night I put it down to fear, but now I’m not so sure.

I frown, wondering if she’s drunk or high, but as I grab her face and force her to look at me properly, I realise that’s not it. She’s not under the influence of anything. She’s stone cold sober.

“What the fuck is wrong with your voice?” I ask.

She winces, her face flushing more red.

“I, I...” Whatever words she’s trying to say get lost and I can’t tell if it’s her fear of me, or her fear of something else making her stammer.

“Conrad, darling.”

We both freeze as that awful, grating lilt rings out down the corridor.

Brynn seizes the moment to slip from my grasp, only she runs right into her aunt, who pins her in place with a look that says it all.

And just as I open my mouth to argue with her, one of the servants comes running.

“Lord Blake.” He says, bowing low. “Your brother is on the line.”

I narrow my eyes, taking a step, wondering why the fuck Magnus would be calling the house and not simply calling me directly. And then I realise of course he would call here, he’d want to make sure I’d actually arrived. That I wasn’t lying about my stay, that I hadn’t managed to come up with some miracle to get out of this.

Brynn looks at me, and our eyes meet for the briefest of seconds. Do I imagine the plea in them? Or is that my own desperation wanting her to feel it, wanting her to get on her knees and beg for my help?

My cock seems to throb at the memory of what she did, that last night she was more than willing to make her distaste for me known.

Maybe this will be a lesson to her. Maybe she'll learn from this that if she wants something, then she has to play nice, to be nice. She can't expect all the honey when she's been acting like a little bitch.

I mutter something barely comprehensible to Giselle and then I turn on my heel, leaving them to it.

Let them fight it out between them. With any luck, Brynn will ring her aunt's neck and solve all my problems for me.

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# CHAPTER EIGHT



*Brynn*

**M**y head slams into the wall. I cry out as it feels like a whole galaxy of stars dance before my eyes.

“Why the fuck aren’t you in your room already?” My aunt snarls. “And more importantly, why the fuck were you with him, talking to him?”

I can taste blood, I can taste it on my tongue. Does a bleed on the brain do that? Did she hit my head hard enough to do real, permanent damage?

I guess it’s my bad luck that I ran into him, ran into both of them, when I was simply trying to get to the safety of my room.

“Talk, bitch.”

She slams my head back again and my knees buckle. I slide down, falling into a heap at her feet.

“He, he...”

She crouches down, getting right into my face, as if that will help. “Use your words. Spit it out.”

I hate the way she torments me; I hate the way she revels in the fact that my speech is fucked.

“He wanted to know about you.” I force the words out. Force the lie.

She pauses, tilting her head, narrowing her eyes looking more snakelike.  
“What?”

She’s going to hurt me no matter what I say now, so I might as well try and limit the damage.

“He, he wanted, to, to know what you like.” Maybe it helps that my sentence is rambled. Maybe that helps hide the lie.

She blinks like she expected me to say anything but that. “He wanted to know what I like?” Her entire face changes, and she steps back as the biggest grin stretches from ear to ear. “But why would he ask you?” She sneers.

I shake my head, pretending to be as confused as she is.

She steps back and starts pacing the corridor. “Maybe he is realising, maybe he is accepting this.”

Could I be this lucky? Could it really be this easy to trick her?

Her eyes snap back to me, and it’s all I can do not to cower.

“Get back to your room.” She spits. “I told you I didn’t want to see you this week.” Her boot jabs at me as I scramble up and I’m gone, down the hall as fast as my legs will go.

# CHAPTER

## NINE



*Conrad*

It's evening. Quinn, myself and a few of his buddies are in the smoking room, having a drink. I'm not sure why he invited them here, they've barely said a word to me, but they do keep shooting glances my way like I'm some sort of celebrity.

Now that the ladies have retired, I can relax. I can breathe, and I can think.

Giselle was especially clingy tonight.

And as usual, my little doll was a no-show.

I narrow my eyes, taking a long sip of whiskey. I'm starting to think it's intentional, that they're keeping her out of sight for a reason. Do they think I'm offended by her? She's technically a bastard, but she is also a Monclere. Besides, she's beautiful enough to not give a fuck about who her parents were or how she was conceived.

It turns out she has a speech impediment. That she wasn't just stuttering through fear. It's endearing, poor little thing.

There's a timid knock at the door. I look up, foolishly hoping that this might be here, only it's Paige. She glances about, looking more than a little uncomfortable and shuffles in like she knows she's in trouble, and she'd do anything to get out of it.

Quinn fixes his gaze on her, before letting out a long, frustrated sigh. "You were late for dinner again, wife," He says.

She bows her head, nodding quickly.

"What sort of impression do you think that leaves on my guests?" He asks, gesturing to me and his two friends.

In truth, I hadn't noticed she was any later than the rest of us, but then Giselle was all over me like a rash, so I was rather preoccupied.

"I'm sorry," She whispers. "I'll do better, husband,"

"Yes, you will," He says, sounding like he intends to drive that point home.

He gets up, strutting towards her and she visibly shrinks like she's trying to make herself so small. Clearly, he's not opposed to getting his hands dirty at home, is he? But then, most of us aren't. We're brought up to understand that as men, we are the dominant ones, the gender that matters. Women are only good for one thing, and oftentimes, you'll find a slave is far more satisfying than a wife can be.

"My guests are upset," Quinn states. "You need to make it up to them. You need to show them that you're a good hostess, a good wife..."

He tears start falling down her cheeks, but she doesn't make a sound as he reaches down and rips the delicate fabric right off her body.

My eyes widen and I sit up, realising what this is.

Her breasts are small, barely worth a bra – not that she's wearing one. She's skinny too, like she could do with a good meal. But that's not what gets my attention; from where I'm sat, I can see her back, I can see her arse. And across her skin are so many stripes, so many scars from where she's clearly been whipped.

"You beat your wife, Quinn?" I remark.

He glances at me, shrugging. "She needs to learn," He remarks before slapping her hard enough across the face that she falls onto all fours. "All these women need to learn."

His two friends get up and it's almost practised, almost rehearsed. They prowl around her, like they think they're two badass predators about to make a kill. My lips quirk as I watch them. It's almost amusing,

entertaining even. At least it would be, if she wasn't crying too bloody much.

One of them undoes his trousers, yanks her thong aside and starts pushing himself into her. The other man grabs her face, saying something I can't hear before he pushes his cock down her throat.

She's clearly not up for it, but she doesn't fight either. She just stays there letting them use her while her husband sits back down and watches the scene before him like he's bored.

When they're done, Quinn looks over at me and gestures. "If you'd like a go," He says, like he's offering up a biscuit. "She's only good for one thing. Her face isn't much to look at, but her cunt grips you quite nicely."

I shake my head. Another man's leftovers is hardly tempting.

Quinn pulls a face, muttering "suit yourself," before he gets up and pushes her down onto her back.

She whimpers as he slaps her a few times and then he undoes his belt, wrapping it around her throat tight enough that her eyes bulge.

I've never been one who's shy about sex. I grew up in Oblivion so I could hardly be that, but listening to his grunting, seeing his pale, wrinkly arse flexing as he fucks her makes my stomach turn.

Thank fuck this is my last night. Thank fuck I get to leave tomorrow.

I mutter some excuse and head out, leaving them all there. I don't doubt they'll continue the party, continue abusing the girl and I have better things to do than sit there and watch them fuck all night.

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# CHAPTER

## TEN



*Brynn*

Dance class is the worst.

We're all there, standing facing the mirrors, dropping and jiving our hips.

It's sensual, sexual - and I absolutely hate it.

I know above us on the balcony, Professor Jude is sitting there, watching every second. We're not allowed to look up. We're not allowed to look anywhere but ahead.

Those are the rules, that we have to pretend that our future husbands are watching us. That this dance is for them.

The music plays out and it sounds so tinny.

Clara is beside me. Dancing and muttering. As she meets my gaze, she rolls her eyes. She must be just as sweaty as I am. She certainly looks it, with her skin all flushed and that hint of a scar showing on the side of her top lip from where it didn't join properly when she was a baby.

"Now, pirouette," The dance instructor says loudly.

We all spin as one, like a bunch of dancing robots, turning on the spot before we're back bucking our hips once more.

When we're finally announced into society, they'll hold a great ball where we're presented to the Senate. All the Brethren Lords will be there, watching. And then I know we'll have to dance, to perform. To sell ourselves as potential wives.

It's how my step-grandmother was chosen. She's not even thirty, and yet she was forced to marry a man over twice her age.

Paige is from a good family, the youngest of six daughters. She had a nice little dowry to entice a would-be suitor, not that our family needed the money. I know my grandfather has no care for more children, not now anyway. Paige has miscarried so many times he's given up on the idea.

No, all his plans now rest on my aunt, on her great match with the Blake's.

I guess I should be relieved that he's not selling me off to secure our family's future. But then, I'm the unwanted one, the unworthy one. I have no illusions as to what my marriage will be. I'll be lucky if I'm even given a match at all and not sold off to be a breeder.

“Brynn Monclere,”

The voice rings out and we all freeze.

My stomach literally drops as I realise I've been called out. But I was dancing, I was.

The teacher beckons me over, and I try so hard not to tremble as I make my way from the very back. Some of the girls whisper and make snide remarks as I pass them, but I don't react to it.

“Yes, Miss?” I say, trying to sound well-mannered, contrite. My backside has only just recovered from the last beating I got. I don't want another one. Besides, I'm acutely aware that Mr. X is there, observing all of this.

“Your family has requested you.” She says.

“Excuse me?” What does that mean?

She huffs, immediately annoyed by my apparent stupidity. “It means, they want you at home, stupid girl.” She swats me over the back of the head as if that will knock some sense into me. “Get your things, they've sent a car for you.”

Home? But why? My stomach turns with unease.

It's not uncommon for my grandfather to have me sent home early. He's paranoid, more so in his old age. He's convinced that I'll do the same thing as my mother, that I'll fall pregnant and bring shame on us all. As if I have the freedom to even look at a man.

I glance back, saying a silent goodbye to Clara and then I practically sprint out of the hall. My things are all in the lockers and if there really is a car coming, then I'll have to hurry to get round to the front or I'll be in trouble for keeping the driver waiting again.



I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY I'VE BEEN CALLED BACK EARLY, BUT I KEEP MY mouth shut and don't ask questions. With my grandfather away on business, Giselle is in charge, which means absolute hell for me if I'm not careful.

The only shining light is that her fiancé left three days ago, so at least I don't have to face that horror.

As I walk through the side door, the house is a hub of activity. The maids are rushing about with their arms laden with boxes.

"What's going on?" I ask.

One of them glances at me before she scurries away like I'm infectious, and I decide that it's better not to know. Whatever this is, it isn't meant for me anyway. My aunt does this regularly; she has nice little soirees with her friends whenever my grandfather is out of town. She probably wanted me home early so she could lock me in my room and ensure I was well out of her way. Not that I'm complaining, mind due. Even a night shut away on an empty stomach is better than having to endure the abuse that usually comes my way.

When I get to my room, I shut the door, ditch my bag and then take a shower. I have nothing else to do tonight but simply while away the hours so I take my time, washing my hair, cleaning myself, even shaving so that I follow all those nice little rules expected of me.

I then dry myself off, get into my pyjamas because why the hell not, and then settle in with a book. A safe book. A permitted book.

My stomach grumbles in protest, and I rub it absentmindedly. You'd think it'd be used to these moments of starvation, but I guess not.

When the door opens, I half expect it to be one of the maids, that she's snuck me out something while no one was looking.

But my smile dies the minute I see her instead.

Giselle comes waltzing in, with her friend right behind her. My eyes dart between them, wondering why the fuck they're in my part of the house? In the shit part. And especially why, when she's supposed to be having her party?

My stomach drops like I already know something horrible is going to go down.

"Wha, wha, what do you want?" I ask, trying to sound far calmer than I feel.

"Wha, wha, wha.." Milena teases, mocking my speech while Giselle smirks.

I sit back, feeling cornered as they both sit on the end of the bed, looking like vultures.

Milena mocks my pyjamas and Giselle pretends to tell her to stop, as if she'd ever defend me.

Giselle then starts making small talk, acting like this is normal, as if she regularly hangs out with me, as if she likes me. I look between them, trying to figure out what the fuck is going on.

"You're almost done with school," Giselle remarks, twirling her hair around her finger. "Have any plans for what you're going to do after?"

I shake my head. Like I'm allowed such a thing as a job. Being a Monclere means we have a standard to set. If my grandfather wasn't trying to pretend I didn't exist, then I'd be officially up on the list of eligible debutantes this year. I guess that's one thing I can be grateful for.

Milena reaches across, snatching the book that's still in my hand, "What is this?" She asks, as if she thinks I'd be stupid enough to have anything forbidden out with all the activity in the house downstairs.

"A book," I reply.

"A boooook," She mocks.

Giselle bats her hand, "Stop it," She says, "My niece is a smart girl, reading is good for keeping her mind occupied."

What? Since when is she playing nice?

Giselle lifts the bottle that's in her hand and takes a swig of it. It's got a bright plastic wrap around it so I can't see the contents, but I'd guess from the look of it that it's alcoholic. We're not technically allowed to drink. As

unmarried Ladies that is, it's a privilege we're only granted when our Grandfather says so.

I bite my lip to stop myself from saying anything

"Oh, shush," Giselle laughs, when she sees my face. "It's just vodka lemonade,"

Milena reaches for it and takes a big dramatic swig but when she brings the thing back down, I can see her lips are dry. Why would she fake drinking it?

"You try," Giselle says, grabbing hold of it and practically shoving it in my face.

I shake my head quickly. Do they really think I'd be so stupid as that? They might be able to break the rules, but I certainly can't.

"Don't be a bore, Brynn." Milena moans,

"I, I, I think you should leave," I stammer. I don't want them here, I don't want them sitting there, acting like this is normal.

Giselle snorts. Milena laughs even louder. "Brynn the bore," She states.

"Take a drink, Brynn," Giselle orders.

I shake my head again. No fucking way.

It's like they move in unison. Milena is suddenly there, pinning me back, using her entire weight to hold me down as Giselle holds the bottle to my lips, pressing it to them.

"Just a sip," She says, "You're twenty-one, you can have a sip. It's not a big deal. Neither of us will say a thing..."

I roll my lips together, pinching them together tightly. In my head it's like I'm screaming, but I can't get them off, I can't fight them both. I'm outnumbered.

Giselle pinches my nose, shutting off my air supply and then she rams that bottle so hard into my mouth I swear she chips a tooth. Liquid pours down my throat. It tastes fruity, and then sharp.

I start choking up, my lungs protest, my eyes stream but she doesn't pull it back, she just holds it there until the contents spill over, down my cheeks, down my face and onto the covers underneath me.

"Fucking hell," Giselle huffs as she stands back up, "Was that really so hard?"

I lay there coughing it back up, feeling I can't get enough air. My head is spinning, my eyes are streaming.

“Give her a minute,” Milena says in a tone that puts the fear of god into me.

I look up and they’re both standing there, watching me with what I can only think is morbid curiosity. God, have they poisoned me? Am I going to die?

My head spins more, and my eyes start to blur. What they fuck have they done?

Giselle leans down, staring at my pupils like she can see something in them. “Damn, that was quick,” She says.

“You did give her half the bottle,” Milena laughs. “Poor bitch will be out till morning now.”

Giselle smirks, before she starts yanking at my clothes, stripping them off me.

“Wha, wha, what are you doooing?” I can barely string a sentence together. It feels like I’m now surrounded. That there’s an army of them, a gang of Giselle’s and Milena’s here, in my room.

“Stupid slut,” Giselle says, slapping my face so hard that I swear my brains slam into my skull.

“Put this on her,” Milena says, holding something lacey and black up. My mind seems to reel as I realise what it is; lingerie. They’re dressing me up.

“No,” My mouth barely makes the sound. My lips seem to be frozen. Whatever this is that they gave me, it’s taking over everything. It’s like I’m locked down, trapped in my body.

“You wanted to play games,” Giselle says, “Well, now we’re gonna play on my terms.”

I don’t know what that means. What any of it means.

I’m pulled about, my legs forced into the black lace thong and then I’m rolled over as something is done up over my breasts.

More material is then shoved over my head, shoved onto me. But it’s not covering, it’s not covering at all. I feel like my entire legs are exposed, that my cleavage is exposed.

Panic floods my body. I try to scream, but no noise comes out.

I’m yanked up, dragged by my arms, with my legs scraping the floor.

“Let’s get this bitch in place,” Milena says as they pull me from my room.

I don't want to go. I don't want to be wherever the hell it is they're taking me.

But my body won't respond and I'm dragged down, passing all those paintings, and into a room I don't recognise.

I'm dumped onto a bed. Milena takes my legs, spreading them wide while Giselle leans down, staring once more into my face.

"How does it feel now huh?" She says, "How does it feel to know you can't do anything to stop this?"

I don't even know what 'this' is? What is she talking about?

My eyes dart between her and her friend. Apparently, that's the only part of my body that will respond.

Giselle slaps me again, slaps me hard. "Stupid little whore," She sneers, "Tonight, you're gonna learn. Tonight, you're finally going to get what's coming to you."

I try to shake my head, I try to lift my arms. I try to fight, and nothing happens. Nothing.

They both move back, standing there laughing at me, and then Milena tells Giselle that she needs to get ready.

As they turn to go, my aunt looks back at me and tells me I'm a whore just like my mother, before she slams the door shut and I'm left there, in the darkness, in my fear, unable to do a thing to stop whatever this is.

# CHAPTER ELEVEN



*Conrad*

I can hear the noise of the party, the music, the laughter of all the people that will make this evening with my fiancée just about bearable. Only instead of joining them, she guides me away from the fun and up the stairs to where the house feels far too quiet.

Surely, she can't be angling for me to fuck her before our wedding night? Because she knows what would happen then, that I'd have proof of her impurity, that I could shirk her off, and there'd be nothing she could do to stop me.

I wrinkle my nose, trying to decide whether fucking her now would be worth the freedom. One moment of sacrifice to give me a lifetime of freedom from her? I guess when you put it like that, it could be worth it.

And besides, I can close my eyes. I can imagine that it's someone else, someone I want, someone desirable. Cunts all feel the same anyway. Although I imagine this bitch makes enough noise for me to know exactly who I'm balls deep in.

She stops in front of a door, opening it wide enough for me to get a good look inside, and my eyes widen as I see who is there.

Brynn is laid on the bed, her limbs splayed as if someone has deliberately positioned her in the most vulnerable way they can.

I take a step forward, frowning in confusion while my thoughts whirl.

*Why would my fiancée of all people bring me in here? What possible gain could she have from this?*

Giselle's hands wrap around me, those tentacle-like nails skimming down my shirt. "I thought we could make a deal." she murmurs into my ear.

"What deal?" I grunt back while it takes everything I have not to shake her off.

She turns me around, and it's only because I need to stop looking at her niece like that, that I allow her to do it. As she reaches up and cups my face, she smiles sincerely.

"We are engaged, soon enough we will be husband and wife. Let's not pretend that this is a love match yet but it will be, once you realise what we can have, how we can be. The true potential of it all..."

"What are you talking about?" I snap. Patience has never been a family trait and it certainly isn't one I've learnt over the years, not with Magnus as a brother, not with Devin either.

"You want her." She says, glancing at the lifeless girl over my shoulder. "I've seen the way you watch her, the way you react. It's okay..." she says, planting a finger on my lips as if I was going to deign such a declaration with any kind of meaningful response. "You can have her, you can have whoever you want. That's the point. That's what I'm offering. I'm a Monclere, you're a Blake, together we can have greatness and that's my offer to you, my wedding gift."

"You want an open marriage?" I snap. Like fuck I'll agree to that. Does she think I'll turn a blind eye to her fucking whoever she chooses? I might need an heir, but I sure as fuck will not pass someone else's brat off as my own.

"No." She smiles. "I want you. I want this, us, and I'm prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure I get it."

My mind seems to spin. I stand there, speechless for what must be the first time in my life.

"You can have her," she says, again. "Have my niece. Fuck her, use her, I don't care. It doesn't matter what you do, as long as you and I walk down

that aisle together.”

*Fuck her? Seriously?*

I shouldn’t do it. A better man would object, would pretend, would deny the fact that they’ve been lusting after the girl, but why should I? Why should I lie when she’s offered up so damned easily?

I turn, shrugging Giselle off and close the distance between me and the bed.

Brynn hasn’t moved. She’s lying there, eyes shut, soft breaths escaping her lips as her chest rises and falls. She looks so peaceful. So unbelievably beautiful.

I brush my fingers over her face, pushing all that brown hair back so that I can see her features fully.

“She’s been drugged.” I state.

Giselle drops to her knees beside me. “Yes,” she says simply.

“Because she didn’t agree?” I ask.

Giselle smirks, and those bright red lips streak up her face. “I didn’t ask. It doesn’t matter what she wants, you want her and I want you. If this is what seals the deal, then who cares what she thinks of it? She’ll wake in the morning, completely oblivious.”

I frown, feeling my stomach twist. Not in guilt, not in concern, but because I want Brynn to remember, I want Brynn to revel in what I do to her body, I want her to leave this room, desperately needing me to fuck her again. To be as obsessed by me as I am of her.

My hand skims up the length of her thigh. She’s wearing a little silk sundress, one I know she wouldn’t have chosen herself. As I push it up over her hips, I see the slutty underwear she’s got on. Did her aunt choose that, too? Has she really been dressed up like a doll just for me to play with?

My dick comes to life at that notion. That she’s my doll, that she’s been laying here, waiting for me.

“Leave.” I say quietly.

Giselle shakes her head but she moves back, moves into the shadows, giving me space. “I watch. That’s also part of the deal.”

“You want to watch me fuck her?”

“Take it or leave it, Conrad,” she states, folding her arms.

Fine, she can watch. What difference does it make anyway? I know once I’m balls deep, I won’t give a fuck what my fiancée sees.

I reach forward, rolling the girl onto her front and unzipping the dress. I don't mean to be rough, and yet the zip catches enough that her whole body jolts. For a second, I wonder if she might wake, if this is all some trick but she just lays there, and it suddenly sinks in that this is happening. This is real.

I grow impatient then, more impatient. I practically rip the dress up off her arms, exposing that beautiful body beneath. Her breasts aren't huge, but they make my mouth water all the same. I grab one, kneading, massaging, feeling the nipple come to life beneath the soft sexy lingerie she's wearing.

*That's my girl. That's right, show me now that you want this, prove that you're as desperate for me as I am for you.*

The bra comes off first. It's too lacy, too covering, too damned annoying. Her nipples are round, small, a shade of pink that looks far too innocent.

I lean down, biting one hard, wanting it to hurt enough that she wakes tomorrow and feels it still throbbing. I know I'm playing with fire; I know this is reckless but I've dreamt of this, imagined this, needed this for so damned long that I refuse to walk away now. I refuse to turn down this opportunity when it's presented so perfectly.

With my hands, I spread her thighs apart and hook her panties to one side. Her pussy is neatly shaved, but not hairless. If I had my way, I'd see to that. I'd ensure she was smooth enough to eat off.

Her cunt looks like the gates of heaven; plump and so damned welcoming. With one hand I slap her, and again there's no reaction beyond a throb of my own cock.

“Fuck her already.” Giselle hisses.

I snarl back, telling her to mind her own business.

She's ruining this, ruining the fantasy.

The panties come off the same way the bra does. In a torn, ripped, hasty manner that shows how damned desperate I am. And then I'm undoing my trousers, pulling my cock out, giving it a few good pumps to try to calm my own need.

I drag the head of my cock up between her labia. She's not wet. She's not even the slightest bit aroused, but then, how can she be when she's got no idea of what is going on? I could prep her, and yet I don't. I want to feel the moment her body gives in; I want to feel the moment her muscles submit, and I won't get that if I finger fuck her first.

As I line myself up, Giselle moves, she shifts. No doubt she wants a better view, but I don't have time to consider what her motives are. I'm too damned riled up to consider anything but the fact that I'm about to win the jackpot.

I push into her, and it takes more than a few thrusts to work my cock in, and fuck me is the girl tight. Too tight. It makes my eyes water; it actually hurts my cock as I push deeper and deeper.

"Fuck me," I groan. I don't know how someone's cunt could be that tight, but I know in this moment that it's what I want, what I need, from now on. No one else will ever feel like this, no woman will ever compare.

I slide myself out, finally feeling that leak of arousal and then I start rolling my hips, letting my body truly claim her. Her breasts start heaving back and forth, her mouth opens just a little and I could almost fool myself into thinking that she's here, awake, enjoying this moment with me. Moaning, gasping, and rocking her hips like she's desperate to come already.

"Fuck, you feel so good." I groan. It's too good, too damned fucking incredible. I know I've fucked up, even as I'm chasing the very heights of nirvana, I realise the mistake I've made. That this moment here will be a high I'll never get to savour again, never get to enjoy.

From now on I'll be an addict, continually chasing it but never ever being truly satisfied.

Behind me, I can hear moans and gasps. Giselle is clearly enjoying every second of me ruining her niece.

I clench my jaw, hating the way that bitch is trying to share this moment with us. And then I remember that my little doll here isn't actually consenting, that tomorrow she's going to wake and be none the wiser.

Fury twists in me.

I snarl out, my hands grab hold of the headboard, and I slam myself into her harder and harder. I don't care that I'm too rough, that I'm twice her size and that Brynn is probably tearing from the abuse I'm inflicting. I need her body to bear witness to this, I need her to wake and see the bruises and remember.

"Fuck," I groan, slamming into her so hard that I know I'm brutalising her insides.

She has to remember. She has to wake and feel what I've done to her, how I've left my mark all over her perfect little body.

Her cunt squelches, her body heaves more and more. I slap her breasts just for the sheer hell of it, and the livid print that remains tells me that I'm becoming rabid now.

When I come, I come hard. It feels like the entirety of my balls empty, and I slump on top of her, breathing in that sweet, innocent scent.

As I slide out, my eyes drop to see how swollen and battered her cunt is. My come is already leaking out, as if her body is already trying to rid herself of me. But I see the streaks of red too. Not just there, but on my cock, on the sheets, all around us.

Giselle lets out an exaggerated moan, her body heaving. As my eyes follow the direction of the sound, I can see her lying barely a metre away, her dress up above her waist and her fingers deep inside herself. Her head rolls back, and she's coming like she's never had so much pleasure before.

"You touched yourself?" I snap, as it sinks in what all her little noises were about.

She gasps, sitting up and spreads her legs wide as if I'd want to see how turned on she got. As if I give a damn about her. "This was for both of us, Conrad." she states. "That's the deal, you can fuck who you want as long as I'm there, as long as you're not hiding it from me. We're a partnership."

I stare at her, almost in disbelief. On some level, this should make me happy. On some level, this is a reprieve. What man wouldn't want a wife so open minded and considerate?

But she masturbated while I was fucking her niece, she watched me taking her, enjoying her and she stole that moment, twisted it so that it was all about her pleasure.

My eyes dart back to the girl I really want. She hasn't moved. She's exactly where I left her, still splayed wide open, and laying in the mess of us both. She's so perfect. Too perfect. If she opened her eyes now, would she smile at me? Would she have that innocent blush on her cheeks? Or would she shy away because she realises that Giselle is here, witnessing it?

"Get out." I say before I can stop myself.

Giselle may have sullied the moment, may have spoiled it, but by my reckoning I've got a little more time before my doll wakes up. I want to hold her, to touch her, to enjoy this first time for as long as I can.

Giselle doesn't move. She just lays there, legs spread like the whore she is. "Don't you want to play with me now?"

"Excuse me?"

"I gave you this, I gave you my niece. Gave you her virginity." She spits. "The least you can do is show your thanks."

I blink as that word registers. Virginity? My eyes dart back to the angel on the bed, to where her cunt is battered and bleeding. I was her first? I was her first. It feels like a chorus goes off, a celebration for something unfathomable.

But then it sinks in that she won't remember this, she won't know it was me. She'll wake and be oblivious to what I am, what we did. This night should have been special. This night should have been her, present and awake, desperately pleading for me to do it. She should have offered herself up to me like the prize she was.

Her virginity might be mine, but Giselle has tarnished even that.

And what's more, I've ruined her because she won't have a clue that she's not a virgin now. She won't know to take the appropriate precautions. And when she's married off, they'll test her and she won't know to cheat it, they'll just think she's a stupid whore who got caught and she'll be sent to Oblivion, banished there for the rest of her days.

Christ the thought of it, of her being fucked by others, used by others, treated like that because I was too stupid to realise what this really is what Giselle wanted. This moment here isn't really about me. This has nothing to do with me, not really. This is about Giselle's hatred for Brynn. She wants to ruin her. Maybe she won't wait until Brynn is married, maybe tomorrow while Brynn is still half sedated, Giselle will go whispering to her father and they'll haul Brynn out and check her purity.

Christ, what a perfect little plan she had. And how easily I fell for it.

"Get out. Now." I repeat, hoping she hears the fury. Hoping she's as terrified as she possibly can be.

She scrambles to her feet, chattering more bullshit about how I should be grateful, and I grab her by the throat, shoving her through the door before slamming it in her face.

I don't give a fuck what she thinks. Or what she does.

In the ensuing silence I stand there, head pressed against the wood, considering my options. If I marry Giselle, I'll make my brother happy, I'll make both our families happy. And apparently, I'll be able to fuck whoever I want, whenever I want, as long as my bitch of a wife bears witness to it.

But I want my doll. I want Brynn.

One second with her is worth a lifetime of fucks with anyone else.

As that realisation sinks in, I do the unthinkable. I cross the room, wrap her up in the bloodied mess of us both and I carry her out, carry her away.

She will still wake confused in the morning.

She will still wake sore and bruised, almost certainly scared.

But she'll come to realise that this is for the best, that I am what she needs. What she wants. The world may turn against us, the world may try to fight us but I will have her, I will have my doll and nothing and no one will be able to stop it.

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# AFTER



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# CHAPTER TWELVE



*Brynn*

I wake up in a daze. My head feels fuzzy, and my body feels far too heavy.

And then it all comes crashing down. The drink, the confusion, the way my limbs refused to cooperate and that grin, that fucking awful grin Giselle had as she started stripping my clothes from my body.

“No.”

I gasp out the word. My throat feels so dry and my tongue feels swollen, as if I’ve spent the last god knows how many hours chewing on it in my sleep.

My hands have been curled up into tight little fists so long that the knuckles feel horribly stiff as I try to manoeuvre myself, as I try to get up.

“Lay still.”

Those words, that voice, sends the very fear of God through me.

This can’t be happening. This can’t be... I blink rapidly, taking in my surroundings and with horror, I realise I have absolutely no idea where I am.

“No,” I gasp.

“Ssssh, it’s okay.” His hand reaches down to brush my hair from my face, and I flinch from the contact. It’s far too intimate. Far too casual.

Something crawls up my spine, some awful sixth sense that something horrific went down last night.

*Where the fuck am I?*

My eyes dart about rapidly, trying to figure that question out. It’s dark but there’s enough light from the open door to give a good feel for the space I’m in. The room is large, far larger than my own. There’s an opening beyond that I guess must be for a separate dressing room, and another door no doubt leads to the bathroom.

Just as his hand starts running up the length of me, the true enormity of it hits me; I’m in a bed, *his* bed.

I jump up, at least I try to. He must have been ready for this very moment because he’s quick to grab hold of me, to push me back down, and to use his entire body to pin me in place.

My body protests, my head feels like it’s going to explode from the blinding headache, and between my thighs there’s an awful ache that can only mean one thing.

“You ber ber bastard.” I hiss.

“What did you say?”

“You her heard me,” I can’t hold back the hate, I can’t hold back the shame too as it erupts through my veins like a seismic flow. “You rape, raped me. You fer, fer, fucking raped mer, me.”

His hand slams my face down, forcing me into the velvety soft sheets that feel so out of place with this entire scene. “I saved you.” He snarls, like he thinks he’s the actual messiah.

I try to protest but no words can come out, and within seconds I’m fighting for oxygen.

“Are you going to be reasonable?” He says right into my ear while my legs jerk out, while my limbs lash out in some desperate, futile attempt at survival. “Promise you’ll behave, and I’ll let you go.”

I couldn’t even say those words if I wanted to from the pressure he’s asserting. A scream seems to be ringing in my ears, like my blood is boiling. I’m going to pass out. I’m going to die if he doesn’t let up. But if I do that, what will he do to me then? Would he degrade me further? Of course he would.

Dots prick at the darkness behind my eyelids. Fear takes over everything as I begin to succumb to this inevitable conclusion, and then his grip relents. Those nails stop digging so forcefully into my scalp and I'm turned over and put on my back while he stares down at me.

Seconds pass. His eyes hold mine captive as I regain my breath, and I can tell that he's proud of himself and not ashamed in the slightest.

"Let's clear a few things up." He says in that smug tone that tells me he thinks he's beaten me. "I hold all the power here. All I have to do is call your grandfather, tell him where you are, and you'll be at Oblivion before I can even finish describing how much you begged to be fucked."

"But I di, didn't..." I stammer. I didn't do it. I didn't want him. I don't want him. I don't... my heart starts slamming into my chest harder and harder. My breath seems to catch, and I already recognise the signs even as it sinks in how utterly fucked I really am, how helpless I am, how this man has already ruined me.

"No one will care, Brynn," He states. "It's my word against yours."

The walls seem to cave in. The ridiculously oversized bed seems to collapse in on me and I'm drowning, suffocating, struggling even more than I was barely a minute ago.

My chest starts heaving uncontrollably and I curl my hands into fists. I hate that I'm showing more weakness now, revealing more of my secrets to a man who won't hesitate to use them against me but it's too late to stop it, too late to do anything.

Panic takes over everything.

Sheer terror grips me far harder than his hands have ever done.

I can't breathe. I can't fucking breathe.

Maybe some small part of him feels regret, maybe he does have some sort of conscience after all because his face softens, his hold becomes more caring and then he picks me up, cradles me in his arms and soothes me.

"I won't do that. It's okay, I've got you, I've got you. You're safe now."

Safe? Is that a joke? In what world am I safe?

I let out a wail, a broken awful sound that only gets worse as it continues. Bile twists in my stomach at the realisation that he's touching me again after what he did and for one very real moment, I'm convinced I'm going to vomit everywhere. But what would he do then? How would he react if I threw up over him? Would he beat me, or console me more? Either option is just as bad.

“I’m not going to hurt you.” He says gently, “As long as you’re a good girl, then you have nothing to fear.”

That’s a lie. Another lie. I’m here, alone with a man who almost certainly raped me. Even if I do somehow miraculously manage to get away, I can’t go back home, I can never return home now. No, I’d have to run away, but where could I even go? Sure that had been my plan, but it was a long term one. I wasn’t so stupid as to think I could just walk out the door, skip down the road and everything would be okay. No, I know what the world is, I’ve seen how cruel it can be. To run, to throw myself on its mercy with no money, with no place to hide, it’s practically suicide.

As if my mind is so preoccupied with my potential fate, I still, and he clearly takes that as some sort of show of submission.

“That’s better.” He murmurs, cupping my face.

“What, what do you want with me?” I stammer. He’s already gotten what he wants, I don’t understand why I’m here. I don’t understand why Giselle didn’t just haul my grandfather into the room while I was still drugged and defenceless?

“You’re mine, Brynn.” He says, as if that’s an answer.

“Yours?” I frown.

“God, I’ve wanted you for so long, so long.” His fingers lace through my hair, tilting my head back further. “You’re so beautiful, do you know that? So fucking beautiful.”

My mind starts racing, and my head becomes more panicked as I try to digest what he’s said.

But his hands are on me, touching me, forcing my legs apart.

“No,” I gasp just as his fingers shove right into my core. A white-hot burning pain makes me jolt. I’ve never touched myself down there, never dared. I know it’s a sin, I know self-pleasure goes against the commandments but I’m also certain it shouldn’t hurt like this, because why then would it be called pleasure?

My body clenches, my body locks up and I stiffen even more with every brutal thrust.

“I’m going to make you feel good.” He says as though he either didn’t hear my lack of consent, or has already chosen to disregard it. “Just relax, doll, let me show you.”

I can’t relax. I can’t stop crying.

Tears stream down my face as my body rocks more and more violently. I don't understand what he's trying to achieve, but he forces his fingers in and out of me in quicker and quicker succession. like this is some kind of race.

"Christ, you're so tight."

I can hear it in his voice, I can hear how much he's enjoying this.

"Please," I sob, too afraid to actively fight him.

"Just relax, Brynn." He says more forcefully, and I make the stupidest mistake of meeting his gaze.

His mouth slams into mine, his body envelops mine and he's pressing into me, his hands holding my legs wider.

Something bigger, something far girthier tears into me and I scream, shutting my eyes, praying that any minute I will be spared.

"Fuck, you feel so good. So fucking good." The way he groans, the way he pants, the way his dick violates me makes all that bile rise up, only I'm too scared and far too conditioned to do anything other than swallow it back down.

His tongue pushes its way into my mouth again and I wonder if he can taste the vomit. If he knows, if he even cares.

"God," He groans, like this is the best damn moment of his life.

My nails dig into my palms. I don't dare fight back; I don't dare do anything but just lay here and submit. It's like my mind is still too muddled from the drugs to truly take any course of action, so instead I play docile, I play dead.

"Fuck, Brynn, fuck." He gasps. "I'm going to fill you up, fill you so full."

His dick jerks, his body thrusts one last time before he tenses and I know what he's doing, what is happening.

As he slumps down on top of me, a voice in my head starts screaming out that I need to do something, that I need to wash, that I have to ensure I don't get pregnant from this.

"So beautiful." He murmurs, and I realise he's staring at me again.

Christ, the way he looks at me. It's not right. It's not okay. He's staring at me like I'm some sort of angel, some divine creature. But who would do the things he's done if that's what he thought of me?

# CHAPTER THIRTEEN



*Conrad*

**S**he's so perfect. Too perfect. How am I going to be able to even leave this room, leave her alone for a second?

My cock is still buried inside her and though I can feel it already softening, I don't want to pull out. Oh, I know she's hurting. I know her poor cunt is bruised but she'll get used to that pain, get used to that feeling. I won't coddle her; I won't pretend to be something I'm not. Her body is mine to use as I see fit but if she's good, then I'll take care of her too. I'll love her in ways she'll never know were possible.

A silent tear streaks down her face.

It's just as beautiful as the rest of her, but then I remember what we've just done. That we've just had sex for the first time with her being present to it and that tear, it symbolises everything she feels about it, about me.

To say it pisses me off is an understatement.

My hands grip her body. She's so fragile that it's easy to flip her over and pull her so that she's face down right across my lap. She needs to learn that I'm not fucking around.

With my left hand, I strike her hard.

She screams out, throwing her head back.

My hand leaves a livid print right on her perfect arse cheek but that doesn't stop me delivering a second blow, and a third.

"Sssstop," She sobs. "Please ssstop."

"You don't get to cry." I growl out. "Not when I'm saving you."

"Saaaving me?" She practically screams back, and suddenly all that fragile docility turns to fury. She starts kicking more, lashing out, slamming her body any which way she can. "Saving me from what?"

I grab a fistful of her hair, yanking her around so that she's straddling my hips, facing me.

"I could have left you there, left you with them."

"Who?" She hisses and clearly, she has no idea what happened last night. No fucking idea at all.

"Giselle laid you out like a five-course meal." I state. "She drugged you and handed you over to me, and then watched as I did what I wanted to you."

Her face pales even more. She shrinks back against my hand that's holding her up, as if she's trying to fold up all those tiny pieces of herself. "She, she watched..."

"She got off on it." I snap, still feeling my anger at the fact she'd laid there, touching herself, tarnishing my moment with Brynn.

That clearly hurts her more than I expected as she curls up into herself like she's just received a physical blow. And I can see she's shuddering, shivering, trembling.

Her eyes dart about. "What, what are you going to do with mee?" She asks. "Why, why am I here? Where even amm I?"

My lips tilt. That sweet, soft, vulnerable tone does things to me that she can't even imagine. I drop my own eyes to stare at her body that's on full display for me once more.

"You're in my home." I say. "And that's where you're going to remain from now on."

"Your, your home?" She whispers.

I lean in, seize the moment and claim her mouth once more but as we break apart, she screws her face up before slamming her head right into mine.

"You fucking bitch."

“I won’t staaay here.” She screams. “I won’t be your, your, your sex slave or whatever the fffuck you think I am.”

The laugh I let out is loud, cruel, and I know it puts her even more on edge. Does she really think that’s all I want her for? Is she that stupid? Or perhaps her family has her so downtrodden that she doesn’t believe she is worthy of anything else, worthy of more.

Perhaps that’s it, my sweet little doll sees me as too good for her. Too above her, too high up the order to be anything better than that in my eyes.

“I don’t want you as a sex slave.” I state, stroking her hair softly. “I can take any woman from Oblivion for that.”

“Then what...?”

“You’re going to be my wife.” I cut across her. “Our families want a marriage, and they’ll have one. But it’ll be you I tie myself to. You who bears my children, not Giselle.”

She gulps, shaking her head more and from the tiny trickle of blood I can see, she split her lip when she headbut me. “I don’t want, I don’t...” She draws herself up, shattering that illusion I have of her, that notion that she saw herself as lower than me. She’s fighting back the tears now, and that pisses me off more. “I want to go home. Taaake me home.”

“You are home.” I reply.

She shakes head more violently. “I want to go home.” She starts screaming. As if she had one, as if that place she grew up in was a sanctuary and not a glorified prison camp.

“Enough.” I sigh, growing bored. Only she doesn’t relent, she sobs even harder. Begging for me to return her, begging for me to let her go, to marry Giselle instead.

Christ, does she not get it? How can she not understand? I’ve done all of this for her, for us. She should be thanking me. She should be getting on her knees and treating me like I’m her very salvation.

“You’re not going anywhere.”

“I don’t waaaant you. I don’t waant to be your wife.” She sobs.

And that is the final straw. I shove her back, leave her sprawled on the bed and I get to my feet. I don’t want to hurt her but by God, I will if I have to. If that’s what it takes, if that’s what needs to be done, then I will break her spirit, I will do whatever is necessary to ensure she complies.

She rolls over, curling up into the duvet, becoming more and more hysterical as each second passes.

And it strikes me then that she's young. Naïve. Perhaps I'm being unfair in expecting her to accept this right off the bat.

Fine then, I'll give her time, a little time to let her adjust to her new circumstances.

"I'm not an unkind man." I say as I swallow my pride. "I understand this will take time. But the sooner you accept that I am your future, the sooner we can both be happy."

She looks up at me in horror. "Happy?" She splutters.

"You will be happy, Brynn," I state, leaning over her to grab her belly. Her skin is so soft, so delicate. "You will be content. I'll put a child in your belly, I'll treat you right. And you will learn to love me, just as I do you."

GOD, I COULD FUCK HER ALL DAY. LAY HERE AND NEVER LEAVE THIS BED.

But that won't do. Not unless I want my brother to know something is up.

When I stroll into Oblivion, it's hard not to compare all these women, all these slaves to the beautiful creature locked up at home. Sure, I've had my fill of them. I've enjoyed them more than most – after all, what would be the point of taking care of this place if it didn't have a few perks?

I glance at the guards. They're good at keeping their eyes forward, and off the merchandise. After hours, they too can have their fun. It helps instil orders, it helps maintain fear. The slaves have to understand that they're at the bottom of the pecking order, and that no one here gives a shit about their wants.

I stroll into my office. Dustin is there, as usual. He hands me the list of today's infractions and I run my gaze down, looking for repeat offenders. When I spot a name I recognise, I tell him to have them taken down for a public beating. They're usually effective, very effective. Sure, the slave in question will be out of service for at least a week, but it'll ensure the others keep in line.

Dustin nods, disappearing off to do as he's told.

In front of me there's eight screens, all showing different parts of Oblivion. Mostly it's just fucking. Average, boring fucking. I hit a button, switching from feed to feed with my eyes searching for nothing in particular.

I can waste hours like this. Hours of just looking, monitoring, seeing tiny infractions, moments of rule-breaking. You let them get away with one

thing and that's it, that sedition will grow, it will spread.

It's a fact my father taught me, taught us. And it's something Magnus repeated to me often as he brought me up.

In my pocket my phone vibrates loudly, cutting right through my thoughts. As I pick it up, I see *her* name. If anything, I'm surprised she has the gall to reach out. I imagined she would have slithered away, licked her wounds in private and reflected on how big of a fuck up she's made.

"What do you want?" I ask.

"Hello, dear husband." She says demurely, as if she wasn't knuckles deep in her own cunt last night while I was violating her niece.

"I'm not your husband." I reply. *God this fucking woman.*

"Not yet." She says in a flirty, teasing tone that pisses me off even more.

"I'm busy, Giselle, either get to the point or get lost."

"She's gone."

"Who?"

"Brynn, my niece, the girl you fucked in my bed."

I pause, my eyes staring at one of the screens as that image hits me. *Her bed? Her fucking bed?* The thought makes my stomach turn and more anger hits me as I realise she's done it again, she's tarnished our first time even more.

"Well?" She continues.

I blink, realising that I haven't replied. I should have been prepared for this, I should have known that even though they don't want her around, they'll still notice that she's suddenly MIA.

"Why are you calling me about it?" I ask. "Shouldn't you be speaking to the police, or the Brethren, or..." I trail off, hoping I sound as disinterested as I can be. We both know she won't speak to anyone, her family won't want the scandal.

"You fucked her, I figured it makes most sense to ask you first." She snarls.

Seriously, this fucking bitch. When will she take a hint? I run my hand through my hair, feigning more boredom. "Have you checked her room?"

"Of course I have." She hisses. "I thought she'd still be where we left her, still half out of it, but she's gone. There isn't a shred of..."

"What do you want me to do about it?" I should have been smarter, packed a bag, made it look like she'd run away. But then, there's still time

for that. The house is big enough that I could make it look like she's just hiding somewhere, licking her wounds until she comes to a decision.

"You're a Reaper." She states. "And considering what we did, I figured you'd be the best person to approach."

"Does your father know?"

"No. He's still away on business, thank god."

"Fine. In that case, gather her things, bag it all up and I'll come collect it."

"Why?"

"Do you want people to be suspicious?" I snarl. "Do you want people to think that she's not run away?"

"What if she hasn't? What if...?"

"What if what?" I ask. God, she's so dense I have to spell it out. "Of course the girl has run. You think she'd want to stay there after what you did?"

"What *you* did." She says. "I did it for you. For us."

"And now we need to cover our tracks." I state, doing my best to ignore the pathetic tone of her voice.

"What if she comes back? What then? How would we explain..."

"She ran away." I shrug, trying hard not to smile at the way this plan is coming so perfectly together all of a sudden. "If she returns, then we can have her shipped off to Oblivion, just like you always wanted."

She takes a sharp intake of breath that gives away her absolute glee at that thought, and I know then that I have her. She'll do my bidding; she'll cover my tracks and I'll have everything I need to ensure Brynn is right where I want her, without arousing any suspicion.

# CHAPTER FOURTEEN



*Brynn*

**H**e leaves me locked in his room. I have no clothes, no belongings, nothing but the skin I was born in and I feel disgusting, completely and utterly repulsive.

My body is covered in bruises. Some I know are from today and some - no, I can't think about that. About what he did, what *they* did.

My aunt literally gift-wrapped me and handed me over. Oh I knew she hated me, I knew she wanted me gone, but this? I can't believe she did this.

More tears stream down my face. At least now that I'm alone I won't get beaten for crying, but as I sob harder and harder, I know they won't make a difference. Nothing makes a difference.

After he left, I flung myself at the door. I tried with all my might to open it but it's too heavy, and it didn't even budge an inch despite my ministrations. The window is similarly locked. But then, what would I do if

it did open? Conrad's place is at the very top of a skyscraper. Beyond flinging myself over the balcony to my death, there is no escape route that way.

And I'm naked.

If I did get out, I could hardly get far unnoticed. I don't doubt he has an army of men on the other side, ready to bundle me up and return me.

I'm trapped here, just like he wants.

In the bathroom, there's a stack of toiletries. I so badly want to take a shower, to scrub my skin and remove every last trace of him. A voice in my head says that I'll only be making myself nice and clean for when he returns, and the thought of that actually makes me vomit.

I don't want to get back in the bed, I don't want to be anywhere near anything he's touched. But I'm exhausted already, or perhaps it's the last side effects of the drugs they gave me, and it's not like I can just stand here all day, naked and absolutely freezing.

And that's how he finds me, curled up in his bed. Fast asleep. Like I was just waiting for him to come back like a good little girl.

I jerk awake at the feel of his touch, and he's smiling down at me like I'm giving him everything he ever dreamed of.

What the fuck is wrong with this man? He must be deluded, or insane, or something, but none of those thoughts give me any comfort. Even if he is as mad as a hatter, that only puts me in more danger because you can't rationalise with crazy. You can't reason with it.

"You looked so peaceful." He says, as if he isn't the cause of all my nightmares.

I don't know how to respond. I don't want to piss him off, but I also refuse to give in. He may hold all the cards right now but if I'm clever, if I'm careful, there has to be a chance of me getting away.

He holds his hand out for me to take, and despite the voice screaming in my head I do it, allowing him to pull me up. With my other hand I keep the duvet wrapped around my body, not that he hasn't seen me enough for it not to matter.

"You didn't wash." He says after studying me for a moment.

I shake my head.

He tutts, yanking the cover away, and then all but frog marches me into the bathroom.

"I have something special planned for us tonight. But first, you need to clean yourself up."

He's right behind me, towering over me as I face the oversized shower. He honestly thinks I'm just going to jump right in there? With a huff that tells me he has lost all patience, he shoves me in, turning the tap on, and freezing cold water suddenly rushes down onto me as I scream.

"It'll warm up in a second." He says as he grabs a bottle and a loofah.

Before I can protest further he's covering me in suds, scrubbing at my body, and focusing far too much on my breasts for my liking. I step back, glowering at him and in retaliation he tosses the loofah, grabs my throat in one hand and proceeds to haphazardly clean me with the other.

The way he's holding me forces the water right down onto my face, and it feels like I'm being waterboarded. I don't know if it's intentional. I don't know if it's just a fluke, but the last of my resistance dies as I struggle with the very real prospect of drowning.

Then as quickly as it began, he turns the tap off, grabs an overly fluffy white towel and wraps me up in it as though I'm a child.

"There, that wasn't so hard, was it?"

I bite my tongue painfully hard to stop the retort, because I'm meant to be playing nice. Being smart, though it feels near impossible right this second.

He yanks me back out into the bedroom, leaving me there while muttering under his breath about how his suit is now ruined.

When he comes back in, he tosses something at me, and I only just catch it as he tells me to put it on.

It's slinky, delicate, and from the feel of the fabric, more expensive than my entire wardrobe combined. I hold it up, noting the silvery pearl colour. It's a shift dress; long, strappy, backless. I've never worn anything even half as revealing as this.

"I, I don't have any underwear." I say, hating the way my cheeks flush. I shouldn't be the one ashamed, he should be.

He runs his eyes over me, and then that smug smirk takes over his face. "You don't need any."

Excuse me? I blink back in shock.

"I want you easily accessible. Ready for whenever I have the need to take you."

Dear god. He's not serious, he can't be.

I shake my head, trying to form any sort of argument. "But, what, what if I'm on my per-per-period? I'll need underwear then."

He tuts back. “With any luck, you’re already pregnant.”

No, no, no fucking way. That’s the last thing I want. The last thing I could handle. I’m twenty-one. I don’t want to have a child, I’m barely an adult myself, why the fuck would I want to be a parent already? I want to live. I want to travel. I want to...my legs start to tremble, my breath catches, and I fight desperately to keep the panic inside me.

“Put it on.” He says more forcefully.

I focus on those words, on that voice as much as I hate it, using it to ground me as I unwrap the towel and do as I’m told. The fabric is even more incredible against my skin. It clings to me, highlighting every damn inch and I know my nipples are poking through, Worse, I know he’s more than aware of it too.

He watches me for a moment more before he starts stripping off his now ruined suit. I try to avert my eyes; I hate the way my cheeks flush even more, and I feel like a child compared to the sheer brute of this man before me.

He’s chiselled, toned, devastatingly beautiful and I hate him even more for that. I don’t want to be attracted to him, I want to be repulsed by everything he is. But he’s all muscles, all strength. He must spend days in the gym, and it doesn’t escape me how futile it is to fight this man. He could crush me in an instant. He could shatter my bones with very little effort on his part.

But what makes me frown is the tattoos. His entire torso is covered in them. They wrap around his chest, his arms, and he looks more like a criminal than a Brethren Lord.

“Like what you see?” He asks in a voice that makes me whimper in fear.

“I, thor, thor, thought tattoos weren’t permitted.” I whisper, hating how much I’m always stammering around this monster. He’ll never take me seriously while I act like I’m petrified. But then, why would he take me seriously in any circumstance? I’m all but his prisoner, his sex slave, despite his words to the contrary.

He gives a little chuckle. “You’ll learn soon enough that rules can be bent.”

“What rules?”

He tilts his head, closing the distance between us and I stumble backwards before he snatches me up. “I’m a Blake.” He says in that

arrogant tone. “My brother is about to become Chapter Lord. Very soon, we’ll be untouchable.”

Is that what he thinks, is that what he believes, that he’ll be above the rules? As if any of us are. As if we can’t be brought down, knocked from our ivory towers. But then again, I guess that’s just us, us Ladies. No, the Lords are playing by different rules. Their rules. It’s their game, and we’re all just marionettes helplessly being strung along.

“I’m a Monclere,” I state. “My family won’t just sit by...”

His grip tightens, and I fall quickly to silence as the anger seems to flash in his eyes.

“Not for much longer.” He says just loud enough for me to hear.

My head drops. I stare down at the fancy dress he’s put me in, and he must think that’s some sort of show of submission because he lets me go, leaving me alone while he dresses himself in a suit that seems almost identical to the one he had on before.

Once he’s fixed his tie, he turns to face me, brushing my still wet hair back before he towel dries enough of it to stop the dripping.

“You look beautiful.” He says. “Absolutely stunning.”

I don’t know where we’re going. I don’t know where he could possibly be taking me but surely we can’t be going out anywhere public, everyone knows he’s set to marry Giselle. If I’m seen with him, if I’m seen alone with any man that isn’t my grandfather, I’ll be ruined.

I gulp, biting my tongue even harder, afraid of every step I take as he guides me out of the sprawling penthouse and into an immaculately polished hall beyond.

There’s a lift ahead, he motions for me to get in and I realise it must be private, for his use only. Neither of us speak as it descends but I take note of how much time passes, how high we truly are. Good thing I don’t have vertigo, or I’d be so dizzy right now.

The chime dings merrily when we come to a stop and as the doors open there’s a man standing waiting for us. He inclines his head to Conrad, but makes a point of not looking at me once. Behind him a shiny SUV is waiting. The man struts over, holding the door for us, and Conrad ensures I get in first.

Perhaps it’s naïve, perhaps it’s stupid but I try the other door, praying that it might open, but what would I even do if it does? I can hardly jump out and skip my way to freedom, can I?

Conrad gets in beside me and gives me a look that stops me dead in my tracks and for a second, I think he's going to beat me.

Without a word he reaches over, and I flinch as he takes the seat belt and straps it into place, all but locking me in. Once he's clicked his in, he jerks his head for the driver to go. We're in an underground carpark. Again, I think it's private, just for Conrad's cars and I count at least three supercars as we pull away, all neatly polished and ready for when he wants them.

Outside, it's dark so I guess I did sleep the entire day away. The city is lit up with fancy neon lights, and I stare out watching as one street after another passes by. It's so weird to think that the real world is out here, within touching distance, that all these people are living their lives and they have no clue what's really going on. No clue that we, the Brethren, control every aspect of it.

Our windows are blacked out so I know it's useless to even try to wave for help, but I'll admit I do feel a thrill at finally being out, at finally seeing this tiny bit of the city. My family always kept me locked away, out of sight. Sure I went to school, but I was chauffeured there and chauffeured back, I wasn't allowed any autonomy.

I turn my body, giving my back to Conrad and I stare out, open mouthed, eager for every glimpse I can get.

And then his hand trails down my back, down my spine, moving my hair out of the way and exposing more of me.

I freeze. I gulp down the fear and pray that he might just leave it at that, but he doesn't. Of course he doesn't. He starts tracing my skin, making patterns across it with his fingertips. Is this why he put me in a backless dress? So he could assault every inch of me?

His lips brush against the softness of my neck, and it's too much. Far too much.

"Don't." I say before I can stop myself.

His breath hits my skin as he exhales with what sounds like a snarl. "Fight me and I will hurt you."

Like he hasn't already. Like he hasn't done the absolute worst.

His hand reaches around to grip my jaw, and he pulls my head around to face him. "Is that what you want? You want pain? Maybe that's your thing, you get off on it?"

I shake my head as much as he will allow, not even understanding what the hell he's talking about. Get off on what? What does that even mean?

His thumb forces its way into my mouth and as he starts pushing further back, I choke. My eyes stream as I gag but he doesn't relent, he just takes more and more, not caring that I can't even breathe.

A vision of Clara, at the front of the class and the professor forcing her to perform flashes before my eyes.

"I could have you on your knees, suffocating on my cock. Would that make you obedient? Would that make you understand?"

I can't reply even if I wanted to, and it's only the car coming to a halt that stops this.

He drags his thumb out, leaving a string of saliva to drip down my chin and then he unclips, gets out and all but storms around the car to open my door for me, pushing the driver aside.

His hand hovers in front of my face. I stare at it and for a millisecond as I think about refusing. About fighting. But he *will* hurt me. He has proven that fact. I need to pick my battles, and this is just not one of them.

With trembling fingers, I undo the seatbelt and I take his outstretched hand which locks around my wrist, as though it will never open.

# CHAPTER FIFTEEN



*Conrad*

I've chosen this chapel very carefully. Chosen the priest carefully too.

I might be a Blake; I might be a high-ranking Brethren Lord, but that doesn't mean I can do whatever I want. No, if I'd gone through the usual channels, I'd be hauled in front of the Senate by now. I would have to answer to them.

And Brynn, my pretty little Brynn, she'd already be snatched back, carted off, probably sequestered away while they decide what punishment they can give that would fit the crime.

She'll be labelled as a jezebel, a harlot who seduced a taken man.

Of course, marrying Brynn won't mean I'm not in the shit, marrying her just makes the crime I've committed a different one. Instead of kidnapping and coveting a woman I have no right to, I'm marrying without permission. It's a lesser offence technically, but add to the fact I'm already engaged and that my brother has to approve of this...

Brynn clings to me, her tiny hands digging into my arm like she's suddenly realised that I am her saviour.

*Don't worry Doll, it'll all be over soon.*

We walk into the building. The place is dirty, with dried up leaves strewn across the stone floor. If I had the wedding I wanted we'd be in the Cathedral, we'd be standing before the entire Brethren of this Chapter, and they'd all look on at the beauty of my wife. They'd all be gawping like little boys in the playground, jealous that she is mine.

I clench the hand not holding my soon-to-be wife. I wanted that. That moment. To make a point that she is mine, that no other man can touch her now. That's off limits. Claimed. Fucking owned.

I wanted them to witness the consummation too. I wanted everyone to see as I took my wife, stripped her and fucked her on the altar.

That's another thing Giselle will answer for.

The priest is standing, waiting for us. He's wringing his hands like he might just change his mind. With a look, I warn him not to even think about it.

I pull out the veil, fixing it to her pretty dark hair. There, now she is perfect.

She falters. She freezes.

My beautiful doll freezes. No doubt she realises what this is and she starts to fight, starts to plead. I tighten my grip, dragging her down the aisle. If I have to, I'll put that ceremonial dagger against her throat and force her to say the words.

When she states that she's a Monclere, when she tries to use her name I can't help but laugh. I pre-warned the Priest, so it'd make little difference what she does say but the fact is, I'm granting her the greatest honour she'll ever receive. Her family would never have secured such a prestigious marriage for her by themselves. Afterall, her father is a nobody, an unknown. She might be a Monclere, but in the eyes of the Brethren she's still a bastard.

I grab hold of her, dragging her down the aisle. She still tries to fight, but I can already feel that she's giving in.

With a curt nod, I tell the Priest to get on with it. This isn't how I imagined it to be. This isn't how it was meant to go. Brynn was meant to be smiling, meant to be delighted that she was becoming my wife.

*Why is she being such a bitch? Why is she making this so damn hard?*

When the Priest says the words, I'm more than happy to rip her dress off, more than happy to push her onto the altar and consummate this.

Maybe this moment here will be enough. Maybe me fucking her here, claiming her before God, will make her obedient. Maybe it'll make her understand.

Her veil falls down, making this moment more picturesque.

My now wife cries out, her hands snatching at the air.

I shove her face down and yank her hips up harder as I push into her tight little cunt. God, it feels so good. I let out a groan, shutting my eyes, revelling in this moment.

It feels like God is here, that he's beside me, applauding me, honouring me. That finally, after all these years, he's granting me the honours I deserve. The rewards I've worked so hard for.

Of course, my little wife refuses to give in. She fights, she cries, but in the end it's useless. Her attempts to stop me are as futile as her strength.

The Priest stands there looking on, bearing witness so that technically, by the old laws, this marriage is unbreakable. I look up and meet his gaze and I can see it, the ghost of a smile on his lips. How many weddings has he officiated like this? How many brides has he witnessed cry and beg as prettily as my now wife does?

I lean down, taking a handful of her hair and I wrench her head up so that she's forced to look at him, forced to meet his gaze.

*You see, wife, you see? No one will stop this. Not even God himself will step in.*

*You are mine now. You can't escape me. You can't run.*

*Even the Brethren can't separate us.*

She lets out a wail; a pitiful sound that if anything, spurs me on more. I buck harder, driving myself more mercilessly into her delicious cunt. Her muscles protest; they clench, they try to fight me but my cock pushes through, my brute strength forces her to submit.

And then I'm roaring out, coming harder than I ever have before. My hands dig into her scalp, my nails tear into her flesh. It feels like an explosion goes off and I pump away, emptying my balls deep inside her.

As I pull out, I see the smear of something, and I wipe myself clean on her pretty torn up dress.

She keeps her eyes down, like she can't even look at me and I lean in to grab her jaw, to force her to meet my gaze.

*This woman here is bound to me for life. Good or bad, there is no way out from this.*

I scoop her up, carrying her half-limp body out. She keeps her tear-stained face staring off into the distance as if she's still expecting someone to come rescue her.

Only, I am her salvation. I am her beginning and her end.

I am her every reason for existence now and the sooner my new wife accepts this, the sooner I can stop hurting her and start showing her my love.

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# CHAPTER SIXTEEN



*Brynn*

I must have passed out in the car, I don't remember how I even left the chapel; if I walked out, or if Conrad continued to carry me.

I'm back in bed. His bed, but it's not the one I woke up in last time.

Everything feels different. The space feels bigger, the room feels stuffy, as though the walls hold too many secrets.

As I force my body to move, my eyes adjust to the light, and I realise it's morning. That's another god knows how many hours of my life gone, again.

The bed I'm in is a four-poster. It's old, beautifully carved with an intricately carved tapestry pinned in place far above my head.

The room is far more opulent, far more tasteful than the penthouse was. Not that the penthouse had been lacking but this place screams history, heritage, bloodlines that go back right to when the Brethren began.

"You're awake."

My eyes dart across the room to where he is, where he's sitting like some monster waiting patiently before they pounce.

The ring on his hand catches the light, practically taunting me as he reaches forward and takes a long, slow sip of his drink.

Around my own finger, I can feel that pressure, that reminder that all of this is real. This nightmare is real, and this man before me is both my salvation and my destruction all wrapped up into one devastating parcel.

My left hand is bandaged, strapped nice and tightly to ensure that my marriage mark doesn't get infected, and I wrinkle my nose in disgust at the memory of it all. At the memory of the way that Priest leered at me, at how he enjoyed watching every second of my assault.

"Come here," Conrad says, curling a finger at me to emphasise that command.

I don't want to. I don't want to get any closer than I already am, but staying in his bed doesn't feel like a particularly safe option either. With what little courage I have, I shove the thick duvet off and I slide my legs out.

There's a massive fireplace; the kind they call an inglenook, with a wrought iron grate in the middle and a pile of logs by the side, all ready to burn. In front of that is a massive, antique, Turkish rug with two couches positioned across from one another. Conrad is sitting like a king, watching my approach as if I were some sort of courtesan that he's just added to his harem.

At the chapel he'd stripped me naked, but I'm dressed now, wearing what I assume to be his shirt. Just his shirt. I have no bra, no underwear. For all intents and purposes, I'm still very easily accessible.

I don't want to think about what liberties he took while he was dressing me. Why does it even matter? He's violated me enough already for nothing else *to* matter, and yet it does. Every touch, every damned glance he gives me feels like further insults.

He reaches out his hand, tapping the space beside him, and reluctantly I sit down.

"You must be hungry." He says.

I can't even remember the last thing I ate but in truth, it's been the least of my worries.

He reaches forward, picks up a sliced fig from the literal platter of food laid out in front of him and offers it up to me.

It's stupid to refuse him. Stupid to not eat. I need to keep up my strength, after all how can I fight him if I'm half-starved? Those are the

excuses I make, those are the justifications as I part my lips and let him slide the fruit into my mouth.

And god is it perfect. The sweetness hits my tongue, the delicate flavour makes me almost moan and I shut my eyes, forcing myself to get a damned hold of my senses. I won't be that easily broken. I won't be that easily bought.

When I open my eyes again, he's studying me, his lips tilted as though he can read my mind, as though he understands every whirling thought in my head.

His hand sweeps my hair back, cupping my face in an intimate gesture.

"You're mine now, Brynn. Let me take care of you. Let me love you."

Love? He talks of love after everything he's done? He doesn't even know me. How can he profess to love me when he's stolen me away, destroyed any chance I have of happiness?

I rear back, my anger spiking but he's quick to lash out, quick to grab me before I can stand up.

"You're my wife." He states. "You're bound to obey me."

"And if, if I don't?" I should keep my mouth shut. I should be smarter.

He clenches his jaw, obviously pissed off, and then he just shrugs. "It doesn't matter what you do. You can't escape me. You can't leave me. If you fight me, you'll only make this worse for yourself."

"Why?" I gasp. "Why mmme? Why marry me, why dooo any of this?" I'm on my feet, clenching my fists, though I don't remember moving. None of this makes any sense. None of this is logical. None of this should be *my* life. "You're meant to ma-ma-marry Giselle."

He snarls at the mention of her name and then he's up, towering over me, and all that courage I had seems to fizzle to nothing. "Is that what you want?" He asks. "Is that what you'd prefer? Me having *her* as my wife?"

Quite honestly, I don't give a fuck who he marries as long as it isn't me but it's too late for that, and besides, I don't dare voice that opinion out loud.

He reaches out, pulling my body to him and with our size difference, I feel even more powerless. "I wanted you. I've always wanted you. From the moment I laid eyes on you, I knew you'd be the one I married, you'd be the one who gave me heirs."

"I don't wannnt children." It's a lie, a half-truth. I've never truly thought about it, because my freedom was much more pressing. You don't think

about starting a family when every moment of your life is about survival.

He tuts, placing a hand on my belly. “It doesn’t matter what you want, Brynn. You’re my wife. You’ll do as you’re told.”

There’s no reasoning with him, I can tell from the look on his face that he has this all planned out.

“So what now?” I ask, trying to change the subject, trying to calm myself. “What do we do now? Are you going to announce me as your wife? Can I go out, can I...” I trail off because I don’t even know what I’m asking, what I need to know.

This all feels so off, as if Conrad is keeping more secrets.

“You will remain here.” He says. “You are safe here. Too much is going on right now for you to leave.”

“Where am I?” I reply.

The weight of his hands dig further into my hips, and he almost preens as he says the next words. “My home. My ancestral home.”

“But I thought the pennnthouse...”

“That’s for when I’m in the city. This house is where we will raise our family, where we will grow old, where we will spend our lives together.”

He’s a mad man. A fucking nut job. Does he really think that we’ll have that? That I’ll, what, just comply and become some mindless, obedient slave of a wife for him?

My eyes dart about, and instinctively I look for an escape route. The curtains are drawn, so I have no idea what level we’re on. The door is shut, so I can’t tell how big this house even is. Is it as big as my grandfathers? It certainly feels older.

“You’re safe here.” He says again, as if I should be afraid of something other than him.

And that makes me pause.

“Why, why wouldn’t I be safe?” I ask before it hits me what’s really going on. Why we got married in an empty chapel and not the Cathedral. Why we had no witnesses. “Nooo one knows, do they? That’s why it was justtt you and me there. No one knows that you ster-ster-stole me away, that you married me.”

He narrows his gaze, and his hand reaches up to grab my jaw. “It doesn’t matter. By the time everyone finds out, I’ll have all my pieces in place and there’ll be nothing anyone can do.”

Nothing anyone can do? Over my dead body. It's alright for him, he's a Lord, his brother is about to become Chapter Lord. If this blows up, he'll probably end up with little more than a slap on the wrist. But me? My fate will be far worse. I'll be carted off to Oblivion. Locked away. I'll be condemned not because of what I've done myself, but because of how my now-husband has ruined me.

A tear slips down my cheek. I can't keep the tremble from my body at the thought of what will happen because let's face it; even if this does work out, even if Conrad gets what he wants, I'll still be here by his side, bound to my rapist.

It's not a future anyone would want.

It's not the future I so desperately dreamed of.

"Ssssh," He says, soothing me. "It'll be fine. Trust me. Trust your husband."

As if I could. As if I would.

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# CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



*Conrad*

I leave her there, in my home. There are enough cameras and guards to ensure she won't be able to escape if she decides to be that stupid, but I'll admit I am curious to see how she responds now that she thinks she has the chance.

Will she wait to see the lay of the land, or will she try to flee the first chance she gets?

I don't know much about my wife, but I know she's malleable. Mouldable. I know, given the right pressure, I can turn her into everything I want. Sure, she's going to resist. Sure, she's going to fight but then, where would the fun be if she didn't?

As I stroll in through the doors to Oblivion, I realise that's something I have been yearning for. Someone that is solely mine, someone who is loyal only to me. I can fuck anyone I want, hurt anyone I want; within these walls I am a God, but it's not the same. It's not as delicious when you know the meat is already primed.

The fact that Brynn is locked away, captured, ensnared; that's what makes her so much more enticing. She's forbidden fruit and now that I have her, I will gorge on every single bit.

Ahead, I can see my brother. He's not meant to be here; he's meant to be off somewhere with Antonio, and it makes me pause for a second.

"Where the fuck have you been?" Magnus snarls.

"Excuse me?"

"You missed the Purification Ritual, you missed my declaration as a candidate for Chapter Lord."

I stop, realising instantly that I have fucked up. I've spent too many days enjoying my new prize, and I've dropped the ball on the things that should matter. Keeping up appearances has always been a point of pride for me. Presenting to the world the carefully crafted image they want of me.

In less than a week, Brynn seems to have shattered that resolve, she seems to have made me forget myself, my responsibilities.

Subconsciously, my fingers wrap around that digit where my ring should be. I left it behind. I had to. Until everything is in place, no one can know what I've done.

"I was busy." I reply. It's a bullshit answer ,and we all know it.

Magnus scowls more. "Busy?" He repeats, "What could possibly be more important than our family's indoctrination?"

"Giselle," I say with little thought.

He arches a brow, his face turning to bloody murder. "You really think I'm as stupid as that?" He growls in a voice I know only too well. Magnus may be my brother, but for the past twenty years he's been more of a father figure than a sibling. He brought me and Devin up after our parents died. He did everything he could to ensure we were cared for, nurtured, fucking moulded into perfect Blakes.

And that's half the problem. He knows me too well. Knows my secrets, knows my everything.

"We spoke to her." Antonio says and I turn my gaze onto him.

He's an enigma I don't care to pick apart, the man can make or break a Lord. One word from him and your entire standing in the Brethren would be altered entirely. You'd think with that sort of power he'd be more of a presence, and yet the fact he skulks in the shadows and keeps his cards so close? Yeah, it's unnerving.

"You spoke to her?" I sneer.

Antonio's lips curl enough to tell me he knows that I'm aware that they know I'm lying.

"Giselle is a two-faced..."

"I don't give a shit." Magnus snaps, pushing me back, shoving me against the wall. He's just as big, just as powerful as I am, despite the ten-year age gap. "I don't give a shit where you were or what the fuck you were doing. You think this is about you? You think the entire world revolves around your wants?"

My fists curl and I slam one into his rib, hoping it hurts the bastard. "Like I haven't had to sacrifice everything for this family already." I state.

"Sacrifice." He laughs, acting like I didn't strike him at all. I swear he's made of steel. "What sacrifices have you made? You've been coddled your entire life, you're pampered, a little fat cat sat on a cushion..."

I don't want to hear it. I don't want to hear how he gave everything for our family, how he's the great saviour. I'm not a little boy anymore, I'm thirty eight years of age; more than old enough to make my own decisions.

I push him off, using all the strength I have and he stumbles back before Antonio gets between us.

"Let's not make more of a scene." He says, his eyes darting up the hall to where eyes are watching us. From this distance, it's hard to tell if they're Lords or slaves.

I huff, straightening my suit jacket.

"I have work to do." I state, moving to leave. Oblivion doesn't run itself, we both know that. Magnus made this place a success for years, but it's not going to fall apart on my watch.

This place is heavily monitored, as are all the other sites across the world. The Brethren need to have something to reward us Lords for good behaviour. If this place went to the dogs, my name would be shit. My legacy would be over. And I, along with my brothers, would almost certainly end up in a different black site.

This moment here *is* a good lesson to learn. I need to be better, I need to keep my obsession in check. I can't let myself get too lost in the want of my wife that I forget everything else that I am.

I stalk through the darkness, making my way up to where my office is. Dustin is there waiting, and we go through all the reports with a fine-tooth comb before we move onto the new delivery of slaves that are arriving today.

I know the Esau tried to stitch my brother up by sending the previous Chapter Lord's niece here. I'm not going to let them pull that same trick again, not while I'm in charge. So every name, every face, every sentence is checked and double-checked. None of them are touched until we've had full blood work back, verifying they're exactly who they're meant to be.

"Good work," I mutter as Dustin hands over all the certificates of ownership. I know our new ways of working have created a mountain of admin for him, but he seems to have risen to the challenge. And gifting him his own personal harem has certainly helped soothe the stress.

"We do have another petition," Dustin says, handing over the last file.

I narrow my eyes, seeing the stamp on it. "Again?" I mutter.

"They don't take no for an answer," He states.

Apparently not. I practically tear the cardboard file open, flicking through the pages of argument as my stomach churns. There are some things I draw a line at. Some things the Brethren have been told to draw a line at, and rightly so.

Problem is, the old Chapter Lord, the one before our latest deceased, decided to mix things up a bit. Decided to lax certain rules, rules that have been in place ever since we became civilised. And now these fuckers have had a taste of it, they want more.

"Well?" Dustin says, knowing damn well what my perspective is on this.

"Not on my watch," I growl. Not on any of the Blake's watch. I know my brother shares the same sentiment, that some things are off-limits. They'd have to remove our entire family before we'd allow children in this place.

"They're appealing to the Higher Lord," He states.

I can't help but let out a laugh. "Of course they fucking are." I reply. Like they'll get any response from him, It's like picking up a phone and expecting God to be on the other end. He rules from above, but he doesn't deign to dirty his hands by interacting with the likes of us. Besides, he's not going to change his mind on an issue like this. Children are off-limits. He set the age, he stated that no women under twenty-one were permitted to marry, no exceptions.

And he's right; you marry them too young and then they won't last. Their bodies aren't ready for it, their hips aren't developed enough. You'll ruin them, and you'll only produce weak offspring. Better to wait, better to

be safe, and better to have the time to train them accordingly in those little schools we make them all attend.

I shove the file back into his hands. “In that case, let’s wait and see what the Higher Lord has to say about this, then we’ll follow his decision.” Like he’ll ever bother to reply to something as insignificant as this.

Beside me, my phone buzzes. I glance over and then see the message that’s there, the one I’d hoped wouldn’t arrive.

“Fuck,” I snarl.

“Problem, boss?” Dustin asks.

I look up, feeling like all that amusement is now gone, blood is suddenly pumping so fast through my body. “Nothing to concern yourself with,” I manage to grit out before I’m grabbing my jacket.

“Where are you going?” He calls after me.

“Home.” I reply. Home, to teach my erstwhile wife a lesson.

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# CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



*Brynn*

I t's stupid to do it.

I know it is, but I can't just sit here and wait for him to come back. For him to spurt more lies, more filth, and for him to fuck me again. I have to try. I have to *keep* trying.

I refuse to just roll over and become what he wants me to be; docile, compliant.

The door creaks as I open it. It's heavy, must be made of solid oak. Being twice the height of a normal one, it takes almost all my strength to get the damned thing open.

Half of me is surprised it opens. I expected him to lock me in, to keep me contained. What does that say about his home? Is it so secure that he doesn't care where I wander because he knows I can't get out? I bury that thought, stifle it. Thinking like that won't help, thinking like that won't get me out of this shit.

I peer out into the space beyond and see a corridor; a hall that is so wide that it must span the size of most people's homes.

This house is nothing like the modern penthouse. The grandeur here is old money, old power. Every surface drips with history and wealth—ornate wallpaper, gilded mirrors, priceless artwork. It's the kind of place that makes you feel small, insignificant. Oh, I knew the Blake's were filthy rich. I knew their family legacy predates even our own, but to see this level of grandeur, to see the history practically laid before me makes my heart stop.

How can you fight someone who has this level of wealth, this level of power? No wonder my grandfather was so anxious to overlook Conrad's indiscretions and bind our name with theirs.

*He's a Reaper.*

The thought sends a jolt of fear through me. As if I'm not petrified enough.

According to the rumours he may not have any notable kills to his name, any notable catches, but that doesn't negate what he is. What he is capable of. It was probably a walk in the park to carry me out of my home, to disappear into the night, to vanish like a phantom.

Do my family even realise I'm gone? Surely, they must have noticed by now? They must have realised I haven't eaten anything, haven't left my room. I don't even know what day of the week it is. How much school have I missed?

Would they be rejoicing at my absence? Would they even care?

I think of my aunt, of what she did, how she wrapped me up and gave me away like a present. I think about the fact that she watched as Conrad raped me, she got off on it. The tears stream down my face before I can stop them. But they're not sad tears, not ones of pain.

No, these tears are full of anger, full of venom.

I want to make that bitch pay. I want to make her suffer. She has made my life a living hell from the moment I stepped into that house, and why? Because I look like the sister she was so jealous of? Because I reminded her of the one person she could never compare to in my grandfather's eyes?

She's a petty, nasty bitch, and I'm going to make her suffer just as much as she has made me.

I clench my fists, hardening my resolve. I can only achieve that if I'm not shackled to my new husband, if I'm not essentially chained to his bed.

I need to get out of here. I need to get as far away from all these people as I can.

My heart pounds against my ribs as I take one tentative step after another. The plush carpet muffles my footsteps, but I still flinch at every tiny creak of the ancient floorboards beneath.

The corridor stretches out before me, lined with portraits of what must be generations of Blake's. Their eyes seem to follow my movements, judging me, condemning me. I try not to look at them directly. I don't want to see the family resemblance, nor do I want to be reminded of the man who now owns me.

I pause at the top of a sweeping staircase, gripping the polished banister. Still no signs of life. No guards, no maids, nothing.

Could it really be this easy? Has Conrad made a mistake in leaving me alone here?

My fingers brush against the wedding ring he forced onto my hand. The metal feels like it's burning my skin. I want to rip it off, throw it away, but I know better. I need to be smart about this.

The main hall below is cavernous, with a black and white marble floor that reminds me of a chessboard. Sunlight streams through tall windows, catching on crystal chandeliers and sending prismatic patterns dancing across the walls. In any other circumstance, I might have found it beautiful. Now it just feels like another gilded cage.

I descend the stairs as quietly as possible, constantly looking over my shoulder, but I don't see anyone. Not a damn soul, it's unnerving. Creepy even. A house like this, a place this big must have an army of staff to cook, clean and maintain it. This has to be a trap, right? Conrad wouldn't just leave me here unguarded. He's too controlling, too possessive for that.

As I reach the bottom of the stairs, I'm still alone. The vastness of this place almost overwhelms me. Doorways branch off in every direction, each one leading to another wing, another potential maze of rooms and corridors. I could hide here and be lost for days before Conrad finds me.

No, that's ridiculous. He probably knows this place like the back of his hand. Add the fact that he's a Reaper, and I bet he'd have me cornered within the hour.

I choose the door that looks most likely to lead outside, my bare feet silent on the cold marble floor. The shirt Conrad dressed me in barely covers my thighs and I'm acutely aware of how exposed I am, but clothes aren't important right now. Freedom is.

Another grand room opens before me; this one filled with display cases housing what must be centuries of Blake family treasures. Golden chalices, jewel-encrusted crosses, ancient manuscripts - the wealth on display is obscene.

My reflection catches in one of the glass cases, and I barely recognize myself. I look wild, desperate, my hair tangled and my eyes far too wide.

A door at the far end stands slightly ajar, sunlight streaming through the gap temptingly. My heart leaps; could it really be this simple?

I quicken my pace, no longer caring about stealth. Twenty steps. Ten steps. Five. I push through the door and find myself in what must be the morning room, windows stretching from floor to ceiling, looking out over perfectly manicured gardens.

There, just beyond the French doors, is freedom.

My hands shake as I turn the brass handle. It's unlocked. The door swings open and fresh air hits my face, making me dizzy with possibility.

The gardens stretch out before me, perfectly maintained with high hedges and stone fountains. Beyond that I can see trees, actual woods. If I can make it there, I might have a chance.

I take off running, my bare feet slipping on the dewy grass. The shirt flutters around my thighs, but I don't care who might see me. I just need to reach those trees, I need to disappear into their shadows.

I'm halfway across the lawn when I hear it, the thunder of footsteps behind me.

"No, no, no," I gasp, pushing myself harder. My lungs burn, my legs ache, but I'm so close.

The impact hits me from behind, sending me crashing face-first into the grass. A heavy body pins me down as I thrash and kick, my screams muffled by the earth.

"Going somewhere, Mrs. Blake?" A deep voice asks; not Conrad's, but one of his men.

I buck harder, twisting my body, but another set of hands grabs my legs. They haul me up between them like I weigh nothing, my feet dangling uselessly above the ground.

"Let me go." I shriek, not caring how pathetic I sound. "Please, just let me go."

But they're already dragging me back toward the house. Now I can see them; the guards who must have been watching me the whole time. They

emerge from behind hedges, from around corners, at least six of them in total. This was never going to work. Christ, I was a fool to think it would be so easy.

"The master said you might try something like this," one of them says, his grip tightening painfully on my arm. "Said you needed time to learn your place."

Tears of frustration and humiliation stream down my face. My shirt has ridden up, leaving me practically naked as they march me back inside. The morning sun that had seemed so promising moments ago now feels harsh, exposing. Taunting even.

I'm taken back through the French doors, past the display cases that mock me with their wealth, across the marble floor that's now smeared with grass stains and dirt from my feet. They keep dragging me up those grand stairs that I'd descended with such hope just minutes ago.

They throw me back into the bedroom with enough force that I stumble and fall, and the door slams behind me with a finality that makes me want to scream.

I curl up on the floor, my body shaking with sobs. I should have known better, should have realized Conrad would never leave anything to chance. The freedom I'd felt was just another one of his games, another way to break me down and show me how powerless I really am.

The sound of a key turning in the lock echoes through the room. He'll be back soon; I know he will. And then he'll punish me for trying to run, for daring to think I could escape him.

I drag myself to the bathroom, needing to wash away the evidence of my futile attempt at freedom.

I know if I don't, if I remain like this, he'll only strip me down and force me anyway. Surely, it's better to be clean on my own terms?

In the mirror, my reflection is a mess - grass stains on my knees, dirt smudged across my cheeks, tiny scratches from where I hit the ground. The shirt is ruined, torn in places from the guards' rough handling.

But it's my eyes that catch my attention; they're different now. Harder, the last flicker of hope dying as I truly understand my situation. This isn't just about being locked away in a fancy house, this isn't just about being Conrad's perfect little wife.

This is about total control. Complete submission.

I turn the shower on as hot as I can stand it, letting the water scald my skin. Maybe if I stay here long enough, I can wash away the shame of being so naïve, of thinking that I could outsmart a Blake.

The bruises are already forming where they grabbed me. More marks to add to my collection, more evidence of my husband's "love."

I don't know how long I stand there, but eventually I snap out of my despair long enough to turn the shower off. I wrap myself in one of the thick towels, trying to stop shaking. When I step back into the bedroom, I know what's coming next.

The waiting is almost worse than the punishment itself.

Conrad will return, and he'll remind me once again that I am his, that there is no escape. That my only choice now is to accept my fate or break myself trying to fight it.

In this moment, soaked and shivering and utterly defeated, I'm no longer sure which option I'll choose.

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# CHAPTER NINETEEN



*Conrad*

The drive home gives me time to calm my rage, though not enough. My knuckles are white from gripping the steering wheel too hard, and my jaw aches from clenching it for the past hour.

I knew she'd try it, I bloody knew it. It's why I laid the trap, I needed to show her how useless her fight is, how futile it all is. But deep down, there was a part of me that hoped she wouldn't dare, hoped that perhaps she was accepting her situation.

Every mile closer to home just reminds me of her betrayal, of her stupidity, of her utter lack of gratitude for everything I've given her.

The guards nod as I pass, and I know from their reports exactly what happened. How she tried to slip past them, how she fought like a wildcat when they caught her. Good. Let her learn the hard way that there is no escape.

When I get to our bedroom, she's curled up in the window seat, staring out at the grounds below like a prisoner counting the bars of her cage. Which, I suppose, she is.

"Did you really think you could just walk out?" I ask, letting the door slam behind me.

She jumps at my voice, spinning around with those big doe eyes that usually make my cock hard. Right now, they just fuel my anger.

"I want to go home," she whispers, and it's the wrong fucking thing to say.

"This is your home." I snarl, crossing the room in three strides, grabbing her by the throat as I force her to face me. "Or have you forgotten that you're my wife now?"

"Please, I jer-jer-just want..."

"What you want doesn't matter." I snarl, closing the distance between our faces. "What matters is what I want, and what I want is my wife to show some fucking gratitude for everything I've given her."

A tear slides down her cheek. It's soft, delicate, just like the rest of her but that doesn't mean I'm going to go easy. "Give, give, given me? You've imprisoned me." She gasps.

"I've saved you." The words explode out of me. "I've fucking saved you. Your family never gave a shit about you. Your grandfather would happily have shipped you off to Oblivion the second you stepped out of line. Your aunt actively tried to destroy you. I'm the only one who's ever protected you."

"Pro-protected me?" She tries to wrench free, but I hold her tighter. "You raped me."

"I claimed what was mine." I state. I'm not a rapist, at least not hers. I'm her husband. She was born to be mine, destined for it. I have every right to touch her, to take her, to teach her. She needs to understand that her body, her life, her everything belongs to me now. This was God's path, his intention. He created her for me and me alone.

But she's not ready to hear that. Not yet.

No, she wants to push me. To test me. To see if I'll just give in to her pretty face and sad tears.

I guess she's about to learn another lesson.

I push her back, push her hard and she lands half on the bed, half off it. A squeal escapes her and she tries to scramble free but I pin her down, holding her in place with one hand.

She's so fragile, so easy to overpower. I don't know why she even bothers fighting when she knows she doesn't stand a chance against me.

Her legs kick out as she tries to wrangle free but I'm on top of her, in her, consuming her.

I know they say makeup sex is meant to be good, but hate fucking - that's just as satisfying.

And right now, I do hate her, I hate that she makes me hurt her, that she makes me force her. If she just behaved the way a wife should, I'd treat her like a queen.

I can feel her insides protesting, refusing to give way and I force myself harder inside her. If I have to tear every inch of her apart, if I have to make her bleed, then by god I will.

She screams more, scratching at the sheets like a wild animal.

"This is your fault." I hiss into her ear. "You're the one making me do this. Making me hurt you."

She spits back words that are muffled, incomprehensible.

"You want to go home." I repeat, "You want to run back to your family. Well, I am your family now, I am everything." I slam into her, emphasising each of those words. I am her entire world and the sooner she accepts that, the better it'll be for both of us.

"You're hurting me." She screams, like I'm not doing it on purpose.

"You deserve this." I reply, wrapping a hand around her hair, tightening my grip enough to ensure she feels every bit of the pressure. "You deserve this pain, Brynn. You deserve everything you get."

The little bitch is still fighting, still resisting.

I pull her head back, and then push her face hard into the duvet, lowering my mouth so that it's right in line with her ear.

"I'm going to keep doing this, keep hurting you until you accept this, until your belly is fat with my child and you're eager to please."

I thrust into her, that thought spurring me on. Of her pregnant, her body swollen and ripe. Christ, she'll look so perfect, so fucking beautiful. I groan out, imagining the feel of her soft skin, the plumpness of her breasts. I'll have to be careful with her then; I won't be able to fuck her nearly as hard for fear of hurting my child. Perhaps she can ride me, she can climb onto my cock and bounce merrily while I cradle that life growing inside her.

Yeah, she'll be obedient then. She'll be a good little wife. Once she's pregnant, then she'll give in. Once she's pregnant, then all this pathetic rebellion will cease.

She whimpers again and I push myself into her one final time before letting my release take over me.

My dick jerks, my body shudders and all I can think about is my seed inside her, seeking out the most precious of targets.

I slump forward engulfing her body. She smells so sweet, so floral, as though she were an innocent flower and not a disobedient little bitch. For a moment I lay there, breathing her in, devouring that scent as if I could devour her soul.

And then I get to my feet, staring down at where she's still laying. She won't win me over with her sweetness. Afterall, what is the saying? Spare the rod, spoil the child? That's exactly the case with my wife. I spare her any lessons, and all it will do is spoil her further.

"Get up."

She doesn't move. She just curls up more, sniffing into the covers.

"Get up now, and accept the rest of your punishment like a good girl, or I can drag you to Oblivion and let every man there have a turn."

Her eyes widen in horror, and I can see the fear in them. Good. She should be afraid, Oblivion is no place for a girl like her. She's too soft, too innocent. She wouldn't last a fucking day.

Not that I intend to hand her over. No, I'd sooner put a bullet in her skull than ever let another man touch her, but my sweet little wife doesn't know that.

"What's your choice, Brynn?" I ask, my voice deceptively calm. "Are you going to be a good girl for me, or am I going to have to teach you another lesson the hard way?"

She swallows hard, and I can see the struggle in her eyes. She wants to defy me, to fight me, but she's not stupid. She knows what awaits her at Oblivion.

"I'll b-b-be good," she stutters in a broken whisper, and it's like music to my ears.

"Prove it." I taunt as I sit down on the edge of the bed and pat my lap. "Come here."

She hesitates for a moment, and I raise an eyebrow. "Do you need me to drag you over here, Brynn? Because I fucking will."

She shakes her head and slowly moves towards me. Her hands are shaking as she places them on my thighs, and I can feel the heat of her skin through my pants.

"You tried to run," I say, running a hand over her beautiful ass. "You need to understand that there are consequences for your actions."

She nods, and I can see the tears welling up in her eyes again. Good. Let her cry. Let her learn.

"I'm going to spank you now," I say, and she tenses. "Ten times. You're going to count each one, and you're going to thank your husband for teaching you this lesson."

She whimpers, but she doesn't fight me as I guide her down over my lap. Her ass is perfect, round and firm, and I can't wait to see it turn red under my hand.

"Count, Brynn," I say, bringing my hand down hard on her left cheek. I want her to feel every moment of this. I want her to feel what the consequences of her behaviour are for days.

She gasps, her body jerking in my lap. "One," she squeaks out.

"Thank you," I prompt.

"Th-thank you," she whispers.

I bring my hand down again, this time on her right cheek. "T-two. Than-thank you."

I tilt my head, staring at where her lower lips are on display for me. I can see it, my come dripping out. My fingers brush against her and she whimpers again in fear.

"I can touch where I like." I state.

She sniffs, nodding, submitting like she has a say in this.

With two fingers I penetrate her, pushing my come back inside. She won't get pregnant if she lets it all out now, will she?

She squirms enough for me to notice so I dig them deep into her inner walls, hoping she feels the strain. Daring her to protest.

With my right hand, I strike her again and she shrieks like she expected her spanking to be over. As if I'd be that easy on her.

I curl my fingers, focusing on her g-spot and her body locks up, though I can't tell if it's from fear or pleasure. If she comes now, I'll let her go. I'll call us even. But if the little bitch refuses, well then, it's fair game.

Her breath hitches, her hands dig into the sheet like she's trying to master herself and for one beautiful moment, I think I have won. I think I have beaten her.

Only, she clamps down on her lip, biting painfully hard to stifle the impending orgasm, and the last of my mercy dissolves with her show of

insolence.

"You wanna be a little bitch?" I whisper. "Then fine,"

My hand comes down harder. The sound of my palm meeting her arse reverberates around the room, and she screams again.

"Thank me." I command. "Count each one and fucking thank me."

Her voice is pitiful, broken. I can hear from the way she's stammering so much that she's taken far more than she can handle. But that again, is her own damned fault.

She tried to run. She tried to leave me. After everything I've done for her, after everything I've given her, she still thought she could just walk away. My anger flares more with every blow.

We continue like that, her voice getting louder with each strike, her body trembling more and more violently. By the time we reach ten, her arse is a beautiful shade of red, and she's sobbing openly.

"Good girl," I say, rubbing her back gently. "You took your punishment well. At least at the end."

She hiccups, trying to catch her breath, and I can feel the heat radiating off her skin. I want to bend her over and fuck her again, claim her as mine once more.

But I know she won't be able to handle that. She won't be able to take it. As much as I want her to hurt, I don't want to ruin her entirely.

Instead, I lift her up and cradle her in my arms. She's so small, so fragile, and I can't help but feel a pang of guilt for what I've just done. But she needed to learn. She needed to understand.

"I'm sorry," she whispers, burying her face in my chest. "I'm so, so, sorry."

"I know," I say, stroking her hair. "And I forgive you. But if you do that again, if you try to run, then I will hurt you more, do you understand? I will beat your arse raw, I will rip your back open if that's what it takes. You are mine, Brynn. And you're not going anywhere."

She looks up at me, her eyes rimmed with red, her cheeks stained with tears.

I don't want to do that, to mar her skin. To permanently damage her. But if she forces my hand, then I will. I will break her bones, I will cut her flesh, I will fucking snap her spine in half so that she's paralysed and can't move at all.

"Say it." I growl. "Say that you understand."

"I, I understand." she says, and I can see the sincerity in her gaze.

"Good girl," I say again, and I press a kiss to her forehead. "Now, let's get you cleaned up."

I carry her into the bathroom and set her down on the counter. She winces as her arse touches the cold marble, but she knows better than to complain. I run a washcloth under warm water and gently clean her face, wiping away the remnants of her tears.

She watches me silently, her eyes never leaving mine, and I can see the trust building in her gaze.

Once she's clean, I help her off the counter and lead her back to the bedroom. She's still naked, her body shaking from both the adrenaline and the cold. I guide her to the bed and pull back the covers, gesturing for her to get in.

She hesitates for a moment, looking up at me with those big doe eyes.

"Get some sleep," I say, pulling the duvet over her. "Tomorrow is a new day."

As I step back, I see that micro expression of surprise and I have to suppress a smile at her reaction. So, she wanted me to join her. She wanted me to comfort her. Is that how she imagined this would end, us curled up with my arms around her, holding her?

My fingers flex, and my dick responds to that. But she needs to learn that her pleasure, her wants, her needs, are all secondary to mine.

I lean down, planting a kiss on her forehead, and I can't help but feel a pang of tenderness towards her despite my anger.

She nods, snuggling down into the pillows, and I can see the exhaustion written all over her face.

I watch her for a moment longer, and then I turn and leave the room, locking the door behind me.

She's going nowhere now, she's not taking a single step in this house without my say so. She thought she had a prison before, now she's going to learn what it means to push my buttons.

# CHAPTER TWENTY



*Conrad*

I left my little doll at home again. Left my wedding ring too.

I run my hand over the empty space where it sits, and it's curious that I've gotten so used to it already that I now notice the absence.

The sun is partially obscured by the clouds. It's practically a glorious day.

Ordinarily, I wouldn't be here at this time. It's easier to attack under the cover of darkness. But word is, this man is fleeing tonight, taking his family with him. And we can't have that, now can we?

Around me, my men wait on my orders.

It feels good to be Reaping. It feels good to be channelling my frustration into something worthwhile. All evening, my phone has been going off, ringing non-stop. Apparently, my 'fiancée' is getting desperate. Like I give a fuck.

My eyes land on the house in question. "Let's go," I mutter.

We're stealthy enough. We keep to the bushes, the hedge line. Stupid bugger has enough coverage that we can practically walk right up to the

brickwork without being spotted. Besides, we've already isolated their surveillance so right now, their camera's are showing fuck all.

"Break it down," I snarl.

One of my men moves forward, using a battering ram to smash the side door in. As the wood shatters, we all barrel inside.

"I want this place secure within five minutes," I bellow. I've no need for secrecy now. Let them come, let them challenge me.

Gunshots ring out. I duck as a hail of bullets narrowly misses my head. Then I take aim and pull the trigger, watching as the guard's body falls from the balcony, landing in a way that would snap his neck and kill him, if he wasn't already a goner.

Then it falls quiet, too quiet. I can literally hear the sound of my men breathing as they go from room to bloody room.

Where the fuck are they? I know they haven't left yet. I know the bastard is still here, somewhere.

"Come out, Lord Upshaw," I taunt, "Come out now, and I might not let my men take turns fucking your wife..."

It's beneath me to make such a threat really, but I know it'll have the desired effect. I know the coward is hiding in here somewhere, I know they all are. As I make my way through their pathetic sized home, I can see all the bags packed. Poor things, they were so close weren't they? So fucking close.

But God is not on their side. No, God does not favour them.

A movement catches my eye. I turn my head, and see a shadow out the window.

As quickly as I can, I wrench the thing open and pull the person back in as they start screaming. It's a maid. She lands on her knees, begging me to spare her. To say I'm disappointed is an understatement.

"Where is your master?" I ask. I know this family is poor. At least, poor by Brethren standards. Not all of it is entirely their fault; they weren't born to immense wealth and circumstance, and bad luck had left them here. It's why Lord Upshaw was doing what he was, selling us out, selling the Blakes. He'd been passing on enough secrets to the Esau to become a problem.

And we weren't willing to let it go on any longer. No, an example needed to be made. A line needed to be drawn in the sand.

“He, he...” She stammers, reminding me of my sweet wife only right now, she’s not sweet. She’s being a little bitch, isn’t she?

“He what?” I snarl.

“Safe room,” She whispers, lifting her arm and pointing to a spot that looks innocuous.

Clever man. My lips turn into a smile as I see it; as I see what is hidden in plain sight.

Without looking at her I take my gun, press it to her temple and quick as a flash, I pull the trigger. She makes the tiniest squeak, almost like a mouse and then she’s dead.

I put my fingers to my lips, whistling for my men’s attention, and then I point out to that exact same spot I haven’t taken my eyes off.

It takes barely a minute before they’ve blasted a hole through the fake wall. I’m not that bothered if they harm his family, but I’ll be pissed if Upshaw himself is killed. After all, my brother has need of him.

When the dust settles, we can hear the sound of crying coming through. I jerk my head, standing and watching as the last of their supposed refuge is pulled away.

“Good afternoon,” I say as the wretched family is now turfed out.

“You, you...” Upshaw says, staring at me as if I were an apparition and not a man at all. “Titus will hear of this,” He says.

“I sure hope he will,” I reply before turfing him out, separating him from his wife and daughter who are standing there, looking shell-shocked.

He starts shouting more, fighting as he’s dragged out through the main door and into the waiting van.

When my eyes land back on the wife, I can see she’s terrified. “Please...” She begins.

God, it’s tedious. Always the same old shit. Spare me. Help me. Have mercy on me. As if I would.

I click my fingers, and the guards grab her only she tries to jump, tries to get free, to get to her daughter. They backhand her, and she lands on her knees with her nose streaming out blood.

“Mother,” The girl screams, fighting too now.

“Get them out of here,” I order.

“Wait, please...” The mother begins again, “Not my daughter, please...”

I roll my eyes, turning my back, studying the place and wondering whether I should ransack it or simply burn it down.

“She’s untouched,” the mother screams again. “She’s untouched. You don’t have to do this. I know you’re a good man. I know it, please, spare her. I won’t fight you, I’ll do what you want, just spare my daughter...”

“How noble.” I mutter, looking back around. She’s willing to sacrifice herself for her child? Shame her actions have only put a higher price on the girl’s head, if it is true.

I reach out, beckoning for the girl to be brought to me.

She looks like a petrified animal, her auburn hair smattered with debris. Her eyes dart about, like she’s trying to figure out which one of us is the greatest threat.

My hand grabs her chin, forcing her to look right at me.

“Is it true?” I ask.

She gulps, just as a tear runs down her cheek. It’s poetic. Beautiful.

She’s pretty enough. A smattering of freckles on her face adds to the innocence, and her long hair makes her look younger and yet more seductive at the same time.

“Tell me, girl.” I snap.

“Yes,” She whispers.

I draw in a long breath. “If you’re lying...”

“She’s not.” Her mother hisses. “We kept her pure, we followed all the regulations of the Brethren. She’s old enough to marry too. One of your men...” She trails off pleadingly, as if looking for a volunteer.

“No,” the girl screams, jerking against the hands that hold her.

“You’re offering her as a bride?” I state, more than a little amused now. Less than two days ago, her father was conspiring against us, acting like we were the scum of the earth. Now, her mother suddenly thinks we’re good enough for marriage.

The mother nods. “Yes, she’s a good girl. An obedient one.”

“Mother...” The girl sobs, “I don’t want, I don’t...”

“Better you be one of their wives than a whore in Oblivion.” Her mother hisses back.

My lips curl. I’m tutting before I can stop myself, and they both look at me.

“You think I can make such decisions?” I murmur.

“You’re a Blake.” The mother gasps. “You have the power...”

Even if I did, I wouldn’t.

I drop my gaze, taking in the girl's body. She's thick. Curvy. Some men like that, like suffocating beneath fleshy thighs. "She'll go to the auction." I state.

"No, no," I don't know which one of them says it, if they both say it, but it doesn't really matter. Their fate is unchanged.

Both of them will go to Oblivion. The mother will become a permanent slave, and the daughter will go on display. Her virginity will fetch a fine price and once she's spoiled, she'll join her mother in the halls. They at least will have that.

As I stroll back out, I see the van waiting ahead. I can hear Lord Upshaw banging on the side like someone's going to simply open it up and let him go after all.

"Someone knock that fucker out," I snarl. I'll be damned if I have to listen to him the whole way back to my brother's house.

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# CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE



*Conrad*

“How long did it take for you to know?” I ask, thinking out loud.

My brother pauses, his whiskey poised at his lips. “Know what?”

My eyes land on his wife. She’s sitting so docile. So meekly. But six months ago, she was locked in the basement, beaten, battered, and half-broken from what Magnus did to her. It was quite the art, quite the skill to dehumanise her the way he did; to take a woman as strong as she was and turn her into the masterpiece she is today.

She’s wearing a sheer dress. I can make out those plump breasts of hers, the nice curves of her hips. He likes her like that, on display, because it’s a testament to how much control he now has. Her hair has grown back enough that it sits just above her shoulders, all that bleach she had at the start is gone, and it’s a beautiful shade of copper now.

She looks back at me, holding my gaze with a hint of fire, and I can’t help but smirk. The old Magnus would have had her on her knees for that,

would have had her bent over and forced to take us both.

Pity, he's not into that anymore. I used to enjoy those games, used to enjoy the way she cried and begged.

I clear my throat, reminding myself that right now I have Brynn and if I choose, I can do the same to her. I can beat her, maim her, hurt her until she begs me to stop. Only, I wouldn't share her the way Magnus did. I wouldn't let anyone else lay a finger on her. She's mine to devour. Mine to enjoy. All fucking mine.

"How long was it before you knew it was working?" I ask, "Before you realised you were actually breaking the bitch?"

Liliana flinches.

Just a little. Just enough.

If Magnus sees it, I don't know. If he does, I wonder if he'll enjoy that reaction or punish her for it after I'm gone. I know he hasn't changed; I know in his core, my brother is like me. He wouldn't grow soft, simply because he loves her. No, the mountain doesn't bend because it enjoys the caresses of the wind. It stays where it is. Majestic, and unmoved.

"You thinking of your wife-to-be?" He asks, with a distinct sharpness to his voice.

Wife. Not wife-to-be. But yes. My eyes fix on Liliana again, on how perfect she is for Magnus.

She's sitting there like butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, but all three of us know what a little bitch she was to start with. The brand on her chest is clear for us to see, it practically glows with the way Magnus had gold tattooed into the scarred flesh once it'd healed.

My lips curl at the notion of doing that to Brynn, of marking her permanently. Maybe that should be a tradition. Something every Blake wife must endure from now on.

I clasp my hands together, contemplating whether the pain would be worth it. But to look at her, to know that every man thereafter would see who she belonged to...

"Conrad?"

I blink, coming out of my thoughts and realise my brother is staring at me intently.

"I'm just coming up with ideas." I murmur.

"I see, and these include torturing your bride?" Magnus replies.

I shrug. Like he didn't enjoy torturing Liliana. Like he didn't enjoy breaking her down, dehumanising her, turning her into little more than an object for him and his mates to enjoy.

Oh, I know she'd die for him now. Magnus even tested that out. But my wife, my wife would probably be the one pulling the trigger if the roles were reversed. I scowl, feeling more fury at the fact that he has her; that he made her so perfect, and my little doll is still anything but.

Liliana lets out a pained sigh, like she knows where my head is. I look up and meet that piercing gaze of hers. Not so long ago we both had her hauled over the dining table, fucking her like the whore that she is.

My eyes drop to her nipples, to where they're peaked from the cool air of the room.

And just like with every other woman, I'm not tempted by her now. Not interested. Brynn has ruined everyone else for me.

"If you do too much, you know her father will make a fuss." Magnus states.

Like that's true. Considering how Quinn treats his own wife, I doubt he'll have much to say on the matter. Only, I can't be bothered to have that debate right now. "He can say what he likes," I say, "I can do as I wish with my own wife."

It's the one good thing about the Brethren, they don't care what happens behind closed doors. A wife is a man's property; he can treat her how he likes. He can beat her, starve her, rape her, and there would be no repercussions.

But if she were to cheat, if she were to disobey him? Well now, that's an entirely different thing. Maybe that should have been my move. I should have married Giselle and then accused her of adultery, and ditched her in Oblivion.

I guess it's too late now.

I get up to leave, feeling thoroughly unsatisfied.

"Conrad."

God, I hate that tone. I hate the way my brother still thinks he can parent me. I'm thirty fucking eight years of age. I don't need his advice, or his help, or his damned meddling.

"What?" I reply through gritted teeth.

"This wedding. This marriage. This union with the Monclere's. It *will* go ahead as planned. We need them on side. *I* need them on side."

I give a curt nod. If only he knew we're already joined with them now, and soon enough we'll have an heir that is both Monclere and Blake. When that happens, Quinn Monclere won't dare to dispute my marriage. He'll be too keen to avoid a scandal.

I walk out of the room, heading up through to the north wing of the house. It's all but derelict now, unused. Although the place is pristine, no one comes here. The ghost of our mother still haunts this space.

I cut through the glass atrium and past the intricate chinoiserie murals.

When I get to her suite I pause, wondering if my life, if my brother's life, if Devin's life would be better or worse if we didn't have the mother we did. If we didn't have her tainted blood. Magnus and I keep most of our urges controlled, measured. But Devin; Devin got the brunt of her poison, of her malign.

My mind flickers to the girl, Paitlyn. She's locked away in a secure psychiatric unit under a fake name. I don't like the fact that I'm keeping her from him, I don't like the fact that I have any connection to her at all. But it is what it is. Once Devin has dealt with the final few items on his to-do list, I can hand her over and I know by the time the sun sets, he'll have eliminated her from our list of troubles.

When I get to my mother's bedroom, I glance about, noting that these rooms haven't changed a bit. They're cleaned every day, so there's not even the lingering hint of dust on any of the surfaces. A great canopy bed takes up one half of the space. It's got crimson red brocade hanging in big dramatic folds. Behind the head is our family's crest, made of plaster, and covered with gold leaf.

Standing here, it's easy to remember, it's easy to see it. Us. Devin as a baby, neatly swaddled up. Me sprawled out on the Persian rug, playing with a toy train, and my mother standing by the window, staring out but seeing nothing. Beside her, Magnus was there like her shadow, like her guard. As if he understood even as a teenager that she was fucked in the head, and beyond saving.

And then our father would walk in.

My mother would become frozen, still as a statue. Magnus would scoop the baby up and the three of us would leave, passing the doctor as he rolled in a machine that seemed to resemble some sort of medieval torture device.

And then those screams.

They'd ring out in the hall, ring out through the entire house.

My hands find my ears, my teeth clench as if I can hear them now.  
*Make it stop. Make it stop.*

I shake my head, burying those childish thoughts. What else was my father to do? He could hardly let her descend further into her madness. No, she needed to be treated. She needed to be stopped.

My hands shake as I open up her jewellery box. Inside I rifle past the smaller items, and my fingers close around the cool smoothness of an emerald pendant as big as a quail's egg. I pull it out, holding it up, admiring its beauty.

It's a necklace my grandmother had, one that her mother had before her. It's a family heirloom, a piece of genuine Blake History. I brush my thumb over the surface, imagining how beautiful this will look nestled between Brynn's breasts.

As I slip it into my pocket, I can feel the weight of it pulling the fabric down, pressing against my thigh.

Women like jewellery, they like shiny things and pretty pieces. Maybe this will be enough to buy my new wife's love. Maybe this will make her happy enough that she'll stop being such a little bitch.

Maybe.

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# CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO



*Conrad*

She's in that same fucking pose as I walk in.  
Curled up, staring out the window like she's serving a life sentence.  
I grit my teeth, feeling that flash of anger once more.  
*Why isn't she happy? Why isn't she grateful?*  
I know what her life was like back at the Monclere house. I know they beat her, starved her, and treated her like shit. She lived in some crappy old wing of the house, right over the servant quarters, as if she were little more than trash.

But here she is a queen. Here she can have anything she wants.  
I let out a snarl before I can stop it and she takes a sharp breath, flinching as she forces herself to look at me.

“Come here,” I say quietly.  
Her eyes dart to my hand, to the holdall.  
“Wha, wha, what is that..?” She stammers.  
“Your things.”  
She frowns deeper, like I’m speaking a foreign language.

“Come here right now.” I snap, losing what little patience I have left.

She scrambles up, her eyes going wide as she moves to obey me and I’ll admit, I like the look of fear on her face.

I drop the bag, letting it fall with a thud. She stops in front of me, just out of reach and I take a step, closing the distance. For a second, we just stare at one another. At least, I stare at her while she stares at my feet like she doesn’t have the balls to look me in the eye.

“I got you something.” I say, pulling the necklace from my pocket. As I hold it out in front of her face, she doesn’t react. “It belonged to my mother.” I add.

Still nothing.

I undo the chain, fixing it around her neck and it sits there glinting, just as perfectly as I imagined.

*God, she’s so beautiful. So fucking beautiful.*

Her big doe eyes seem to well with tears and for one brief moment, I think it’s with joy. With love, that she understands what her place now is and that she’s fully accepting it.

But then her lip trembles. She sniffs, and it hits me that those tears are not of joy at all. They’re of anger, of resentment.

“Don’t you like it?” I snarl. That necklace is worth a fortune.

She doesn’t reply beyond openly crying, and that there is the final fucking straw.

My fist slams into her face before I can think of any other reaction.

A scream passes her lips as she goes flying, landing on the rug with a thump.

“I’m giving you my home.” I spit, hitting her again. “I’m giving you my love. My time. My fucking time.”

I hit her again.

And again.

Does she not get it? Does she not understand?

She curls up, her hands coming over her head to try to protect herself and I haul her around, yanking her limbs down and pinning them with my knees so she’s completely defenceless.

“You’re my wife.” I snarl. “My fucking wife. It’s about time you accept it, about time you start acting like it.”

“Per-per-please...”

I don't let that pitiful plea past her lips. I don't let her finish her sentence.

"This is your doing, Brynn." I yell as I undo my belt, pull my cock out and ram it down her throat. "Your fault. I don't want to hurt you. I don't want to beat you, but you make me. You give me no choice."

She openly gags on me as I start thrusting away, but I don't give her a second to adjust. She'll take my cock, she'll take my gifts, take everything I give her because if she doesn't...

A deep guttural scream vibrates around me, and I let out a groan at how good it feels. I know she didn't mean to do it in pleasure, but this woman... My hand delves into her hair and I thrust harder, more mercilessly. I don't care what it takes, what I have to do. This wife of mine will learn her place.

Her tears stream down her cheeks, her face is so red. Her nose hits my stomach as I pound into her and my balls slap into her chin.

If she were good, if she were well behaved she'd be cupping them, massaging them, showing me how much she enjoys being used.

But this little bitch here still wants to fight.

"You'll take my cock." I growl. "You'll fucking choke on it until you learn."

But even with her fighting, even with her trying to throw me off I'm still there, still chasing my high. This woman does things to me I can't explain, I can't even fathom. It's like she's put a spell on me, enchanted me. Bewitched me.

I let out a roar as I come, pouring myself deep down her throat. As I drag my cock out, I smear what's left over her lips.

She looks in a state, she looks a mess. But with my come over her, she looks magnificent too.

She sits up, just enough to meet my gaze and then her eyes turn furious and she spits. Semen, saliva, it all comes flying out, landing on my cheek.

"You fucking bitch..."

I'm on her again, not that I'd gotten off her to start with. One hard strike knocks her back, and then I'm beating her once more. My knuckles protest as I land a blow to her ribs. I can feel my own hands bruising from the impact, but she needs to learn. She needs to stop rebelling.

My chest heaves, my entire body seems to want to protest. But this is what is necessary.

"I haaate you."

She screams at me. Screams those words loudly.

My hand wraps around her throat and I lower my face till our noses are touching.

“The fuck did you just say?”

“I hate you.” She says again. With more venom. More anger. More emotion than I’ve ever heard from her. Gone is the placid, meek little girl. The woman in front of me now is all poison. “I hate you.” She screams it once more. “I hate you. I hate you. I hate you.”

I slam her head back, slam it into the rug and her eyes roll back on impact.

“I’ll, I’ll never love you. I’ll never feel anything for you but hate.”

The fact that she’s not stammering right now pisses me off even more.

My fingers curl around the chain of my mother’s necklace around her throat and I tighten it, seeing the way her flesh pops out, the way it reddens. Part of me wants to do it, to strangle her, to silence her forever.

*My fucking wife.*

She was meant to be docile. Malleable. But this bitch before me is anything but.

She starts clawing, flailing, her body jerking violently as she tries to throw me off. For one moment I consider doing it, tightening my mother’s chain even further, taking the last of her breath and watching as she slowly dies.

It would be a fine punishment.

It would be more than justifiable.

Her eyes bulge. All the little blood vessels seem to pop and they go so violently red. Her tongue lops out of her mouth, swelling with the pressure.

And then my fingers ease. The voice of reason talks us both off that ledge.

“My fucking wife.” I hiss as she gasps for breath.

More tears stream down her bruised face. The chain sticks to her skin, and I can see where the mottled flesh is already turning purple.

She starts shaking; whether from shock or fear I don’t know, but I realise now that I’ve been going about this all wrong.

I shouldn’t be trying to win her love with nice gestures. I shouldn’t be trying to kill her fight with kindness.

No, I’ll break her the way Magnus broke Lilianna.

I'll break my wife down into tiny little pieces and I'll rebuild her until the only thoughts she has in her head are the ones I've put there.

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# CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE



*Brynn*

I can't move.

My entire body feels like it's been crushed. Broken.

I'm still here, on the floor, where he left me.

My ribs are throbbing from where he kicked me, and that awful necklace is still wrapped around my throat like it's trying to choke the last of the oxygen from my lungs.

Every time I blink, I see it. That look in his eyes. That anger.

I knew Conrad was a monster. I knew from all the things he'd done to me so far but today, today was so much worse.

I shudder, letting out a chuckle that is so at odds with the situation I'm in. In what world is him choking me worse than him raping me?

But it is. It's so much worse.

And I know now, in my heart, that this man will be the death of me. He is going to kill me. He is going to lose control, and he will snap my neck before he even considers the consequences.

Would it be better to die though? Better to just get it over with?

My tears stream more at that thought.

I've wanted to die for so long and yet now I'm looking it in the eye, it feels so very different.

No, I don't want to die. Not really. I want to live in a world where I am free. Where I can be me, where I'm not subjugated and forced to bend to the ever-changing whims of a monster.

A sob escapes my bleeding lips. I try to silence it, but another one follows and then another, and I realise I have no control over myself now.

Has he broken me? Am I that easily cowed?

I shake my head, clenching my fists, groaning at the pain that shoots up my limbs.

What did I do? What awful transgressions did I commit to end up here, to end up in this life, with this horrific future before me? What sort of God allows this shit to happen? Allows the world to be like this.

I don't know how long I've been laying here. Immobile. Useless.

I slip in and out of consciousness, dreaming of things I can't have. When I open my eyes, only one seems to respond. My right eye remains shut, like it wants to jump ship and abandon me.

When I hear footsteps, I freeze. Fear takes over. My breath turns into a rattle and my heart slams into my chest like a drumbeat of war, but I can't fight. I'm in no position to fight. No position to mount any form of defence.

The door opens.

My dear husband stands on the threshold, staring in. I can't meet his gaze, so I do the only thing open to me. I lay there, weak and pathetic, embodying everything he thinks I am.

He doesn't say a word as he walks towards me, doesn't even react as he stares down at me.

What does he see? Is he proud? Is this some victory lap for him? Has he come to admire his fine handiwork?

"Get up." He says, as if I'm merely dozing dreamily in bed.

I try to move, try to obey and my arms give way, my body crumples. I collapse back into the bloodied rug.

He tutts as though I'm being deliberately difficult and then he grabs me by my arm, yanking me up as I scream. White hot pain shoots through my body. I try to muster what little strength I have left to fight, but I'm too far gone.

He drags me to the bed and drops my useless body onto it. For one awful moment, I think he's going to fuck me again.

But instead, he stares down at me like he has no idea how I'm so hurt.

"You did this, Brynn." He says. "You caused this."

I try to reply, to argue, but my voice catches in my throat. I guess it doesn't matter anyway, nothing I say will help me. Nothing I say can save me.

He reaches down, unclasping the necklace, his mother's necklace, muttering that I don't deserve it and then he tucks into his pocket.

"It's your choice." He says. "You can choose to accept this, to stop being a whiny little bitch, be my wife and build a life together. Or you can choose to fight me, to defy me, and spend the rest of your life like this; locked away, miserable and alone."

That's not a choice.

I scream those words, but not a sound leaves my lips.

He turns away, picking up the holdall, and he dumps it in the closet.

When he returns, he towers over me once more. "No one else wants you." He states. "No one else will help you."

Like anyone was ever going to help me anyway.

His nostrils flare like he can hear the very voices in my head.

"Make your choice wisely, Brynn. I'm running out of patience."



I WAKE IN A PANIC.

It's dark in the room.

I have no idea what time it is. With the drapes drawn, it could be day or night.

A face seems to flit into view.

*But it can't be, it can't.*

"Momma?"

I sound so broken, so helpless. Something creeps up my spine, and I shudder violently as I try to get some grip on reality.

But she's there. Still there.

She hasn't changed, hasn't aged, she looks exactly as I remember her.

She gives me a pained smile before she's hugging me, comforting me, whispering in my ear that she loves me.

"He's going to kill me." I gasp.

She shakes her head, brushing away the tears. Soothing me in a way I so desperately need.

"Please..."

I don't want to be here. I don't want to stay. I want her to take me with her, to take my soul, to carry me away and keep me safe forever.

"Take me with you..." I gasp.

I'd follow her anywhere. I'd follow her to hell. Which is where my family believes she is. I just don't want her to go, I don't want her to leave.

But I can hear the footsteps, the sounds of someone approaching.

Is it him? Is he back?

"Please momma," I sob. "Please..."

The door opens. Bright, blinding light fills the space. I throw my hand up to cover my eyes and I groan from the horrific pain that shoots through my body at the movement.

He's dressed in his usual suit, with his shirt slightly unbuttoned. His hair is ruffled. There's a sheen of perspiration on his forehead, and he looks tired. Like something has been keeping him up at night.

Good.

I hope the bastard is struggling to sleep.

He lets out a sigh as he walks into the room and he shrugs off his jacket, revealing those bulging muscles.

As he undoes his shirt, my eyes dart about, trying to spot where my mother is. Where she's hiding.

Only, I can't see her. It's like she vanished into thin air.

*She left. She left me alone.*

I can't keep the pain in, I can't contain it. That old grief stirs in my belly, and the bitter unfairness of my life hits me at full force.

Conrad walks up to me, crouching down to sweep the hair from my face.

"Have you slept all day?" He asks, sounding every bit the loving husband now.

I blink back, afraid that if I admit that I have, he'll beat me again for the sin of slothfulness.

I can feel his warm breath on my face, I can smell that intense hit of his aftershave. My skin erupts into goosebumps as sheer terror creeps down my spine at the thought of him being so close to me.

His thumb brushes aside the last remnants of my tears.

“Let’s get you up.” He says, pulling the covers off.

Cold air hits my body. It’s soothing, relieving against the bruises but the feeling is short lived, stolen almost immediately as he reaches down and scoops me up into his arms.

I whimper as he presses me into him and thankfully, he seems to take that as a response to my pain and not a response to him touching me.

He carries me through to the bathroom and places me down delicately on the ridiculous couch in there.

I watch him warily, the way a mouse does a tiger, preparing for the moment that playfulness turns to something deadly.

He pulls something out of a drawer, fiddling with the box to get it open.

When he holds it out to me, I stare back dumbfounded. We’re doing this now? Surely, it’s too soon? My thoughts race as he gestures to the toilet.

“I’ve fucked you enough times.” He says, proudly. As if it’s some sort of Olympic sport and he’s already claimed the gold.

I can barely muster the strength to walk, and I almost fall face first into the pan. Conrad has to grab me, has to help me which if anything, makes it even more degrading.

I don’t even know how to do these tests. How they work.

“Piss on it.” He says, clearly seeing my confusion.

I wrinkle my nose in disgust, but I know I can’t refuse him. He’ll only force me anyway and I doubt I’d survive another beating.

I can’t look at him as I follow his instructions. Shame heats my face. He holds his hand out expectantly and I put the plastic into it, doing everything I can to avoid my fingers touching his.

*What if I’m pregnant?*

*What then?*

I don’t know how long the test takes but it feels like forever as I sit here, paralysed.

Will he treat me better if I am carrying his child? Will he stop hurting me? Stop raping me?

My stomach turns at the thought of it. Of something growing inside me, of a part of Conrad now forever tied to me.

I don't want it.

I don't want his child. If I'm pregnant, I'll never be able to escape. I'll never be able to leave.

I bite my lip hard, trying to keep in the sobs. This can't be my future. This can't be it. No loving God would allow this to happen.

“Fuck.”

I know from the tone that it's negative.

The relief that washes over feels indescribable. I feel suddenly saved, I feel suddenly spared. I clap my hands to my mouth but it's too late to hold the sound in and it escapes, filling the room, echoing off the tiles like a merry little tune.

“You think it's funny?” Conrad snarls. “You dare to fucking laugh?”

The plastic test hits my head with enough force to bruise.

His hand grabs my hair, wrenching me up and I'm thrown across the room like I weigh nothing. My body collides with the solid door frame, and I crumple once more.

Only, Conrad doesn't leave me there. No, he's too angry. Too furious. He drags me out by my hair. He dumps me on that same bloodied rug and as he starts to land more blows, I wonder if that's what the rug is for. To soak up my blood. To ensure his precious hardwood floors don't get damaged.

His boot comes down, slamming into my ribs. I scream out, but it makes no difference.

Would he even notice if he killed me? Would he stop? I wonder if he would keep going, keep crushing my bones until I was nothing but dust.

My eyes swell shut, my mouth is filled with the metallic taste of my own blood. It's streaming down my face, it's covering me.

In my fear, in my wretched state my bladder gives way, warm urine streaming down my leg and I'm lying there, curled up into it when Conrad walks away and all but leaves me to die.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR



*Conrad*

She laughed. She fucking laughed.  
Even now, even hours later, I can't contain my rage.  
I've a good mind to go back and hurt her more. But that won't help, will it?

No, apparently my fists seem to have little impact.  
I storm through the hallways of Oblivion, feeling like this is already getting out of control. Who even is she? She was meant to be fucking meek.  
That woman back at my house wasn't meek.  
My nails dig into my palms. My fury feels insurmountable.  
*What would Magnus do?*

I hate that thought. And more than that, I hate the knowledge that my brother would probably have broken her by now. He'd have had her so twisted up she wouldn't be able to think without him putting the very words in her head.

But I'm just as good as him.  
Just as fucking good.

I snarl, slamming my fists into a slave that just happens to be walking past. I don't know where the girl is headed but as her body crumples, I tilt my head and slam my boot into her ribs.

*Why won't she just give in? Why is she making this so damn hard?*

All I wanted to do was love her, spoil her, treat her better than she's been treated up until now. Why is she rejecting me? Why would she not want that?

The slave cries out, her hands grasping my leg, but it's not enough to stop me. I bring my leg up, this time slamming it down on her face. In my mind it's not this pitiful creature, in my mind it's her, my wife. And I'm teaching her a lesson, one she'll never forget. One she'll never move on from.

My boot crushes her nose, and blood sprays out. Her screams turn more and more high-pitched, but it doesn't stop me. Nothing can stop me.

"Why won't you love me?" I snarl out. Doing it again, hurting this useless excuse for a human. "Why am I not good enough for you?"

My boot comes down. I crunch the heel right into her mouth, grinding it against the very bone and this time it's her jaw that gives way. Those screams seem to falter. That fight seems to subside, as if she doesn't have the will power anymore.

I lean down, yanking her up by her throat. Her neck hangs at an angle so her blood pours down, covering her chest, covering her nipples. There's a broken whimper coming from her lips. It tells me she's still alive, still breathing.

Well, that can be remedied just as easily.

I toss her back onto the concrete, and then I'm slamming my fists into her. Crushing her skull.

"You will learn," I seethe. "You will fucking learn."

By the time I'm done, her face is pulverised. She's unrecognisable. Not that she was anything of note before. Two guards appear behind me, and I jerk my head, ordering them to clear up this god damn mess.

And as I walk away, I can feel it. Her blood under my nails, in-between my fingers.

"Again," Dustin says, looking just as bored as I feel.

Some days work is easy, entertaining even. Some days, it's sheer monotony.

The slave dips her head, acknowledging his words without a show of emotion and she raises the whip up, striking hard against another slave's back.

We all hear the crack. The hiss. The sound of flesh ripping apart.

It's a good technique, having them torture and train one another. It ensures there are no friendships, no alliances. They get rewarded for reporting on one another. They get punished arbitrarily to keep them on their toes.

We've never had an uprising here, never had a rebellion. New stock is brought in, separated into temporary and permanent and then we condition them, we teach them, we give them all the skills necessary to please our Brethren Lords. Of course, even if they follow the rules, even if they're the best slave alive it won't guarantee them an easy life, a pain-free one. They exist now for the whims of the free. Their every breath must be to grant our desires, our wants, not theirs.

The exercise hall is packed. Enough of them are obedient enough to be left alone, but we always make an example of the new starters, put them in the middle. It's more degrading that way, more amusing to watch how they shy away, how they try to hide, because they haven't yet accepted the fact that their bodies belong to us now. Decency doesn't exist within these hallowed walls.

To the side, we keep the cages. Where our most precious cargo is kept.

I glance over and see that same girl standing, wide-eyed and clearly terrified as she stares out.

"Are we all set?" I ask Dustin.

He looks over, seeing the five girls and two boys all in the cages. All individually chained up so they can't get at one another, so they can't spoil themselves before their big day.

"We're all set," He states.

The auction is tonight. Already the high levels are filling up, and I know more than a few Lords are standing behind the glass screens, getting a good look at the stock as we speak.

I stride across, coming to a stop before the Upshaw girl's cage. She's naked now, completely exposed. I can see her fat, chunky thighs, and her nice round belly. It makes a change from most of the starving ones we have here – I reckon we'll get a fine price for her this evening.

She grits her teeth, visibly shaking when she realises who it is.

“What’s your name?” I ask. I could ask Dustin but it’s more fun to toy with her.

“Clara,” She snarls.

Silly bitch. I press the button on the top of her cage and she screams, grabbing the collar around her throat.

“What is your name?” I repeat again, emphasising each damned word.

She gasps, glaring up at me with such a look of hate. I let out a laugh, squatting down and reaching through the bars to grab her face, “You’re lucky I have a wife now,” I state, “Because if I didn’t, I’d take great delight in breaking you in,”

“Fuck you,” She spits, “You think I’m scared of you? You think I’m scared of any of you?”

I grab her nipple and I pinch hard, twisting it around as she screams. “You’re a whore,” I state. “If you’re not scared, then you’re a fool. By the end of tonight, you’ll no longer be fucked and be back for training. You’ll learn to ride as much cock as your mother is right this second. You’ll choke on it, you’ll beg for it, you’ll become an addict. Just like every other slave here...”

She sobs, shaking her head while I step back, sneering at what a pathetic excuse for a person she really is.

I turn to leave, wanting to wash my hands, wanting to remove the taint of another woman’s flesh.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE



*Brynn*

The maid finds me. Still on the floor. Still lying in my urine.

If I had any self-respect left, I'd do something to cover myself, to move. It's a moot point anyway, because I don't have the strength.

She's on her knees, brushing back my hair, showing her shocked expression as if she didn't know Conrad was such a monster.

"What did he do?" She gasps.

I can't reply, all I can do is whimper in pain. Did he break bones? Did he beat me so much that I'm now irrevocably damaged? What will he do if he's broken my spine? If I'm now paralysed? Will he toss me aside, will he see me as useless and find a new wife?

No, I won't be as lucky as that. Conrad won't let me go. He'll never let me go. Even if I was quadriplegic, I can see him still fucking me, still abusing me. Hell, he'd probably like that more because I'd be completely defenceless then.

The only way I'm escaping this man is in a coffin, though there's a high chance he'll be the one to put me in it.

“Why?” She asks. “Why did he do this?”

“Not pregnant.” Is all I can say back.

She screws her face up. “That sick bastard.” She says, as if we don’t know it.

She gets up, disappearing into the bathroom and comes back with a cup of water.

“Here, drink this.”

I gulp back the drink, letting it pour down my chin in my haste.

Will Conrad punish me for this, for drinking? Will he punish her too, for intervening?

She moves around, crouching beside me so I can actually look at her. Not that I want to. Shame, fear, so many emotions rush through me, and once more I’m trembling uncontrollably.

She reaches down, hugging me and that seems to be the catalyst, the final straw. I let out a wail, a broken sound that makes me feel more like an injured animal than anything else.

*I just want to go home.*

*I just want to get out of here. But I know I’ll never escape him.*

“You’re okay,” She reassures, as if we’re both now pretending this is all some misunderstanding. “You just need to hang on.”

“Han-hang on for what?”

I don’t e/ven know if I want the answer. What does she know that I don’t? Has Conrad already made a decision Has he now decided I’m too much hassle, is that it?

Perhaps a nice bullet to the head is the answer here.

But Conrad won’t do that, no way he’d give me an easy death. Oblivion is my fate, that’s where he’ll send me. And then he, his friends and all the other Lords can continue to abuse me until I really am dead.

“We’re going to get you out of here.”

Those words make me freeze, sending a chill through me. I know it’s what I want, what I’ve dreamed of but I have no friends, no allies, no one who would be willing to risk going up against the Blakes.

“What, what are you talking about?” I gasp.

This is a trick. It has to be. Is my dear husband there, is he hiding in the dark crevices of this room, waiting to see how I react and before planning to punish me accordingly?

“Your father is coming.”

I blink back, barely registering the words.

What the fuck? I don't even know who my father is. I doubt the man knows I exist either. Beyond the scrawled pages of my mother's diary, the man is a ghost. A figment of my imagination and nothing more. Besides, I've lived the last twenty-one years of my life without any contact from him, why would he suddenly appear now? Why would he even care now?

She gives me a sympathetic smile while looking at the bruising, as if my injuries alone explain why I'm not jumping for joy.

"He didn't know where you were." She says. "It's complicated because of who he is, but he's on his way now." She states. "He's coming back for you."

Bullshit. I know it is.

This is a test of loyalty. Conrad is wanting to see if I'll betray him.

She tuts, muttering under her breath. "I'm not lying, I'm trying to help you."

"No one helps me." I can't hold those words back, nor the tears that follow. And I hate that it's true. That I am so utterly alone.

"Ssssh, it's okay." She says, like she's my friend, like I'd believe a word she has to say. "He's going to get you out of here. You just need to hold on, to be patient."

Hold on. Hold fucking on? Like I have the luxury of choice.

"I'm going to be here, waiting, doing everything I can to protect you until he rescues you."

Somehow those words don't give me any comfort.

"Why...?"

"Because you deserve a better fate than being Conrad Blake's battered wife." She hisses.

I gulp, nodding. I know that. I know I deserve better. But so far, this is the life God has given me. This is what he's allowed to happen.

"Why didn't he come before?" It's a question I've been asking for years. Who he is, where he is. Why he abandoned us. Why he left me to grow up in that house.

She sighs. "It's complicated. Too complicated to explain." But she puts something into my hands.

My eyes widen as I realise what it is. The diary. My mother's diary.

So she knows about it, about them.

For a second, I want to hold it so close, to cherish it. This book has brought me so much comfort since I found it six months ago but now, now it feels like another thing that could condemn me.

Because what will Conrad do when he finds this? Will he read it? Will he realise that I have someone coming for me, someone who actually cares?

Half of me is tempted to lob it at her head.

Is that what my husband would want me to do? Is that what a good wife would do?

My heart starts racing again, my mind starts scrambling over every scenario.

And then we both hear that sound. Footsteps.

*He's returning.*

My heart suddenly races, my body freezes with sheer terror.

*He's coming back. He's going to hurt me again.*

She whispers something meant to calm me, meant to reassure, but it does nothing. If he finds her here, if he sees this diary, I don't know what he will do.

She takes the book, pushing it between the mattress and the bed so it's hidden.

"I'll be back," She says, and I don't know if that's a threat or a promise, but it doesn't help.

*He's getting closer. He's almost here.*

# CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX



*Conrad*

S he's on the floor.  
Still just lying there.  
My nose wrinkles at the acrid stench of piss.  
*She pissed herself?*

Did she do that just to spite me, or was it to make her as unattractive as she could be in the hopes I wouldn't fuck her?

I shake my head. Stupid little bitch will learn very quickly that I won't be put off by inconsequential things. No, even if she shits herself, even if she smears it all over her body I'll fuck her, I'll use her, and then I'll rub her face in the dirty sheets like a dog.

Around her neck, I can see the livid bruising where the chain strangled her.

I yank her up. Her whimper becomes a scream of pain, but I bear it no attention. She did this. She caused this. She deserves to hurt.

I toss her onto the bed and she groans, rolling over, curling up into a foetal position.

Only, there's a sharp, haunting sound coming from her mouth.

I pause, watching her, waiting for her to spit out more hate, more vitriol but nothing comes. She just lays there, broken and pathetic.

*Maybe she really is hurt.*

A flash of something hits me. Did I break her too much? Did I go too far?

I crouch down, brushing the hair from her face and I can feel how icy cold her skin is, and yet her forehead is covered in sweat like she's burning up.

"Doll?" I murmur.

She doesn't look at me. She just stares, with her eyes hazy and unfocused.

"Doll?" I growl again.

No response. Not even a blink.

I stand up, storming out of the room and holler for the doctor. I know the bastard is there somewhere.

He comes in, looking in far less of a hurry than I'd like. My hands ball in my pockets as I gesture over to her with my head and he pauses, staring like he expected to see something else.

He walks over, narrowing his eyes, before he opens up that bag and pulls out a stethoscope.

I don't speak as he examines her. Though it takes everything I have not to tell him where he can and cannot put his hands.

Brynn whimpers, clearly hating his touch as much as I do.

When he's done, he looks over at me.

"Well?" I snap.

"It's just bruising. Bad bruising. You might have fractured a rib or two, but I suspect they're only hairline fractures. It would be best to get her to a hospital though, to be on the safe side."

'Absolutely not.'

I'm not having her taken from here, from her home. Besides, the more exposure she has to the world, the more risk I have of someone realising where she is, and what I've done.

"She could be concussed." He adds.

"Then I'll get a sick bucket." I snap. She can spend the entire night retching for all I care, but she will not be leaving here, leaving me.

He mutters under his breath, just low enough that I don't catch it. He's lucky I need him right now, or he'd be dead in a ditch for that insolence.

"I can give her something for the pain." He suggests.

I shake my head. No, she won't get that. She isn't allowed that. She needs to feel every moment of this, to understand that this is of her making. She caused this, and she has to face the consequences.

My eyes land back on her; she's curled up, her hands grabbing her sides like she's trying to protect something. Only, we both know that's not the case.

But an idea settles.

"You can give her a shot." I say.

"A shot?" He repeats like a damn parrot.

"I've fucked her enough times. She should be pregnant by now, and she's not." I'm not opposed to using other means, to tipping the scales to ensure I get what I want. Hell, if I have to construct some sort of machine to keep her continuously filled with my semen, then I'll do that. I'll get the bitch pregnant one way or another.

"You mean a fertility shot." He says, like he's just solved a puzzle.

"Yes."

He glances back, staring one second far too fucking long at my wife. "She's battered, bruised, and emaciated." He states like I'm not more than aware of that fact. "She's in no fit state to conceive, let alone carry a child."

My anger flares. Who the fuck does he think he is to talk to me like that?

"Give her the shot." I snarl, grabbing his collar, shoving him enough to make my point. Like I give a fuck what his opinion is on the matter.

He has the audacity to sigh, but he pulls over his bag, rummaging through like he's Mary Fucking Poppins. *What else does he have in there?*

He pulls out a vial and a syringe.

If Brynn is aware of what's going on, I'm not sure. She certainly doesn't show any hint that she's even conscious. She's still just lying there, like a broken toy waiting to be fixed.

He leans over, jabbing the thing into her skin, right where her arse meets her thigh. There's a handprint there, a mark I know I left.

She hisses and her hands clench, but she doesn't try to fight.

And then he's pulling it out, putting it away, and moving to stand in front of me.

“Mr Blake,” He says quietly. “You cannot do that again; you cannot beat her like that again. If she does get pregnant, then there is a high chance you will cause a miscarriage.”

I wave my hand, dismissing his words, dismissing him. Like hell I’ll be told what I will and won’t do in my own home.

As the door closes, I go and sit on the bed. Maybe it’s my imagination but she looks better, calmer.

“I don’t want to hurt you.” I murmur, stroking her hair. “I want you to let me love you. I want you to let me treat you right.”

She sniffs and I tuck my hand under her chin to make her look at me.

“I love you, Brynn. I love you. And if you’d only stop fighting me, then you’d realise that I will do anything for you. I will give everything for you. I will make you happy.”

“I want my freedom.” She says in a clear, unbroken whisper.

God, it takes everything I have not to slam my fist into her face, to shatter those pretty eyes staring up at me.

My hand curls into her hair, I yank hard enough to ensure she realises I’m not fucking around.

“You are my wife.” I state. “My fucking wife.”

Why is that so hard to understand?

Why is that so hard to realise?

# CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN



*Brynn*

**H**e gave me two days. Two fucking days.

I suppose I should be grateful for that.

My body is still broken. Not permanently, mind you. But the way my flesh has turned black is enough to make me physically sick.

I can't walk straight, I can't even stand without my legs giving way. Every breath I take feels like a knife in my chest.

But that doesn't stop my dear husband.

No, he's more than happy to continue whatever this is, despite the warning from the doctor.

Oh, I know he thinks I didn't hear. He thinks I was too out of it to realise what was going on, but I hear every word. I heard it all. Including the fact that they gave me a shot.

My stomach turns at the thought of it, that I'm even more likely to get pregnant. My helplessness seems to magnify, seems to take over, like it's

spreading wings and all I can do, all I can focus on is that. I'm trapped. I'm practically defenceless. And there's a very real, very loud ticking clock above my head.

As we get to the front door, a servant is standing there, holding what looks like a bunch of black cloth in his arms. He passes some of it to Conrad and he takes it, placing it over my head, covering my naked body.

Yes, it's a relief to be covered but as I look down, I see how the fabric swamps me. How it engulfs me. It's a robe. A ceremonial one. I've seen my grandfather wear these often enough to understand the significance.

Is he taking me before the entire Brethren now? Is he parading me in the Cathedral and announcing me as his wife? If he does that, then there is no way out, no escape. Not that there was ever a chance of that anyway.

My body trembles more as I wrap my arms around my waist, trying to muster what little strength I have. Beside me, Conrad has put his own robe on. It covers his clothes like a shroud, but it fits him far better than mine does me.

He looks at me for a second, and then forcibly pulls me out the open door to where the car is waiting.

I sit beside him, staring out, chewing my lip while I try to figure out what this is. I know he's taking me to some Brethren meeting, but why? Why now? Unless he's announcing our marriage, letting the entire community know we're together?

I tremble more at that thought. Will it be a replica of our wedding ceremony, him abusing me on another altar, only this time there'll be more witnesses? I don't think my body can take it. I know my ribs can't.

The minutes feel like they go too fast, that this journey is over far too soon.

We pull up outside a massive building. A cathedral. God, no.

I can see the lights inside, illuminating every window. There must be hundreds of cars. Hundreds of Lords.

*I don't want to be here. I don't want a part of whatever this is.*

Conrad pulls my chin around to face him and before I can register it, he's sticking something into my mouth. My eyes widen. I try to move my lips, but they're taped shut.

He silenced me.

I make a noise of anger in my throat, and he just narrows his eyes before backhanding me.

“Not another sound.” He barks before placing a gold mask over my head, hiding my face.

I know the normal Ladies’ masks are meant to be held in place by a mouthpiece. Clearly, this one has been altered. Clearly, he doesn’t trust me to not spit it out and scream at the first opportunity I get.

He pulls the hood up, concealing the ties that shouldn’t be there and then puts his own mask on.

Each mask is made to fit the wearer. Each mask is individual. I wonder what mine looks like. Did he dare to use my actual face, or is he even now still hiding who he has captive?

We step out, him all but yanking me from the car and slowly we make our way inside.

The place is packed. Rows and rows of seats are filled with robed masked Lords and Ladies, though notably the men outnumber the women ten to one.

My eyes dart about, anxious to see if my grandfather is here, if my aunt is here. Would I even recognise them if I did see them? No, there are too many bodies, too many golden faces. This place feels macabre, it feels unworldly.

Conrad leads us up, past row after row. It’s clear he wants to be as far from everyone as he can without attracting attention. We take our place, practically in the rafters, and yet we have a perfect view of the stage. Every seat, every row, it’s all been placed to ensure everyone present can see what is happening.

There’s a crucifix, a massive one, laid out in the centre. They must have had to roll the thing in, because it looks like it’s made of granite or some other dark polished stone. I stare at the thing, half in awe, half in terror.

Conrad places his hand on my thigh, and I swear I almost hit the roof with how high I jump.

His fingers squeeze just enough to keep me in place. As if I had any thoughts of getting up, of drawing attention to myself.

Within seconds, twelve men walk out. They’re wearing red robes, all hooded and masked, and they surround the crucifix, six on each side. I know what they are, what they represent; the twelve apostles. They’re here to pass judgement. They’re here to pass sentencing.

A man is then dragged from what must be the crypt. His knees brush the floor as he tries to gain some footing, but he doesn’t manage it. He’s

shouting, swearing. A hush of noise reverberates through the crowd as he's manhandled onto the stone and locked into place by the iron cuffs.

"Do you understand?" Conrad whispers into my ear.

I shake my head, unable to tear my eyes away from the figure beneath me.

"He broke the rules. He betrayed the Brethren. Now, he will be punished."

I frown in confusion, because my understanding was everyone who committed a sin went to Oblivion. Evidently that's not the case.

Perhaps Conrad realises where my head is at, perhaps he's just looking to taunt me more.

His lips curl and he tilts his head, murmuring into my ear. "Some crimes are too big to be ignored. Some crimes demand a greater sentence."

A greater sentence than being a life-long sex slave? I shudder, shutting my eyes, wondering what this man could have possibly done to be so publicly humiliated.

One of the red cloaks starts chanting, a Gregorian chant that echoes around off the cold carved stone.

Then another steps forward, throwing his hood back.

I let out a gasp as I realise who it is; Magnus, Conrad's older brother.

As the other men start joining in the chanting, Magnus leans down to whisper into the condemned man's ear. Clearly, whatever he says is not meant for us, but the man starts jerking against his bindings, fighting harder.

*Is he playing this role because he's a Reaper, or is this because he's running for Chapter Lord?*

I don't know enough about our traditions to understand what this is. My grandfather kept me ignorant, just as most Brethren Lords keep their children ignorant. Until we are married and blessed, we aren't permitted to know any of the finer details.

"It's a lie." The man starts yelling. "I didn't do it. This is a conspiracy, they're trying to silence us..." Before he can finish that sentence one of the apostles moves, quick as a flash, and rams something into the man's mouth, silencing those words or at least, turning them into inconsequential sounds.

I want to ask what he's done. What crime was so great that he ended up here.

Of course, the tape over my mouth doesn't allow that but then, I'm not sure I would want to know. Part of the safety of the Brethren is not

knowing. Knowledge is a crime; knowledge gets you condemned. Ignorance is bliss. Ignorance keeps you alive.

It's how it's always been. How they've ruled. The Chapter Lords keep their power by ensuring the rest of us don't get any silly ideas, don't have any temptation.

The eleven other red robes circle the man while Magnus stays perfectly still, only now he's holding a gold dagger in his hand. Even from this distance it looks sharp as hell.

"We, the twelve, will give you absolution. We, the twelve, will save your immortal soul." The others chant.

I draw in a sharp breath as Magnus starts slicing away. Tiny pieces. Small cuts. Taking his time to really carve him up.

The scene is horrific. All of us watching on sit silently.

It takes me a second to register where Conrad's hand is, that it's moved. My head turns sharply, and I stare at him in horror. My robes shift as he moves closer and closer to my core.

"Spread your legs." He says, loud enough that I can hear.

I shake my head. Not a fucking chance.

His snarl sets my heart racing and within seconds, his other hand is wrapped around my throat.

"Do you not get it?" He hisses. "Do you not see? I have total power here, total control. You're my puppet, my plaything. All I have to do is raise my voice, let them know of your presence and they'll have you strapped to that crucifix and be fucking the living daylights out of you."

He won't do that, I know he won't. I'm worth too much to him. He's too obsessed to ever let another man near me, and yet as he yanks me around, I'm petrified all the same. How well do I truly know him? How well do I understand my monster? If I were pregnant, I'd be of more value, but he could just as easily cast me aside and marry another. I'm only worth something while he decides I have value.

"Spread your fucking legs." He snarls.

My body shakes, and my stomach turns but I do it, I give in. I give my abuser what he wants, playing once more into his hands.

His fingers probe my entrance, and he lets out a deep groan against my throat. "You're dripping, Doll." He says. "I think you get off on the violence, don't you? I think you're enjoying yourself after all."

I'm not. I'm not wet, I can feel I'm not. And I'm certainly not aroused.

He forces two fingers into me, forcing them as deep as they can go and a whimper escapes my lips despite the tape.

As he drags them out, he holds them up in front of my face. "Little slut," He says, full of satisfaction. I can see by the way the light hits them that it's covered in my juices, and yet I don't understand how. "I think you want this more than me." He continues. "You want me to play with you. You want all these Lords here to watch as I make you come."

No. No, I don't want that. I don't.

His left hand grabs my throat, holding me in place, pinning me beside him and his right hand penetrates me again.

"That's it," He groans, "Take my fingers, take it all,"

The tape smothers my cries.

I know this is a powerplay, I know he's doing this to prove a point. To show that he has total control over me, over my life.

My tears stream down my face, and my body seems to lock up as every cell inside me protests. My ribs feel like agony from the pressure of how I'm held against my husband.

What will the other Lords do if they notice? Will they say anything? My fear escalates as Conrad pulls the robes up further, exposing my legs, exposing my entire lower half.

No.

Nooo.

"You're going to show the world how much you enjoy this." He states. "You're going to let anyone who dares to look at you see that your cunt is only for my hands, my cock, my pleasure."

My feet kick out, and my body jerks more.

I can hear the pitiful cries of the man still being tortured below, and part of me wonders who right now is suffering the greater punishment? Surely it would be better to be shackled to a cross, to have my flesh cut off, inch by inch from my body, than be forced to endure what I currently am.

And all the while, Conrad's fingers thrust in and out of me. They torture me, they work away, trying to make me submit to my husband's will. Only, I won't. I refuse to.

I shake my head, biting my tongue painfully hard.

The sound of my own breathing, of my heart slamming into my chest and Conrad's obscene words fill my ears. I know I'm getting louder, that

I'm making more noise beneath the tape but it's not sounds of pleasure. It's not.

"You will come," He growls. "You're my wife, you will come right here because defying me, is defying God..."

I know that too, I know that my behaviour is a sin. That fighting him is technically a sin. But how can I obey a man such as him? How can I switch off my hate, and my disgust?

"Do you not understand? I have all the power here, I can do what I like to you so it's pointless to fight me, because all it will result in is your pain..."

Tears stream down my face as my legs visibly shake. Conrad is now finger fucking me so voraciously that I'm worried he's going to start doing some serious damage to my insides.

And then the men around us start moving, start leaving.

Conrad freezes, looking around before he snarls and withdraws his hands. "Fine," He mutters, "We'll do this a different way then."

He shoves the robes down, covering me back up and then he's dragging me out, dragging me away, clearly anxious to be gone, as if he doesn't want anyone to spot us.

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# CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT



*Brynn*

We drive back to Conrad's home so fast that I have to grip the handle on the door to stop myself from slamming into it.

When we pull up to the house he practically jumps out, dragging me inside, ripping the robes from my body and tossing them behind us.

The cold air hits me, and shame heats my face as I'm taken past servant after servant. Not that they're looking at me. No, they know better than that.

"I'm going to teach you." Conrad says, pulling me along with a look that makes him seem half manic. "You're going to learn."

*Teach me what? What the fuck is he talking about?*

*My body trembles at the thought of another 'lesson' from him. My face is still bruised, and one of my eyes is still swollen shut. My legs barely function properly, and I feel like a newborn creature that hasn't learned how to walk.*

He all but drags me into a room. It's big, but relatively sparse. There's a bed, a TV, and only one sideboard. It feels like a panic room. The walls are lacking all the finery that the rest of this house displays, and that makes me pause. Where the fuck are we? It can't be a holding cell, there wouldn't be this much furniture. But what else is it?

"Lay down." He orders.

I turn, giving him an alarmed look and he just clicks his fingers, expecting me to be obedient.

When he realises I won't, he picks me up and tosses me onto the bed. As I bounce on the mattress he grabs my ankles, securing them against the frame with cold metal chains.

"What are you doing?" I scream.

He ignores me, ignores my hands too as I try to slap him, and he binds them up so that I'm spread eagled.

Leaning down, he plants what could almost be a chaste kiss to my lips. As if he can't contain himself, he runs his hands over my body, over my breasts. I shut my eyes, praying that whatever the fuck this is, it passes quickly.

When the bed moves enough to tell me he's gotten back up, I look around and he's there, holding something up.

"What, what is that?" I shouldn't ask. It shouldn't matter. I already know that whatever the fuck it is, he's going to use it on me.

His lips curl. "It's a toy. A sex toy."

"But, but those are forbidden." I state. The Brethren are very implicit about what and what is not allowed and things like that? Toys and such, are a sin. To use them is blasphemous. To use them is to anger God.

He chuckles as if I'm a stupid little girl who knows nothing. "We only teach those things so you girls remain chaste. No one wants a wife who's already fucked herself senseless with a dildo before he's even gotten her to the altar."

"But it's forbidden." I state again as he brings that thing nearer to me, and I start to panic even more.

I know it is. I've spent years at school having that fact drilled into me.

"Relax, Brynn. Let your husband teach you what pleasure is."

That's forbidden too. Any form of female pleasure. Any form of female gratification. We're meant to be vessels. We're meant to be passive. We're

meant to take what our husbands give, purely for the purposes of bearing children.

The thing comes to life in his hands. It starts to vibrate, and I let out a gasp.

“Please don’t.” I beg. I don’t want it near me. I don’t want it touching me. I don’t want whatever this is.

He tuts, clearly growing frustrated. He pays me no heed and that bright pink thing is pushed against me, slid right up my pussy.

I freeze, hating the way it feels. Hating the way my body doesn’t exactly dislike it.

“It’s good, isn’t it?” Conrad says, staring at my face.

“It’s forbidden.” I repeat again.

He shakes his head, bringing it back down before circling it right at the very top where it’s even worse. Even better. Jesus Christ.

My legs lock up, my body seems to forget everything, and I shut my eyes to try and pretend that I’m not here. But I can’t shut that feeling out. I can’t shut out how good it is.

My whole body feels alive in a way that doesn’t even make sense.

“Your cunt likes this, Brynn.” He taunts. “Tell me, have you ever touched yourself?”

I can’t answer that. I can’t form words. I simply shake my head because again, we both know that is not permitted. Masturbation is another sin.

He laughs louder, more cruelly. “Fuck, you’re perfect. I’m gonna turn you into my perfect little doll. My perfect little wife.”

“I don’t want that.” I gasp.

He presses that thing in and I gasp, losing myself once more in that hateful pleasure.

My entire core seems to hunger for it, seems to beg for it. I can’t think. I can’t breathe.

“You will, Brynn. You’re going to come for me. Right now, you’re going to come for your husband and once you do, you’ll want to do it again. You’ll want to keep doing it. You’ll want me here, every minute of every day. Touching you, teasing you, fucking you until you can’t even think straight.”

No. I don’t want to. I don’t... all my desperate, panicked thoughts turn to mush. All his fancy words and nasty taunts, all of it seems to fizzle out as my head explodes.

I scream. I arch my back as something intangible, something incredible takes me. Just as I'm desperately trying to catch my breath Conrad is there, sliding his dick into me, groaning about how wet I am.

For the first time, it doesn't hurt. Or at least it doesn't hurt as much. He's still massive, and I'm still brutalised from all his previous abuse. But as he thrusts into me, I can feel it. I'm slick, moisturised even.

He curls his arms up beneath where mine are still strung up, and while he's propped on his elbows, he starts fucking me. He starts telling me what a good girl I am, what a good wife I'm being. How if I behave, he'll make me orgasm again. As if I'd want that, as if I'd welcome him forcing me to sin further.

His dick slides in and out, and to my horror a moan escapes my lips. I don't want to make that sound. I don't want to enjoy any second of this.

"Fuck, Brynn," He groans, "You're doing so good. You're so perfect, so fucking perfect."

Tears roll down my cheeks. I don't want to be perfect either. I think right now I'd take his fists, take his anger, rather than have to face what he's making of me.

It feels too good. It feels too nice.

He picks up pace and I don't know when but he puts his hand between us, slides it right there, touching that awful incredible part that makes me lose all control.

"You want to come, wife?" He asks.

No.

Yes.

Nooo.

I can't do it. I can't say those words. I can't want that. I'm not going to give in that damned easily. I've barely even put up a fight, and already he's beating me.

He starts massaging, manipulating my body and the last of my rational thoughts leave me. I shut my eyes, clench my fists, but it's too late. It's all too damned late.

He's still fucking me but it feels different now, more intense. Like he's trying to hit some spot inside me.

I CAN'T DO THIS. I CAN'T...

I scream. I thrash, my wrists pull at the bindings and I can feel my skin tear, but it doesn't hold me down. Nothing holds me down.

Something cataclysmic, something euphoric explodes in my head. My body moves on instinct. I writhe, and I moan, and I become some creature possessed. Pleasure overrides everything, every thought, every breath.

And then it stops. All of it stops.

I slump back with his body on me, in me. I can taste his scent. I can feel how horrifically strong this man is. I try to get my breath, and I practically choke on it.

I can feel his come inside me, I can feel it collecting there.

As he slides out, his lips are pulled into a devilishly attractive grin and I hate the fact that out of everything, I still see his beauty. How can a man as evil as he is, even be beautiful?

He leans down, catching my mouth and I do my best not to react, not to kiss him back.

He runs his hands over my breasts, admiring them the way one does a precious work of art, and then he pulls himself out of me and gets up.

It's hard not to squirm, not to flinch. I'm still laid here, spread eagle and instead of letting me go now that he's gotten what he wants he just stands there, right between my legs. Watching me, watching how *he* is leaking out of me.

"Fuck," He groans, pulling out his phone as he snaps a picture while I can do nothing to stop him.

"Please uncher-chain me." I beg. "You got what you wanted."

Only, I can see from his expression that he clearly hasn't. God, what more does he want from this? What more is he going to do?

He turns around, fiddles with the TV and it flickers to life, before he's changing the channel and then the most explicit, graphic scene is right there, displayed in ultra-HD.

"You're going to stay here, Doll." Conrad says. "Stay here and watch."

I blink, wondering if I've misheard him. Surely not. Surely... my eyes dart back to the screen. To where a naked woman is there, with a cock in her mouth and another one in her pussy. And she's grunting, groaning, while the sound of their sweaty flesh slapping against each other seems to echo far more than it should.

I can't do that. I can't.

Just the noises alone are already messing with my head, doing things that make me feel disgusted with myself.

He chuckles, stepping back, looking every inch the very devil come to taint my soul and damn me to hell.

“It’s time you learned. Time you realised that your body is designed to give and receive pleasure.”

“Please...” I shake my head more, shut my eyes, refusing to watch but I can still hear the sounds.

*Is that what sex is? Is that how it's meant to sound?*

Conrad walks up to me, slapping my face to get my attention. “You will watch, you will watch it all. You will obey me.”

And then he walks out, leaving me there. Tied up, spread-eagled, and utterly appalled at the way my body seems to be reacting to the vision in front of me.

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# CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE



*Conrad*

I leave her there. Bound. Chained. Like a literal fuck doll.

She pisses the bed. Defecates in it too and I have the maids clean it up, clean her up.

And all the while, those videos play on and on.

I know she tries to resist, tries to look away. I can see the way she fights from the surveillance camera I put up. Like I'd leave her all alone and defenceless like that without taking precautions.

Every day I walk in, dress her up, and then fuck her. For a week she pleads, she begs, she tries to convince me that I can let her go, but I'm not so stupid as to fall for it.

And besides, she doesn't understand what is happening. She doesn't get what this is.

That I'm training her. Just as I would a new slave for Oblivion.

I'll get her body craving sex, I'll get her mind obsessing about it. I'll have her so turned on and desperate for it that soon enough she'll be the one riding me, fucking me, crying out for me to fill her up and breed her.

My cock hardens.

My lips pull into a smirk. God, I can't wait for that. I can't wait for her to lie back, spread her legs and show me her pretty little cunt while she's gagging for me to fill it.

My hand tightens on the bag as I reach the door.

This morning, I left her full. I left her well-fucked, but I also left one hand untied.

She thinks it was a mistake. An oversight on my part.

But I wanted to test her, to see if she was ready.

And when I'd logged on, when I'd seen her hand, seen what she was doing, then I knew I was finally making progress.

*Will she be touching herself now? Alleviating that awful ache?*

The door is silent as I push it open, but there's a sharp intake of air all the same.

Her eyes dart to mine. Fear or arousal, either could explain why her pupils are so blown.

Her legs are splayed, her cunt is glistening. And her right hand, it's frozen, close enough to have been at the gates of heaven.

"Were you touching yourself?" I ask.

She whimpers, shaking her head.

"It's okay if you were."

She shakes more violently. The lace of her bra flutters with the movement and where it's pulled up, pushed up over her breasts, I wonder if it tickles.

I drop the bag, pausing for a moment. God, she's a work of art. All those bruises are fading, her eyes are back to their beautiful, healed state. Her skin is looking a little pale, but then, she's not seen the sun in almost a week now. Maybe when she's good, when she's behaving, I'll take her for a walk. I'll put a pretty little leash around her neck, and I'll parade her through my grounds like a dog.

"I brought you a new present." I say.

She takes in a sharp intake of breath while I lean down and pull the outfit free, holding it up.

"No..."

The word escapes her like a gasp, desperate to get free. But there's no escape from me. No reprieve.

I meet her eyes and decide not to respond. After all, it makes no difference if she wants this or not. She's mine to do with as I please, and I'm starting to realise how much I enjoy playing with her.

I lay the silk down on the bed. I know she was washed earlier, so I don't have to worry about any undesirable discoveries as I peel off the old lingerie. Even though she's in crotchless panties, there's still a string of her arousal stuck to the side and I lift it up, giving it a good sniff while she whimpers and turns her face away.

"You smell delicious." I state.

I can see the way she grimaces more, as if she wants to disagree. I let out a tut, clambering closer to her and shove the soiled underwear into her mouth.

"Taste it." I snarl. "Taste how wet you got, how turned on you got. This is what your cunt will do every time you see me, this is what your body will do. It'll become an impulse. A need. You'll look at me and you'll salivate, do you hear me?"

She shouts back a reply, but the black lace swallows it up.

I roll my eyes before turning my attention to the rest of her.

She tries to make herself a dead weight as I roll her body far enough to unclasp the bra. Her breasts bounce, her nipples look so pretty and pink and I lean down, planting a tender kiss on her right one.

She lets out a growl that could be a moan.

My lips curl. I know she's not begging me to continue, but in my head, that's what I'm telling myself this is. Her getting so desperate and needy from watching all that porn that the only thing that will fix her is my cock buried so deep in her that she can't think straight.

"All in good time." I murmur.

I won't let her distract me.

I force myself off the bed and grab the bag again, tipping the contents onto the duvet.

With the hairbrush I take my time, easing out the knots, making her hair lay perfectly on either side like a princess. She shuts her eyes, probably trying to pretend the rest isn't coming.

With the makeup, I carefully apply the foundation, the blush, and I add just enough mascara to make her eyes pop. She's difficult with the mascara; she refuses to open her eyes, and I have to smack her hard to get her to comply.

Once her face is made up, I then get the body lotion and start rubbing it into her skin. It gives it a nice hue, a nice glow. And it smells incredible.

One day soon, I'm going to sit here and watch as she does this herself, as she preps herself and makes herself all perfect and ready for me.

I massage it into her thighs, into her calves, giving her feet a nice bit of attention too. I painted her toenails the other day, so they won't need to be done for a little bit. She was bitch about that too, kept kicking her toes out so I smeared it a few times.

Once she's ready, I stand back and admire her for a moment, taking my phone out to snap a picture. It's another one for the wank bank, when I'm at work and she's here, getting herself all worked up and desperate for me.

I slip the new thong on, tying the sides so I don't have to unbind her feet. This pair is also crotchless, but the pretty pink shade makes her look even more doll-like than the black did.

The bra is more frilly. It has curly lace bits for the straps, and as I tie them in little bows at the top of her shoulders, I decide that I want this set in every single shade. The cups are exposed, cut out, like a nice little outline around her plump tits.

I flick her nipple, and she jerks enough to make me flick the other.

"Tell me, Brynn, are you wet enough for my cock, or do you need a bit of play first?"

She shakes her head violently from side to side, practically chewing at the dirty thong still stuffed into her pretty little mouth.

I let out a laugh, pulling out the vibrator. "Play time it is, then."

She snarls, throwing her head back and I make myself nice and comfy, sitting on my haunches between her thighs.

"Shall we see how many orgasms you can give me before you're ready enough to welcome your husband home?"

The thing buzzes to life. She stills enough to tell me she's mentally preparing for this.

Normally I like to plunge it in hard, to go for the shock value but today, I'm going to toy with her more.

I tease the head, focusing on her clit and her thigh muscles suddenly clench tight.

"You like that, Brynn? You like how your husband touches you?"

She doesn't reply beyond a sniff so I give her more pressure, waiting for the tell-tale sign of her body leaning into it.

And as I begin to circle I see the change, I see the way her cunt gets a little flushed.

“That’s a good girl.” I state. “A good little wife.”

I plunge the toy into her cunt. She yelps out in shock, and I pull it out before doing it again.

“Not ready yet, are we?” I state as I see the minuscule bit of her arousal smeared on the plastic.

I lower my mouth, lapping at her while I thrust the toy in and out. Christ, she tastes so good. She tastes like pure heaven.

She whimpers and cries, clearly trying to pretend like she doesn’t enjoy the feel of my tongue on her clit, but we both know that’s a lie. We both know she wants this just as much as I do.

When she’s nice and wet I lean up, undoing the ties and I flip her over, pulling her hips up. Her arse is pure perfection, her skin is so beautiful that I have to lean down and take a bite out of it.

My teeth leave delicious little marks behind and I’m half tempted to get it tattooed in, to start biting all over, to cover her entirely.

“Please,” She sobs and I know she’s asking me to be nice, to play nice. Only in my head, I pretend that’s not the case.

I lean down, taking her clit into my mouth and I bite there too; I bite hard enough that she bucks her head and she screams with everything in her lungs.

I know it hurts. I know it’s painful, but that’s the point. You don’t get pleasure without it. You don’t get one without the other.

“Ssssh,” I soothe, running my fingertips over the now damaged part.

I push my cock inside her. Her muscles are so tight, she’s wound up so much that it’s quite an effort, despite all my work with the toy. For a second I have to hold still, to keep still. I’m so close to just blowing my load from how she’s gripping me. God, she just feels so good.

“Are you ready?” I groan, once I’ve finally managed to compose myself. “Are you ready for your husband to use you?”

I don’t wait to hear her reply. I don’t give a fuck what she has to say about it anyway. I’m going to fuck her now because it’s what I want, what I need. I’m going to fuck her cunt until she’s crying, until she’s begging, until her little body can’t take another moment of it.

I reach forward, using her breasts as an anchor, slamming into her harder and harder with each thrust.

“You’re my fuck toy,” I groan, “My perfect little doll and soon, very fucking soon, you’re going to be fat with my child. I’m going to breed you, Brynn. I’m going to breed you over and over, until all you can do is lie on your back and leak out my come until you push out my sons one after another. Your body is going to look so beautiful, your stomach is going to swell so much it won’t ever go back down. And these breasts, Christ, these breasts. I’m going to suckle on these, I’m going to taste your milk and I’m going to bathe in it too.”

She shouts out, saying something stupid that earns her a sharp slap on her arse.

“My perfect wife,” I grin, pushing her face down, shoving her head into the pillow so I don’t have to listen to any more of her bullshit. “My perfect little fuck doll.”

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# CHAPTER THIRTY



*Brynn*

He lays there, half-collapsed on top of me, all fucking night.  
When he gets up I play dead, I play docile.  
He fucks me again, gently, almost lovingly, and then he gets dressed and heads off somewhere. Work, I guess.

The maids bring me food. They arrive ready to wash me down and they pause, confused when they see I'm no longer tied to the bed. I don't make a big deal of it, I don't say a word. What if they decide to lock me back up, chain me again?

I stand still, obedient as they scrub me down, as they spread my legs, and they shave me all over like I'm an invalid. I'm half tempted to grab the razor, but I don't stand a chance of getting out of this place even if I can overpower them.

When they leave, they switch the tv on to that awful channel, and then I hear the door lock so I know I can't get out.

That isn't going to stop me. Not this time.

The sounds of fucking fills the air and I narrow my eyes, trying to block it out.

There's a bathroom to the left and I search the space, but the window doesn't open and there's nothing of use whatsoever.

In the bedroom I try to undo the window, but that too is locked tight and won't budge.

I can't get out.

In the drawers there's instruments, sex toys, things I have no clue what they do, nor do I want to know.

For hours I just pace, covering my ears, trying to come up with some sort of plan but there is none. The maids come back with lunch and this time, because they know I'm not incapacitated, there's three of them. Two to bar the door, one to put the tray on the bed and pretty much run out, as if I'm contagious.

My mind flickers back to the maids in my home, how they treated me at the end, and it feels the same. I'm not a person in their eyes, I'm a problem.

I stare at the food, a club sandwich and chips. It's not exactly thrilling but I'm so hungry I wolf it down, practically licking up the crumbs too. The plate is paper, as if they were worried I'd smash a ceramic one and turn it into some sort of weapon.

I snarl, folding my arms, pacing the room again as I realise I can't get free, but I can get even.

The door opens. Conrad peeps through it as if he's expecting me to be there, splayed and ready like I'm a mindless slave now.

As he steps through I move quickly, bringing the lamp down on his head and it shatters into a million pieces like an explosion.

He groans, falling onto his face and I take the chance to drag him, to tie him, to make sure he can't fight back.

As he lays there, in that same defenceless position he's put me in so many times, all I can feel is anger. Sheer bloody fury.

"You bastard." I scream, slamming my bare foot into his side.

He looks around, and I see that smug fucking look on his face. As if this is a joke, as if this is some sick game we're playing.

"I didn't realise you wanted to be in charge, wife." He says, in that awful sexy tone.

I kick him again and he rolls over, landing on his side.

But the way he's looking at me... I want him to feel fear, I want him to understand. Does he see me as that little of a threat, is that it?

I storm over, not even thinking logically about this but he did it to me, he's raped me so many times. I grab the toy, the big one, the one that he hurts me the most with.

It's solid enough, and it represents a truncheon in my mind. I whack him around the head, the arms, beating him as hard as he can while I scream out my rage.

He groans and he takes it but still, I can hear the mirth in his voice, the amusement as he taunts me further, like the blows are nothing to him.

Maybe I'm the monster now. Maybe I'm becoming as fucked up as he is, because I'm suddenly clawing at his clothes, ripping his fancy suit off and I'm shoving that thing so hard up his arse he really does react. He jolts, his body locks up and finally, finally he snarls in actual pain.

"How do you like that?" I hiss into his ear. "Huh? You little slut, you want it harder?"

I yank it out and slam it in with all the strength I have.

He growls more, showing that he's not enjoying one moment of this and finally I feel like he's getting the point.

"Does it make you feel good, does it make you feel powerful? To hurt me, to rape me?"

I scream the words, thrusting in and out while my arm protests from how weak I've become. But I'm not stopping. I won't stop. I want him to feel it, I want him to understand. He's so happy to be the aggressor. I want him to feel weak and defenceless.

I want him to beg.

"You get off on hurting me." I spit. "You get off on inflicting pain, how does it feel to be on the receiving end?"

He doesn't say anything to that. He just lies there as if he's submitting to this abuse, but we both know that Conrad is not that person. He wouldn't just take this, he wouldn't just give up his dominance.

"How does it feel to beat up a girl half your size? Does it make you feel strong, huh? Does it make you feel like a man, is that it?"

I leave the toy buried in his arse, right up to the hilt. God, it must be in his bowels with how long the thing is and I start laying punches, slaps, using the last of my energy.

*I can't get out. I can't escape this. And soon, very soon, he's going to make me pay for this too.*

Tears start streaming down my face at that realisation.

Yeah, he will make me pay. But right now, I have the upper hand.

I slam my foot back into his ribs and his hand grabs it, locks around it, pulling me off balance. I land on my arse, hard.

As I look up, I can see the bindings are no longer tight, that he's pulling them free.

“Naughty, naughty Brynn.” He says, shaking his head with that smug look on his face.

I take a deep, shaky breath before I try to make a run for it. He grabs my ankle again, pulls me back and I land face-first on the carpet.

His one hand holds me in place, proving if nothing else, how much strength this man really has compared to my feeble body. Was he just letting me think I'd won? Letting me think I could hurt him, and all the while he was just biding his time?

“Did you enjoy it?” He whispers into my ear. “Did you enjoy being in charge for once?”

I whimper, curling my fists up into tight little balls. *Why am I always on the losing side? Why?*

He hauls me up, carries me across the room, and then yanks on a rope that looks like it's suspended from a beam.

My eyes widen as it drops down. As it dangles there, like a new form of torture I know I'm going to be forced to endure.

He's quick to grab it, to start wrapping me up, turning me, and then suspending me like I'm a fly caught in his trap.

The ropes cross my body. As I hang there, he ties them more intricately, knowing that now I can't do a thing to stop this.

“This is called Shibari,” Conrad says, like I give a fuck what its name is.

As he wraps it around so my legs are now bent and splayed, and my heart seems to stop. He ties each end off, before stepping back and admiring his handiwork.

“You look so good,” He says smugly. “Such a work of art.”

I hang my head, hating how helpless I am. Barely five minutes ago, I thought I had the upper hand, I thought for once that I could make a point. Now, I see how wrong I was.

He steps away, grabbing something before he comes back, running his hands up and down my exposed flesh.

“Such a perfect doll,” He states. “We should have done this sooner,”

“Please don’t,” I gasp. Whatever this is, I don’t want a part of it. I don’t...

My mind falters, my body freezes as he pours something cold, something very liquid all over my arse.

No, surely not. Surely, he wouldn’t. He’s obsessed with getting me pregnant. Why would he go there?

Something hard, something that feels unforgiving starts probing me. I know I’m pathetic, I know I brought this on myself but I start sobbing, shaking my head, silently begging now for a mercy that will not be granted.

“Seeing as you enjoyed this so much...” He shoves the toy into my arse, and I scream out as my body can do nothing but take it.

Jesus, it hurts. It hurts so much.

His grip on me is unrelenting. I can barely breathe.

“How about I fuck your arse with the toys from now on, huh? Keep your cunt for just my cock?”

Tears stream down my face. I want this to stop, I want everything to stop.

He pulls it out, and I can feel it dragging my insides. I can hear it, the sound of squelching.

He tuts as he looks at the thing, then comments about how next time he’ll prep me better, whatever that means. And then he’s thrusting it back, pushing it as far as it will go only this time, this time he turns it on.

Something deep inside me starts vibrating.

I hate that I like it, I hate that it actually feels good.

“There,” He mutters, running his hand along my arse cheek. “That feels nice, doesn’t it?”

Can he see? Can he see how my hips are jerking, how I’m slowly turning into such a horny, horrible, needy mess. How I’m a whore. His whore.

God, I’m ruined. Wretched.

There’s no coming back from this. No mercy. I know even now, God is judging this, judging me. This was a test, a chance to see if I’m worthy enough of going to heaven, and I’ve failed. I’ve failed so badly.

A sharp slap makes me hiss. Conrad then gives me another and another.

“I should beat your arse raw for that stunt,” He says. “I should make you bleed.”

I know he will too. I know he will hurt me now.

He spins me around, grabs hold of my face and shoves two fingers as far down my throat as they can go.

“Little slut,” He says, “I’ll give you a choice. Take my cock now, suck it like a good wife, or I’ll give you so many lashes you’ll need stitches to sew your skin back together,”

I know what my choice is. I mean, it’s obvious. He’s tipped the scales, hasn’t he? And besides, we both know I’m a coward.

He drags his hand away, a string of saliva trails down my chin and I wince with shame.

“Tell me, wife, which is it?”

“Your cock,” I whisper as my cheeks flame, as more shame than I could possibly imagine floods through me.

That thing is still there, in my arse, and I wonder if that is also affecting my head. If it’s fucking with it, overriding my senses as I desperately chase something forbidden, something sinful.

“Say it again. Beg me, beg me to be merciful,”

I hang my head for a second, hating how this has turned. How he’s now, once more proving all the power he has over me.

“Please,” I say, “Please give me your cock, please show me mercy,”

“Tell me how much you want it, how much you can’t wait to taste it...”

He’s a bastard, he’s an absolute bastard.

“I want it,” I reply, “I want your cock so much. Please, let me taste it. I need to taste it...”

Is that enough, is that enough fucking humiliation now? Maybe I should have gone for the beating after all. At least I’d be able to look myself in the face afterwards.

I hear the sound of his zipper. It’s not relief I feel, far from it, but the silver lining is that I won’t have to say any more degrading words now.

He pulls his dick out, holds it right in front of my face and then he pulls it back, slapping me across the cheek with it. It doesn’t hurt exactly, but it’s not pleasant. He does it again, and again.

“I’m not sure you deserve my cock,” He mutters. “After that stunt, I’m not sure you’ve even earned it...”

I know what he wants, it's so damned obvious. He thinks he's being clever, thinks he's playing me like I'm a fool.

I hate that I do it, but then, what choice do I have? The longer this goes on, the more humiliating this will be. I part my lips and stretch my tongue out, drawing it right across the tip of him like I'm desperate for every little bit. His precum hits my tongue. It tastes salty, but I know better than to grimace.

He slides himself in, pushes himself as far as he can, as if daring me to protest.

I can taste his sweat, I can taste *him*.

He takes a handful of my hair and then he starts bucking his hips, fucking my face slowly at first.

“Fuck, Brynn” He whispers, “Do you know how many times I’ve dreamed of this?”

I don’t know if those words are meant for me. They sound too soft, too human to be coming from my husband.

He’s big, I knew that but to have him in my mouth, down my throat? I start gagging, it’s hard not to. My tears stream, but he doesn’t relent. Part of me wonders if this is his plan. To kill me here, to have me literally suffocate on his cock.

He tightens his grip, thrusting more, setting a pace that is brutal.

“That’s it,” he groans. “That’s a good wife. I’ll humble you if I have to, I’ll break you if that’s what it takes. You’ll get so used to my cock down your throat that you won’t be able to function properly without it.”

I narrow my eyes, but I can’t make any reply. I guess that’s a good thing though, because my backtalk is half the problem. If I could learn to shut my mouth, to be obedient... no, I won’t do that. I won’t be that. I refuse to become that creature.

As he starts thrusting harder and harder, it becomes more difficult to breathe.

He grips my hair, practically yanking it out as he becomes that angry beast I’m getting used to seeing now. “Did it turn you on?” He snarls, “Did you enjoy being in charge? Did it make you feel good to have all that power over me?”

Yeah, it did. We both know that, but not for the reasons he’s trying to pretend. It wasn’t some sick sexual game we were playing.

He growls again, raising his hand, slapping me hard again on my arse.

I don't mean to scream, I don't mean to jerk but the shock makes me do it. My teeth snag against his cock and he laughs, the bastard laughs.

"You don't have the balls to do it," He taunts. "You wouldn't dare..."

And he's right, we both know he's right. As if I'd bite him.

He reaches down, grabbing that toy that's still buried in my arse and he starts fucking away, fucking me mercilessly like he wants me to come.

"Little bitch," He groans. "Little fucking bitch. I'll teach you, I'll fucking teach you."

He buries it inside me so aggressively that I scream. And then he's finally coming, finally growling out his release before he slaps me hard across the face again.

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# CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE



*Brynn*

**H**e left me there, tied up, suspended. I don't know how I managed to sleep, but I guess my body got so weak that I didn't have the energy to stay awake.

The next day he unties me, and watches as I literally fall off the thing and collapse in a heap, then he hog-ties me. My legs are bent over so my ankles and my wrists are bound up together. My arse, my pussy, all of the parts of me he enjoys the most are exposed.

He carries me, dumping me onto the bed. The weight of my own body makes it hard to breathe.

I think he's going to fuck me now, to keep me like this. Bound up and ready to receive him in whichever hole takes his fancy.

Only, he doesn't. He disappears off, then comes back with a bowl.

My eyes widen when I realise what he's doing. Normally it's the maids who wash me. Who shave me. It's humiliating enough for them to do it, but

to have Conrad up that close and personal... hell, who am I kidding? He's seen every inch of me, pretty much abused every bit he can lay a hand on. What difference does it make if he's the one shaving me?

But it does. In my desperate, twisted mind, this feels so much more humiliating to lay there, to lay still while he's running a blade over my most intimate parts. While he's prepping me for what will undoubtedly be another attempt to get me pregnant.

He's gentle at least, I can give him that. He doesn't cut me once.

When he presses his fingers to spread my arse cheeks widen, I protest, earning another hard slap.

Him shaving my arsehole is the worst. I thought him shaving my labia was bad, but this, it's indescribable. It only means one thing; that he's planning on fucking me *there* again.

My stomach churns at the thought. Anal sex is the most forbidden of all the sins. I know God won't forgive me for allowing myself to be used like that, for allowing myself to be continually used.

As he pours some lube onto my arse, I brace myself for it, for *him*. Something heavy, something metal is slipped in. It hurts for a moment, and then it's just more uncomfortable.

"You look so pretty," Conrad says, pushing on it, jolting it enough to make me feel it move inside.

I don't have a reply. I simply bury my head in the sheets and pray that I can just suffocate here, that I can have a massive heart attack and just go, just end it.

He leaves me there, bent over, held in the most uncomfortable of positions and he walks out, disappears again for what feels like forever. When he comes back, I know hours have passed. My body is literally shaking from the pressure of the position it's in.

He unties me without a comment then he pulls me to my feet, ignoring my whimpers of pain. Blood starts to flow back to my toes, to my fingers, to all the bits that went so horribly numb, and it's like tiny needles stabbing all over me.

As I stand there, trembling, he pulls my hair up into a high ponytail and then starts lacing something else around my body. It's lingerie, but nothing like what he's put me in before. This stuff is latex, with thumb width straps that he wraps around, holding my flesh in place. He scoops it around my breasts, forcing them up and out, into a weird position. He then brings it

down, across my stomach and around my back to where he loops it around both my thighs. When he gives it a good yank, all the slack disappears and with horror I can feel what it's doing to my arse; how it's spreading my cheeks, how it's exposing me.

I don't dare to question him, not with the look on his face, but he looks at me as if he's daring me to.

He takes something new, something leather, and he locks it in place around my neck.

It's a collar. He fucking collared me. It takes everything I have to bite my tongue, to hold back the hate I want to spew.

"So fucking pretty," He taunts before fixing what can only be a damned leash to the collar.

He's treating me like an animal. A fucking animal.

He gives it a yank and I whimper, moving my hands to try to help stop my neck from literally snapping in half.

"We're going on a trip," He says.

I swear the bottom of my stomach drops out. I don't want to go. I don't want to leave this place. It's bad enough here, where the hell would he be taking me anyway?

And then it hits me; we're going to the one place that is safe for him. The one other place where Conrad can do anything he wants without consequence.



#### MY LEGS TREMBLE AS CONRAD PULLS ME FROM THE CAR.

The entire journey, we didn't speak a word. I just stared out, seeing everything I'd never be able to experience flashing by.

When we pull up, I stare at the massive building ahead while I try so hard not to puke.

Security waved us through and those blood red walls get closer and closer. The place is like a fortress. No, not a fortress, a prison.

"No," I gasp the word as the cold air swirls around me. I'm wearing a shirt, one of Conrad's. I know he's only let me cover myself so that none of the guards will see his wife naked.

But inside? I know that all changes, because why else would he have me more trussed up than a Sunday roast.

“Please...”

I don’t know why I’m begging, it’s not like he’s ever listened to me. But I know Conrad’s abuses are far better than what I will suffer within those walls.

“Come on, wife.” He says, yanking on the leash, dragging me along like an actual dog.

I don’t want to. I don’t want to go anywhere near that place.

The building might be soundproofed so you can’t hear it, but I swear there’s a ringing like the very pits of hell are beneath us.

And that is exactly what this place is, what it’s intended to be. Literal hell on earth.

The devil’s playground.

Somewhere the Lords can come and indulge their worst desires, and somewhere horrific enough to ensure the rest of us follow the rules without question.

“Conrad.”

He barely even looks at me, as I murmur his name. And he certainly doesn’t slow his pace.

I know I’m making a pitiful, whimpering sound as I’m dragged inside.

The temperature is barely warmer than outside, and my skin erupts in goosebumps. Conrad leads me into a room where there’s a small table and little else.

He picks up the masks from the top and places the black one on my face. It only really covers my eyes. My nose and lips peek out, but it’s enough to make me feel like I’m no longer a person, no longer human.

Conrad then strips off the shirt I’m wearing, exposing that awful latex strapping that covers me.

He tilts his head, thumbing my nipples, playing with my body while I shiver and whimper.

“None of that,” He says. “You’re not a slave here, wife.”

“I’m as good as,” I hiss back. Because that’s how I feel, what he’s made me into. His sex slave. His disgusting little toy.

His lips curl and he brushes his thumb over my core, as if he has a right to touch me. “Act like a slave and in here, they’ll treat you like one. Act like

a Master, a Lord, and well..." His thumb pushes into me, and it's almost lazily that he thrusts.

I gulp, already knowing that whatever the fuck he has planned, today is going to be especially bad.

But there is something telling in what he just said. Apparently, he's not here to wash his hands of me, to hand me over. No, I'm not coming here to serve a sentence. I'm coming here as his wife – though I'm not sure that makes it any better.

He pulls his hand away, sucking the digit like it's now covered in the finest of sauces. Then he undoes his tie, unbuttons his shirt and removes his clothes. He places them neatly onto the table, and a servant who I barely noticed steps out from the shadows and begins folding them so they won't crease. He then picks up some long black robes, throwing them over his shoulders like he's some sort of Roman god in a fancy tunic, and he places his own mask over his face. His too is black, and it also leaves his nose and mouth free.

He's wearing nothing else. All his tattoos, all those forbidden pieces of art are on display, like it doesn't even matter that he broke those rules. His impressive body is practically glowing in the soft lighting and his dick hangs down, semi-hard while I do everything I can to ignore it.

He grabs the leash around my neck, giving it such a hard yank that I fall to my knees.

"Let's go," He says, striding off.

I try to stand, I try to get up but as I do it, he turns and uses the end not attached to me to whip me around the head.

"Get back on your knees." He states.

I blink up at him. What the fuck? He said I'm to act like a Master here, and yet he wants me to what, to crawl?

He crouches down, cupping my cheek and his eyes glisten with amusement. "You're not a slave today, wife. But you are still my pet. My toy. You'll crawl on your knees, you'll cry and you'll beg. You'll do whatever I want, because that will give me pleasure. Do you understand?"

I gulp, and bile turns in my stomach. The floor is hard, cold, unforgiving. There's some plastic surface covering it, which no doubt makes it nice to wipe clean for hygiene reasons. There's a faint smell of bleach here. Did they have to scrub this place down, is that a regular thing? Washing away the blood, and the other bodily fluids?

I shudder with revulsion, and Conrad gives my leash another sharp tug to get my attention back.

“Crawl.” He orders before he starts walking off again.

I try to keep up. I really do.

My hands and knees can’t move fast enough as that leather around my neck tugs and tugs.

I can’t look up or around, I’m too humiliated by this entire thing. We pass by enough people to be more than aware that I’m on display here.

My breasts hang down, straining against the latex. My stomach is mercifully held flat, but my lower half...shame heats my cheeks as I realise that all of me, all of my pussy and my arse and my most intimate areas are visible for anyone to gawp at.

My hair hangs down over my left shoulder, and a few strands end up stuck against my lips.

I wonder what he thinks, what he feels. Is he enjoying this power play? This humiliation? I bet he is. I bet he spent all day planning this, planning how to make me pay for what I did to him.

As we enter a huge, cavernous hall he stops. I take the moment to try to get my breath back. My arms are shaking, my knees feel bruised.

“Do you see them?” He asks.

I don’t want to look up, I don’t want to see whoever is there, but I know he will hurt me more if I don’t. I lift my head, and what I see renders me utterly speechless.

“Wha-wha-what are they?” I stammer.

It’s clear what they are. I just can’t process them.

Skulls seem to line every inch of the walls. They’re on little plinths, all neatly on display. There must be hundreds and thousands of them, all circling us, all leering back. Some are still rotting down, some have fine golden lines trailing all over them as if they’ve been shattered and then glued back together.

But some are literally gilded. They glow gold in the candlelight, making them even more eerie.

In the very centre there’s a great column. All around it, these skulls are jewel encrusted. With neat little inscriptions as if these ones are worth more than all the others.

“Lifers.” Conrad says beside me.

“Whaar?”

He turns his head, meeting my gaze and this time, there's no amusement in his eyes, just that harsh brutal menace. "Those who serve for life are immortalised here." He states.

This isn't immortalisation. This is subjugation. They're keeping them as objects, even beyond the grave.

"Why, why are some gold and some..." my voice trails off as I decide I don't actually want to know the answer.

"They did well." Conrad explains. "They learned their place, served their master's loyally."

I blink back, then stare at a skull near us that is literally rotting. The eyes are gone, but there's a tendril of greying hair coming down from the top of the head.

"They didn't." Conrad says right in my ear, answering my unspoken question.

I pull my face away from him, fighting the rising bile. I can practically taste the smell of that flesh on my tongue.

Conrad grabs my face, dragging me a few metres until we're right up by the ornate column. "That's where we will be." He says.

"What?" I gasp. What the fuck is he talking about?

"The Blakes." He says pointedly. "My family. We all serve the Brethren. Some of us through choice, some of us through action, and some through force. When we die, we two will remain here, we Blake's never leave Oblivion."

I blink back in horror. Maybe it would be better to be cast aside after all. At least if I'm no longer a Blake, then I won't be put on display. But I doubt Conrad would do me the generosity of a nice grave.

He lifts his arm, pointing to a particularly fancy skull, one with huge rubies for eyes. "My mother." He says with a hint of what could be love, as if he is capable of feeling such an emotion.

But I stare at her, at what remains of her. I know little about his parents, only what my grandfather and my aunt talked about. I know they died when Magnus was fifteen, that Magnus brought Conrad and their younger brother up while somehow managing to keep hold of Oblivion and all the family wealth. I know Devin is off on some mission for the Brethren that no one seems to know anything about.

But their mother, looking at her, at her skull. Was she happy? Was she a good parent, a loving one? Did she and her husband actually want to marry,

or was she forced into it too? Is that why her son is the way he is? Did he learn that from his father, did he witness that firsthand?

I narrow my eyes, wondering what brutality that woman lived through, because at the end of the day she was a Brethren Lady, and that means only one thing, doesn't it?

"One day, we too will be up there. Side by side. Immortalised, just like my ancestors," He states.

My face must show my horror. My face must show exactly what I'm thinking.

He grabs my chin, raising it so I have to look at him full on. "Do you understand what I'm giving you, what you now have? We are Gods here, you and I. And we can sit here, on our thrones, and rule this place like royalty."

Royalty? I don't want to be a royal, I don't want to ever step foot here again. My eyes cast about, over his shoulder, at all those awful skulls that are leering back at me. Is this how Persephone felt? Is this what she saw? At least she loved Hades, I don't even have that. No, her story would be far less romantic if there wasn't a happy ending to it.

"What are you thinking?" Conrad asks.

I shake my head, too fearful to articulate any of it.

Clearly, that pisses him off because he suddenly loses all interest in this 'show and tell' thing and drags me on, moving through the hall as if it no longer represents a mausoleum for his ancestors.



## SEX.

All around us.

That's all I can hear.

Moaning, groaning and fucking.

The sound of bodies heaving and flesh slapping against flesh.

And the weeping, the crying – I hear that too. I hear as it rings out, as it echoes through this cursed place, as it sings like a melody of horror and depravity.

I want to cover my ears, to cover my eyes too. Only, I can't. I'm still forced to crawl beside my husband like a damned pet.

My hands slip and slide as the floor goes from the clean washed surface to one of grime, sweat and something infinitely worse.

As we reach another great hall I hold my breath, wondering if this is where Conrad intends to 'play'.

A man strides up to him and Conrad narrows his eyes, clearly pissed at being disturbed.

"You brother..." The man continues, and my husband curses before dropping the leash.

"You even think of moving." He threatens me before walking off to the side where they start conversing quickly, as if something awful has happened.

I sit back, rubbing my palms, trying to massage the pain out of them.

In front of me, six women are brought in, all chained to one another. They keep their heads low, and beyond the iron they're completely naked. I stare in horror as they walk on like robots until they disappear beyond my view.

It feels like there's some sort of party, everywhere I look people are fucking. Some seem willing enough, others are definitely not.

One girl in a red mask is clearly putting up a fight. She starts screaming, lashing out and then she tries to run. A man grabs at her, and she goes sliding.

I don't know what makes me do it, what stupid thought gets into my head but I spring up, trying to catch her before she smashes her skull on a wooden bench.

As she recoils from my touch, I get a glimpse of her face and that scar on her lip, I know that scar.

"Clara?" I hiss.

She freezes, staring at me. There's a strand of her auburn hair now loose from the plait. I know it's her. I know it.

"Clara," I repeat again.

"Brynn?" She gasps. "Jesus, Brynn, what are you doing here? What?" She falls silent as a shadow covers us.

The man that had only seconds ago been assaulting her tries to pull her away and she moves, wrapping her arm around me, using me like a shield.

"Stay away from me!" She screams.

The man pauses, staring at me like he knows who I am, who my husband is and then he strolls off, leaving me with a sense of dread.

“What are you doing here?” I ask. What the fuck happened to put her in Oblivion?

“They sent me here, they arrested my father...”

I screw my face up. What the fuck? What did he do?

“They sold, they...” She trails off, her cheeks heating as she looks away. “They put me in an auction and now...” She shudders. “Why are you here? I thought you ran away, I thought you got away?”

I let out a bitter laugh. Is that what they all think? That I got lucky?

“Brynn.”

That voice, it echoes behind me, making my blood turn cold. He’s back, whatever the fuck took him away clearly wasn’t enough to keep him occupied for long.

Clara looks at Conrad, then at me and she takes a step back. “No, no,” she whispers.

Conrad’s lips turn into a smile. “Making friends, are we?” He says in a tone that tells me I’m in serious trouble.

“He, he took me, he was the one...” Clara’s words are silenced as Conrad sends her flying with a backhand.

I scream, trying to grab her and Conrad yanks me back, using that leash to keep me in place.

She lands in a heap, her mask now slightly ajar and she looks up at us. “He sold my virginity.” She snarls. “He had me brought here, he turned me into this...”

My heart slams into my chest. Conrad? Conrad did that to her? He made her into a slave for Oblivion.

I turn to face him, and it’s clear he’s not even denying it.

He tilts his head, cupping my cheek. “Kill or be killed, Doll. This bitch and her family were selling us out.”

“No, we weren’t.” Clara screams. “My dad is innocent, my mother is too.”

“Was.” Conrad corrects her. “Your mother didn’t make it through training, and your father made a good sacrifice for my brother’s cause. Seemed fitting, considering all the trouble he caused...”

I blink back, registering what he’s saying. That her dad was the man Magnus butchered, while Conrad was assaulting me.

Clara starts howling and Conrad looks around, jerking his head for a guard. Two burly men come over and haul her up by her arms.

“Please,” She begs, and I don’t know if she’s talking to me or to my husband. “I didn’t do anything...”

Conrad tuts, “You didn’t pay attention, did you? Didn’t learn your lessons very well.”

He jerks his head, and she starts kicking out as she’s dragged away.

“No,” I gasp and I’m pulled back, slamming into Conrad’s bare chest.

“You’re making a scene, doll. And not the kind of scene I envisioned.”

He murmurs into my ear.

“She’s my friend...” I state. “You can’t.”

“I can and I have. She is no longer the girl you know. She is the property of Oblivion. As the wife of a Blake, you need to understand what that means, what all of this means.”

I can feel my tears sliding down my cheeks. I don’t want to understand. I don’t want to even be here.

“Why am I here?” I whisper.

His spare hand comes up to massage my right beast. I arch my back trying to pull away from his touch but all that results in me being pressed closer against his body.

“Like I said, we’re going to play. This is all part of your conditioning.”

Conditioning. He’s treating me just like these slaves, just like another piece of property. If I give in, if I bend, what will I become? Will I lose all rational thought? Will I no longer question what this is, and simply accept each brutal thing he does without complaint?

“Don’t make this harder than it has to be,” He says before pushing me forward. My feet struggle to get any grip, but it makes little difference as we move out of this hall into a new space.

# CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO



*Conrad*

She's so soft. So kind.  
I need to change that about her. I need to break that.  
She needs to understand that our world is not soft or gentle, and that those who are get broken.

I don't want my doll broken. I want her to live, to thrive. I just need to broaden her horizons, make her realise that my way is best.

I'm almost grateful to her little friend for giving us this opportunity, for making herself such a useful lesson.

She clings to me as I drag her further into the darkness.  
I've been coming here to play since I was a teenager, since Magnus first allowed it. Of course he had strict rules to start with. But once I turned eighteen, he made sure I understood exactly what this place was, and what our duty as a Blake was.

It seemed stupid not to enjoy the fruits of our labour, considering we gave our blood to maintain it. I could walk through this place blindfolded.

We come to a stop in a small playroom. While I enjoyed showing my wife off, I don't like others to see her disobedience, and I know she's going to resist this. She's going to fight me every inch of the way.

As she sees the figures waiting, she takes a sharp intake of breath.

All of them are on their knees with their heads bowed, perfect examples of how a slave should greet their master.

Within seconds, the two guards bring a now bruised Clara in, and they force her to her knees beside the others. You can see where the livid bruising is streaking her arms. Well, that won't be the only damage the girl receives. It's a good thing she made such a nice price at auction, because her time at Oblivion is already coming to an end.

I release Brynn and she staggers, only just managing to stay on her feet.

"Each one of these represents a lesson." I state. My doll whimpers, shaking her head but I continue anyway. "You see, obedience is the currency of survival. You would not wish to upset the balance, would you?"

She doesn't reply beyond staring off at the slaves, as if she's already begging their forgiveness for what's about to happen.

I click my fingers and the first of them gets up, silently walking to us.

"What's your name?" I ask her.

"Sal, Master." She says in a monotone, emotionless voice. Yes, this one has been trained well. We give them new names when they enter here. After all, they have new lives, don't they?

I look at my wife, and she's staring back at me.

"I want you to beat her." I say, holding out a whip for her to take.

"Whaaat?" Brynn stammers.

"Beat her," I repeat.

She stares at the whip like she has no idea how to use it so I grab her hand, forcing her fingers around the handle.

"She, she hasn't done anything wrong," Brynn says.

I tut, growing impatient already. "That's not how this works. You don't have to break the rules to be punished here."

I take her arm, yanking it forcefully back and then I bring it down, bringing that nice little whip across the girl's chest, across her tits. She hisses, her nipples turn hard and there's a beautiful slash of red now.

"Why?" Brynn gasps. "Why do this?"

"Because..." I state, pulling her into my arms, holding her firmly so that her back is pressed against my chest and I have total control of her

movements. I can feel how she's trembling, but I can also feel how delicate, how soft her skin is. And those straps, those tight little straps criss crossing against her skin are such a tease. "In here, we are the Masters. We can do what we like. Act how we like, and nobody can do a thing to stop us."

"But why would you want to hurt someone?" She replies.

I let out a snarl, grabbing her arm, forcing her to bring that whip back down again. This time it catches the girl's face, catches her chin, leaving a livid bruise behind.

"Did you feel that?" I ask. "Did you feel how good it was?"

She shakes her head, and I lose what little patience I have left. I grab her hair, grab her ponytail and yank her head right back so her neck is at a near impossible angle.

"I know you enjoyed fucking me," I growl in her ear. "I saw it in your face. You liked the dominance, you liked being in charge, meting out your anger."

"I only liked it because it was you," she spits back, "because you hurt me first. It felt only fair to get back at you."

There it is. There's finally an admittance of truth.

"Kill or be killed. Rule or be ruled. Those are the terms we live by, Brynn," I state. "You either adjust to your new cage, or you'll die in it."

"I don't want to," She says. "I don't want to become what you are."

*It's too late for that, Doll, you're already in far too fucking deep to go back now.*

I haul her arm back up and this time, when I bring it down, I use my full strength.

Brynn screams, and it feels like we watch this moment in slow motion. Both of us caught. The leather lashes through the air, it strikes hard, and it not only slices through the slave's face, but it gets her eye, and it splits it. It sends blood splattering.

The girl screams, howling, falling to her knees, covering her face.

And in my arms, my precious little wife all but collapses.

I let her fall. I let her crumple and I stare down at her, seeing all her weakness, all her feebleness. Her family did her a great injustice by bringing her up as they did, by allowing her to hold onto such childish notions. Sure, it makes her malleable but now I'm having to do all the hard work to fix it.

I pull the remote for the collar out of my pocket and switch the tiny little black bit of plastic across so that it's now live. As I shift the button up, my beautiful wife starts screaming, clawing at her neck like she's rabid.

Her body jerks, her tits are electrified, and she kicks out like she's having a fit.

And then she stops. It all stops.

I hold it out, all but shoving it in her face.

"Did you think that collar was just to lead you around in?" I ask, scooping down to catch her face. "As pretty as you looked on all fours, I did have an ulterior motive,"

"Fuck you," She whispers, glaring back at me and that defiance, that anger, it goes right to my cock.

I'm half tempted to pull it out, to make her choke on it before we continue, but that's not the plan. That's not how this sort of conditioning works. Besides, she hasn't earned it yet, she hasn't earned my cock.

I jerk my head for the girl to be taken away. Two of the guards I personally selected move quickly, following my orders. She'll go down to the infirmary where they can see if her eye can be saved or not, though I doubt it.

As my gaze settles on the next slave, I curl my finger, beckoning them to me.

It's a man this time. I don't like the fact that he's naked, that my wife can see his flesh, but maybe she'll be less forgiving when it's not her own sex she's faced with. He stumbles as he comes to a stop and he falls to his knees, adopting that nice subservient pose we've instilled in them from the moment they arrived.

Brynn looks at him, then back at me, her eyes saying everything she's feeling.

"You're going to do it all this time," I state.

"Like her-hell I will," She spits back.

And that earns her another hit, another wave of pain. She screams out, spasming on the floor while I pull up a chair and take a seat.

As the pain subsides she just lies there, panting.

"You don't seem to get how this works," I say. "The entire purpose of these slaves' lives are to be conduits for our wants. They have no thoughts of their own, no desires, we've broken them down so all they think about is us, keeping us happy,"

“They’re human beings.” She retorts, “They’re pe-people.”

“No, they are not.” I laugh. “Not anymore. They forfeited those labels the minute they walked through these doors, the minute they offended the Brethren.”

She gulps, like she’s realised suddenly how futile her fighting is.

“Every person here is a criminal, a traitor. They broke the rules, they thought they were above the rules, and that is why they’re being punished.” I say, getting up, bending down to pull her back up to her feet. “Right now, Doll, you’re also breaking the rules...”

Her eyes widen, they fill with tears, and she shakes her head, “I haven’t.” She whispers.

“Poor little doll,” I mutter. You get yourself so worked up, so stressed, and it’s so very unnecessary. All you have to do is listen to me, to do what I say. Let your husband guide you with this. You’re overthinking it; you’re making this far more difficult than it needs to be.”

For a second I think those words actually sink in, I think she actually hears what I’m saying and believes it. But then she’s rearing back, clenching her fists, and she slams her right hand into my jaw so hard my teeth bite right into my lip.

“Fucking bitch.” I snarl, backhanding her, sending her flying before I compose myself, before I realise where we are. And who is watching.

I won’t be insulted; I won’t be disobeyed. Not by my own wife, not like this. Not in front of my men, not here, where I should reign fucking supreme.

“Fine,” I murmur, “You want to play hard, then I’ll play fucking hard too,” I kick my boot into her stomach, hearing that familiar scream as I make impact.

It’s not hard, not too hard anyway. I don’t want to break her, I just want to wind her, to make her remember who has the power here. As she curls up I squat down, grabbing her pretty little ponytail and I yank her head up by it.

In my right hand, I slip the vial out of my pocket and twist the lid off. I’d hoped we didn’t need to resort to this. I’d hoped that she’d be a good girl and wouldn’t need the additional help. I guess I was wrong.

“No...” She gasps as I force her lips to pucker up. Like she has any clue what this will do.

I pour the tiny amount of liquid onto her tongue then drop my hold, letting her head slam back onto the vinyl.

“Bastard,” She whispers, and that makes me smile.

It’s only a little alcohol. Pure alcohol. I didn’t want to risk anything stronger, but a little hit should loosen her up, should have her drunk enough to loosen her inhibitions, to lose those damn morals she’s sticking to.

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# CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE



*Brynn*

**M**y head spins.

As I lay here staring back up at him I can feel whatever that disgusting tasting liquid was, working through my body. I gulp, then gulp again.

I feel like I'm floating, and yet my body is so heavy.

I look down, checking that I've not suddenly grown wings, and my eyes widen as I realise how naked I am. How exposed I am.

My breasts are just there, on display, and so is my pussy.

I move my hand to cover myself and Conrad tutts.

“Don’t.” He says. “You’re beautiful, Brynn, don’t hide yourself when I’m enjoying the view so much.”

*He’s enjoying it? I shouldn’t blush, I shouldn’t.* This man is a monster. He’s the worst kind of human alive.

And yet I shift my leg, exposing myself more. God, what the fuck is wrong with me?

He tilts his head, staring where he has no right to look and then he tells me to get up, that we have training.

Training? I blink, glancing around and then it hits me where I am, where we are.

There's a naked man barely two metres from where I'm standing. He's bowed over like he's waiting for something to happen.

Conrad takes my arm, pulling me up. My legs are so shaky, so horribly unstable.

"I, I don't feel well," I stammer.

"You're doing fine." Conrad says dismissively and then he puts something heavy into my hand, something solid. Something sharp.

I stare at it, at the beauty, at the horror. It's a dagger, with an intricate handle that looks like someone spent far too much time making this object of death pretty.

Conrad places his hands on my shoulders, turning me around and I'm staring at that man, at that slave. He's older than me, but not so old. He must be in his late twenties, or early thirties.

"Where do you want to cut him?" Conrad whispers into my ear.

Cut? I blink back, wondering if I've misheard him?

"He's offended your wife, he's broken the rules. He has to be punished."

"Punished," I whisper. Conrad punished me, Conrad has hurt me, he has kicked and slapped and hit.

I tighten my grip around the dagger, and I wonder for the briefest of seconds if I had the time to drive it into his throat, to spill his blood the way he's spilled mine.

He glances down, his lips curling, "You want to try?" He asks mockingly, like he knows I'm just some silly little girl, and I don't stand a chance.

My anger flares. My pride does too, as much as that's worth.

I make a split decision, a reckless one. I swing my arm around, aiming for that vein that's pumping too prominently in his neck. He barely moves in response, but he blocks me so easily that it's a joke.

His hand snatches my wrist, and he holds it so tightly I think it might snap.

Snap.

I let out a laugh, a bitter one that turns manic. And then my husband is joining in, laughing with me as if I hadn't just tried to murder him.

God, did I really think I could do it? That I could kill him?

Tears stream down my face, and my head spins more and more.

Conrad turns me around again, roughly this time. "Imagine he is me," He whispers into my ear. "Imagine this man is your husband, that he's the one who took you, that he's the one who raped you..."

But he isn't. He doesn't even look like Conrad.

He shoves me forward, and I take one step before I almost fall over.

The slave looks at me, he lifts his head and those big brown eyes stare back at me, but they're expressionless, emotionless, just as my husband described. This man doesn't look human, he looks like a robot. A machine.

"He's not real," I murmur. "None of this is real."

"Go on," Conrad orders behind me.

I don't want to do it, I don't want to know what it feels like. I look down at the blade, and it's so sharp. I can't even imagine what it would feel like to have someone slicing your skin up, to just carve away chunks while you're sitting there all obedient like it's nothing.

My mind flashes back to that man, the one Magnus killed in the Cathedral. He didn't lie there obediently; he didn't take it. He screamed and he fought, but it did no good.

"Brynn," My husband growls, clearly growing frustrated.

I shake my head. No, I don't want to. I don't want...

Something hits me, something awful. It makes me crash to my knees, it makes my eyes stream, it makes my entire body lock up. I can't think. I can't breathe. I feel like every cell in my body has been set on fire.

It's something around my neck, something horrific. I claw at it, no longer holding that knife. My nails dig into my skin, I scratch and rip and I scream too. I scream so loud.

And then it stops. Everything goes silent for a second.

"The more you disobey me, the higher the shock." My husband states.

He holds out the remote, showing me where the slider is, how it's not even halfway. If he keeps going, surely he'll fry my insides?

I let out a whimper, feeling more helpless than ever.

"It's you or them, Doll." He says, "Either you get hurt, or they do."

Why? Why does it have to be like this?

My head spins again and I swear I almost vomit. I feel so drunk, so horribly drunk.

He bends down, picking the dagger up and he places it into my hand, then he's pushing me, forcing my body to move. With one quick slice, he slashes down the man's arm.

Blood beads, it pulls along the wound as the man bites his lip to hide any sound.

"There," Conrad says, "That wasn't so hard, was it?"

I narrow my eyes, staring at the trail of blood trickling down his bicep. I don't see the point to this, I don't even understand why we're here.

"Now you do it," Conrad orders, "Repeat what I did."

I open my mouth to argue and he holds the remote up, silently threatening me with it.

I don't have any choice. I don't...

I shut my eyes, lift my arm and move quickly, hoping that at least it will be over in one nasty, sharp action.

"And again," Conrad barks, barely giving me a second to collect myself.

I hate him, I hate that he's doing this. I hate that he's forcing this. I don't want to be whatever it is he's turning me into.

My lip trembles. I whisper how sorry I am, and I slice again. A small slice, one that's meant to appease.

"Deeper," Conrad snaps.

Like fuck I will. I don't look back, I just take the blade and make a snick, a tiny little cut on his thigh.

Conrad snarls, grabbing hold of me, grabbing my wrist while his other hand wraps around my throat, pinning my head back against his chest. "When I tell you to do something you will do it, do you hear me?" He growls into my ear.

"I can't," I sob. I can't do this. He can hurt me all he wants, but I can't be this person.

He snarls again, taking my hand and he starts cutting, slicing, hacking at the man who's now no longer hiding his pain. A man who's howling, who's holding his hands up like he's begging for mercy.

It's like Conrad turns into a monster, more of a monster as he shoves me aside. He shoves me hard and then he's pinning the man down as he unleashes all of his fury, his anger, every piece of his blackened soul. Blood sprays out, bits of flesh land on me and I scream, trying to move away. Only he grabs me, he shoves my face right into the mess.

“You will stay.” He spits. “You will stay right there.”

The fury in his eyes, the hate, fills me with more fear than I thought possible. I’m paralysed, petrified.

He turns back, hacking, cutting off one nipple and then the other.

His one hand holds the man down and he carves a great chasm through his abdomen, before he reaches further and hacks his dick off.

When he holds it up in front of my face, I freak out. I start screaming more, scrambling away.

“Where the fuck are you going?” He snarls, dragging me back by my ankle and forcing me to look at it. At him, at the man now bleeding profusely from so many wounds that I know he won’t survive.

“Please,” I gasp, “I don’t want to, I don’t want what this is...”

“You just don’t listen, do you?” Conrad says. “You just don’t get it. I’m making you stronger, wife, far stronger than you’ve ever been.”

I don’t want to be stronger. At least not like this, not the way he thinks.

I clench my fists, staring down as the man starts to jerk, as his body starts to move like he’s having a fit. He’s gasping, spluttering blood, and then he just stops. He stills. He stares out, stares right at me but I can see he’s gone. That he’s dead.

My heart thumps in my chest, and my tears stream down my face. He’s dead. He’s gone. Conrad killed him, and for what?

My husband lets go of me and I fall, landing on his body, landing in the blood and the horror. I scream, trying to get up. Conrad grabs hold of the awful leather thing strapped around me and he pulls me up by it, giving me a painful wedgie before he dumps me on the floor.

Right in front of Clara.

No.

No.

No, I won’t do it. I WON’T DO IT.

Clara stares back at me, her eyes just as wide, just as afraid as mine are.

Her mouth has been taped so she can’t speak. She’s being held in place by one of the guards because clearly, she won’t be obedient enough to take this abuse.

As I hear footsteps behind me, I know Conrad is there.

“We tried to train her,” Conrad states. “Your little friend here didn’t respond well to it. Usually, we can either break someone in within a few

weeks or we change tactics, we send them somewhere else, to someone else. Do you know where that is, Brynn?"

Like I could. I know nothing about this place except that it's straight out of a nightmare. Straight out of hell.

"We send them to the levels where they don't want sex, where they're not so vanilla in taste. Where they like other forms of entertainment, other forms of amusement."

I blink back, refusing to look at him, but I can't shut those words out. I can't shut out the taunt.

"She hasn't done anything to deserve this." I reply. "She's my age, she was in school with me..."

"She's a traitor, her family are traitors. And unfortunately for her, she's not high enough on the pecking order to warrant the effort of keeping her as a sex slave."

What does that mean? What the fuck is he even talking about?

"You're going to beat her, you're going to cut her, you're going to hurt her, Brynn. Do you understand? Because if you don't then I'll leave you here, leave you in this hell..."

I won't. I refuse. He can hurt me all he fucking wants, but I won't do that.

He drops a bat by my knees, and it makes such a thud as it bounces on the floor before it rolls into my leg, like it too is urging me on.

I reach down, picking it up and he must think that I've given in because he looks so triumphant. So fucking smug.

With all my strength I hurl it across the room, hurl it as the furthest wall.

Clara is my friend. I won't hurt her. I won't.

Pain rips through my body. I scream, hitting the floor but I don't feel it because I'm too overwhelmed by the sheer level of electricity pouring into me. It feels like my blood boils. Like someone has picked me up and thrown me onto a fire and I'm burning, I'm frying, I'm turning into ash.

When it stops this time, I'm physically wheezing. I have no idea how my heart doesn't give out, how I can take that much pain without passing out.

Conrad gets right into my face. "Are you going to behave now, wife?" He asks.

I'm a fool to do it. A complete fool.

But I spit back, I spit right in his face.

More electricity shocks me, and I swear I can smell the stench of my own flesh burning. That I'm cooking in my skin.

"I can do this all day," Conrad remarks, "But we both know you can't. Give in, Brynn, give in before you really hurt yourself."

I shake my head. I refuse again.

It hurts. It hurts too much.

I can't think. I can't breathe. I try to crawl, and another wave hits my body, making me spasm uncontrollably.

There's an awful whimpering, and I realise it's me making that sound.

"It's very fucking simple, Brynn." Conrad growls. "It's you or them. Either you hurt, or they do."

I hate him. I hate him.

And I hate myself for what I'm about to do.

My hand wavers, it shakes so violently as I pick up the blade he's laid right in front of me.

Clara makes a noise. She's clearly screaming behind that gag but I block out her words, block out her pleas.

We're all dead anyway, aren't we? We're all in hell already, so what difference does it make?

My tears stream as I realise this action condemns us both. But I shift forward, shift closer.

Behind me, I can feel the anticipation. I can feel how Conrad is already reacting, getting excited. He knows he's won, he knows he's beaten me in this.

Her screams hit my ears, making my skin erupt into goosebumps. I drive that knife into her throat, hoping that it's quick, that it's merciful. It's all we can wish for in this life, so in a way it feels like a blessing.

Her blood sprays out. It hits my face, hits my mouth. It's hot. It's like a rainfall, a shower, pouring over me. I clearly hit her main artery so I'm at least happy that I made it as fast of an ending as I could.

Clara sags, slumping onto the floor.

Beside me Conrad grasps my shoulders, planting a kiss on my cheek.

"There's my girl." He says, as if I should be proud of what I've done.

I can't look at Clara, I can't bear to see it. To see her blood. To see that wound. To see that vacant look in her eyes as she slowly dies.

I stare at my hands, I stare at my fingers, wondering if I hacked them off, would that be a fit atonement for my crimes?

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# CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR



*Conrad*

F inally, finally we are making progress.

I drag her up, drag her back through Oblivion, anxious to drive my point home.

By the time we get to the main hall, she's in an absolute state. She's sobbing, shaking, clearly distressed.

But this is a moment of triumph, not disappointment. Why is she crying? Why is she not thanking me for providing her with such a necessary lesson?

All around us it's like an orgy. I can see the bodies writhing, I can hear those beautiful sounds of flesh slapping against flesh.

As I pin her against me, I can feel all the blood trickling down her. It feels like a lubricant, and it makes her soft skin feel even better.

"You've been such a good girl," I state. "Such a good wife. You deserve a reward, don't you think?"

She shakes her head, whimpering like she understands exactly what I have in mind.

I force her down, force her to her knees and I throw my robe back, sinking down behind her. She has such a perfect arse and with it spread so well in those bindings, I can slide my cock right up the crease.

“Fuck,” I groan, making myself harder.

“Don’t, please, I’m begging you.” She stammers.

“Now, that’s not very considerate, is it?” I reply. “Here I am wanting to make you feel good, wanting to reward you.”

She shakes her head, right as I run my hand down her stomach and to her core.

“Please, not here, not now...” She begs.

“Nah, ah,” I say back, “Your body belongs to me so I can do with it as I like, and right now, I want this...”

She squirms, trying to get away and I’m quick to wrap my free hand around her throat to keep her in place.

Her cunt is so smooth from where I shaved it. It’s wet too, and it makes me wonder if it’s Clara’s blood that has trickled the whole way down.

I start running my fingers up and down, slowly feeling all of her labia. She grimaces like she’s not enjoying this, but we both know she’ll be coming soon enough.

As I turn her face, I order her to open her eyes. She’s watched enough porn on the big screen, it’s about time she saw it up close and personal. It’s time we took this step together. After all, I plan on bringing her back here many times. The two of us will become regulars, we’ll play here, we’ll fuck, and we’ll have fun for many years to come.

She gasps, clearly horrified at the threesome going on barely a metre from where I’ve got her pinned down.

There’s a girl being spit roasted. Her arse is up in the air, her hips held by one man and her mouth is being put to good use by another man who’s fucking her like he needs to come right that very second.

“Do you like it?” I ask, “Do you like seeing all of these people, fucking right here?”

She shakes her head. “It’s a sin,” She says.

I let out a laugh at that. My poor little wife, they really did teach her well at that school. Maybe I’ll have a word with Magnus once all of this is sorted. We clearly need to change up the curriculum, because these girls should be far more open minded than my wife is.

I plunge two gingers into her. Christ, she really is wet.

“Doll,” I taunt, “Your cunt is begging for me.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

I press hard into where her G-spot is and she jerks, her body tensing up immediately.

“You like this Brynn. You like me touching you, pleasuring you, showing you off where all these Lords can see. You want me to claim you here, don’t you? You want everyone to know you’re mine, that you’re off-limits.”

“No,” She cries, and it sounds more desperate, far more needy than she clearly intends.

“Fuck, you’re so perfect,” I groan, pulling her around, pulling that nice little plug out of her arse. Her hole is so pretty, just like the rest of her. I push my thumb in, taking my time to play and she whimpers more.

“Sssh now,” I mutter, “You’re going to come so hard that you’re going to be thanking me for the next week.”

And she will come, I’ll make sure of that.

I line myself up, push my cock in slowly, giving her arse time to adjust. I’ve never been one for this sort of thing. I much prefer a woman’s cunt but I know this is shaming her, I know from the way she reacted when I put that toy up her arsehole.

If I’d thought about it properly, I would have prepped her, would have cleaned her out but I’m not bothered by bodily fluids. Besides, you get used to that, used to all of it, here in Oblivion.

As I start thrusting in and out, her muscles relax, her body accepts me, welcomes me even.

“Fuck, you’re so good,” I whisper. Like it was a conscious thing. I plant a kiss on her back, then start pumping away into her cunt.

She’s getting wetter now, she’s definitely starting to squelch.

“Listen to yourself,” I say, “Listen to how wet you are. You’re fucking soaked, wife. Tell me how much you want this, tell me how much you want to come.”

“I don-don’t.” She sobs, but that’s a lie. We can both hear it, we can both hear how desperate she is. How her body wants to obey me, even if her mind is too stubborn to do so.

“It’s a si-sin,” She stammers, shaking her head.

“You just killed your friend, Brynn,” I reply, “There’s no coming back from that. You might as well embrace the fact that you’re bound for hell and just enjoy yourself.”

She wails, she sobs more, but as if those words are a catalyst, she combusts. She flails in my arms, coming so hard that her muscles squeeze my cock almost painfully.

“That’s it,” I groan, slamming harder into her arse, keeping that feeling going on and on. “Come on my fingers Brynn, come all over me.”

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# CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE



*Conrad*

I can still see it. Can still hear it. Her moans. The way she got off on it.

My little wife is a sadist, she just doesn't realise it yet.

My lips quirk as I think of how I'm going to continue to bring that part of her out, how I'm going to tease it out. Turn her into my little monster. She'll be the perfect match for me.

"You seem happy today, husband,"

That smile instantly dies. I scowl, looking at the witch now standing beside me.

"Don't call me that." I snarl as quietly as I can. I don't want to draw attention to us, not with so many damned beady little eyes around.

Giselle glances about, that fake smile still plastered on her face as she tucks her hand into my arm. "But you are my husband, it's predetermined." She says.

Her nails dig into my suit, I shrug to get her off and she digs in tighter.

We're at a rally. Nothing too big, but big enough that Magnus has demanded my presence. From the outside this race is meant to look like it's

all above board, but we know that the Esau are doing everything they can to swing it their way.

As if we'd let them. As if we, the Blakes, would simply roll over and give up.

"So, what is it that has you so content?" She purrs.

Now, that would be telling. I meet her gaze, so close to laughing in her heavily made-up face. The day she finds out what's really happened, she's going to hit the roof. As will Quinn. But by then my little wife will be pregnant, and no one will be able to do a thing to fight this.

I roll my eyes, ignoring the desperation in her voice.

"You know," she continues, "We need to start planning this thing, seeing as it's only a few months away."

Over my dead body. I clench my hands, trying not to react to the obvious tease in her voice.

"I want it in the Cathedral," She states, turning to face me full on. "I want everyone to be there and to witness as we consummate it."

An image of her, of my real wife spread out on the altar flashes before my eyes, and I feel the annoyance again that our wedding was in private. That I couldn't hold her up for everyone to know she was off-limits and untouchable.

"...seeing as your brother might be Chapter Lord, I think it's only fitting."

"Might?" I repeat. Like it's a maybe.

She smiles more, as if she's flirting. "It's not a done deal yet." She says, reaching up to straighten my tie, even though it's already perfectly straight.

"Don't touch me." I growl under my breath.

"No? But you could touch me," She says, battering her eyelids. "I haven't even seen you since..."

I know what she's alluding to. Who she's alluding to.

I shrug her off and go to get a drink, only the bitch follows me.

"I'd almost think something of it." She murmurs, taking her own glass and sipping it. "I'd almost think you were avoiding me. But why would that be?"

"Yes, why?" I reply, letting my sarcasm hang there.

She scans my face for a second. "Did you have something to do with her disappearance?"

"Excuse me?"

“Come on, the girl doesn’t have the brains to pull something like this off. She was too stupid to run away and not get caught. So, either she’s dead in a ditch and we haven’t found her, or she had help...”

“And you think I’m involved?” I reply.

She smirks. “You did seem to watch her so very much.”

“It beat looking at her aunt.” I snarl, not caring if she hears the hate in my voice or not.

“You think she was prettier than me?” She hisses.

I drag my eyes over her; seeing that heavily made-up face, the way she’s spent hours styling her hair and that dress, the way it clings to her body in a way that screams desperation, not seduction.

She takes in a long, deep, pissed off drag of air, and then turns on her ridiculously high heels and struts away.

“What the fuck was that about?”

I groan as my brother comes to stand beside me. How he managed to sneak up I don’t know, but it can’t be a good thing to have his undivided attention at this moment.

“Lovers tiff.” I mutter.

He raises his eyebrows looking at the figure still storming away.

“Where is she?” He asks.

“Who?”

“You know exactly who I’m talking about.”

Fuck, I hate that tone. I hate the way he still thinks he can parent me, even though we’re way fucking past that point in our lives. I turn to look at him, and he glares at me for a second.

“Oh no you didn’t.” He says, as if he can read on my face everything I’ve done over the last god knows how many weeks.

“Didn’t what?”

He grabs my shirt, pulling me in so that we’re nose to nose. Neither of us are particularly small men. “Tell me you didn’t do what I think you did.”

“You wanted an heir, Magnus.” I state.

He shoves me back, shaking his head, then lands a punch before I can even see him swing his arm. As he goes to punch me again, I dodge it but Liliana is there, stepping between us.

“What is this?” She says. “Magnus, stop,”

“Don’t you tell me to stop, woman.” He snarls back.

She narrows her eyes, glancing over at the crowd. I don't care what they think, but I know my brother will.

He takes a long deep breath, straightening his suit. "You will bring her to me. You will both be at my house this evening."

"Or what?" I ask.

He glares at me, giving me a look only the way Magnus can. "Be there, or that girl will no longer be an issue for any of us."

I know that's not an empty threat. It's partly why we've been hiding at my house, why I had her face concealed so well at Oblivion. Until it's official, this marriage is precarious and this man here, my brother, he holds the keys to my future. As much as I fucking hate it.

"We'll be there." I mutter. "It's about time my wife met all the in-laws."

"Wife?" He repeats and I let out a chuckle, taunting him more before I walk off. He can think whatever he likes about that.

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# CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX



*Brynn*

If I thought being taken to Oblivion was bad then this place, this is so much worse.

I can't stop shaking as the car makes its way up the long drive.

Conrad had me dressed in a long, silver satin dress that scoops low enough to show most of my cleavage. No bra, though thankfully I'm allowed to wear a thong, so I guess I should feel grateful for that. My hair hangs down, my makeup is perfect, and I'm all beautifully made up by the maids.

I feel dressed up. Dolled up. Too pretty by far.

The house is just as imposing as Conrad's own. But to know this place is his brother's, that that is where we are headed? It puts the fear of God into me.

"You will behave today." Conrad says under his breath, though I catch every word.

I nod. Quickly.

I don't want to anger him, I don't want to push him. Something already tells me that he'll be so much worse around his brother, that he'll play up to him, that he'll make a point of showing off his ownership over me.

"Whatever I say, whatever I command, you will do it. Understood?"

Those words don't help at all. But then what would help?

It sounds like he's got something planned, something already agreed upon with Magnus.

Will they hurt me? Torture me the way they did Magnus' now wife? I gulp, nodding again, praying that this evening goes quickly. Praying that I'm just overthinking this, that we'll have a nice meal. Conrad will do all the talking, and then we'll go home.

I dig my nails into my palms, reminding myself that Conrad's house is not my home. I've never had a home, at least not since my mother died. No, that place is a prison. A gilded one, granted, but a prison nonetheless.

When we pull up there's a servant there, opening the door, offering his hand for me to take. I do it quickly, mainly to appease my husband. Only, he looks absolutely furious as he gets out and stalks around.

"Do not touch my wife." He snarls, grabbing my hand back, shoving the servant out of the way. "Nobody touches my wife but me."

If I had the balls, I'd roll my eyes. He acts so protective, so damn possessive, and yet he is the greatest threat to my life.

At the grand entrance, I can see him, Magnus, standing watching us both. What does he think of his brother's display? Does he act the same around Liliana?

His arms are crossed, and he looks just as pissed as my dear husband is.

Conrad tightens his grip, practically pulling me up the steps to where he is waiting.

"Conrad," Magnus says in a tone that sends a chill through me. He's clearly not impressed at all, but is it me or his brother that's got him so annoyed?

I don't know what to do, what to say. Should I curtsy? This Lord is so far above me in the pecking order that I'm afraid one stupid mistake could cost me.

"My wife." Conrad says, shoving me forward so that his brother can properly look at me.

I bite my tongue, trying to keep my face neutral.

“How old are you?” Magnus asks after what feels like an awfully long time of him just staring at me.

“Twen, twenty-one,” I stammer, my voice sounding just as small as I feel in this moment.

His eyebrows rise, he glances over my shoulder at Conrad, and I swear there’s a silent exchange between them. Some unspoken message I can’t fully grasp.

“Aren’t you going to let us inside?” Conrad says pointedly.

Magnus tilts his head like he’s considering slamming the door shut in our faces and then he steps back, holding his hand in what would ordinarily be a gesture of welcome but right now, it feels like another sign of my doom.

As we walk in, it feels like the grandeur of the space swallows me whole. Yes, Conrad’s home is magnificent, but this is on a far bigger scale. Each and every step I take seems to amplify my fear.

Conrad holds my hand firmly, as if he expects me to turn tail and run at any moment.

I dare look at him and his face is unreadable, but the tension between him and Magnus seems to crackle like a thunderbolt.

We make it past the colossal entrance hall and into what must be a long gallery. There’s a massive, ornate chandelier hung, casting fragile light that seems to dance around the room.

Underneath it, waiting as if made of stone, is Liliana. His wife.

Her red hair is styled short, in a pixie cut. She’s tall, serene almost, but she’s not lithe. Her body is curvy, womanly. And in the dress she’s wearing, you can see absolutely every inch of her.

I blink back, registering how sheer the material is. She’s not wearing a bra or any form of underwear. Her breasts hang a little, but her nipples are big and round and they’re all acting like this is perfectly normal, like her wearing this is normal. I don’t look down, I don’t dare to. I don’t know how I’d react to seeing her bare pussy.

But my gaze lands on her chest, on where there’s a brand. The Blake family crest, burnt into her very flesh. I gulp when I see it, and it takes everything I have not to stumble, not to say anything.

“Brynn,” Liliana says with a warm smile, holding her hands out to welcome me.

Of course, Conrad refuses to relinquish his grip and there's an awkward moment where we just stand there.

Magnus makes a noise that shows he's less than impressed and Liliana looks at him pointedly before she turns back to us with a perfect mask on her face.

"Dinner is ready," she says.

Magnus all but rips my arm from his brother's grasp, pulling me through to the dining room, leaving Conrad to lead his wife in.

"Look at you." Conrad's drawl rings out loud enough for us to hear. "Playing the perfect little wife now."

It sounds like a taunt, one I don't fully understand. Liliana clearly knows better than to react.

Magnus pulls out a seat for me and I take it quickly, clasping my hands together, trying to shore up the last of my nerves.

The lighting in here is softer, the great chandeliers over our heads don't glint as brightly. The table is laid for a full silver service and as the entrees are put in front of us, I whisper my thanks and wonder how on earth I am going to even hold my cutlery without shaking.

Around the perimeter of the room, a dozen servants stand in perfectly done up uniforms of navy blue. They keep their gazes ahead, staring off as if they aren't allowed to even look at us.

It feels like a stark contrast between them and the furious looks Conrad and Magnus kept shooting at one another.

Conrad places his arm over the back of my chair, making an obvious display of possession and then he leans in, whispering into my ear. "See how he dresses her? He likes everyone to see how beautiful his wife is, likes everyone to see how much control he has over her, too. Maybe I should do the same with you. Show you off, show everyone what I have, what they can't touch."

I gulp, shutting my eyes, unsure how to respond without pissing him off. But I know my face betrays me, I know it shows exactly what I'm thinking of that idea.

He lets out a chuckle, running a finger down my cheek, "No, your body is for my eyes only." He says, as if I'm meant to feel honoured by such a declaration.

"Is the food not to your liking?" Magnus asks, cutting through the moment with a voice like ice.

Conrad looks around and tilts his head. “I hadn’t thought to try it yet.” He says. “Not when I have such a delicacy right here already.”

Magnus’s face morphs into something that puts the fear of God into me. He leans forward, staring at us both.

“You came for dinner, brother.” He says, pointing a polished silver knife right at him. “So you will eat the food so kindly prepared for you.”

Conrad sits back, the ghost of a grin at the corner of his mouth and he picks up the fork, stabs a chunk of salmon and makes a deliberate show of eating it.

God, are they always like this? What if they escalate? What if this turns into an actual fight?

As Magnus’s eyes turn to me, I literally cower in my seat. I can see why they want him as Chapter Lord. He’s a monster, more of a monster than the man I’m now chained to.

“Tell me, Brynn,” He says, with that icy tone, “How long have you two been married?”

I blanche, stammering a reply, “I, I, don, don’t know exactly.” I say with a voice that sounds so weak, so small, so utterly pathetic. “It must be a month now, may, maybe mooore.”

His eyebrows raise, and he looks pointedly at his brother before turning his attention right back on me.

“You don’t know.” He repeats. “Does this marriage mean so little that you haven’t even kept track of it?”

My stomach drops, bile twists somewhere deep inside me and I think I might just vomit. “It’s not, it’s...” I try to explain it, try to rationalise it but Conrad takes my hand, placing it in his on the table, and that silences me.

“Time has not been linear for my wife.” He says.

“What does that mean?” Magnus replies.

My heart slams into my chest. I swear you can see it, my pulse thumping away at my throat. What will Magnus do when he finds out I’ve not been an obedient wife, that I’ve not behaved the way the Brethren expect, the way I was groomed and brought up to be?

“She’s had some lessons to learn, haven’t you, Doll?” Conrad says as his hand squeezes mine harder and harder.

I don’t want to do it. I don’t want to give in, but I drop my gaze and nod, feigning the obedience that they expect of me because I’m petrified of what will happen if I don’t.

Magnus stares back, scrutinising me like he's trying to find every fault with my person. But Liliana, Liliana stiffens. I see it, the way her shoulders freeze, the way her face shows for one brief second what she's thinking, what she's feeling. Then it's like a mask comes down, like she folds up that part of herself and she becomes that picture perfect wife again.

"Lessons?" Magnus echoes, his voice sounding more and more cruel with every syllable. "And what lessons are these exactly?"

I shiver, shrinking even further into myself. How can I possibly admit to him of all people what I've done. How bad I've been? I'm a Brethren Lady, technically. I know my place, I know my duty.

If I admit to it, will he decide to override Conrad and send me to Oblivion anyway?

Or is this their plan? Him and Conrad, playing this little game together, deliberately manipulating the situation. Twisting the knife until I'm an absolute wreck, right here at the dinner table.

I can't confess what I've done. I can't.

When I look back at Magnus, his eyes hold such a fierce intensity that I feel even more exposed. He's dissecting me, assessing the fractured pieces, and trying to work out if I'm worth the effort of continuing.

I'm nothing but a pawn in this little game they're playing.

My breath turns shallow, and the air seems to suffocate me. It takes all I have not to start clawing at my throat, and how I keep those tears in, I don't know.

"Do you not trust her, then?" Magnus shoots back at Conrad.

"It's not a question of trust." Conrad says stiffly. "It's a matter of conditioning. The girl is young, malleable. I'm just ensuring that she bends to fit my precise needs."

God, the way he says that. I want to grab the knife, I want to impale it in his throat. I stare down, realising that I'm gripping it so tightly my knuckles are now white.

Conrad tilts his head and it's clear he's seen it too. His lips curl, he stares me dead in the eyes, practically challenging me to do it.

I don't know if Magnus sees it, if Liliana sees it either. But Magnus sits back in his chair, his fingers lightly drumming against the tablecloth.

"I gave you specific instructions." Magnus begins, "I told you what I needed, what this family needed..."

“And I did it.” Conrad says back almost nonchalantly despite his brother’s tone. “I got married, just as you requested.”

“To a child.” Magnus practically roars. “I ordered you to marry Giselle Monclere.”

“Brynn is twenty-one.” Conrad snaps back, releasing his hold of me and slamming his fist onto the table. “And she’s a Monclere too.”

“The wrong fucking one.”

“You want heirs?” Conrad says, “Brynn will give me far more children than that shrivelled up bitch could ever produce...”

“And yet Giselle was willing.” Magnus says, acting like he’s produced a trump card. “She wouldn’t have put up a fight, like this one...” He waves his hand almost dismissively at me.

Conrad jumps to his feet, the chair falling back behind him with a crash and I cry out in shock.

Magnus is up too. And it’s clear neither of them want to back down over this.

Suddenly, Liliana is by my side and she takes my hand, pulling me gently away.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Conrad snarls, yanking me back so aggressively that I slam into him, and my ribs protest so badly it brings tears to my eyes.

“Conrad,” Liliana says, “Let her have a moment, you and Magnus can talk. We’ll be right outside the door.”

Conrad narrows his eyes and Magnus tells us to go.

I don’t look back, I practically bolt for the door and as they close shut, I let out a long rattling breath.

# CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN



*Conrad*

“**Y**ou married a child.” Magnus says again as soon as the door shuts.

“She’s twenty-one.” I state. “And what’s more she’s malleable, unlike Giselle.”

Like he doesn’t appreciate that trait. Like he didn’t spend months ensuring his own, now wife, has that very same trait.

“Why do you think I chose her in particular?” Magnus says. “I knew Giselle would keep you in check. You’re reckless, headstrong...”

“I am not.”

“This very act proves it.” He snarls.

“I deserve to pick a wife of my own choosing. And Brynn will give me sons. Lots of sons.”

He rolls his eyes, sitting back down, but it’s clear this discussion is far from over, even as he picks up his cutlery and starts eating again.

I take his cue, sitting down, and eat in that same stilted silence.

“You put us all at risk.” He says suddenly. “There are rules. You can’t just do what you want...”

“You did.” I state, “And besides, none of it will matter when you are Chapter Lord. No one will be able to touch us then. We can do what we want.”

“When.” Magnus repeats. “But I am not Chapter Lord yet, and you creating issues like this puts our entire future in jeopardy.”

“Like you haven’t been reckless. You broke the rules when you married Liliana.”

He narrows his eyes, but we both know it’s true. The day he chose to put a ring on that bitch’s finger instead of a knife through her heart, he changed our entire trajectory.

Oh, we may have Antonio pushing for us, we may have him pulling the strings, but Magnus marrying that woman turned the contest into a damned mountain instead of what should have been a stroll in the park.

“You’ve gone soft.” I sneer. “That woman made you soft.”

He’s up before I can register it and he’s hauling me out of my seat again, while his hand wraps around my throat.

“The Magnus I knew wouldn’t give a shit what the consequences were.” I add as we glare at one another.

“The Magnus you knew understands the boundaries.” He retorts. “Understood what games to play and when to keep his mouth shut.”

My lips curl. I know I’ve hit a nerve, I know I’ve pissed him off. Good. He thinks he has the right to judge me? He thinks he can decide my future and expect me just to go along with it, as if I don’t have Blake blood running through my veins.

He shoves me back before releasing his grip and I shrug, straightening my suit jacket, smoothing out the creases.

He walks back, sitting down once more.

“I would have broken her weeks ago.” He says pointedly. “She’s easy pickings. Are you sure you even know what to do?”

Those words piss me off, and I know he can see it. I draw myself up, using the only defence I have. “I’m not going to ruin her the way you did Liliana. And I certainly don’t intend to share her either, so you better forget that idea.”

Magnus’s laughter is like a sharp crack in the air. “You accused me of going soft, but look at you. One taste of that girl, and you’re under her thumb. You’re so entangled, brother, you can’t even think straight.”

I clench my teeth, resisting the impulse to lash out. “I’m not weak. I’m in charge of her, not the other way around,” I reply, each word laced with defiance.

“And if that’s the case, then why is she not obedient, huh? Why is she not pregnant already?” he asks, tilting his head, challenging me with amusement flickering in his eyes.

“Because I’m doing this my way. Not yours.”

He leans forward with a calculated look in his eyes. “You have one month, Conrad. One month to get Brynn pregnant, or I’ll sort the entire mess out myself. And you’ll be back down that altar, marrying Giselle whether you like it or not.”

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# CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT



*Brynn*

“Did he hurt you?” She asks as soon as we’re far enough out of earshot. I stare back at her, my voice struggling to work. “What, what do you think?” I reply.

She must know. She *has* to know. From all the rumours of what they put her through, how they broke her. She must know exactly what he’s done to me.

But can I trust her? She’s Magnus’s wife now. Where does her loyalty lie?

My eyes drop to her chest, to where that brand is literally glistening in the light. Though it could also be the tears.

“He shouldn’t have done that.” She says, pulling me further from the door. “He shouldn’t have taken you. Shouldn’t have touched you.”

I snort. Like Conrad gives a shit what should and shouldn’t be happening.

But the fact she’s saying it, voicing it? Maybe this is my chance. Maybe this is my moment, my way to escape. My heart seems to leap in my chest

as I stare back at her pleadingly.

“Can you help me?” I ask before I can stop myself.

Her face turns to one of pain, of anguish. “I, I can’t.” She says.

“But you know.” I hiss. “You know what he is. What he’s capable of. Please, please you have to help me...”

“You’re married.” She states. “That alone seals your fate. And even if you weren’t, do you really think I have any power?”

“But, you, you have Magnus.” I reply. “He would listen to you, he would...”

She lets out a bitter laugh. “You think Magnus Blake listens to anyone?”

My heart sinks, and all that beautiful hope that was brewing is suddenly crushed. God, she must think me a fool. An absolute idiot. “I can’t, I can’t do this.” I whisper back. “I can’t be with him, I can’t...”

Her hands grab my shoulders, practically holding me up as my legs seem to crumble. “You can. You won’t like it, but you have to accept it. You have no choice.”

“He rapes me.” I gasp. “Daily. And he hurts me. He...”

“So does Magnus.” She says, so matter of fact. “None of the Blake’s have a kind bone in their body from what I can tell.”

“I can’t live like this...”

“Brynn...”

“Please, I’m begging you, please help me. Please. I know you were free once, I know you weren’t even part of the Brethren. You have to help me. You have to...”

Her hand clamps around my mouth, silencing my pitiful words as she looks over my shoulder to the door behind us.

Is she worried they can hear? Is she worried they’ll come crashing in, that both of them will start beating us?

I know her face is a mirror of my own. She looks just as broken as I am in this moment, only, there’s a fire there, something that tells me she was stronger than me. Perhaps that’s the difference. Perhaps that’s why Magnus is better to her than Conrad is to me. If I were stronger, if I were smarter, hell, if I were anyone other than who I am, then maybe I wouldn’t be in this situation.

“I am as much a prisoner as you are.” She says. “You think I want to be married to a man such as he is?”

“But you did.” I state.

Sorrow, resignation, despair too, it all shows in her face. “Yes. Yes I did. I married him because he broke me. I married him because as much as I hate him, I love him too. And I hate myself for that fact. I hate myself. He forced his way into my head, forced his claws into my soul.” She clenches her hands into fists. “I cannot escape him, just as you cannot escape Conrad.”

“So, your advice is just to what, to smile and accept it? To let him continue on, until one day he grows so angry he really does kill me?”

She winces, and for the first time I see her fragility too. This great strong woman they all talked about, this great wife of Magnus’s, it feels like the veneer comes away, that I see the broken creature that has been hiding there all along.

“Don’t give him cause to hurt you.” She says. “Whatever he does, whatever he says, you have to accept it, because you have no other choice.”

I shake my head, refusing to accept that advice. This can’t be my fate. It can’t be.

Her hands grip me once more and I’m all but forced to look into her eyes. “Accept what this is. Please Brynn. You don’t want Conrad to do to you what Magnus did to me. Trust me, you don’t want that.”

What could possibly be worse than what I have now?

What could she possibly have gone through that is worse than what Conrad has already done to me?

My eyes drop once more to that brand on her chest and I open my mouth to ask, but then Conrad is there. At the door, half-glaring at us.

I can’t hide the shiver of revulsion, nor the fear as he holds out his hand to silently summon me away.

“Be brave, Brynn.” Liliana whispers as I pass her.

Bravery. That was never my forte. Never a skill I possessed.

I’m not brave, I’m broken. I’m literally existing in the very pits of hell and I don’t know how I can possibly escape this.

How I can even begin to save myself.

# CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE



*Conrad*

I don't speak to her as we walk back to the car. She's shaking, shivering, and I'm pretty certain she's crying too.

I want to grab her face, to slam her against the wall and make her see sense.

Does she not realise what I have given her? How I have raised her up? She's a Blake now. She's as close to God as anyone can possibly hope to be.

We step outside, and the cool wind whips around us. She brings her spare arm up to protect herself and if I were a better man, I'd offer her my jacket.

But she deserves to be cold. She deserves to suffer.

Tonight did not go to plan, and a lot of that was because of her.

A servant opens the back door of the car, and I shove her inside before clambering in. As we start driving off, those silent tears turn to something louder, something more pitiful.

I run a hand down my face, contemplating Magnus's words. One month. I have one month to breed my wife. It shouldn't be that hard to achieve

considering I've been fucking her at every opportunity, but I don't understand why she isn't carrying my child already. She's had a god damn fertility jab, for fucks sake.

As she sniffs again, I lose what little patience I have left, and I unclip her seat belt, shove her into the footwell and undo my belt.

She looks up at me with those innocent, tear-stained cheeks and it pisses me off even more.

"Why the fuck are you crying?" I snarl. "Don't you like my cock?"

She sobs more, her pretty makeup smearing down her cheeks but if anything, that makes her even more stunning.

I grab my cock, giving it a few pumps before I ram it down her throat.

Her eyes widen like she wasn't expecting it. But why else would I have her on her knees?

I grab her face, pulling her down. It's hard to lift my hips with the position I'm in, so she'll have to do all the hard work for a change. Her hands flail, her fingers grab at me, but I don't give a fuck.

"Take what I give you," I snarl, forcing her down further. "Take what I give you, you ungrateful bitch."

And she is ungrateful. She's spoiled. Selfish. She has no idea the sacrifices I have made for her. The shit I am going through to spare her. I could just as easily put her aside, could find another bitch who would more than happily carry my child, who would be honoured to have her name attached to mine, to a Blake's. Brynn thinks she's got it so damn hard when in reality, all she has to do is smile at me and lay in my bed and let me fuck her, and yet she acts like it's a hardship.

"Fucking bitch," I spit again, pulling more of her hair.

She tries to speak, no doubt tries to beg, but I won't hear it.

"I saved you," I snap, "I fucking saved you, and all you can do is shove it back in my face."

I can see how her pretty dress is getting ruined, I can see how her nicely done hair is now all matted. I guess that's another thing I'll have to sort. Will have to fix.

"I could have done to you what Magnus did to his wife," I add, "How would you have liked that Brynn? How would you have enjoyed being shared among all my friends? Having each of them fucking your tight little holes all at the same time? Bet your cunt wouldn't have enjoyed that, bet your arse would have split right open, just like Liliana's did..."

I shut my eyes, seeing it. Seeing how she'd laid there, how she'd tried to kill herself. I'd even felt a bit sorry for her in the end. At least she'd learned to be contrite, at least she'd learnt her place, unlike my wife here.

"I could shave your head too, I could throw you in a padded cell until you're a blubbering mess..."

"Please."

I hear the plea, I hear the way she's sobbing.

*This wife of mine. This fucking wife.*

But she has to know. She has to understand. I can't ease up on her now, I can't be kind because it won't do her any good in the long run. Spare the rod, ruin the wife -never has that saying been more apt than with my Brynn.

"I'm going to come," I groan, "I'm going to come down your throat, and you're going to lick me clean, do you hear me?"

I don't wait for a response. I'm too riled up, too fucking furious for that. I push myself one last time, push myself as far down her throat as I can go and I pump away, I pour myself into her, pinching her nose for good measure.

She struggles, she jerks. I know I should let her get her breath, but I don't. I keep myself there, I keep myself right where I am, knowing that she really is suffocating.

She starts to slow, she starts to gasp more, as if her lungs are truly empty, and that's when I let her go, that's when I release her.

She falls back, her head resting on my abdomen as she takes long, desperate breaths of air.

"I'm waiting," I say and she looks up with bloodshot eyes.

No, I won't give her a moment. No, I won't go easy. This bitch is giving me a raging headache, so it's only fair she feels some of that pain.

She shudders, dropping her gaze and then slowly, tentatively she begins to lick my cock.



WE PULL UP TO THE HOUSE, AND I'M DEFINITELY CALMER THAN I WAS. Having Brynn caressing my dick the rest of the way home helped.

I wonder if I've made my point. I wonder if I've finally got through to her, though I doubt it.

When we come to a stop, I take a moment to do my trousers up. Brynn is still in the footwell, and I get out, then stand there waiting as she has to crawl onto the drive before she can stand.

Her cheeks are flushed, and though that could be from shame, I wonder if part of that is from her practically asphyxiating.

We walk in silence back to her room. When I open the door, I tell her to take her dress off and lie on the bed. There's a flicker there, a moment of hesitation that tells me that my wife is still going to be a problem, but she does it. She slides that rich fabric down her skin and then lies down, staring at the ceiling.

I stand there, watching her for a moment. Even at points like this, when she makes me so mad I can't even think straight, I still want her. I still need her more than any other woman.

I let out a sigh, shutting the door, going to get the things I need. She won't like this. She won't like any of what I have planned, but ultimately I'll win this round, just like I win all of them.

When I walk back in I half expect her to be gone, to be up, to have disobeyed me. It makes me pause to see her there, lying in that exact same position, as if she hasn't dared to move a muscle.

"I see you're finally learning." I mutter.

She doesn't look at me. She just carries on staring at the ceiling. Perhaps this is her plan now, the silent treatment. My lips curl, because I'd rather her silent and sullen than openly defying me, so I guess this is a win.

I place the blow torch and the antique down on the side. In my hand, I keep the syringe and she chooses that exact moment to look down, to see it.

"No..." She whimpers.

"It's not going to hurt," I tut.

"Conrad, please..." God, it makes my cock twitch when she says my name, when she begs me. Even if she's not begging me for something nice, it still does something to me.

I clamber onto the bed. She tries to move, to get away, and I yank her back.

"Trust me, Brynn." I say.

"I don't, I don't trust you at all," She cries.

"If I don't sedate you, it'll hurt more. Do you want that? More pain?"

Her eyes dart to the blowtorch and she clearly panics more. “You don’t have to do this. You don’t...” I don’t know what she thinks I’m planning. Does she think I’m going to burn her eyes out? Burn her face off? What would be the point in that? No one wants to fuck an ugly wife, do they?

I let out a growl, grabbing her by her throat and I pin her down before jabbing the needle into her neck, sinking the plunger.

“Sleep, wife,” I say, like she has any choice. “Sleep and when you wake, you’ll have such a lovely surprise.”

Her feet kick out, her eyes continue to plead for a few more seconds and then her pupils dilate, she calms, she relaxes and then she passes out entirely.

I get off her, grab the blowtorch and the brand, immediately starting to heat it up. I know I contemplated doing this before, but tonight, tonight it feels necessary.

I want to mark her in a way that is permanent. I want to mark her in a way that she cannot remove.

But more than that, I want Magnus to see her next time. I want Liliana to see it, I want every fucking person to see it and know what it means. Magnus thinks his wife is so fucking special, that he’s allowed to break the rules but because he doesn’t see how precious my wife is, I’m not allowed to do the same?

From now on, I want him to look at her and know that she means as much to me as that whore.

The metal takes a good while to heat. It doesn’t help that the flame isn’t that big, but patience is a virtue and I’m more than happy to wait for this one.

When it’s finally ready, I toss the torch, barely caring if it burns a hole in the carpet.

I want this to be perfect, I want to turn her into a work of art. Afterall, she’ll carry this for the rest of her life.

I clamber over her body, making sure it is perfectly straight and then in one quick movement I press the thing into her chest. Right above her cleavage. It burns. It actually hisses. I can see a bit of smoke coming off, and the unpleasant stench of burning flesh makes my nose wrinkle. I’m not sure how long it needs to be on there, but I want to make sure every little bit of my family’s crest is visible.

Liliana's brand wasn't done with such precision. When I look at it, I can see it's a tiny bit off centre. That not all of the detail came through.

My wife will suffer no such insult.

I pull it off, seeing the bright red, bloodied and blistered flesh all moulded around and forced to take on the shape of two lions and a shield. Fuck, it's magnificent. It's even better than I imagined.

I take more care with the brand; it is a family heirloom after all. I place it so that the hot end isn't touching anything and then I'm cleaning up the wound, sterilising it the way I read, before putting a big white bandage over it.

It'll take a few days before I can show her what I've done but when she wakes, she'll know anyway. Besides, she doesn't have to see it, not when she knows I've done it right.

I sink back down, feeling for the first time in hours, like I'm back in control.

She looks so peaceful now, like sleeping beauty. All patient and waiting for her Prince Charming to come save her.

I guess it wouldn't hurt, would it? She is after all, my property.

My lips twitch as I pull my clothes off and spread her legs wide. Normally she'd be fighting me in some way, normally she'd be protesting. It's nice to not have that for once. It's nice to remember how we were the first time.

I push myself inside her. She's not as wet as I usually find her, but then, I did just burn a bloody great big hole into her skin. Even if she isn't aware of it, her body will be.

I run my hands down over her soft skin, cupping her breasts, taking my time while I have it.

"So beautiful," I murmur, "So fucking beautiful."

Her lips don't react as I lean in and kiss her. I pull her jaw open just enough and slip my tongue inside.

I can still taste the hint of our dinner there. Perhaps I should have made her brush her teeth before bed? I guess it doesn't really matter now.

With my hips, I start thrusting, working my cock in and out. This time it doesn't feel like I have to race, like I have to dominate. I can fuck her slowly; I can take all the time I want. I can stay here all night, buried in her cunt, revelling in the feel of her.

It's like I'm back in that room in the Monclere house. Only, thankfully her bitch of an aunt isn't there, spoiling it.

"I love you so much," I murmur.

All I want is for her to say it back. All I want is for her to open her eyes, to reach for me, to kiss me.

*Why is that so hard? Why does she have to still fight me?*

I don't want to hurt her. I don't want to do any of that, but she won't let me love her, she won't just give in.

"I'd be so good to you," I state, brushing her hair back, "I'd buy you so many jewels, so many pretty dresses too. You'd be the envy of all your friends, all the other Brethren Ladies. Wherever you went people would watch you. You'd be able to go to the parks, to the beach. We could enjoy ourselves together, we could..."

I screw my hands up, forcing myself not to squeeze them around her damned neck.

*She's the one ruining this. She's the one ruining all of this.*

I just want her to love me. I just want that one simple thing. Why is that too much to ask?

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# CHAPTER FORTY



*Brynn*

I'm groggy, so fucking groggy. I go to roll over, but my arms are tied.  
I'm tied?

I blink rapidly, looking around, realising with horror that I'm here, in this damned room again, tied up like a doll.

"Morning, beautiful," Conrad says, stroking the strands of hair from my face. He's sitting there, on the bed, next to me like he spent the entire night watching me sleep, waiting for this moment.

"What is this?" I hiss.

Only then do I register it. The pain, the horrific sharp pain on my chest. I look down, ignoring the lingerie that he's apparently dressed me in, and I can see that large white plaster taped above my cleavage.

No.

No.

Please, no.

He leans in, cupping my cheek, "I told you, you'd have a reward."

I frown before it all comes back to me. Yesterday. Magnus. Him being so angry in the car that he almost killed me. God, what a way to go. I can imagine it, the irony of choking on his cock. I guess that would be karma for him though, wouldn't it?

But it doesn't explain this, it doesn't explain why my skin feels like it's on fire.

"Magnus's wife has one, it's only fair you do too." He states.

Has what? Why is he speaking in riddles? What the fuck is he talking about? It would help if my head wasn't still struggling from the aftereffects of whatever drug he gave me.

"We're going to make it a tradition," He adds, "All Blake wives from now on will be branded."

Branded? Did he say branded?

I stare with horror at that plaster again, and then it hits me. Jesus fucking Christ. He did it to me, he burnt that same awful thing into my flesh, just like Magnus did to Liliana.

"No!" I wail. No.

No. No. No. I can't undo that.

I can't get rid of that.

Even if I did ever get away, that will now always be there, will always be a reminder.

"You're perfect now," He states, "Well, almost perfect..."

Oh god, he's going to go on about being pregnant again, isn't he?

He reaches over, turning the tv on and that same familiar moaning starts up.

"We're going to ramp up your conditioning. You didn't exactly perform as expected in Oblivion. Next time I take you there, I expect an improvement."

My eyes bulge. I shake my head, but he's already shoving a toy into my pussy, pushing it in so it's there vibrating against that deliciously forbidden spot that I hate so damn much.

"Just relax, doll. I'll be back in a few hours," He says before fondling my breasts one last time and walking out the door.

I let out a growl. A snarl.

The rope is too tight to get loose. I yank as hard as I can, and all I can feel is my skin tearing.

I sink back, shutting my eyes but those moans continue so loudly that I can't block it out. And despite how I feel, my body is already reacting, already leaning into it. Into the toy, desperately seeking that promised hit.

Only, it's not enough. It's never enough.

He does it on purpose, he leaves that toy vibrating so low that all it does is make me desperate. Leaves me a pathetic, needy mess. Ready for him.

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# CHAPTER FORTY-ONE



*Conrad*

I watch his approach with a mixture of irritation and disdain. The man has the audacity to show up at my door, unannounced, with that look etched upon his face.

Oh, I knew he would come. I knew he'd be over here as soon as he found out.

"You've really fucked up this time, Conrad," Antonio begins, his voice that usual condescending tone. "This business with the girl could seriously ruin Magnus's chances."

"Not everything is about Magnus," I retort.

Antonio's eyes narrow, and he steps closer, his finger pointing like an accusation. "Don't play the fool with me, Conrad. You're not that fucking naive. You know as well as I do, what the consequences are if we fail. It won't be just Magnus who pays the price."

He's right; I'm well aware of what our future will be if my brother fails, but that doesn't mean I need him to come here and reiterate it like I'm a fucking child.

"I want to see her," he demands.

Every fibre of my being wants to tell him where to shove his demands, but I hold my tongue. I know this man likes to keep his cards close to his chest but if the rumours are true, he's just as fucked up in the head as I am. Just as controlling, just as obsessive.

And I'll admit, I have a perverse sense of pride in showing my wife, showing what I am capable of, because this man here has always seen me as second best when I am far from it.

I lead him through the halls, and it feels like the air is thick with anticipation.

My wife is kept in a remote part of the manor, away from the main hustle, so there's no potential for outside disturbances to distract her from her training.

I know the maids went in this morning after I left. They made her fresh, cleaned her up, ensuring she is ready for my lunch time visit. My cock hardens at the thought of her and as I open the door, the sight leaves me breathless.

She's tied up. Spread-eagled. Dressed in a pale pink babydoll chemise that rides high on her thighs.

Her makeup is just how I like it best; a nice bit of blush, a little eyeshadow, and big black sweeps of mascara, although I can see from the smudges that she's been crying again. Her hair, as usual is in two neat plaits coming down to rest either side of her pert breasts.

On her chest is the white bandage, covering where I branded her. God, I can't wait to pull it off, to fuck her with that right there, in front of my face.

Her breath hitches as we walk in and her eyes dart to Antonio. There's a flicker of something there; fear, I guess. As if I'd ever contemplate letting another man touch her. As if I'd be that reckless.

Antonio steps closer, tilting his head and I know he's staring between her spread legs to where those pretty crotchless panties frame the toy that's buried in her soaked pussy. Even now, even as we stare at her I can see her hips moving, just a little, just enough. She's riding that thing, desperate to get her release.

My poor little wife, how long has she been lying here now? Three, four hours? And not once have I let her come.

Around her neck is that jewelled collar which serves as both adornment and a tool for her training.

In the background, the sound of the television playing our sex tape on a loop fills my ears. It's a visual symphony that serves as a constant reminder of her place, her purpose, her sole reason for existence.

Antonio's gaze flickered to the screen, and I can't help but smirk at his reaction. He's always presented himself as being so proper, so controlled, and here he is, witnessing the depths of my depravity in ultra-HD.

"This is what you're doing?" he asks, his voice barely above a whisper as he looks upon Brynn's silent, submissive form.

I shrug back. "She's my wife," I state. "I can do with her as I choose."

"And you're choosing this?" He says, like he hasn't done worse from what I've heard.

"You act like there's no purpose behind it," I bristle, "But there is, I'm turning her into a sex addict, just like we do with some of the more difficult slaves in Oblivion."

At the mention of her conditioning Brynn whimpers, a sound that's music to my ears. With a tut of admonishment, I press the remote in my pocket, and she jerks as the collar delivers a sharp shock that makes her cunt clench even harder around the vibrator.

"I'm training her," I say again.

Antonio's concern seems to shift to exasperation. "Electricity and pregnancy don't mix, Conrad."

Like I don't know that. "I know exactly what I'm doing," I assure him. I've calculated every risk, every potential complication. I doubt Brynn will take many more days like this anyway, so the effort is more than worth the reward. Soon she'll be gagging for my cock, desperate to ride me at all hours.

Antonio rolls his eyes and turns to leave. "One month, Conrad," he repeats, his voice stern as he delivers the same ultimatum Magnus gave me. "Get your house in order, or it's all over."

The door closes behind him with a definitive thud, and I'm left alone with Brynn once more. The clock is ticking, but I'm a man accustomed to pressure, to the thrill of the gamble. I'll meet Antonio's deadline, and when I do, there'll be no doubt that I am in control, that I hold the reins, not only to Brynn's submission but to the future of the empire that my family have built.

As I watch Brynn, silent and almost obedient, I feel a surge of satisfaction.

She is my masterpiece; a living, breathing testament to my power.

She is everything I deserve, everything I could want.

I shrug off my jacket and loosen my tie.

She whimpers as she watches me, and we both know what is coming. I stare down at her again before I clamber onto the bed.

I've worked hard all morning. Worked really hard. It's time my wife had a little of my attention.

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# CHAPTER FORTY-TWO



*Brynn*

I lie on the bed, a prisoner within the confines of satin and frilly damn lace. This room feels like a shrine to my own personal hell, and the tv screen across from me is a relentless tormentor, playing the same vile scenes on an endless loop.

I can't look away, even as each image sears itself into my memory, a brutal catalogue of my violation and shame.

I can see the imprints of his hands, the bruises like a morbid fingerprint on my skin. Each mark is a testament to the savagery he's capable of, as well as a stark reminder that my body is not my own. It's a vessel for his twisted desires, a marionette dancing to the cruel pull of his strings.

The stranger is mercifully gone, his presence a fleeting shadow against the backdrop of my ongoing, never-ending nightmare.

But Conrad remains, his silhouette a dark stain against the doorway.

I'm dressed up like his pretty little doll. His pretty little toy. The irony isn't lost on me—that I should look my best for the performance of my own degradation.

As he clammers onto the bed, he starts running his hands up my torso, feeling what he has no right to, and yet owns all the same. "Are you ready to pleasure your husband?" he asks, his voice so fucking smooth as he undoes his belt.

I shake my head in a silent plea for mercy, for reprieve.

But my resistance is met with the harsh rebuke of the collar around my neck. The shock is a violent jolt, a brutal reminder of my place in his world. God, he likes that doesn't he? He likes using that thing to hurt me now, because evidently, he's grown sick of all the bruising.

I whimper, the sound pathetic and small in the grand scheme of my suffering. I can't even bring my hands up to alleviate the pain.

Another shock, more intense than the last, leaves me gasping for breath.

With a tenderness that feels like a cruel joke, he fastens a clit clamp onto me. The pain is immediate, a white-hot lance of agony that radiates from that single point of contact.

I don't know why he does this, why he hurts me. But there's a part of me that is grateful.

I need the pain.

I need the horror.

Now more than ever.

Because there's a traitorous part of me that's starting to crave this attention. I'm starved for it, desperate for any scrap of affection, no matter how tainted it is.

It's a stark realization, one that cuts deeper than any physical wound—that I've become so conditioned to seek his approval, his praise.

*Oh god, it is working. He is breaking me.* That thought almost turns me catatonic. My breath turns to a rattle, and I fall apart as he lowers his mouth and starts tongue fucking me.

Stop. I need it to stop.

I need to think. I need...

He groans, pushing himself into me, not giving a damn that I'm doing everything I can to fight this.

And then he says the words I hate so much.

"I love you."

It's a lie. There's no way he can love me. You don't do the things he does to me when you love someone.

I screw my face up, feeling that burning on my chest, feeling all my anger.

“I hate you,” I spit. “I hate you. I’ll never love you.”

Pain, so much pain hits my body that it makes my eyes roll back, making me jerk so violently that I think I might dislocate my limbs.

“You will love me,” Conrad snaps back. “You will.”

On and on, he shocks me. By the time he’s done, my heart is racing so fast I think it really will give out.

He gets right in my face, wrapping his hand around my cheeks, pushing them together. “Say it,” He says, “Say that you love me.”

I scowl, shaking my head with the limited movement I have. I won’t give him that power, that last piece of me.

My defiance is met with another shock, a reminder that my silence comes with a price. Yet, as the pain courses through me, there’s a flicker of something else - pride perhaps, or the faintest glimmer of hope.

Because, in this moment, I realize that as long as I can withhold those words, I still have something of my own. Something that he cannot bend or break, no matter how hard he tries.

And that keeps a part of me alive in the midst of this waking nightmare.

Because I am more than the sum of my scars. More than what he’s trying to make me. I have to be. I can’t just be this. I can’t just exist like this.

# CHAPTER FORTY-THREE



*Conrad*

Why won't she say it? Why can't she just pretend for once? I wouldn't even care if she didn't mean it. Hell, I know she doesn't mean it, yet.

But she won't even play along. She's so damned insolent, so fucking defiant.

I storm out of the room, going to grab something, anything that will hurt her enough that she understands. But nothing has worked so far, has it?

It doesn't matter how many times I fuck her, how many times I shock her, the bitch won't learn.

*I need to do something more. Something worse.*

*I need to make her understand once and for all that this is her life, this is her future.*

I come to a sudden stop as I realise what I *can* do. But is it too far? No, no it fucking isn't. In so many ways, it's not nearly far enough.

By the time I walk back into that room, I've made my mind up and I know this is the right decision, the logical one.

She looks at the weapon in my hand and she shakes her head, her eyes imploring me for mercy. But where was my mercy? Where was my god given respect?

All she's done from the moment I brought her here is fight me, and I'm done with it. Done with the bullshit.

I tried to play fair, I tried to give her time. The softly- softly approach didn't work. Now it's time for the stick.

"You did this." I state as I place the thing down with a thump and start unbinding her, manoeuvring her so that she's lying on her front, with her entire back exposed.

"You had to be a little bitch, you had to keep fighting me..." I loop the rope back around, tying it firmly against the livid marks on her skin.

"Please," She sobs, "I'll be good, I'll be..."

"It's too fucking late." I snarl. She always begs and pleads when she's faced with the consequences, well maybe now she'll understand once and for all that I am not fucking around. That this is not a game.

I reach for the mallet, straddling her thighs. She jerks enough that I know she's trying to buck me off, but her feeble attempts do nothing more than piss me off further. Again, she refuses to accept my decisions. She refuses to submit.

"I will break you." I state. "I will fucking break you. And then you will understand."

"No..." She screams out, right as I lift the mallet up and I aim for her lower back, where her spine meets her buttocks.

I don't want to hit too high. I don't want to turn her into a complete invalid. I want her to keep use of her arms, I want her to be able to caress me, to jerk me off, to cup my cheeks and to kiss me.

But her legs. Her legs have to go. Her legs have to be rendered useless.

She doesn't need them anyway, not when she has me in her life. I can carry her wherever she needs to go. And this way, this way she'll never be able to run from me again.

She doesn't need to walk.

She doesn't need to dance or do anything but lay here and let me fuck her.

That is her purpose. That is her reason for existence. She'll be my literal doll. A living, breathing toy that I can move and manipulate however I choose.

I bring the mallet down again and there's a sickening crunch as it makes contact. She screams harder, louder.

It sets goosebumps all over my skin and on some level, I hate that I'm hurting her, but she asked for this. She bloody well deserves it.

The stench of faeces reaches my nose, and I realise she's shit herself. I guess that's to be expected with such an injury.

I look down, seeing the dark stain already soiling the bed.

Her skin is mottled, blackening, and I can see a lump already forming where the mallet crushed her bones.

She's face down in the pillow, gasping, sobbing, heaving as much as I am in this moment.

"Wiggle your toes." I order.

She doesn't react. She doesn't move. Maybe it's because the mallet has done its job, or maybe it's because she's still being a defiant little bitch.

I toss the mallet, letting it clang onto the floor, and then I'm undoing the bindings. I grab hold of her right leg, yanking it up. She cries out in protest but as I let go, I can see from the way it drops, from the way it falls that she no longer has any control over it.

Triumph soars in my heart. I let out a laugh filled with relief.

And then I lay down beside her, pulling her into my arms.

"It's okay," I murmur as I cradle her now shattered body and press it into mine. "You're okay. Everything is as it's meant to be now."

She's taking long, sharp breaths like she's hyperventilating, like the pain is too much for her to handle.

"You're okay," I murmur. She's more than okay, she's perfect now. She's completely dependent on me. Brynn will never take a step again, she'll never go anywhere unless I physically take her there.

She's mine in every sense of the word.

# CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR



*Brynn*

The room is a silent witness to my madness.  
The walls are closing in with each passing second.  
Conrad cradled me all night like he had no shame, no remorse.  
In the morning, he had the doctor check me and he confirmed what I already knew. That my lower spine was broken enough to damage my spinal cord.  
I'll never walk again.  
I'll never dance. I'll never feel the grass beneath my feet or the sand between my toes.  
I try to wiggle them; to force my body to do something and the hollowness, the emptiness that follows feels worse than any of the abuse Conrad has inflicted on me before.

I'm paralysed. Or as good as.  
The doctor gives me an injection. 'For the pain' he says. I don't want that pain to go away. As much as it's unbearable, I need to feel it. I need to feel something.

And as that icy nothingness slips through my veins, I feel more broken, more useless, more trapped than ever.

Conrad fucks me as soon as the doctor leaves.

He pulls my body around, he spreads my legs and then he's shoving himself into me, grunting and grinding and using me exactly for what I am now.

A toy.

A doll.

A living, breathing womb and little else.

When he comes, he slumps on top of me, and I'm almost grateful that his weight no longer crushes me now that I can't feel the pressure on my lower body.

He raises his hand, cupping my cheek and that look, that joy in his face, it makes me feel sick. How can a man possibly do the things he's done to me? How can he even think of them?

"You're so beautiful." He says softly. "So fucking beautiful."

A tear escapes my eye, it streaks down, hot against my cheek and he brushes it away quickly.

"Don't cry, Brynn. It's all going to be okay now. This is how it was meant to be. It's what God wanted for you."

That's a lie. How can anything be okay, and how can God possibly want this?

He doesn't even tie me up anymore.

I've laid here for days, unmoving. Like a human statue. He lifts me up, carries me to the bathroom each morning and then puts a nappy on me like I'm a fucking baby when he goes to work.

When he comes home, he takes it off, washes me down and then fucks me.

And all the while he's telling me that he loves me, that I'm so perfect now. That soon I'll be fat with his child, and everything will be as he planned.

Every time he leaves, he makes sure the TV is on, that *that* recording is playing. I may not be able to physically fight him, but he still clearly wants me to be a brainless addict all the same.

I hate the way my legs just lie there.

I hate the way I feel like a literal deadweight on this mattress.

And worst of all, I hate the way I can still feel *that* need.

You'd think that sensation would have gone. You'd think God would have granted me at least that small kindness, but no. I feel everything. EVERYTHING. Between my legs, inside, I feel every time his cock pushes into me, every time he touches me, and I can feel even now, that toy working away, trying to make me nice and needy for his return.

My hips no longer move, no longer chase that hateful ending. But I know that I'm wet, that on some level, I'm still so horrifically aroused.

I guess that's the one kindness he has given me in not tying me up. I can sort this. End this. Alleviate this awful tension.

I reach down, grabbing the vibrator and yank it out. It shakes in my hand enough that I almost drop it, and it's slick with my arousal.

*I need to come.*

I hate that I need it. But at least this way, I will feel something.

I circle the thing, focusing on that spot that my husband has caressed and tormented in equal measure. It doesn't take long. My body thrums almost immediately and I swear I can hear my blood rushing in my ears, my heart pounding as I get closer and closer.

*I'm disgusting. I'm fucked up. I'm everything he wants me to be.*

But I can't stop now. I have to do this. I have to end this, and in truth, I want to feel something other than pain, even if it is a sin, if it does damn me.

The shame of it all crashes over me in waves, each one more potent than the last. I sob, the sound of my own despair filling the room like a cacophony of sorrow that no one will hear.

I can see his face before me, I can taste him on my tongue, I can feel his lips peppering my skin with kisses.

*I don't want this. I don't want him.*

And yet, my body betrays me, responding to the phantom memory of his touch, the ghost of his presence haunting my flesh.

*I can't let him win.* I can't let him put a baby into me, to grow and fester into a person that would bind me to him for eternity.

The thought of it, of carrying his progeny sends me spiralling further into the abyss of my own mind.

I become feral, clawing at my body, my nails digging into the soft skin as if I could somehow reach in and tear out the very essence of my womanhood.

My hand is slick with blood; the coppery scent fills my nostrils, fuelling my frenzy.

*I have to rip it out. I have to rip it all out.*

I don't know where the toy went. I don't know when that disgusting pleasure turned to pain but now that I'm here, now that my hand is buried inside me, I know that this is the answer to it all. This here is my salvation. My pathway back to redemption.

The pain is a distant echo. My screams of fury seem to drown out everything else.

I will not be his broodmare. I will not bring a child into this world to suffer at the hands of a monster. If this is what it takes to end it, to force Conrad's hand and bring about my own demise, then so be it.

I will mutilate my body, I will claw out my own womb if that is what is necessary.

The room around me blurs, my vision tunnels as I spiral deeper into my own personal hell.

I am no longer a person with hopes and dreams. I am a creature of despair, a wretched soul caught in the throes of a battle I may not survive.

But there's a strange sense of power in my defiance, a perverse strength that courses through my veins alongside the pain. I am marking myself, reclaiming my body as my own, even as I defile it in my madness.

This is my choice, my decision, the one act of autonomy I have left open to me.

So, I claw, and I rip, and I mutilate, until my arms can no longer move, until I'm too exhausted to do anything more.

Is it enough? Is the damage enough to ensure my destruction?

Because I know what he will do, I know how he will act when he sees this, when he realises his precious little doll cannot be bred after all. He will end it. He will end me.

I should feel some fear in that, some concern, and yet now, in this moment, all I feel is acceptance.

And in the quiet that follows, a strange calm washes over me. I have made my choice, I have drawn my line in the sand. Whether I live or die, I will do so on my terms, not his.

He may have shattered my spine, may have shattered my body but I am still here, still fighting, the only way I know how.

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# CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE



*Conrad*

I stare in horror at the mess. At the blood. At all of it.

I know this has nothing to do with her back. That this here, is something else entirely.

And then she looks at me, with an awful, crooked smile on her lips and she raises her hands, and she shows me her bloodstained nails.

“Now I will never carry your child.” She smiles.

What the fuck has she done?

I sprint from the room, shouting for the damned doctor once more. Christ, the amount of time he spends here, he might as well just move in.

He appears looking far less concerned than is acceptable and as I usher him in, he finally shows some level of understanding.

“What happened?” He says as if I was the one to do this.

“I don’t know.” I reply. I didn’t get a chance to look at the cameras today. We had a new shipment in and I’ve been with Dustin, I’ve been rushed off my damned feet.

He crouches down, examining her for a moment. “What did you do?” He asks her softly.

She narrows her eyes, fixing her gaze on me, as if he doesn’t even exist. “I will not bear him a child. I will not.” She spits with all the venom she can muster.

The doctor grabs his bag, starts examining her and then shakes his head in disbelief.

“What is it?” I snap. What the fuck is going on?

“She must have tried to rip out her uterus.” He says turning to look at me.

“What?”

“I can see it, where her nails clawed...” His face turns green like he might just puke.

“What does that mean? Was she successful, can she still have children?” Christ, I don’t know what I’ll do if she can’t. I won’t lose her. I refuse to give her up. But she must be mad. She has to be, to attempt such a thing.

He doesn’t reply beyond examining her more.

And all that insanity, all the fury seems to boil over. My wife becomes a thing possessed. She starts snarling, scratching, attacking the doctor and I rush over, holding her down.

The doctor pulls out a syringe and quickly stabs her with it, and within seconds her arms stop their fight, she gurgles up nonsense and then falls into unconsciousness.

“Well?” I snap, “Is the damage irreparable?”

“No,” He says. “Though it will take a little time to heal. She will have some internal scarring, but she has not done enough to prevent a pregnancy.”

Finally, some good fucking news.

“You won’t be able to have intercourse. At least, not until the sutures are out.” He adds.

“And how long will that be?” I ask. Like I have the luxury of time.

He tilts his head. “At least a week.”

A week? A fucking week? I need her pregnant now. I need... my mind comes to a stop as I realise, I haven’t tested her in a while. Nor has she bled.

“Could she be pregnant now?” I demand.

The doctor winces, glancing at her broken body. “If she was, there’s a high chance it wouldn’t have survived the spinal injury...”

I narrow my eyes, what the fuck is he saying? My hand grabs around his throat before I can register the movement. “Tell me she wasn’t pregnant. Tell me...”

He splutters, his stupid little arms wave around and I let him go while he gasps about checking to be sure.

Yeah, he better check, he better be absolutely certain.

I sink to my knees, taking Brynn’s hand. Did I kill our child? Did my anger ruin the one thing I wanted more than anything else in this cursed world? No, it wasn’t anger that made me hurt her, at least, not all anger. It was logical, it was the right thing to do. It was what was necessary to keep my wife as mine.

It takes forever for the doctor to find out, for him to say.

And the relief, the peace that hits me. No, she wasn’t pregnant. No, I didn’t just fuck up.

I should have known, God wouldn’t have played such a trick on me as that. He wouldn’t have let me kill my child. He wants her bred as much as I do.

“Fix her.” I say, as my eyes settle back on her face.

She looks so peaceful right now. So placid.

I know once the sedative wears off, she’ll be back to her rabid state again, that this won’t be the only time she tries to pull this stunt.

I get up, going to get the ropes but I’m sick of tying her up, sick of seeing the marks on her wrists and ankles from where it rubs. Besides, it kills the mood, having to untie her and retie her every time I want to change position. Breaking her spine was meant to fix that too. It was meant to incapacitate her enough that I didn’t have to resort to such measures anymore.

I run my hand down my face, realising that I need a new plan, a better plan. I’ve broken her body. I have to break her mind.

# CHAPTER FORTY-SIX



*Brynn*

I wake up groaning. My eyelids feel so heavy. My body feels like it's lying on a slab of concrete.

I try to move and nothing works, not my arms, not my legs... that awful memory hits me as I remember what he did. What he broke.

A whimper escapes my lips and within seconds, my tears are streaming down my cheeks.

*He broke my spine. He broke my spine.*

Grief seems to engulf me. It's like I'm drowning in it, drowning in the loss of something I thought would never be taken.

“Ssssh, it's okay.”

His fingers stroke my hair, his touch so soft and gentle and loving.

I can't stand it. I can't stand that he's like this. That he acts all kind, all caring when deep down we both know he's a monster.

“I hate you.” I scream out. “I fucking hate you.”

It's all I have left now. My words. I can't physically fight him in any way, but I'll make sure he knows that it makes no difference, that it will

never make any difference.

His hand stills, he lets out a low breath and I can see how he shakes his head in disappointment.

“You won’t, soon this will all be sorted. This will all be fixed.”

What the fuck is he talking about? Fixed? How can it be fixed? Nothing he does now will ever fix what he did to me, will ever repair all the awful things he’s inflicted upon my poor broken body.

“I don’t need you to love me, Brynn.” He says, planting an almost chaste kiss on my lips. “I don’t need that from you, because my love is enough for both of us.”

What the fuck does that mean? What the fuck is he talking about?

My rage seems to engulf me more. I thought he would kill me, God, I hoped he would. I thought when he saw what I did, how I’d mutilated myself, that he would see this entire thing was pointless.

Why am I not dead? What more could he possibly want from me?

“Just relax, Brynn, it’ll all be over soon.”

All of what? I turn my head, trying to make some sense from the madness. In the corner of the room, the doctor is there, setting something up, some sort of machine. It’s big, on wheels, and he pulls it over before placing the metal band around my forehead.

“This will only last a few seconds.” He says.

*What will? What is going on?*

The doctor tells Conrad to step back. My husband tilts his head, looking annoyed at having to let me go for even a second but he does it, he stands back by a good metre.

“Trust me, Brynn.” He says with that intense, almost psychotic look in his eyes. “This will fix it; this will fix everything.”

“What’re...?” My words turn to a scream.

Pain. Indescribable pain wracks through my body. I can’t breathe, I can’t think, I can’t move as my body spasms. Electricity pumps into me, through me. It shocks every cell in my body, and it feels like my eyeballs are going to explode. It’s so much worse than the collar. So much stronger.

There’s a high-pitched ringing in my ears. I know it’s my voice, I know it’s me, screaming and screaming but it sounds so much more than that.

And then it stops.

Everything falls silent.

My body slumps back against the hard metal gurney that I'm lying on while my heart seems to race so fast, I think it's going to give out.

"You're certain about this?" The doctor asks. But not to me.

Conrad nods, and it feels like a death knell. It feels like that colossal hammer coming down on my spine all over again.

I can't even move my mouth to speak, I can't even form words. Whatever they've done has rendered me mute. My hands try to twist, try to plead, but even they won't respond. It's as if my muscles no longer work. As if all of me is now paralysed.

I stare back, my eyes flitting from one man to the other and back again.

The doctor takes the band off my head and he moves the machine out of the way. For a second I feel such relief that they won't do it again, that they won't shock me again.

But then he comes back, and this time he has something that looks far worse in his hands.

Fear explodes in my chest. I try to scream, I try to fight, but my body won't respond. It's like I'm locked down, locked in. I'm a complete statue now, I'm not even a person. I'm trapped in my own body and there's no escape. There's no way out.

Conrad moves around to sit by my side, taking hold of my hand once more, in that show of comfort.

"I love you, Brynn, I love you so much."

# CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN



*Brynn*

I thought it through. I thought about it over and over.

I know this is what is meant to be. That this will fix it.

Her hand feels so cold, so still in my grasp, but there's no movement, no rejection, nothing but obedience.

The doctor mutters again and I know he's reticent, but I don't give a fuck what his opinion is on the matter. He's not here to make decisions, he's here to carry out orders.

He places a metal instrument against her eyes, pinning her lids back and then he secures it in place to a stand that keeps her head up, so she's in the perfect position for him to do his work.

He then takes the leucotome and slides it under her right lid. From the way her eyelids are held, she can't blink and I wonder how uncomfortable that must feel, to have something forced in where it's not meant to go.

Her mouth starts moving, her lips start trembling, and I swear she whispers my name.

But it's too late. It's far too late.

This might be extreme, but I know it's the right thing to do.

I've seen the results of the procedure a few times, in Oblivion. It's worked on some of the more aggressive slaves, but I've never witnessed it up close. To say I have a morbid curiosity is an understatement.

The doctor starts working away quicker, breaking through the eye socket and taking out tiny bits of brain matter that he places into a dish. When he's done with the right eye, he moves over to the left.

A cry echoes around the room as he breaks through her skull again, and I wonder if she needs another shock. When I voice that opinion, the doctor shakes his head.

"I don't want her too out of it." He says. "I need to see by her pupils how she's reacting to it."

I nod, giving way to his better judgement and I squeeze her hand again, reassuringly.

"Just a little longer." I murmur, though I don't know if that's necessarily true or not.

I guess it doesn't really matter. She won't remember this. She won't remember much from now on. The lobotomy will render her docile. It'll render her emotionless. She'll smile and she'll respond but beyond that, she won't feel true emotions, she won't feel anything.

And that can only be a good thing. It's her emotions that are the problem. Her emotions are the reason she won't submit. I don't need her to love me, no, I have enough love for both of us. I just need her to stop fighting me.

This will fix it. This will fix her.

All that fighting, all the anger, all the mania she's had will be gone.

And she'll be perfect then. My perfect little doll. She'll accept my love without complaint. She'll accept my caresses, and my touch and she will not know anything different.

# CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT



*Brynn*

**H**e's going to blind me.  
He's going to take my sight.  
I can see that instrument coming down right on my eye.  
And I can't blink. I can't even turn my head.  
My limbs won't work. My body won't respond. Whatever they did in  
shocking me, it was enough to render me useless. Defenceless. Helpless.  
“Please...” I beg, praying that this time they might listen. This time they  
might spare me.  
Only, those words are in my head too because my mouth won't work. My  
throat won't form words.  
And that sharp thing keeps coming down, it keeps lowering.  
I can't shut my eyes. I can't even look away. The thing on my face keeps  
my lids open as the spike pushes into me.  
Pain explodes behind my eyes, and I scream out. I can't stop screaming.

*But neither of them react. Neither of them seems to even hear it.*

*Something in my head snaps, some part of my skull seems to give way.  
My screams turn to an awful groaning sound. My thoughts seem to dissipate.*

*As he pulls the thing out, I can see the amount of blood on it. My blood.  
But there's something else too. At the end, mingled with it. It's tissue, brain  
tissue.*

*He's mangling my brains.*

*I let out another scream, only this sounds like a strange gurgling noise.  
The doctor leans down, staring at my pupils, checking for something I don't  
know.*

*And then he lowers that instrument again, forcing it into my other eye,  
forcing it through.*

*No.*

*No.*

*Noooo.*

*I need it to stop.*

*I need them to stop.*

*My legs kick out, my body fights. But it's useless. It's all useless.*

*Please.*

*Why won't they stop?*

*Why won't anybody help me?*

# CHAPTER FORTY-NINE



*Brynn*

B right light.

Bright.

Like an angel.

Floating, swimming in the air.

I try to raise my hand, to snatch at it. Maybe this is it, this is what death is. And that is my soul leaving my body, leaving me behind to rot away like bad fruit.

“I don’t want to die.”

I don’t know if I speak those words out loud or in my head, but they sound wrong. Twisted. Like I’m in a glass tank, and everything is echoing against the sides and distorting.

“I don’t want to die.” I scream louder.

Someone tutts. It’s an irritated sound. Me, I’m irritating them.

“Well?”

Well, well, well.

“She’s recovering well.”

A deep well. One filled with water, one sloshing and slurping and making a mess.

God I'm thirsty, so thirsty.

"Drink," I gasp.

I think I could drink the ocean. I could swim in it too. Swim far away like a mermaid. Swim deep, where no one can catch me.

"Will you behave?"

I will. I chant. I will. I will. I will.

Cold smooth glass presses to my lips, I open my mouth like chasm and water pours in. It fills the darkness in me, it topples out, down my chin, onto my chest like a wave from a tsunami.

"For fucks sake." He snaps. "Swallow it then."

Swallow. That's a bird. A pretty bird. I used to watch them from the window, used to wonder why they were free, and I was caged.

I guess now, it doesn't matter, does it?

I blink again, trying to sit up but my body is too heavy.

I'm a dead weight. I'm dead.

A giggle escapes my lips, but it doesn't make sense.

It's not funny. Funny.

Conrad looks funny. His face is blurred, his beautiful, awful features look so distorted as he leans down to stare at me.

"Sleep, Doll, you need to sleep."

Like a baby. A baby doll.

I want to wrap my arms around myself, I want to lie in a cradle and rock.

Rock.

Rock asleep.

Like a baby.

# CHAPTER

## FIFTY



*Conrad*

I t's so hard to leave her, to know she's lying there like my perfect princess, in my bed.

The way she stares at me now makes my cock hard.

I want to fuck her, I want to hold her down and see how she takes me now that she's fixed.

Will she ride me? No, she can't do that, her legs won't allow that. But I could hold her up, I could prop her up, I could tie her legs with rope and move her around like a marionette and she'd be so willing.

I can see it in her face.

I can see the way she needs it too. She wants it. That ice pick thing might have addled her brains, might have taken away bits of her brain, but the conditioning is still there.

She wants to be fucked.

My phone rings again and I hit the decline button. I don't give a fuck that my brother is waiting for me. He can wait a little longer.

"Doll," I murmur, stroking her cheek, "My perfect little doll,"

She shuts her eyes, leaning in, clearly seeking comfort.

Her breasts are held so beautifully in the little romper I dressed her in after the surgery.

My hands skim down her side, feeling her softness.

And she doesn't fight, she doesn't even whimper. She just lays there, looking at me with those big 'fuck me eyes'.

"I can't." I state. "I need to let your stitches heal first."

I want her to pout. To beg and to plead for my cock, but she doesn't respond. I guess placidity is better than rebellion, and perhaps in time I can train that too.

My hands slip between her thighs all the same. I know she's too damaged to do anything, but I can't resist touching her, I can't resist watching her come for me.

"Spread your legs." I say, and of course, she's not able to.

I roll her over, letting her thighs flop wide open. There's a little blood on the panties she has on. I slip them down, tossing them away.

"Will you be a good girl for me and come?" I ask.

She blinks back, before answering. "Come, come, come."

My lips curl. It sounds like she *is* begging me.

"You just lay there," I instruct, "I'll do all the hard work." Not that it is hard.

I scoot down, lifting her legs up and I place them over her shoulders. As I pull her cunt closer to my mouth, she gasps out in surprise.

She's still bruised. In truth, her cunt has never looked more battered than it has right now.

I lick my lips, my cock hardening beneath me at the mere thought of this and I trace one long languid lick right up her cunt. She jerks, but shows no more reaction beyond that.

I can't tongue fuck her. I can't even stick my fingers inside her.

But I can give her clit my full attention.

As my fingers start circling it, I can see how she grows more wet, how her body wants this.

And then I'm the rabid one. I'm sucking, licking, devouring her like I can't get enough. My phone rings again, it keeps ringing, and I refuse to stop for even a second to silence it.

Her hands grip the sheets and she's making these weird, almost animal sounds.

But she isn't fighting me. For the first fucking time, she isn't resisting.

Her arms fall back, her body jerks, she starts screaming, and god is it music to my ears.

"That's it," I groan, "That's a good little wife, come for me, come for me right fucking now,"

Her eyes roll back, her body jerks again and I can taste it, I can taste her arousal all over my tongue, over my lips, god, she's covering me.

Did my wife just squirt? I stare back at her in awe.

She's still going, still combusting. Her cunt is so flushed, so fucking gorgeous. Of course I can see the bits of damage, I can see where she hurt herself but it doesn't take away from the beauty, her beauty.

She's dripping. It's practically oozing out of her.

My wife just squirted all over my fucking face.

I throw my head back, roaring with triumph. I fixed her. I fucking fixed her.

And very soon I'm going to have her swollen with my child.

I lean down, planting a kiss right on that deliciously sensitive part of her.

"I love you," I whisper, letting my warm breath heat her skin more. "I love you so much."

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# CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE



*Conrad*

“**Y**ou took your damned time.” Magnus growls as I get out of the car.

“I had things to do.” I say as I walk up to meet him.

“More important things than this?” Antonio asks.

My lips curl at his tone. “You’re the ones who set a deadline, remember?”

Magnus reacts. I see the way he bristles, as if he hasn’t kept me waiting hundreds of times while he fucked and tortured his now wife.

I guess they’re not in the mood for an argument, because they both choose not to respond.

I look up at the house so far up the hill. We’re currently in the trees, hiding out of view. Our men have already ensured the security system is not operating as it should, so they have no idea that we’re coming.

Our target is another member of the Esau. He’s been brazen enough to threaten anyone who he thinks is backing Magnus. I guess tonight, he’s going to learn what his stupidity will cost him. Tonight, he’s going to realise what it truly means to come up against the Blakes.

Antonio looks at his watch and mutters that we need to wait a few minutes more. He has this thing timed to perfection and as much as I dislike him, I'll admit he's damned good at his job.

I glance at my brother, and for the first time I can see the strain of this on his face. It's subtle, but it is there. He looks back at me with that zero fucks fury in his eyes. I wonder if he might just tear the bastard to pieces when we get hold of him.

"We go now," Antonio says.

We feel like an army, a plague descending upon the house as we make our way in the darkness up the gentle slope. Antonio has already been on the inside, so the gates slide openly silently, welcoming us in like Greeks going to destroy the city of Troy.

We already studied the blueprints so we know the layout, and we've got a good guess what part of the house Lord Holsten and his family will be in. The heavies go in through the basement. They'll be doing the worst of the fighting.

Ordinarily, Magnus and I would be with them. Neither of us are the kind who like to hide at the back while the hired hands do the dirty work. But tonight is different. This entire fight is different. Magnus has a target the size of Manhattan on his back, and if anyone gets the chance, they will pull the trigger and eliminate him. We can't afford for that to happen. We cannot afford to fuck up, even once.

"Clear."

The gruff voice crackles out through my earpiece.

I take one last look around before I saunter in behind my brother as the sound of screaming starts to fill the air.

"Please, please..." A guard's hand beats the words from her lips and she falls hard, landing on her face. Her children surround her, crying more and someone mutters for them to shut the fuck up.

"You'll pay for this." Holsten snarls as he's dragged out in his pretty navy silk pyjamas.

I can't help but snigger back. Did he really think we wouldn't come? Did he really think he could get away with challenging us, like we'd just do nothing?

As Antonio steps in front of him, his eyes widen. "You bastard," He snarls. "You traitor..."

“The only traitor here is you.” Antonio replies. “You and all your Erau’s scum.”

Holsten starts spluttering, ranting. “You won’t get away with this, enough people know...” the sound of the gun echoing around the stark room silences the last of his tirade.

Antonio pockets the weapon as the man slumps forward with a gaping wound at the back of his head where the bullet clearly exited from.

“He could have gone to Oblivion.” I state. I would have enjoyed watching him being degraded and tortured until he no longer resembled a person anymore.

Antonio shakes his head. “Man was a liability.” He states. “Some things are better taken to the grave.”

My eyes narrow, and I wonder not for the first time what Antonio’s secrets are. He definitely knows far more than he’s letting on, at least to me. I look over at my brother, and he’s barking orders to ensure everything is set up the way we want it. That this scene will be left as a nice little warning for those still opposing us.

Does he know? Does he see who Antonio truly is? Magnus is not so naïve as to think Antonio is backing him out of the goodness of his heart. No, he must know his motives. And yet, he hasn’t shared that with me, has he? No, he’s blocked me out, kept me at arm’s length. Me, his own brother, his own flesh and blood.

A wave of jealousy hits me, anger too. How dare Magnus treat me like this when all I’ve ever done is sacrifice for this family. He treats me like I’m a joke. Like I can’t be trusted. Yet our future lies in my hands, with my child, not his.

I clench my fists, realising that Magnus can be Chapter Lord but soon enough, my child will inherit everything. Afterall, Magnus has no offspring of his own and Devin, well, Devin is Devin. Fuck knows what he’ll do with his life. For all we know he’s already put a bullet in his head to silence all those voices he’s always whispering about. No, I am this family’s future. Me.

“Please...” the screams of the wife break me out of my thoughts. I look around to see her now grabbing the leg of the nearest guard. “It wasn’t me, I haven’t done anything.”

“But you did.” I state, getting her attention. “You were married to him.”

"I did as I was told." She gasps. "I did what any good Brethren Lady does. I married the man my family chose. I didn't know about, about, any of this." She stammers before clutching at her two small, ashen faced children. "I haven't done anything wrong. They haven't done anything either."

I bat my hand, bored of her hysterics. "Put her in the van." She'll be off to Oblivion. That will be her fate. I guess we'll see then how good she is at following orders, won't we.

The guard grabs hold of her and starts dragging her away. She screams more, this time pleading for her children.

They stare back at me, their eyes wide, as if they're looking at the devil himself. Well, I guess for them, they are. I pull my gun, wondering whether the simplest answer to this would be best.

But they are Brethren. That means something.

The girl is pretty, the boy, well, it's hard to tell. They must have only just started school. Too bad for them that their parents were pieces of shit. I can't let them go, but they can serve another purpose.

"Take them to the House of Eden." I order. Yes, that feels fitting. Appropriate even. Lord X tried to fuck the Brethren over, now his children will be brainwashed and groomed into providing heirs for those unfortunate enough within our ranks to be unable to produce their own.

"Conrad," Magnus says, walking up to me.

I turn, facing him, realising we haven't said a word to one another in hours. Not since I arrived.

The air seems to bristle, and I can feel the irritation coming off of him. Is he pissed at me, or this entire situation? We never anticipated this would be such a fight. But then, we never anticipated the Esau's would have been nearly as entrenched into our world as they are.

"Any news?" He says, tersely.

"News?" I repeat. What news is he wanting from me?

"The girl." He snaps, losing his patience as if I'm a bloody mind reader.  
"Is the girl pregnant?"

God, how much do I want to say yes. How much do I want to beat my chest and prove that I'm just as worthy as he is.

"Not yet."

The disappointment shows in his face as his lips turn into a sneer. "Do you even know what you're doing? How hard is it to impregnate a twenty-one-year-old?" He growls.

I turn on my heel, deciding not to bother with replying. My job here is done now, I can head home. I can go enjoy the placidity of my wife.

“Where are you going?” Antonio says as I walk past him.

“Home.” I snap, loud enough for everyone to hear. “Home, to fuck my wife.”

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# CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO



*Brynn*

D rip.  
Drip. Drip.  
Drip.

I let out a groan as I realise it's rain. Rain on the windows.

The room is dark. Monsters come out in the dark. My husband is a monster.

Mooonster.

I let out a giggle, I married a monster. A monnnster.

Something opens, something moves. I can hear it. It's in the distance, too far to be near me but there's a steadily growing cacophony of sound that makes my heart race like it knows something I don't.

Is that him? Is he the storm? My husband is coming back like a whirlwind.

I used to fear him. I know that much. But fear feels so far away now, so removed from what I am. Emotions feel like a mirage. Like something you dream of but never experience.

I try to roll over. The sheets are so soft and gentle on my skin. Soft.

My husband's touch was soft, his eyes looked at me with love, but I know he used to feel other things. He used to hurt me.

I glance down, staring at the two pale legs that refuse to budge.

Budge.

Budge budge budge.

My toes are painted a pretty pink, and even though I can't see them in this darkness, I can shut my eyes and see that perfect shade. I want to wiggle them, to show them off. But they too refuse to budge.

Crash.

I jerk more awake. That noise was nearer. That noise was closer. It's coming for me.

Is it God? Has he decided that I've had enough now, that I've done enough. I've paid my price to enter Heaven, and these are the angels coming to carry me away?

"Jesus." A man says.

The light comes on, and I only just manage to cover my eyes. They're swollen anyway. My sight is still blurred from when they mashed my brains.

My brains. Mashed like potatoes.

I'm hungry, and I like potato mash.

"Brynn?"

I don't know that voice. I don't know what is going on.

There should be fear here, there should be panic, but I feel nothing as the duvet is yanked off and these men who fill the room are staring at me. They're dressed in black. They look like an army, a swarm of beasts. Who are they? They can't be with my husband because he would never have let them see me like this.

"Oh god, Brynn." A girl pushes through, shoving them out the way and she comes to kneel beside me with what looks like horror on her face.

I lift my hand, tracing the way her skin crinkles.

"I know you." I whisper. I do. It's true. I'm not lying. I know her.

She shakes her head like she doesn't understand something.

"It's okay," I say repeating those same words Conrad says to me. It's okay. It's all okay. Everything is fixed now. Everything is good.

"What the fuck has he done?" A man snarls.

I look at him, I tilt my head and I stare at the stranger.

“Done.” I state. “All done. All fixed.”

“What the fuck?” Someone else mutters.

“We need to get going.” The man states, “Can you walk?”

He’s talking to me? He thinks I want to leave? I frown, staring down at my legs. I just want my toes to wiggle. I don’t even care if my feet don’t work. I just want to see my toes move, just a little bit.

But there’s nothing.

“No walk,” I say.

That clearly pisses him off. He starts barking orders before he turns back to me. “Get up, we’re leaving.”

“No walk.” I repeat. “No legs.”

“What does she mean ‘no legs’? They’re right there?” The girl gasps, pointing like we can’t see them.

I remember her now. I remember her face.

“You came.” I whisper. “You found me before. When I was bad. When I was broken.”

She was there. She found me on the rug. She was a maid.

She nods, taking my hand. “Please Brynn, we want to help you.”

“No walk.” I repeat. “No legs.”

“What does that mean?” The man snarls, losing the last of his patience.

I shut my eyes, taking a deep breath. There’s too many people in this room. No one is meant to be in this room. Conrad doesn’t like anyone here, not even the doctor.

“Broke.” I whisper, “He broke... Now my legs are gone.” I roll over, showing my skin, showing my spine and I know that the bruising is there, that the damage is there.

The room reacts. I don’t look at their faces but it’s clear no one here likes my legs like this.

“I’ve been good.” I state. I have. I haven’t moved. I did what he asked. And when he comes back, he’s going to reward me.

Reward me. My hand moves, it’s so instinctive I don’t question it. That need is suddenly there, so strong and I need to sort it. I need to do it. I’m not allowed to touch my cunt, they said that, they said it’s damaged, but I can touch the other part. The part that is nice, the part on the outside that makes me see stars.

“What the fuck is she doing?” The man snarls.

“He’s fucked with her head.” The girl replies. “She wasn’t like this before. I swear...”

“We don’t have time for this.”

A hand smacks at me. It stops me. I look up, not understanding because this is what my body needs. This is what my body wants. And my husband wants it too. He likes this.

“Conrad wants...” I trail off, unable to finish that sentence as I’m scooped up.

I’m not wearing anything. I’m naked, and the feel of my skin against the stiffness of his clothes is horrible. It rubs. It scratches.

“Let’s go.”

Go.

Go. Go. Go.

*But I can’t go. I can’t.* Conrad will be back. He will be expecting me to be here.

“He wants me here.” I state. Why don’t they understand?

Colours, paintings, rooms pass me by in a whirl as I’m carried out.

“It’s okay.” The maid says reassuringly, echoing those same words my husband says. “Don’t be scared.”

But I’m not scared. I don’t feel scared. I don’t feel emotions.

It’s cold outside, really cold. The man holding me wraps something around my body and we stand by a car but he doesn’t put me in it.

He just turns me and lets me look back at the house. My house. Conrad’s house.

Only, it doesn’t look like it should. Why are there flames? Why is it billowing out smoke? I start to cough as that black ash seems to fill the air.

“You’ll never have to go back there again,” The man says. As if that’s meant to be a good thing.

I blink at him, staring at his strange face. “Who are you?”

His lips curl. He’s older, too old, far older than Conrad and Magnus too. He must be my grandfather’s age, only he doesn’t look like he’s looked after himself so well. His skin is more wrinkled. His eyes look tired. And his hair is so grey.

“You know who I am, Brynn.” The man replies. “I’m your father.”

# CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE



*Brynn*

I stare at him. Stare at the man I've only read about, had glimpses of, through my mother's juvenile words. He's old. Wrinkly. He has grey hair and peppery stubble on his face. He's nothing like the man I imagined.

*I don't know what this means. What I'm meant to do.*

He puts me in the car, straps me in like I'm precious cargo and then we're driving away, disappearing into the night like thieves.

I have so many questions. Questions. Questions.

How did he find me? Why didn't he find me before? Why does he even want me now?

I blink, feeling a wave of exhaustion hit me and it takes what feels like my entire strength to raise my hand to cover my mouth as I yawn.

"Try to sleep." My father says. "We have a long journey."

"Where?" Where are we going? Will Conrad be there? Has he decided he wants a new home now that I'm fixed, is that it?

He plants a soft kiss on my forehead. “I’ll explain in the morning.” He says.

The morning. That feels so far away. I don’t think I can wait till then. But I don’t think I can keep my eyes open either. My lids are so heavy.

My father’s hand strokes my hair. It’s still in plaits from the way Conrad did it. He teases them loose, letting the now kinked strands fall down over the blanket I’m wrapped in.

“You look so like her.” He says.

I don’t need to ask who. I know who. He means my mother. The woman he loved. The woman they wouldn’t let him be with.

I shut my eyes, lean back and let my sleep take me while the hum of the engine sounds like a lullaby carrying me away to neverland.

I’m in a bed.

Not my bed.

Not my home.

I sit up as best I can and stare at the strange surroundings. There’re thick velvet curtains covering the windows, and the walls are decorated with elaborate panelling. The furniture looks old. So old. It feels like I’m in a castle, like I’ve stepped back in time.

I’ve been washed. Washed and dressed in a nighty, and that bandage on my chest is gone. I can feel my skin prickling around the cool air. I drop my gaze, trying to get a good look at what my husband did but the angle is all wrong, and my eyes won’t focus.

My bladder feels so full I’m worried I’m going to piss myself but as I try to get up, my legs give way, and I slam face first into a thick rug.

“Brynn.”

A girl rushes over to me, helping me up. “Are you okay?”

I nod. My chin feels like I have a carpet burn, but I’ve had worse. “Piss.” I state. “Need to piss.”

She jerks her head, and another girl takes my other arm. Together they help get me to where the ensuite is. My feet drag behind me, my toes bang on the threshold but I’m still so grateful as I sit down.

The sound is so loud. I wrinkle my nose, wondering if an elephant could piss any louder than I do.

“Would you like some breakfast?” The other maid asks, as if this is all perfectly normal.

Breakfast. I can't remember the last time I ate. It must have been before I lost my legs. Before I was bad.

I nod again, biting my lip with my enthusiasm.

They help me back up, and I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I look pale, my eyes are so bruised it's like I've been in a fight, but that scar, that mark... my fingers brush against my damaged skin and I hiss for a second at the flash of pain.

He branded me. My husband branded me.

"So pretty," I whisper. I can see all the detail, I can see how my skin is literally moulded now.

The two maids frown more, whispering something I don't catch and then they carry me out, carry me back to the bed.

The girl I don't know disappears off while the other stays, watching me.

Ingrid. That's her name. The other maid, the one from before. She just smiles at me after propping me up on a mountain of pillows.

I blink back, unsure if I'm worthy of her happiness.

"Where is Conrad?" I ask. It's morning now, he'll be wondering where I am. He'll want to be fucking me again.

Something flickers across her face and then she recollects herself. "He's away." She states, like that's an answer.

I open my mouth to ask for more details, but the other girl comes back with a tray. I can smell the bacon. I can smell all the delicious food. My stomach grumbles loudly as they place it on my lap.

"Can you feed yourself?" Ingrid asks.

"I'm not a dummy." I reply. My legs might be gone, but that doesn't mean I don't know how to eat.

The other girl stifles a giggle, but they stand there anyway, waiting for me to prove if I'm capable or not.

I pick up the fork and take a big scoop of scrambled eggs. They're hot. Hot hot hot. They burn my tongue, but I don't care.

I want the bacon next. It's streaky and crispy, and I munch on it with my bare hands.

The beans are the challenge. The slippery suckers drop all over the sheets and in the end they take over feeding me. I guess it's only fair, seeing as they'll be the ones changing these now that they're dirty.

Once the food is done the plate is taken away but Ingrid stays there, watching me almost curiously.

“Where is Conrad?” I ask again.

“Your father wants to see you.” She replies, not answering my question.  
“He asked me to get you bathed and dressed.”

“I have nothing to wear.” That fact alarms me. I’m naked. Conrad doesn’t like me naked around others. He doesn’t like them to see me.

Except he paraded me about through Oblivion. He had me trussed up like a pig, crawling on all fours.

My cheeks flame. I feel the memory of it hit my core and my hand moves, fisting the duvet.

I just need a moment. Five minutes max.

Ingrid’s eyes drop to see where my hand is. “Are you okay?” She asks.  
I nod back. It’s okay. It’s all okay.

She lets out a low breath, like I’m acting crazy. “How about a nice dress?” She says, going to what I assume is a wardrobe.

I don’t watch her. I don’t look. My hand slips under the covers and I’m there, touching myself, relieving that need now that it’s screaming in my head.

It feels so good. It feels so necessary. My body thrums, I come alive as my fingers move in that same way my husband touches me.

*Conrad.*

“Oh my god, Brynn. What are you doing?” Ingrid shrieks.

I open my eyes, staring back at her.

“You, you...” She pulls the duvet back and there, between my useless legs, we can both see where my hand is circling my clit.

“Conrad likes this.” I state. “He wants...”

Her hand slaps my cheek, and it sends a jolt through me.

“He’s not here.” She says angrily. “You’re not his toy anymore. You don’t have to do anything he says anymore.”

“But he’s my husband.” I state. Husband. Husband and wife. He put me in a pretty dress, he took me down an altar, and he married me. Not my aunt, not my horrid, horrid aunt. He wanted me.

She slaps me again, harder. “Enough.”

I don’t understand. This doesn’t make sense.

The other maid appears and looks between us with that same hard expression.

“Let’s get her dressed.” Ingrid says, taking charge.

They lift me up, pull me out of the bed by my arms and place me on the end of it. And I sit there, quiet, and behaved. Like a robot. Like a doll.

I'm in a wheelchair. It's so smooth. It glides over the polished wooden floorboards and makes me feel suddenly invincible.

They dressed me up all pretty in a nice lace white dress, then they brushed my hair and left it hanging loose.

My legs are propped up on little steps, and my pink toes sparkle back at me. But still, they refuse to move.

As we come to a stop, I look up and see I'm in a room. It's just as fancy as the one I woke up in. The same panelling is on the walls. Only, there's a great stone fireplace here, and the windows are on view so I can see they're made of stone too. The glass is diamond shaped, all put together like a puzzle and held with black bits of metal. It's pretty, so pretty.

“How's she doing?”

“She ate all her breakfast.”

“Good.”

“And then she tried to touch herself again.”

“Excuse me?” That's a different voice. A stranger.

I look up, staring at the stern bald man who's caught between outrage and amusement.

“She tried to touch herself.” Ingrid says again.

“Conrad wants it.” I explain. Why is it so complicated? I'm not broken anymore. I'm fixed now.

My father shakes his head. “I never want to hear his name again, do you hear me?” He growls.

Why is he so angry? Conrad is my husband. It's my duty to do what he wants, we all know that.

“Where is he? Where is my husband?” I ask.

It's Ingrid who slaps me. Her hand strikes the same cheek, and this time it makes tears stream from my eyes and down my face.

“He is not your husband. Not anymore.” She snaps.

“Yes, he is.” I know he is. I know it. He dressed me up and dragged me down that aisle and then the priest...

My father sighs, walking over to me, and kneels in front of the chair. “Brynn, I know this is all very confusing, but we have your best interests at heart. We're going to protect you now.”

“Protect me from who?”

His hand comes up to cup my cheek. “Do you trust me?”

I don’t know him, I don’t know any of these people. I blink back, unsure what to say. I only trust my husband. But then he took my legs, didn’t he? He took my wiggling toes too.

“Conrad is a bad man.” My father explains. “He has done a lot of bad things, and he’s hurt you.”

“No.” I shake my head.

“Brynn...”

“He did that because I was bad. But I’m not bad now, I’m fixed. I’m all fixed.”

Ingrid makes an exasperated sound, and my eyes dart to her.

“You saw,” I state. “You saw me, at our home...”

“I saw you.” She says. “You were lying in a puddle of your own piss after he’d beaten you so badly you couldn’t even walk.”

I don’t remember that. I don’t... the rug had been so soft. I like soft. Conrad is soft now. Conrad likes me now.

“She’s a nutter.” The bald man laughs.

“What do you expect?” Ingrid replies. “She’s been in his dirty grasp for months now.”

Months. Months. I’ve been with Conrad for months. Magnus asked me how long we’d been married.

“Months.” I repeat.

My father waves his hand in front of my face, catching my attention once more.

“We’re going to fix you, Brynn. We’re going to take care of you.” He states.

But Conrad fixed me. I don’t need more fixing.

The feeling of being held down, of having my eyelids prised open hits me. I shake my head, shake it so violently. There’s something there. Something behind my eyes. It’s pushing too hard. It’s going to break me.

“Make it stop.” I scream suddenly. “Make it stop. Make it stop.”

My hands claw at my skin, my nails dig into those awful bruises. My father grabs hold of me, wrenching my arms back.

“It’s okay.” He says, but it’s not. The doctor is there, he’s right there, digging into my skull, taking out the bits he doesn’t like.

“Sedate her.”

I don't know who yells it. But the needle jabs me, it pierces my skin and despite the sharpness a calm seems to wash over me.

"I'm good now." I whisper as my head drops. "I'm fixed."

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# CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR



*Conrad*

The acrid stench of smoke fills my throat, fills my lungs.

I walk through the ruins of what had been our home, and I see nothing but charred bodies and charred furniture.

They killed them. They killed my damned servants. My guards, and then they took my wife before they tried to burn the place to the ground.

I can't help seeing the irony in the fact that I was there, at an Esau's stronghold while they were here, in mine. Both of us landing blows. Both of us making moves.

Did they hide and wait for me to leave? Were they watching us the entire time?

I want my wife back. I want Brynn in my arms.

My hands clench into fists and I slam them into the crumbling remains of a wall. It shatters on impact, and I stare at the small piece of destruction I've made, feeling like it isn't enough.

My wife is out there, with them. Are they hurting her? Are they touching her?

At least her brain is so muddled now she can't give them any useful information, but that doesn't ease my concern. She is mine. Mine.

And they took her from me.

My phone rings in my pocket. I pull it out, narrowing my eyes when I see who it is.

"What the fuck do you want?"

This is his fault. All of this. He picked a fight when we could have just carried on as we were.

But that there is what a loser would say, that there is what a defeatist would argue. And we are not that. We are Blakes. We were born to rule, destined for it. It is our God given right to be where we are, to strive for more.

"There's been a development..."

Too damn right there has.

I'm barely listening to his words. I'm storming through the house, searching for what, I don't know but when I come to a stop I'm in our room, our bedroom. Where I first brought her before she became too difficult to handle.

The fire hasn't done as much damage here. The rug is ruined, the walls are covered in smoke damage, but the bed is barely affected.

I sink down, sitting on the very end of it, thinking about her, about us. About that bloody timeline that Magnus gave me. I guess that's out the window now that my wife is gone. They can hardly call that in, when she's MIA.

Magnus is still talking away. I grunt and make the appropriate noises, but I don't give a fuck what he has to say.

As my eyes drop, I spot something sticking out from under the mattress. It's small. A book, or a diary perhaps.

*What the fuck?*

I flick through the pages, seeing the scrawl, and come to a stop on what looks to be an entry with a date over twenty years ago. My eyes scan the page, then I flick to another, and another.

*Is this for real? Where the fuck did Brynn get this from?*

If you didn't know any better you'd think this was real, you'd think that this was an account of what happened all those years ago, why she fled. It reads like a love story, exactly like those forbidden books Brynn used to sneak out of her grandfather's library.

Two star-crossed lovers who weren't allowed to be together.  
But I know that's bollocks. I know all of this is bullshit.  
Because I know this handwriting. I know exactly whose it is.  
And it absolutely is not her mother's.

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# CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE



*Brynn*

T t's evening. The night chill is already starting to set in.  
Does Conrad know I'm gone yet? Will he be looking for me?  
I'm sitting in my chair, staring out at a scene that looks so unfamiliar. There's a great formal garden with box hedging and roses all pruned and nicely managed while the setting sun illuminates a lake, making it look otherworldly.  
My head hurts. My eyes feel heavy.  
I know I was bad, that I upset them, but I don't understand it.  
I've been cooped up in this room by myself like they needed to tuck me away and pretend I didn't exist.  
I'm hungry. It feels like breakfast was so long ago now, and I know I didn't have anything for lunch.  
As if they can read my thoughts the door opens and Ingrid walks in, giving me a tight smile and then she starts setting up a table. Three places. Three glasses. All of it neatly arranged.

I watch in silence. It feels like every time I speak, I make her angry and I don't want her to hit me again.

She turns to look at me again and runs her eyes over my dress like it's no longer appropriate.

"Do you need to change?" She asks.

I shake my head.

She flares her nostrils. "Do you need to use the toilet?"

Again, I shake my head. I was able to manoeuvre the chair in, to hike my dress up, to sort myself out. It took some doing, but at least I didn't have an audience.

"Fine then, they'll be here in a few minutes."

"Who?" I ask. Is it Conrad, has he arrived?

She must see something in my face because she scowls more. "Who do you think?" She snaps before walking out.

I stare at the door, at where she all but slams it behind her. Is it locked? I never thought to try. But why would they lock me in?

*Conrad used to tie me up to a bed.*

I know that's true; I can see the evidence of it around my wrists. I can see where the rope bit into my skin and made it red raw.

My hands grab the metal handles, and I spin the wheels, moving quickly. My heart slams into my chest unsure if I want to know what the answer to this is, but as my hand reaches the doorknob it swings open.

I cry in shock, almost toppling the chair.

My father frowns, staring at me for a moment. "What are you doing?" He asks, not sounding pissed off. Sounding curious. Like he's caught me being cheeky rather than breaking the rules.

"I just wanted to see..." I mumble.

"See what?"

"If I was locked in."

His eyebrows raise. "Why would we lock you in?"

I shrug. My cheeks flame, and it feels like you could fry an egg on my face.

Eggs, we had eggs for breakfast.

"Come sit at the table." The other man says, the bald man from before. He gestures to the corner, and I realise they're the ones I'm having dinner with.

I start to wheel myself towards my place, and then feel as my father takes the handles behind my back and helps.

The cutlery is so shiny. It's polished silver, heavy too. I pick up the knife, taking the weight of it in my hand. Magnus's cutlery was like this, heavy, expensive.

The other man sits down, and he places his hands together, his eyes fixed on my face while my father takes his seat beside him.

"Who are you?" I ask. No one's even told me his name. What he's even doing here.

"This is Xavier," My father explains. "He's a close friend of mine, and amongst other things, he's very highly skilled in managing these sorts of situations."

"What situations?" I frown.

"Your husband." Xavier says pointedly.

My eyes dart between them. I can't figure out what that means. "Is Conrad coming here?" I ask hopefully, and then I remember how they reacted the last time. How Ingrid slapped me. I don't want to get slapped again. I don't want them to hurt me.

My father sighs. But Xavier, Xavier leans in, studying me more.

"Do you miss your husband, Brynn?" He asks.

When I nod enthusiastically, my father scowls more, while he just chuckles. "Fuck, he did a number on her, didn't he?" He mutters.

"What's a number?" I reply. What does that mean? Is this a puzzle, like sudoku? I liked that. I liked those numbers.

He tilts his head up with a look that tells me he's messing with me now. "It means he fucked you over. Fucked you up." He states.

"Fucked." I repeat. Yeah, he did fuck me. But that's what husbands do, and good wives want that. Good wives should need that.

I feel a wave of something hit me at the memory of him. Between my thighs it suddenly feels so wet, so desperate. I want to rub them together, to try to ease the pressure but my legs don't move.

"Brynn?" My father says, "Are you okay?"

I nod my head, even though I'm not. I'm so far from okay. It feels like sweat is pooling along my forehead. I feel so thirsty for something so much more satisfying than a mere drink.

As the door opens, I jolt in my chair. Ingrid glances at me, and then she and her friend start placing the food down.

It feels awkward, tense even. There's something going on here, something my muddled mind can't quite figure out.

My stomach grumbles loudly enough that my cheeks heat. I pick up my cutlery and dig in, practically wolfing down the beetroot and goat cheese starter.

Both my father and Xavier take their time eating theirs. I guess they actually had lunch, unlike me. I wonder if I'll have the balls to request more food tomorrow, though I doubt it. I don't want to rock the boat. I don't want to cause trouble.

When I look up again, my father is staring at me, and for a second it feels so odd to look at him, to know who he was, to remember all the little entries my mother wrote about him.

"Why didn't you come for us?" I blurt out.

He frowns, narrowing his eyes. "I had no idea she was pregnant. If I did, I would have made sure she married me."

The way he says it, he doesn't sound heartbroken, he sounds angry. Absolutely furious.

"But they wouldn't let you." I whisper.

He frowns more. "What?"

"I know what happened." I state. "I found her diary, I read it."

He sits back in his chair, his lips curling as if I've said something funny. "I forgot about that." He says in such a different tone.

I don't know what to say. How to reply. It sounds like he forgot about us. About me.

Silence seems to settle between us and the maids bring the food. More delicious hot food. I almost squeal when I see the mash.

"Mash like my brain." I declare, giggling.

Ingrid freezes, staring at me dumbfounded. My father waves her away.

I chew my food. I chew each mouthful. And my father doesn't take his eyes off me for a second.

"What do you mean by 'mashed like your brain'?" Xavier asks.

I don't like him. I don't know why I suddenly realise that, but there's something about him that puts a chill up my spine. But he's also my father's friend. And I trust him, don't I? Don't I?

"My brain was broken." I reply. "So, they fixed it."

"How?" My father asks.

I gulp, dropping the cutlery. Remembering that moment, that pain. My hands instinctively cover my eyes and all the bruising that's still there.

"They poked me with ice-picks." I state. "They poked my eyes, and I thought I would go blind. But then they removed my brain. All the broken bits came out. And now I'm fixed. And I can still see."

Xavier and my father exchange a startled look.

"He gave you a lobotomy?" Xavier says.

Lobot-a-what? I shrug. Maybe that's what it was. Maybe it was something else. It doesn't really matter. All that matters is that I'm good now.

"Lucas," Xavier says, "If that's true..."

"It makes no difference." My father states, batting his hand.

"Don't be stupid."

"Xavier, look at her, look..."

"I am looking." Xavier snaps.

"You're not seeing what I'm seeing." My father replies as Xavier rolls his eyes. "I see her, I see her mother, I see Ophelia. She's the spitting image of her..."

"She's fucked. She can barely string a coherent sentence together."

"We don't need her to talk." My father laughs. "We just need her body, her womb."

"Womb." I murmur, and they both look at me.

"I'm not doing it." Xavier states, folding his arms, dropping his gaze over me like I've got something wrong with me.

"We had an agreement. We had a deal." My father snaps.

"You think I want to fuck that?" Xavier sneers.

"Like you haven't had worse." My father says dismissively. "Look at her, look at her body. She's beautiful. Her breasts are big, her skin is perfect..."

"Bruised." Xavier states. "Battered and bruised, and already used by a Blake of all fucking people."

"We had a deal." My father snaps again.

"I could breed with any bitch, I don't need..."

"An Asher?" My father says. "Yes, you fucking do. You want to be Chapter Lord, you want to replace Titus, you want them to follow you, then you need my name. You need my blood. Founder blood."

Blood. So much blood. I remember it, all over my hands, all over the floor. I shut my eyes, shaking my head. I don't want to go back there; I don't want to ever go there.

"Go where?" My father asks and I realise I spoke out loud.

"Oblivion." I whisper.

He reaches over, taking my hand. "Don't worry Brynn, you'll never go back there again. No one is going to hurt you here, as long as you're a good girl."

"Good girl," I repeat. I am a good girl. I am good now. Conrad fixed me.

Xavier pours more wine into my glass. I don't remember even drinking the first lot, but I take a shaky hold of it and sip it to be polite.

The maids clear our plates and then bring out the desserts. I lick my lips as I see a big serving of apple crumble being placed before me.

I don't think anything of the fact that neither Xavier nor my father have anything in front of them. That I'm the only one eating.

"She was so beautiful." My father says suddenly.

I look up, the spoon poised between my bowl and my mouth.

His eyes seem to glisten as he runs his hand over his jaw. "First time I saw her was at a recital. She sang so well, and she had such presence. Whenever I went to see your grandfather, she would be there, waiting for me, and I'd always ensure I gave her a little present."

I rest my chin on my hand, no longer interested in the food. "Tell me more," I plead. No one ever tells me anything about my mother. Nothing except the fact that she's a whore, that she deserved what she got.

He sighs. "She and your aunt didn't get along. Giselle was naughty. She would steal things; steal presents I gave Ophelia. I wanted to take her away, but Ophelia wasn't of age, so I had to wait. But it was so hard. Watching her, seeing how everyone else admired her..."

He trails off, lifting his wine glass to take a long sip.

"Why did you leave?" I ask. I know that's what happened. He had to go on a trip, and she couldn't reach him. That's when she found out she was pregnant.

He tilts his head, "I had no choice. They were onto me. A friend helped me get away, but they'd found out about us, about the Esau. They wanted to destroy us all. I had to run."

"And you didn't want to take my mother with you?"

He shakes his head. “I couldn’t. She was still in school...”

His words seem to fade out as I suddenly become aware of how tired I am. How my head is spinning. I stifle a yawn, but another one rushes to take its place.

My father gives me a gentle smile. “Let’s get you to bed. You’ve had a hard few days.”

“I’m okay.” I whisper.

I am okay. I’m fixed.

He stands up, barking for the maids to come clear everything away and then he’s fixing the fire, ensuring the room is heated while I sit there in my chair, unsure what to do.

Xavier is standing now, standing at the window, like he can see through the darkness.

I expect him to leave. I expect them both to, but as the maids drop a curtsy and shut the door, it’s more than clear that that’s not what is happening.

My father walks over to me, picks me up out of the chair and carries me to the bed.

I mumble about needing a maid to help undress me, and he shakes his head.

“We can do it.” He says.

I shake my head quickly. No. I can’t allow that. Conrad wouldn’t like that. He doesn’t like anyone seeing me naked.

My father crouches down so that he’s eye to eye with me. “Don’t be shy now, Brynn. You’re just as beautiful as your mother was. Don’t you want to show us?”

I look between them as my heart thumps just a little louder.

He places his hands on the straps of my dress and then he slides them now, exposing my entire upper body. My nipples instantly harden, something screams in my head for a second before it goes silent.

“Such a pretty girl,” My father says, reaching to cup my breasts. “You’re curvier than your mother was,”

Is this normal? Is this what parents do?

My father jerks his head for Xavier to come over and he walks purposefully to stand beside him, his eyes now fixed on my exposed flesh.

“Feel her,” My father instructs.

Xavier shoots him a look before he reaches down and gives both my breasts a hard grope.

I don't like it. I don't like any of this. I let out a whimper and my father tsks.

"I thought you said your husband fixed you?" He murmurs.

Fix. I was fixed. I mean, I thought I was fixed.

He gives my right breast a little slap, hard enough to sting, hard enough to leave a little red mark. "Prove that you're fixed, Brynn. We wouldn't want to have to do that again, to use those ice picks..."

I don't want that. I don't think I could take that pain again, but I also don't know what to do. What this is.

Xavier pushes himself between my legs, crumpling the skirt right up and then he's shoving me back, shoving me so that I'm lying flat on the duvet.

An alarm seems to go off again, it repeats in my head. I try to sit up, and Xavier is holding me down.

"I thought you gave her enough to make her relax?" He says, but not to me.

My father shrugs back. "It should have been enough, maybe it just needs a few more minutes."

Xavier shakes his head. "We do this now, or I'm out."

"Don't act like you don't want to fuck her," My father sneers, grabbing my arms back. "Her mind might be useless, but her body is still good. I guarantee once you've had a taste, you'll be happy enough to keep returning..."

Xavier grunts, pushing my underwear aside and he jams two fingers into me.

"No," I gasp. He can't do that, he's not allowed. I'm married to Conrad. I belong to Conrad.

"Brynn," My father says again, sounding so disappointed. "Don't you want to be a good girl? Don't you want to make your father proud?"

I do. I want that. But this isn't allowed, is it?

My tears start streaming down my face as Xavier starts thrusting in and out of me.

"She's a tight bitch," He comments. "I bet Conrad loved that."

"Conrad," I gasp. I want Conrad. I want him here. I want him doing this. Not this man, not this stranger.

“Brynn,” My father growls before slapping me across the face. “If you won’t behave, then we won’t have any choice.”

Choice.

Choice. Choice. Choice.

I didn’t have any choice when Conrad stole me away. When he married me.

I don’t have any choices here, do I?

I shake my head again, and try to lash out with the only part of my body that still works.

My father pins my arms over my head, his face so close to mine as Xavier rolls my dress up, exposing all of my most private parts.

“I don’t like fucking her with that brand on her,” He remarks. “That has to be fixed.”

“Fine, we’ll fix it.” My father replies.

Fix.

They have to fix me.

Xavier lets out another disgruntled huff, pulling my legs up, pulling them wide, and he moans about how he’s ‘having to do all the work here.’

“Your whores can ride you, my daughter is better than that.” My father says.

Better. I was meant to be better.

But this doesn’t make me better, does it? This doesn’t make me good?

“No,” I repeat again, “I married Conrad, I’m his wife,”

“Stupid fucking bitch,” Xavier snarls, getting right into my face, “This might be hard for you to understand seeing as you only have half a brain, but your marriage doesn’t count because it hasn’t been ratified by the Senate. That means, you’re fair fucking game. So you’re going to lie here, and you’re going to let me fuck you. You’re going to let me use you any way I decide, and once you’ve given me a few sons, then maybe you might have proved your worth...”

No, no children. I don’t want his children.

“...your father here is giving me permission. He’s a Founder, you’re a Founder, that means he can bend the rules. But you will lie here, and you will take my cock willingly, do you understand?”

He doesn’t give me a second to reply. He just rams himself into me.

It feels horrific, it hurts so much more than all the times Conrad forced himself onto me. I guess that’s because of all the damage I did to myself. I

can feel my muscles refusing to move, I can feel those stitches catching with each brutal thrust.

“Be a good girl,” My father says, keeping his eyes fixed, not on my face, but where his friends is currently penetrating me, “Show your father how good you can be...”

I don’t want to be good. I don’t want to be this.

But my body responds all the same. I know it’s not technically my fault. I know on some level that Conrad made me like this, that he turned my body into this, but the way my pulse starts to beat faster, the way everything just thrums...

I start screaming, start trying to buck them off, but I’m too broken from the way Conrad smashed my spine to stand any chance of succeeding.

Xavier growls, “Shut that bitch up.”

And my father rams his hand over my mouth, telling me what a disappointment I am. What a terrible daughter I am too.

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# CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX



*Conrad*

W<sub>here is she? Where is my wife?</sub>  
I know this bitch has the answers. I know she's behind this entire thing.

There's a voice in my head telling me I should be more careful, that to go up against the Monclere's in broad daylight is not only reckless, it's suicidal.

And yet I don't care.

I don't give a fuck.

I kick the door in, storming through the entrance hall.

One of Quinn's men comes running and I pull my gun, shooting him down before he even gets close.

Another follows right after and he's dead, lying on his mate before he can even blink.

I walk in, heading through to where I'm certain the bitch will be. As I reach the Great Hall, Quinn appears with a golf club in his hand, holding it like a bat.

"What is the meaning of this?" He snarls.

I let out a snort, a sound of derision. He really thought they were a match for us. He really thought that the Monclere's were as big a name as the Blakes.

And then I hear those stupid little click-clack heels. She all but struts in, and she pauses when she sees me, running her hands down her body to smooth her dress like I'm here to fuck her.

"Husband, really, is this any way to behave around your in-laws?" She cooed.

"You're not my wife. You're not anything to do with me." I state.

She puts a hand on her hip and rolls her eyes. "Conrad, Darling. We've been through this. The marriage is next week. You can't back out of it now..."

"I can if you're not around to meet me at the altar."

"And what reason would I have not to show?" She half-laughed.

I cock the gun, pointing it right at her face. "Maybe because you'll have a bullet in your brain."

Quinn looks between us, clearly not quite sure what is going on. "Conrad, be calm. Whatever this is, we can work this out. We had an agreement after all, the Monclere's and the Blake's are uniting. We're one family now."

"Not with her." I sneer.

"I'm your fiancée." Giselle says. "And this time next week, I'll be your wife."

I don't bother to deign that statement with any meaningful reply. Instead, I toss the diary, and it lands right in front of Giselle. She stares down at it for a second before she crouches to pick it up.

"What is that?" Quinn asks, but we both ignore them.

"And where could you possibly have found this?" She says with that twisted, know-it-all look on her face.

"You know exactly where it was." I reply.

"What is it?" Quinn repeats again, looking between us.

"Maybe you should ask your daughter." I reply. "And while you're at it, ask her where Brynn is."

“Brynn?” Quinn scoffs. “What has any of this got to do with her?”

The way he says it, the way he speaks her name, the way he’s so dismissive makes me see red. It makes me lose control, more control. As if I had any to start with.

I raise the gun, pulling the trigger and he howls, grasping his leg as the bullet lodges itself right above his left kneecap.

“Daddy,” Giselle screeches. “Daddy, are you okay?” She asks before turning to look at me. “You shot him.”

“If you don’t start giving me answers, then I’ll shoot him again.” I state.

“Answers to what?” Quinn snarls.

“Why Giselle faked a diary about Brynn’s mother. Why she planted it with her things. Why she made her believe there was some great love affair between her parents.”

Giselle draws herself up, folding her arms. “I knew it, I knew you had her. I knew you were too obsessed to let her go. I was even willing to turn a blind eye, to marry you anyway and pretend that she didn’t exist.”

“None of that explains the diary.” I retort. I don’t give a fuck what her feelings were, what she did or didn’t know. She’s acting like she’s made some great revelation, when in reality, it’s yesterday’s news.

“Why the fuck are we talking about Brynn?” Quinn shouts.

“Because he was fucking her.” Giselle replies, pointing a bony, manicured finger at me.

Quinn’s eyes seem to explode, and his jaw drops. He stares at me in shock. “Whaat?” He says. “Brynn?”

“He was fucking her.” Giselle cries again. “She was just as much a whore as her mother was. Stealing the man I wanted...”

“Just like last time, eh?” I taunt.

Giselle narrows her eyes. “He was mine first. I saw him first, then she stole him away.”

I shake my head, mentally doing the math. Ophelia was older than Giselle by a good ten years, why would any man be interested in a child that young?

“He was mine.” Giselle screeches, “Ophelia knew it, she did it on purpose. She was always taking my things, always playing the perfect daughter.” She turns her head to look at her father with something akin to hate in her eyes. “You never saw a fault in her. She could have done anything, and you let her get away with it.”

Quinn frowns, clearly not following half the conversation, but then with the amount of blood he was losing, I wasn't all that surprised.

"I watched as she led him on, as she took his gifts and she smiled at him, and then suddenly she changed her mind. Suddenly she tried to play hard to get." She lets out a nasty little laugh then, one that sends goosebumps across my skin. "He came round one night, came to see Daddy. I knew what he wanted, so I showed him to her room. I wanted him to see what a whore she was, I wanted him to realise that she wasn't worth his time, that I was the better sister. That I would give him whatever he desired. Of course, she ran away after that, stupid bitch got pregnant didn't she? And well, we all know how that ended..."

God, I knew she was a bitch, I just never realised how far she'd go.

"Who?" Quinn asks.

Giselle pauses, glancing at me, like she knows this secret is worth something. "I tell you that and you kill me."

"I'm going to kill you either way," I state. "I guess you get to decide if I do it nice and quickly, or if I draw it out and make you suffer."

Her eyes widen, and she glances at the door so far from where she is. Even if she wasn't wearing those stupid heels, she'd never make it.

"Who was it?" Quinn asks, reaching up to grab her. "Who is Brynn's father? Tell me."

She draws herself up, that same look of derision she had for Brynn now etched across her face. "God, Daddy, you were an idiot. You never even saw it. You can't even put it together now, can you? All those times he stayed here, all those times he went out hunting with you, and you never saw how he looked at me, at Ophelia, at both of us..."

Quinn narrows his eyes, "No, surely not."

Giselle cackles again, clapping her hands together.

"But, but he left years ago..." Quinn stammers.

"Do the math, father." She screams, "It all adds up."

"Lucas would never..."

"Lucas Asher?" I gasp. That's her father? But he's so old, he's almost sixty. And Ophelia was barely sixteen when she ran away. My stomach churns as I do the math. I might be a sick bastard, but even I draw the line at girls that young.

Giselle tilts her head, her eyes sparkling with triumph. Only she doesn't get it, she's too smug, too ignorant to realise what it means. Brynn is an

Asher. Not a Monclere. And that makes her even more of a catch than she was before.

“Where is she?” I snap.

Giselle shrugs, “Damned if I know. You’re the one who said to make it look like she’d run away.”

“Why the fuck would you do that?” Quinn splutters.

“Because Daddy, Conrad fucked her while I watched.”

Quinn’s eyes widen, and he stares from his daughter to me. “You, you...”

“How does it feel, to know your granddaughter is as much of a whore as her mother was?” Giselle sneers.

“Only, she’s not.” I reply.

“Yes, she is. They’re both the same, both stealing the men I want...”

“She didn’t steal anything.” I snap, losing my patience. “And I’ll be damned if you speak about my wife like that again...”

“Your what?” She hisses, cutting across me.

I grin the biggest fucking grin of my life, and I hold my hand up, letting her see the ring on my hand. I haven’t worn it before Brynn got taken. It felt too precarious, too risky, but now? Now it’s like I need every reminder I can get. And this ring, it feels like a good luck charm.

“My wife.” I state again.

“But, but, I’m your fiancée.” She gasps. “Our wedding is next week. I’m..”

“Nothing but a conniving little bitch.” I say. “You really think I would have married you?”

“Where is she?” Quinn asks. “Where is Brynn?”

“That’s the point.” I state. “My wife is gone, she’s been taken. And I think Giselle here knows more than she’s letting on.”

Giselle shakes her head, “I don’t...”

“Why the fuck did you make that diary? Why the fuck did you want my wife to believe that her parents were some sort of Romeo and Juliet bullshit?”

She blinks back at me, and then it’s like something hits her, like she realises how fucked she truly is. She ditches the ‘caring’ daughter act, and she turns, running as fast as she can.

Of course, she can’t outrun a bullet.

I pull the trigger, and watch with zero emotion as she screams, as she falls, as she lays there with her ankle shattered, bleeding profusely all over that pretty floor.

“Please...” She says, suddenly looking contrite.

“Where the fuck is my wife?” I ask again.

She starts sobbing, shaking her head. “I didn’t, I didn’t. I don’t know.”

I pull the trigger again, this time aiming for the hand nursing her damaged leg. It blows her fingers off. Three mangled digits go skidding across the floor, leaving a smear of blood while she starts screaming bloody murder.

“I told you Giselle, I’m going to kill you. But you get to decide if it will be quick or not.”

“I don’t want to die.” She gasps. “I don’t want to.”

I pull the trigger again, narrowly missing her hip, and it leaves a nice little hole in their pretty parquet. “I don’t give a fuck what you want.” I state. “You will tell me where my wife is, or I will rip every inch of flesh from your rancid body, do you hear me?”

“For fucksake, Giselle,” Quinn growls. “Tell the man.”

“Really?” She says, “You’re siding with him, over your own flesh and blood?”

“He won’t kill you if you just tell him.”

I keep my face blank. I have no intention of honouring that, but whatever, if it gets me to where I want to be quicker, then fine. Let the bitch imagine there’s a cosy way out of this.

“It was a joke,” She says. “It was meant to make her think she was wanted, to make her go looking for him.”

“You mean the fake diary?” I clarify.

“Yes, I wanted her gone. I knew you were looking at her too much, I knew you wanted her. I thought if she was removed, then maybe she’d forget about her.”

“So, what happened then?”

She sniffs, her mascara now smearing her cheeks. “The maid,” She stammers. “She said she wanted to help. That she could get rid of her for me, that she could help me.”

“And what did you have to agree to in exchange for that?” I asked.

She blanched, “I..” She mumbles something so quietly I can’t make out a word of it.

I pull the trigger again, this time taking out a nice little Louis XIV cabinet. It splinters as if it were made of paper and Giselle screams, covering her ears.

“Fucking tell me.” I order.

“They wanted me to kill Magnus.” She whispers.

Of all the things I expected, this was not it. I stare at her for a second, trying to figure out if that’s just some sort of sick joke.

“Magnus?” I repeat.

She nods. “They said it was for the future of the Brethren. That in doing so, I would then become head of the Blake family alongside you as my husband. That we’d be given great honours too...”

I snort as it all sinks in. All those nasty little pieces. She sold Brynn out for her own greed and power.

“You stupid little fool.” Quinn says.

I drop my gaze, looking at him. So, he wasn’t involved then. He’s not tied up with the Esau. Too bad that fact won’t save him.

I raise my gun, pointing it right at his forehead. His eyes widen. “Conrad,” He pleads. “I wasn’t part of this. I would never have condoned such a thing. I’m loyal to you, to the Blakes.”

“The Blakes?” I repeat as my lips curl. “My wife is a Blake now, and you made her life a misery. You and that bitch of a daughter. You bullied and belittled her, and treated her like shit.”

“Please, if I’d have known...”

I pull the trigger before he can finish that sentence. I don’t give a fuck what he has to say, what futile words come out of his mouth. He disrespected her. He hurt her. He *has* to die.

I look over to where Giselle is bleeding, whimpering and repeating over and over that she’s sorry. As if that fixes it. As that undoes the years of damage, the abuse, the treachery too.

“You’re coming with me.” I declare, and her eyes light up like I’m about to put a veil on her head and marry her. Fuck me, she’s insane, isn’t she? “I want Brynn to witness your death.” I state. “I want her face to be the last thing you see before you depart this life for hell.”

As we reach the main doors I catch sight of a shadow, a figure. I raise my gun, but pause when I see who it is; Paige. She’s sporting a black eye and a split lip, no doubt her husband did that.

“He’s dead,” I state. “Quinn is dead,”

She stares back at me, like she's waiting for me to pull the trigger and kill her too.

"Go home, Paige," I tell her. "Go back to your parents. Your marriage is over, so you're free of him. Free of them."

Someone deserves a happy ending in all this, might as well be her.

Giselle hisses like she's about to throw herself on her stepmother and start ripping out her eyes, so I tighten my grip and drag her out. Nasty bitch won't be hurting anyone else from now on.

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# CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN



*Brynn*

I wake in a sweaty, confused state. For a moment I have no idea where I am, and then it all comes back. The fire, Conrad, my father – my breath hitches at the memory of what he did, what Xavier did.

I know Conrad won't be happy. I know it's going to make him so mad.

My body jerks, but as I try to move, I realise that I can't. That not only will my legs not move, but my arms aren't moving either.

*What the fuck is going on?*

My heart starts to beat faster. I blink rapidly, trying to work out why it's so damned dark in here.

I don't understand where I am.

*No. No. This can't be happening.*

The door creaks open, light pours in, and I see Ingrid standing there, holding a tray with her eyes narrowed.

She puts it down, then walks over and pulls the curtains open. More light streams in.

She turns around, staring at my body for a second and then she carries the tray over and places it beside me. With a little jump, she lands on the bed. Her plump legs seem to dangle down, making her look like a comic book character. Only, I'm not laughing.

As she scoops up a mouthful of porridge, she mutters about it being hot and then she holds it in front of my lips. I realise then that she's planning on feeding me. Like I'm an invalid.

I shake my head, refusing to allow it and she huffs.

"You're being so difficult Brynn, after all I've done for you."

"What have you done?" I hiss back. She said she would help me. This doesn't help me.

Help.

Someone help.

She rams a mouthful in and I almost choke on it as I try to get it down. It burns my throat, it burns the whole way to my stomach.

"You don't have a clue," She states. "You don't have any understanding of this. You're an Asher, Brynn. That's royalty by Brethren standards. You'd never have found your father if I hadn't helped you. You'd still be in that house, with that man..."

"I want to be there," I reply. "I want to be back with Conrad, with my husband,"

She shoves another mouthful in, using the porridge to silence me.

"He is not your husband. Your father hasn't agreed to it, no one witnessed the ceremony. You have Founder Blood, that means any marriage has to be sanctified. Besides, Xavier makes a far better candidate."

"I don't want him. I don't like him." I sob.

"You will learn to like him. Besides, once we've sorted everything, you'll be Chapter Lady. Chapter Lady, Brynn. You really want to turn that down?"

"Magnus is going to be Chapter Lord," I mumble back because what she says makes no sense.

She lets out a laugh. It's bitter, twisted, and it sends goosebumps up my skin. "He will not be Chapter Lord, we're seeing to that. And once Titus is in, once everything has settled, then we'll set everything straight. Xavier will take charge, and we'll purge anyone who stands against us."

"I want Conrad," I state. I don't care what the plans are, I don't care who is in charge. I just want to go home.

She gets to her feet, moving the tray out of the way. “Fine then, be difficult. But the more you fight, the longer we’ll keep you like this...”

She walks out, leaving me there, leaving me tied up. Defenceless.



HE COMES AN HOUR LATER.

My stomach drops when I see the light reflecting off his bald, shiny head.

He stares at me, taking me in, like he didn’t get a good enough look last night.

“How’s your cunt feeling?” He asks.

I gulp, unsure how to reply to that.

He walks over to the fireplace and starts packing it with wood, making the tiny embers that were there spark into flames.

“You bled enough that if I hadn’t known better, I’d have thought you were a virgin,” He remarks. He doesn’t sound remorseful. He doesn’t sound sorry. His voice is emotionless.

He reaches over, grabbing one of the instruments from beside the hearth and he places it hard against the stone, flattening it with his boot so it’s now at a ninety-degree angle against the handle. It’s a spade. A little one. One used for shovelling ash or coal.

He shoves it into the flames and then straightens up, walking back over to me.

“Will you be good or bad today, Brynn?”

I don’t want to be good. Not the good he wants.

But bad isn’t okay either.

I frown, unsure what to say. Conrad doesn’t like me bad, but this here, this would make him so angry.

Xavier grabs my chin and forces me to look at him.

“God, you’re so messed up you can barely string a sentence together,” He sneers.

Messed up. I am messed up. He messed me up and Conrad won’t be happy about it.

“I want to go home,” I whisper. Maybe if I say it enough times, then they’ll listen to me.

He tuts, slapping my face enough to make me jump. “This is your home now. This is where you live. And I, I am your husband.”

No. That’s a lie.

A big lie.

Liar liar, pants on fire.

“Conrad...” I begin,

“Speak his name again, and I’ll make sure it’s the last word you ever say.” He growls, squeezing my throat hard enough that I can’t get any oxygen in.

My hands claw against the bindings. My eyes seem to bulge, and it hurts so much with all the bruising. Dark spots prickle my sight and tears stream down my cheeks.

And then he lets go, he stands back and he watches as I struggle to get my breath back.

He walks over to the fire, grabs the little spade out of it, and he leans right over me.

I can feel the heat of the thing, I can see how red it is from being in the flames.

His eyes drop to my chest, to where my brand is, and he pushes the flat bit right down onto it.

I scream.

I scream so loud.

It hurts even more than my back breaking, even more than my brains being removed. I can smell the stench of my flesh burning, I can feel it, the way it’s melting. My body locks up, my hands curl into fists but I can’t make it stop. I can’t do anything.

After what feels like hours, he pulls it away. I see a string of my flesh trail with it, and the cool air that replaces the metal makes it sting just as much.

“There,” he says, tossing the instrument into the fire. “That’s better. Now I don’t have to look at his damned crest anymore.”

*He burned it. He burned it all off.*

I drop my head, staring at where my skin is more burnt and blistered than ever. At least Conrad had the decency to sedate me. Xavier clearly wanted me to feel every second of that pain.

His lips curl as he meets my gaze, and then he's undoing his belt, clambering onto the bed and hoisting my body up till he gets me at the right angle for him.

"Let's put this body to some good use," He says as he thrusts himself into me.

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# CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT



*Conrad*

E very lead, every clue leads to nothing.

I don't sleep. I can barely eat.

All I can think about is that they have her, they have my Brynn.

Are they hurting her? Are they torturing her? Do they think she knows something about Magnus?

Why would they have taken her? Surely, Liliana was the better one to take?

Giselle gave me nothing of worth. Even the servants gave me nothing. Did it ease my temper to torture them, yes. But it was also a monumental waste of my time.

On the table, my phone buzzes and I glance at the message, seeing more of the same bullshit. We've locked down Oblivion. It's not shut, but we've made sure there won't be any surprises there.

I've had to put provisions in place for Paitlyn too, I can only imagine what the Esau would do if they knew about her.

I feel like I'm spending my time protecting them. My brother's, my family name, and all the while, it feels like the one thing that matters to me most slips further from my grasp.

Brynn.

I have to get her back.

I have to.

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# CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE



*Brynn*

He comes to see me every day.

Each time, it's after Xavier has fucked me.

He stands there at the end of the bed, staring at where the evidence of what his friend has done is leaking out of me.

I was embarrassed, I was shamed. Now, after what I figure has been weeks of this, I feel nothing.

Of course, part of that is because of what Conrad did. But now I'm realising that my body is so broken, my mind is so fractured that nothing matters anymore.

Today when he walks in, he's wearing a long black robe. He looks different. More oppressive. More like a member of the Brethren.

He rubs some lotion into that new wound where my brand was. He takes his time, ensuring every last bit has soaked into my skin, and all the

while he's telling me what a good girl I've been, and that he's finally proud of me.

But I'm not proud of me.

I'm breaking the rules. Despite what he says, I know Conrad is my husband.

And I know that he's going to be so angry with me.

My father leans in, brushing my dirty hair back from my sweaty face. "Would you like a reward?" He asks, like he's offering a piece of candy.

Mmm candy. I like candy.

I nod just a little.

His lips curl, and he jabs something into my neck so quickly I barely feel it. "Ssssh," He soothes, "It'll help you to relax,"

Relax. How can I relax when I'm all tied up?

Maybe he can read my thoughts because he starts undoing the bindings, letting my body slump into him.

"I've got a nice bath ready for you," He says.

A bath? God, I'd kill for one of those. I haven't properly washed in what feels like so long. My body is dirty, disgusting. Like it's covered in handprints, fingerprints.

He carries me through, and I can see it, I can see the bubbles and the steam.

He gently slides me into the water and it's so perfectly hot that I let out a moan.

"There, that's better, isn't it?" He says.

I nod back, chanting, "Better, better, better,"

All those bruises, all those nasty little cuts on my body seem to welcome the heat. I shut my eyes, leaning back for a moment, forgetting where I am.

He moves to kneel behind where my head is and he takes a long deep sniff of my hair, like he's trying to shore up the smell of it. His hand dips down, into the water and he cups my breasts, with his thumb rubbing gently against my nipple.

My mind seems to falter. My breath stops entirely.

He slides his arm down, moving between my thighs. "You're so like her," He says, "Everything about you, your smile, your stubbornness, even the way you fight..."

"Fight," I whisper. Did she have to fight too?

He plants a kiss against my cheek. It's delicate, soft, so confusing. "She was a fighter, just like you. She liked to pretend that she didn't want me, but we both know that was a lie."

Lie. Liar. Xavier is a liar. Is my father a liar too?

I blink, trying to get some clarity but whatever he gave me seems to be muddling my head even more.

I can feel his fingers running over me, touching me, probing me.

It shouldn't feel nice. I know that. I dig my teeth into my tongue, trying to stifle the whimper.

*Make it stop. Please, make it stop.*

"I don't like Xavier hurting you," He states as he starts circling that same bit Conrad likes so much. "I don't like him punishing you, but if you behave then I'll make sure all you feel is pleasure..."

Pleasure. I want that, I want...

No. This is wrong. I want Conrad, not this, not...

"Ssssh," he groans again, pressing harder, trying to force my body to obey him, only my head is screaming out about Conrad. He won't like this. He won't.

"Lucas."

Xavier's voice makes me panic. I look up and he's there, watching us both. His eyes are focused in on where my father is touching me and for a second, I think he's going to say something, to stake his claim. But then he meets my eyes, and I can see he doesn't care. He doesn't care at all.

"It's all ready," Xavier states before turning and walking right back out.

My father sighs, "Then we'd best get going,"

He pulls the plug, letting the water drain entirely before he's wrapping me up and drying me off. He then carries me out, completely naked, and for the first time in weeks, I'm out of my room.



BY THE TIME WE GET DOWN THE CORRIDOR AND A FLIGHT OF STAIRS, MY head is spinning.

I'm laid down on a bed. It's big, in the centre of the room. The lighting in here is strange, the corners all seem to be in shadow but where I am, it's

bright.

There must be a spotlight.

I frown, staring around and it feels like the entire world spins.

There's at least six men here, all robed, all wearing those same black outfits my father has on.

I want to ask what is going on, but my voice seems to catch in my throat.

I can see Xavier stood, talking to someone. A man, he's got a camera pointed right at me. They both keep gesturing like they're having a debate.

"Brynn," My father says, as the mattress sinks. I look up and see him sitting there, looking down at me.

I haven't moved. I just laid there, still as a statue.

"This is very important," My father states, "This video is going to your husband,"

"Conrad," I breathe. But how can that be? Xavier doesn't like him. Xavier thinks *he*'s my husband. My eyes dart to him and my father gently pulls my face back to focus on him.

"It's okay," He soothes. "We're going to play a little game. We're going to show Conrad how good you're being."

Good. I am good.

"We're going to show him how well he fixed you." He continues. "Would you like that?"

I nod quickly. Does that mean they were listening? Does that mean that I can go home?

"It's very important you play your part." He states.

Part. Apart. Me and Conrad are apart right now. "I want to go home," I gasp. There are too many eyes here, too many people watching me. Conrad won't like this. He won't like this at all.

"And you will," My father says as I hear Xavier hiss with annoyance. "But to do that, you need to behave. Conrad doesn't want you back if you're naughty."

"But I'm not naughty." I'm not. I haven't done anything wrong, I haven't. It's not my fault that Xavier touched me, it's not my fault that the house got burnt down. I didn't want to leave. I was carried out... Tears start streaming down my face and I try to brush them away, but my father is already there, wiping them like each one is precious.

"You're a good girl, aren't you Brynn?" My father says.

I am.

I am. I am. I am.

A buzzing sound fills the air. I jolt as I realise my father is now holding something against my clit. That he's teasing it, pleasuring me.

"There," He says, "I told you I'd reward you..."

That need, that awful, desperate need seems to take over everything.

"All you have to do is show Conrad how much you want this, pretend that this man here is Conrad," He says pointing to Xavier, "...and then he will be happy with you. He'll be so happy."

"Happy," I repeat as my eyes land on the man who's looking at me like he hates me.

He's the only one here who's wearing nothing. I can see his dick hanging limply between his legs.

"A word," He says to my father, pulling him roughly away.

The vibrator drops, landing between my thighs. I want to pick it up, I need to pick it up. That ache is too much, too desperate. I bite my lip, trying to make myself lie still but I can't. I can't.

I can hear Xavier growling. "What the fuck was that?"

"She doesn't have a clue what's going on," My father replies, "The drugs have seen to that, so who cares what we have to say to her? As long as she does what you want while the camera is running, what does it matter?"

Xavier frowns more. "I wanted him to see her crying," He snarls, "I wanted him to see her being raped because that would motivate him..."

"Trust me," My father smiles, "Nothing will piss him off more than thinking that she's enjoying this, that she's willingly letting everyone fuck her."

They both look at me. My father smiles gently, reassuringly. Xavier, with that stern look on his face that he always has.

As I stare back, I swear their faces morph. They twist, and Xavier is then pulling a hood down to hide his features as my father shouts out to get recording.

And all the while, I'm doing it. I'm imagining it. I'm touching myself because that's what makes my husband happy. That's what he likes.

The man with the camera moves it around to face my father. He's talking, presenting almost. Xavier is close, too close. I don't like him. I don't like how he looks at me. How he hurts me.

As Xavier gets onto the bed, I know he's going to do it again. My father said to pretend, but I know this isn't Conrad. And besides, Conard hurt me too.

They all hurt me. Every single one of them.

They lied and they tricked me. Tricked.

Trick or treat.

But no treats for me. Just pain. Pain and pain.

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# CHAPTER

# SIXTY



*Conrad*

The screen flickers in front of me, casting grotesque images across the walls of my office.

I don't know how this tape got here, but I know what it means.

A chill creeps down my spine as I see her face, as I see the way she's laying on a bed.

Her eyes dart about, but there's a vacancy to them which tells me she's been drugged.

She's naked. Completely exposed.

My anger flares to see her like that, to see her on show and knowing that all those figures there are looking at her too. My wife. Mine.

A hooded figure steps in front of the camera, blocking my view of her. I can't make out his face, but I can tell from the build that it is a man.

"Conrad," The man says in a strange, distorted voice. "As you can see, we have your wife..."

He turns, creating enough distance that I can see Brynn again.

She lets out a whimper and with horror, I realise what she's doing.

*She's touching herself? What the fuck?*

"Show your husband." The man taunts, "Show him how much you're missing him."

"Conrad," She says, sounding like a robot.

What the fuck is this? She's got some sort of bullet vibrator, and she's masturbating right there, while all those men stand around and watch her. I can hear her cunt, I can see how wet she is.

Oh, I knew I was making her an addict, but it wasn't so others could enjoy her. It was meant to be for me. Solely me. For my pleasure. My satisfaction.

She lets out a long deep gasp, sinking into the mattress more.

And a man clammers onto the bed. Unlike the others, he's not wearing a cloak, but he does have a hood on. Only a hood. Coward won't even show me his face because he knows what I'd do, that I'd hunt him down.

But I can see his damned cock, I can see his entire naked fucking body.

"No," I snarl, jumping to my feet. I know this isn't filmed in real time. I know that this had to have happened at least a few hours ago, but I feel it, I feel that dagger in my heart.

The man gets on top of my wife. Her legs are splayed open from where she was touching herself but he pushes them wider.

She shakes her head as he starts touching her. "No," She says. "Conrad won't want it. He won't."

"Ssssh," The man abusing her soothes, "Your husband fixed you, right? He fixed you. So now you'll be a good girl, won't you?"

"Good," Brynn whispers in that timid, confused voice.

The man laughs, all the men laugh.

I snarl again, unable to tear my eyes away from that awful vision in front of me.

He grabs her face, forcing her to look into the camera. "Tell your husband Brynn, tell him how good you're being for us..."

"Good." She repeats like she has no idea what the fuck is going on right now, like she's so damn high she can barely string a sentence together.

He drops his hold, then pushes himself into her. I see it. I fucking feel it. His cock taking what is mine, what is only mine.

And the bastard groans, he drops his head, clearly enjoying this moment.

"No," Brynn whispers again.

“Tell me Brynn, whose cock do you prefer, mine or your husbands?” He taunts as he starts fucking her hard enough that her body jolts, that her tits shake and he leans down, taking a sharp nasty bite of her right one.

“Stop,” Brynn says, sounding tearful. “Stop. Conrad won’t like. Conrad won’t want...”

He grabs her face, his fingers digging into her cheeks. “I’m in charge right now, Brynn. Not Conrad, not your husband.”

“No,” Brynn whispers. “No. I don’t want. I don’t...” Her words turn to sobs as he starts grunting away.

The man steps in front of the camera. “We’ve been taking good care of her, real good care.”

“You bastard.” I yell, even though he can’t hear me. Even though my words make absolutely no difference.

“You want her back, then you do as we say. Eliminate Magnus. Kill your brother, and you’ll have your whore of a wife returned...”

It can’t be. It can’t.... but of course it fucking can. It was that obvious, that damned easy. They take her, and they know they can make me do whatever I want.

She’s too necessary, too essential to my life to act otherwise.

But Magnus - I can’t kill my brother. I won’t.

I grab my phone, dialling the number and he grunts as he picks up. It takes me barely a minute to relay what is happening. Do I like going to him for help? No, but right now, I have no leads, I have absolutely nothing. Besides, they’re making moves against him. All of this is because of him. The least he can do is help me fix the damned situation.

“Well?” I snarl when he doesn’t say anything back.

“Isn’t it obvious?” Magnus replies, as if this were a mere crossword puzzle we were stuck on. “She’s gone, brother. She’s over. The best thing you can do is move on, marry Giselle. You’re lucky no one else knows about this marriage.”

“Move on?” I repeat. I haven’t told him what I’ve done. I haven’t told him that right now, Giselle is in a cell in Oblivion. That I’m making her pay for her part in all of this. I also haven’t told him that Brynn is an Asher, that information feels too precious to spill right now. I need to keep it to myself, because there’s a high likelihood that fact could get Brynn killed. Lucas Asher is a wanted man, after all. He has a lot of enemies. I don’t doubt

some of them would be more than happy to eliminate the daughter if that was who they could get their hands on.

“Forget she ever existed.” He states.

“Like fuck I’m going to do that.”

He lets out a snarl, “What other option is there? One bitch is not worth more than our entire family’s legacy.”

“No?” I sneer. “You seemed to feel otherwise when Liliana was lying on a table, half-dead.”

“That’s entirely different,”

“Is it?”

“Liliana is my wife...”

“And Brynn is mine,” I roar back. My wife. My fucking wife. And right now, she’s in danger because of him. He did this, he’s the sole reason we’re in this situation.

But that’s not entirely true, is it? I made Brynn how she is now; I broke her spine, I fucked her head up enough that’s she can’t even defend herself.

I made her a sitting duck. I made her weak, fragile.

And then the wolves came knocking, and I couldn’t defend her.

I hang up, and I throw the phone. I’ve never been helpless. Never felt helpless. I’m a damned Blake for God sake. We make the rules, the world bends to us.

And yet, in this moment, I don’t know what to do. I don’t know how to fix this.

# CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE



*Brynn*

**E**verything is so fuzzy.

I roll over, and it feels like the entire world moves. Like the entire world rotates around me and not the other way.

My lips feel big. Swollen. I've been chewing on them for hours. There's a lump of flesh in my mouth between my teeth where I've been gnawing enough to draw blood.

Blood.

There was blood before.

A lot of blood.

I spilled blood. My blood. Other people's blood.

I killed people.

Is that why I'm here? In this darkness. Is this what death is? Is this purgatory that I'm in?

It's drool, the dripping. It's my drool escaping my lips, falling down my chin and onto my chest.

There's a high-pitched sound, like a whirling machine that's gone slightly wrong. It goes on and on and on, and I need it to shut up.

Shadows move around me.

It's too bright to open my eyes. I try to lift my arms, but they must be weighed down. They're too heavy, too big to lift. I have monster arms. Great, grotesque things that spiral out from my sockets.

And that screaming goes on.

Footsteps come near.

I can see blurred faces. They look cartoonish, they look like cartoon devils come to steal my soul. Only, I lost it long ago. I lost it the day my husband took me to Oblivion.

A cackle rings out at that thought, and I know the noise escapes me.

I am soulless. I am devil-like.

I deserve death.

A torch is shone right into my eyes and I hiss, trying to bat it away.

I don't want the light. I want dark.

*Stay away from the light. Stay away from the bright.*

*"The drugs should be all out of her system."*

Those words dance in my head. They spin, bouncing off the walls of my brain.

Drugs.

The word hangs there in technicolour, flashing like an alert going off.

Is that another thing I'll be punished for?

"If that's the case then why the fuck won't she shut up?"

Shutttt up. Shutttt up.

Shut up. Shut up. Shut up.

I'm screaming those words, hissing them. Why can't *they* shut up? Why can't *they* go away? I want to be here; I want to lie here and just die forever.

A hand slaps my face. I know it's my father's. I know the feel of his palm now, the roughness of his flesh.

"Fix it." Someone snarls.

"Fix." I repeat, like that is the answer to everything. All everyone has tried to do is 'fix' me. Always fix me, because I've never been right. Never been good. There's something wrong with me, something broken.

Only, this time they were the ones doing the breaking.

I'm pulled around, yanked violently across the carpet that I'm lying on. It burns my skin. My hair gets caught under someone's boot, and that high

pitched ringing becomes more intense as I try to get free.

“Fix.” I repeat again.

Fix. Fix or die. Fix or die.

Those are my options.

My heart thrums in my chest. It’s like a battle cry, a beat I can no longer recognise.

“Fix.”

“For fucks sake.” Someone snarls and a boot comes from nowhere, slamming into my ribs.

I hiss more, I snarl back like the devil I am.

“Give her time. She’s only just come round.” My father reasons.

Round. Around and around. The world is round. The earth is round. My skull was round before Conrad punctured it.

The lights suddenly go out.

Darkness swallows me up again.

And that ringing, screaming noise continues.

Ring.

Ring and ring.

And moan.

And groan.

I roll over as the light once more attacks. It’s like laser points, jabbing at me. Slashing.

I can see his face. I can see his anger. My tears stream as I realise how mad he’s going to be. How he’s going to hurt me more.

“Conrad,” I cry. “Conrad.”

Those footsteps surround me and I can hear Xavier yelling, shouting, spewing out his anger like a volcano erupting.

I’m hauled up, I’m dragged out.

My feet dangle beneath me, they catch on the floor, on the threshold, on the rugs. I can feel the pain, but there’s no fear. No panic. Harsh emotions are beyond me now.

And yet that ringing follows me out, follows me like a shadow.

I’m laid out once more. I’m strapped down only this time, the room is different. It’s cleaner.

The doctor glances at me before turning to Xavier. “Are you absolutely sure?” He says.

“Will it shut her up?”

He grunts back.

“Then do it.”

Do it. Do it.

Fix.

Hands grab at me, hands claw at me. I’m once more held in place.

My father appears and he’s suddenly in front of me, his head shaking like he’s trying to stop something. Like he wants to protect me. But my family don’t protect me. My family hurt.

“Don’t,” He says to Xavier. “There’s no need for this...”

“I can do what I like,” Xavier snaps back. “Besides, she doesn’t need it, and it’ll be a nice little thing to send to him. Maybe it’ll speed things up because I for one, am sick of waiting...”

“Xavier,”

My father is pushed out of the way, held out of the way.

My mouth is wrenched open. My jaw feels like it’s pulled apart.

The doctor stares deep into the crevice of my throat and I don’t know what he expects to find there. What secrets he thinks I have locked up.

Metal latches onto my tongue. It yanks and it yanks and I can’t get it free.

Then something slashes. Something cuts.

Pain erupts, blood pours hot from the source. Filling my mouth, filling my throat, pouring down my chin like a river. I gurgle, I choke. I throw up as my blood flows and flows.

It’s unfathomable, unbearable. I writhe and I flail, while my body curls into itself like I’ve been set on fire. Like someone has poured petrol over all of me and then lit a match.

And that high pitch scream moves. It no longer rings out around me but it is in me. In my head.

*I can’t breathe.*

***I CAN’T FUCKING BREATHE.***

My hands claw. I’m fighting out of pure instinct and the doctor is there, pushing something in, something hard and plastic and nasty. He forces it down my throat, forces it into my airway.

# CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO



*Conrad*

Three weeks. Three tortuous weeks.

There's been no sign, nothing beyond that awful tape. I know they're waiting for me to just do what they want, but I also know if I do it, I still won't get her back. The Esau don't work like that, they don't behave like that. And the fact that Brynn is an Asher, no, they'll never willingly hand her over. If I want her, I have to find her.

And that feels near impossible.

I clench my fists, letting out a snarl, and it's only by pure luck that the noise doesn't carry.

I'm in the Cathedral, surrounded. Far below I can see my brother performing another damned ritual.

*She's gone. Move on.*

Those words echoed in my head, as if Brynn was just a thing to brush under the carpet and forget about.

He has an almost bored expression on his face as he stands, draped in nothing but a black cloak. The same style cloaks as the ones from that

recording.

It makes me want to strangle him.

It makes me want to lash out.

All of this is because of him.

My sacrifices are for him, and yet he has the audacity to look fucking bored?

His physical prowess is undeniable. Beyond the robes, he's completely naked and everyone here can see exactly what he's packing.

I glanced at Titus, and I couldn't help but smirk at the difference.

Ahead of them lay two massive baths filled with blood. This ritual was meant to be a grim test of endurance and faith. The Blood Baptism, they called it. Many times in the past, a man had balked at this, had turned tail and run, proving they weren't fit to lead us.

Titus had already performed his. He'd stayed under just long enough to get his hair wet, then he'd half sputtered through the second part.

Magnus on the other hand, looked almost serene as he stepped into it, as that liquid pooled around his body. The sight was grotesque. I was grateful for the mask covering my face so no one would see my grimace.

He sunk down, onto his knees, and then lay back before allowing himself to slip beneath the surface. I couldn't help but wonder what would happen if he failed, if he drowned in that sea of blood. Would they release Brynn, if Magnus died right here?

Somehow, I doubted it.

As Magnus was lifted back out he barely gasped, showing an unnerving control over his own body.

What would our father think if he could see him now? I know he had great plans, I know he was just as ambitious as Magnus is, and I also know that was what got them killed. Both my parents paid the price. My father wasn't as shrewd as Magnus. He didn't have the kind of backing Magnus has, either.

And that's what marks him out, what makes him stand out. Magnus is destined for greatness. We can all see it. No wonder the Esau are so scared of him.

As the priest signalled that the ritual was completed, a mass of cloaks stood up as one, and I couldn't help feeling that this whole spectacle was a farce, a waste of time that could be better spent searching for Brynn. But

Magnus had forced my attendance and just like every other time, Magnus got what he wanted.

My hand gripped the dagger hidden beneath my cloak.

*I could end this charade right here.*

I could literally see my future flash before me, a future where I killed him, just as the Esau's wanted.

But that future held no appeal for me.

I would be condemned, locked away, and I'd never see Brynn again.

No, I needed another way, a way to save her and ensure Magnus beats them.



THIS PLACE FEELS HOLLOW. EMPTY.

Even the screams sound off.

I know the extra guards have rather spoiled the mood, but I can't afford to lose control of Oblivion. I won't be the first Blake in a thousand years to allow such a thing.

This place has become my temporary home since my real one was destroyed. There's an apartment here, fully secured. Though our recent family didn't utilise it. It needs renovating, upgrading. But right now, all I need is a bed anyway.

As I get to my office though, I notice a small wooden box on my desk. It's the size of a hand. I have no idea how anyone could have gotten in to leave it. I open it quickly, and my stomach turns at the sight.

Inside is a cut up piece of tongue. It's laying on a piece of velvet, like it's some fucked up trophy. A bloodied note falls out onto the desk, its message a chilling threat: 'you should have taught your wife to shut up.'

My anger explodes and I slam my fist onto the desk, sending papers and objects flying.

They're hurting her, hurting her more.

And not just hurting her, but hurting her in ways that couldn't be fixed. That couldn't be repaired.

If I had killed Magnus, then she would be okay now. True, I would be condemned but she would be free. For a moment, I contemplated it. I

contemplated killing him, even though it would be the death of me.

But what was Brynn without me? What was my wife, if I wasn't by her side?

No. That wasn't the answer.

I grab my phone, dialling Antonio's number. He picks up immediately, almost as if he'd been expecting me.

"Conrad, what a pleasant surprise."

"Quit the pleasantries." I snap back.

He sighs, and I hear that usual tone he saves just for me. "What do you want?"

"You know what I want," I growl back.

"And you know your brother doesn't want to help." He states.

"What if I told you that if you don't help me get Brynn back then I'll do it, I'll kill Magnus. I'll kill my brother and then all your hard work will be for nothing."

Antonio scoffed. "Conrad, please, we both know you're bluffing."

"Am I?" I say as I start pacing the room, "I don't even need to be the one to wield the blade. All I have to do is tell Devin where Paitlyn is," I begin, using my trump card. God, why hadn't I thought of that before? "... What's more, I think he'd be more than interested in knowing that Magnus knew it was a set-up. That Paitlyn wasn't even involved, and yet he had her locked up and condemned all the same..."

"Conrad..."

I smirk, but I haven't finished yet. Oh no, I've done my dirty work. I've done enough digging to be able to use this moment here to my advantage. If patience is a virtue, then I'm the most virtuous man on earth. "We both know how sensitive my brother is about that girl, imagine his reaction when he discovers that. I doubt the Brethren will be reassured if the Blake family turn on themselves. And add the fact that you fucked Paitlyn..." I pause, waiting to hear his reaction and the silence tells me *everything*. "Imagine his reaction to that little piece of information too..."

I didn't know he had. I wasn't certain of that, but the pieces fit so perfectly. Antonio served her then-husband, and we all knew what that man was like. How he abused his power. It's probably why Paitlyn did what she did, why she murdered him.

"Alternatively," I add, "You could help me get Brynn back and as a reward, I'll give you something you want, something you really want..."

“And what is that?”

Yeah, I have the bastard, don’t I? “Grace Ratcliffe,” I say.

He scoffs but I hear the sound, the hint that he is flustered. “You and Titus were friends.” I state. “I don’t care what drove you apart, what little argument you had but by the time this is done, he’ll be dealt with, and his wife and daughter will go to Oblivion. We both know Grace is untouched, and Titus has put a high price on her virginity. A girl like that, she’ll go to auction and because of who her father is, everyone will want to fuck her. You do this for me, and you can have her. I’ll rig the damn thing. I’ll gift-wrap her for you, and you can do what you like, no questions asked.”

“And Magnus?” He says.

“What about him?”

“You’ll stop fighting him, stop causing issues? You’ll do whatever I say from now on without question.”

I smile, “I’ll be the perfect brother.” I declare, and it’s true. What issues would I have anyway, once my wife is returned? I can get back to the matter in hand, producing an heir. And Magnus, he can get back to focusing on the race for Chapter Lord.

“You got yourself a deal,” Antonio says.

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# CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE



*Brynn*

P ain.

That's all I feel.

Nothing but pain.

I can't move. I just lay there, where I was tossed in like trash.

It's freezing cold. It's pitch black too.

I know my father left right after Xavier had my tongue cut out. I know they argued, the guards wouldn't shut up about it.

And then Xavier had me thrown down here, had me locked away. Apparently, he got sick of my screaming, even after he removed my tongue.

I make that same gurgling noise, the one that pisses him off. Only, thankfully no one now can hear me in this cold darkness.

My nose wrinkles as I smell the stench of my own shit. I'm naked, lying in it. But with my legs as useless as they are, I don't have the strength to even crawl away from it.

Ingrid doesn't come down here.

No one comes down here.

I know Xavier is punishing me, that this is his method of trying to fix me.

But I'm sick of being broken.

Why am I never good enough? Why must I always have to change, have to bend, have to be moulded to fit them?

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# CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR



*Conrad*

H e wasn't lying.

We did apparently have a deal.

It's been two hours since I called him, and here we are. The bastard must have known the whole time. I narrow my eyes, trying to work out not for the first time how deep he was in the Esau before he turned tail.

He meets my gaze head on, with that arrogant smirk. God, I'm pleased he's on our side and not against us.

As the girl is dragged in, she starts kicking and screaming. I don't know where he found her, but she was 'snooping around' according to Antonio.

But I know her face. I've seen her a few times in my home.

"You?" I say, though I don't know her name. They had people in my house? No wonder it was so damned easy to get to Brynn. I guess I should be grateful she wasn't taken sooner.

She sneers back at me before spitting. “Scum,” as if she thinks she’s better than me.

“Watch your mouth,” Antonio barks.

“Watch yours, traitor,” She replies, and that makes me laugh.

“You’re a servant,” I state. “Lowest of the low. The only thing worse than you, are the whores we have here in Oblivion.”

She stares at me, as if she wants to say something boastful but doesn’t dare.

“Where is Brynn Blake?” Antonio asks.

She bristles, more at the sound of my surname than anything else.

“Where is my wife?” I snarl, grabbing her by the throat. My fingers dig delightfully into her flesh and I tighten them around her oesophagus, feeling all the ribbed bits of muscle contracting.

She gasps for a second, her eyes filling with hate. “She’s not your wife,” She says, “Your marriage wasn’t properly sanctified...”

Oh please, they’re trying that one. Like I need a sanctified union. Neither of us are so senior in rank that the Council has to have a say.

“You don’t know, do you?” She cackles.

“Know what?” Antonio asks.

Her eyes dart to him, she shows more disdain as she meets his gaze. “Brynn isn’t a Monclere,” She says, like that’s new information.

“She’s an Asher,” I reply, taking the heat right out of her sails. At least, that’s what I think.

Beside me, Antonio seems to stiffen but I don’t take my focus off her. Lucas Asher is notorious enough to explain that reaction anyway. The bastard had to do a runner years ago, after he was caught running a paedophile ring out of one of the Houses of Eden.

She turns her eyes on me. “She’s a Founder.” She declares.

And it feels like the entire room stills.

“What?” I stammer. A Founder? Is that true? The Ashers are Founders? No, it can’t be.

None of us know who the Founders are, we only know they exist. Seven original families. Seven pure bloodlines. We’re all kept in the dark to keep them safe. If an outsider, a genteel wanted to bring the entire Brethren down, that’s who they’d go for. Every Chapter has their own set of Founders. Every country, it spreads out like a spider’s web. But if Brynn is one...

“Her father is Lucas Asher,” Antonio states, putting it together, bringing me out of my thoughts.

I nod back, but even now my head feels like it’s going at a million miles a minute. Brynn has Founder blood?

“See?” The girl gloats looking right back at me. “Your marriage isn’t valid.”

“She is my wife.” I growl back. I don’t give a fuck what anyone says. I consummated our marriage, I fucked her good and proper against that altar, and I still have the cloth to prove it. “My fucking wife.”

“And it makes little difference.” Antonio adds, “Once Magnus is Chapter Lord, he can sanctify whatever he wants.”

“He won’t make Chapter Lord,” She says. “We will see to that.”

“Over my dead body,” I don’t think, I just react, slamming her against the wall by her throat. Her fat little legs kick out, her body jerks but I press all my weight in.

“Tell me where my wife is.”

“Go. To. Hell,” She gasps back.

“Conrad,” Antonio says, quietly. “If it is true, if Brynn is an Asher...”

“Then what?” I snarl. Like I give a fuck who her parents were in this moment. I just want her back. I need her back.

“The Ashers own property in the Black Country. A lot of property.”

“Meaning?”

He glances at the girl who’s growing more and more red in the face as I restrict her oxygen.

“The Esau have a few secure bases there, I can make a reasonable guess as to where they would be hiding.”

“Reasonable?” I repeat. Like I want to go traipsing halfway around the country, from house to bloody house. Besides, they’ll get wind of us coming. If we don’t hit the right house straight away, they’ll do a runner. They’ll take my Brynn, and they’ll disappear.

“Leave me with her.” Antonio says, fixing his eyes on the maid.

“What?”

His hand wraps around my arm. He squeezes just enough to emphasise his point. “Give me an hour.”

I don’t want to do it, I don’t want to let go. I want to torture the bitch myself. I want to rip every bit of flesh from her body, I want to pull out her

fingernails, I want to cut off her eyelids, I want to hurt her so badly she can't even speak her own name.

And yet, I could do all of that and still not get the answer I need.

“Give me an hour.” Antonio repeats in a tone that tells me he knows something I don’t.

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# CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE



*Conrad*

The sound of the engine seems to roar in my ears. I don't give a fuck that it might give us away.

I don't give a fuck what the consequences are.  
For the first time in my life I feel invincible, untouchable.

Antonio is muttering something into the piece in my ear, but he could be speaking French for all I cared.

We had a location.

As we pulled up, I could see the outline of the house illuminated by the starry sky. It was almost picturesque. Like a fairytale castle. Did Brynn feel hope when she was brought here? Did she think this place would be her respite at first?

Perhaps I'll punish her, when we're safely away from here. But then, maybe, she's suffered enough at another's hands to learn where her loyalties should lie. I guess her reaction now will decide that outcome.

I jump out of the car as armed men file out around me.

It's a tactical assault. A raid. My lips curl as I realise the numbers we have. Lucas doesn't stand a chance against us. But as quick as that form fills my head, I brush it off. I was confident before, so damned confident, and look where it got me. Where it got Brynn. I thought my house, my home would be secure enough to keep her safe. I'm not going to be so stupid to allow my arrogance to fuck us over again.

There's a gentle slope up to the house. I bet on a nice day, it's almost scenic.

"Conrad," Antonio mutters, beckoning me over like I'm his lapdog.

"What?" I snarl. Like I want to stand around gossiping all day when Brynn is right there, right up that hill.

"There's a good chance a man called Xavier Heeps is in that house. If he is, then he's mine, do you understand?"

"I don't give a fuck about anyone but Brynn." I state. But that's not exactly true. I want him, I want her father, I want Lucas Asher.

And I want the man that touched her, the men, I want them all dead. I want them all erased from existence.

I clench my fists, trying to calm myself. Patience. Fucking patience. I will have them, I will have them all. God is on my side. God favours me. He won't let them go unpunished. He won't let them beat me, not in this.

We move on in silence, only the sound of ruffling fabric can be heard.

Antonio is near enough that I can reach out and grab him, but I don't look in his direction. I keep my eyes firmly on the target ahead.

As we round the corner, there's a group of them ahead, like they're hiding out. Waiting.

Did someone alert them to our presence? Did they know we were coming?

Too fucking bad that they're not ready because it takes barely a minute before we've blasted each and every one of them. I count twenty as I step over their bodies and continue on.

Twenty isn't a bad number. Maybe they've split their force up, decided to hedge their bets. Either way, they won't beat us.

Somewhere in that house, my wife is trapped. Is she in pain? Is she tied up, trussed up? Are they even now abusing her?

I let out a growl before I can think not to, and I hear the warning noise Antonio makes in response. As if one sound from me is enough to alert a house this big anyway.

As we climb the low stone wall I look for signs of life, but it's deserted. The house is in darkness. It's as if it's been abandoned and for one horrific moment, I fear that is the case. That they've been tipped off, that they've moved her, taken her somewhere further from my reach.

"Brynn," I murmur.

Again, Antonio curses, like I give a fuck what his opinion is.

We let the men break in first. They're quiet, more skilled at gaining entry than I would be because I'm all for smashing the doors in and shooting our way.

After a few moments we get the signal to move. Antonio heads right down the left hand side, as if he knows exactly where Lucas is hiding. And while I can't wait to get my hands on the bastard, my focus is my wife. Once I have her safe, then I can think about revenge.

There's a great winding staircase. I make my way up just as silently, with my gun drawn. On the first floor something moves and I'm quick to pull the trigger. Thankfully the silencer keeps the sound down but there's nothing to disguise the cry the man makes as he falls flat on his face.

Beneath me, I can hear the rising clamour of the battle. Shouts, gun fire, the sound of objects smashing tell me that the time for stealth is over.

It takes me a second to remove the silencer, and then I'm back, focused, moving onwards. The thing might have been useful at the start, but it means you can't shoot as straight and I'm all for the accuracy right now.

A guard rounds the corner, and his eyes widen as he sees me. Before he can react, I shoot him in the neck, and he falls back. As his body slumps I crouch down, asking him where Brynn is. Only, the man is dead or as good as.

I kick him over, leaving him to bleed out while I carry on looking.

Room by room, I make my way. Maybe it's the noise of Antonio's lot that gains all the attention, because there's a distinct lack of guards in this section.

I climb another staircase, this time the servants one. On the next floor, I spot the guard, standing with his back to me as if he's too stupid to recognise death when it creeps through the darkness.

I smirk, taking aim, and hit his lower back right where I intended. The fucker will never walk again, not that he'll be drawing a breath come sunrise. I stride up to him, kicking him so that he rolls over and he coughs up, blood splattering his lips.

“Tell me where Brynn is.” I growl.

The man blinks, his bloodied lips turning into a grin. “Fuck you.” He gasps.

It’s the wrong fucking thing to say.

I kneel down, pulling my dagger, and I plunge it into his left thigh. “Fucking tell me,” I snarl.

He splutters more; he groans, but I can tell it’s a losing cause.

Fine then, I don’t need him when there’s a hundred more of his ilk between me and my wife. He’s not special. He’s not necessary.

I plunge the blade into his eyes, one after another as he howls. His hands try to bat me away but with his spine as good as useless, he doesn’t have the physical strength to do anything of worth.

As I get to my feet, I point almost lazily at his forehead and pull the trigger, but I’m barely two metres away when someone comes barrelling into me. I’m quick to land a punch and then I’m ducking, avoiding the blow aimed straight for my face.

Finally, a real fucking fight.

The man tilts his head, as if he too can sense the energy coming off me.

He’s big, bulky, but not all of it is muscle. Stupid fat fuck should have spent more time in the gym than eating all the pies. He’s no match for me on a normal day, and today, I’m not normal. Today I’m a fucking psycho.

As he attacks again, I can see he’s untrained, unskilled. What he lacks in talent though he clearly thinks he can make up for in brute strength.

I let him land a punch, a good hit to my ribs. The pain helps, the pain gets my own adrenaline pumping, and it’s a reminder of what the stakes are. What happens if I get cocky.

He swings again, a lazy, poorly timed swing that tells me the bastard thinks he’s winning this, and that’s when I make my move. I let his arm come around and then I’m reaching out, snatching it, bending it right the way it doesn’t fucking bend. He howls, and we both hear the delicious sound as the bone cracks.

“How’s that feel, huh?” I taunt.

He falls to his knees. Hard, and his other hand curls into a fist, as if he could do enough to hurt me now.

I lift my boot, kicking him right in the jaw before he can land it and he falls back as the blood spurts out, and a few of his teeth go flying.

“Where the fuck is my wife?” I ask, getting right into his mangled face.

He shakes his head like he doesn't know who I'm talking about and I snatch at his throat, hauling him up to look me in the eyes.

"Brynn, where the fuck is she?"

He mumbles something incoherent, something bullshit. I release my grip, letting the fucker hit the floor hard. And then he repeats whatever it is, but his mouth is too mangled, too broken to make sense.

I pull my gun, finger on the trigger but as I go to put the bullet in his useless brain, another guard comes running.

Like I have fucking time for this.

Brynn is here, Brynn is somewhere in this house.

I need to get to her. I need to find her.

I shoot the newcomer, then deal with the half-dead oaf at my feet.

Another guard comes careening out at me. I take aim, blasting him back, blasting his buddy right after him.

It feels like an onslaught now, an actual battle. I can feel my heart starting to pound in my chest.

It's been years since I've had a real fight, a real contest. That's the downside about being a Blake, being a Reaper. The odds are almost always on your side, it makes these games more than a little boring.

But not today. No, today, any moment one of these fuckers could beat me. I could be the one lying here, bleeding out.

And then what? What would happen to my dear wife then? I don't want to think about that, I don't want to contemplate it.

I need to focus on the now, on the killing first, then the finding after.

By the time I make it to the next set of stairs, there's half a dozen men dead and dying behind me.

I can hear the sound of gunfire growing steadily louder and it tells me that either Antonio doesn't give a fuck about Lucas anymore, or he has him secured, and now he's on a rampage too.

Boots appear on the top step. I shoot first, then shoot the pair that follow after. Stupid fucks, did no one teach them basic fucking countermeasures? Who walks right down a stairwell when their buddy just got their toes shot off?

The third man clearly learns the lesson the first two ignored and he takes off running, yelling, like a little boy lost and wanting his mother.

I make short work of his mates. They had one moment, one chance to kill me and instead they lay there, blubbering like babies.

I take aim but nothing comes out the barrel and I realise then, I'm out of damned rounds.

The guns they have are shit compared to mine, they're all show and have no substance. But then beggars can't be choosers.

I yank the assault rifle from one of the dead man's necks. Who the fuck actually hangs the straps around them? What is this, a Call of Duty game?

The running man is quick. He's almost at the end of the hallway when I take out his right knee. He slams down, face first into the plush rug and then he starts begging, pleading.

I stalk towards him, feeling like death himself and he turns, holding his hands together as if in prayer.

"Please, mister, please..."

God, he sounds like a child. Have his balls even dropped?

I narrow my eyes, seeing the hint of stubble on his chin and the obvious acne. I doubt the kid is more than nineteen.

"Where is she?" I ask that same fucking question.

"Please, I didn't, I don't."

"Where the fuck is my wife?" I holler, pointing the barrel right at his throat.

"Mer, mer, mercy..." He sobs, crawling closer.

"I'll give you mercy," I reply. "If you tell me where Brynn is."

"The, ba, basement." He stammers.

The basement? Right where Antonio and his fucking men are headed.

I take a step back, losing what little control I have left and I slam my boot into his pitiful face. He howls, landing on his side.

"Please, mercy. You said you'd give me mercy."

I don't hesitate. I pull the trigger, aiming right for his puny chest. A bullet to the heart is far more fucking merciful than he deserves. A bullet to the heart is better than ending up in Antonio's hands.

Besides, a man like this is worthless. He won't know anything of use, and he isn't interesting enough to bother with the hassle of taking him to Oblivion either.



I GET TO THE GROUND FLOOR, BACK THE SAME WAY I CAME. PASSING ALL the dead bodies.

Only, when I get to where the basement is, there's a man blocking it.

He tilts his head, smirking as if he knows exactly who I am, with his gun pointed right at me. He looks like he's already been in a fight. His shirt sleeve is torn, he's got blood dripping from a wound in his shoulder and he's panting like he raced to get here, like he intentionally put himself in my path.

I raise my own gun, pointing right for his chest, "Get the fuck out of my way," I snarl.

Stupid old fuck. Like I can't gun him down in a heartbeat.

"I wouldn't go down there," He replies. "You probably won't like what you find."

"And what is that?"

"Just a whore, getting what she deserves." He shrugs, trying to seem nonchalant, only that movement is anything but.

I glance at the door, then back at him. Is he baiting me, is that it? Like I wouldn't happily blow his fucking brains out.

"You know she fucked us all," He says, laughing, "She was so keen to spread her legs, welcoming each cock, one after the other..."

"Shut your fucking mouth," I pull the trigger, hitting him in the chest and he falls back before he gets back up, holding the bullet.

"Wearing a vest, mate," He says as if I'm an idiot.

"Get the fuck out of my way, or you'll be wearing the rest of my bullets," I growl, raising my gun again.

He laughs more, before glancing at his watch like he's on some kind of schedule.

"Waiting for backup?" I ask, "Not those twenty or so men we left dead in the woods?"

His face reacts, it tells me I'm spot on.

So, they did know we were coming. Is my wife even here? Or have they moved her somewhere and this is simply a distraction?

Someone far off hollers. It makes the bald fucker turn his head, and I seize that moment.

I pull the trigger, aiming not for his chest this time but for his throat, for that sweet spot where it'll kill him, but it'll take a little time.

He falls back, coughing up blood, and his head slams into the stone floor.

I step up to him, narrowing my eyes. “Did you fuck my wife?” I ask.

He grins, a bloodied, disgusting grin, “Every fucking chance I got,” He boasts.

The second bullet lands between his eyeballs. Sure, I meant to leave him to suffer but knowing he’s dead is a far better plan. With my heel, I drive my boot into his face, mashing up his features, churning up his nose, his eye sockets. I’ve got a good mind to pull my cock out and piss on him too but someone is yelling, calling my name.

And that puts the fear of God into me.

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# CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX



*Conrad*

There's an awful hush. A silence that I don't fucking like.

I see Antonio ahead. I see his men, still rounding up those they want.

He looks at me and jerks his head.

"Where is she?" I ask. I know he has her, I can tell by the look on his smug fucking face.

He strides off, leaving me to follow and I'm quick on his heels, practically stamping on his shadow. We reach the end. The basement was clearly built for an older structure than the one standing. It's made of solid stone, it's dank, musty. I stare at the blocks, at the cavernous ceiling. It feels like we're something built for the Romans, something ancient. Something with serious history.

"She needs a doctor." Antonio says, turning to face me.

No shit, like I don't know that. They cut her fucking tongue out. I doubt she's in perfect health.

He places his hand on my chest as if in warning, and I shove him off.

There's a wooden door ahead, and a room built probably once for food storage or supplies, but it's freezing fucking cold as I step in. It's pitch black too.

I squint against the darkness as an awful smell hits my nose.

It's hard not to choke, not to cough. I have to pull my jumper up to cover my lower face as the overwhelming stench of piss and shit makes me physically gag.

Behind me, Antonio shines a light. It's like a beam, a halo, highlighting the curled-up creature in the furthest part of the space.

There's a bag over their head. A shitty, scratchy bag with a suspicious stain right where someone's mouth would be. Their hands are bound with coarse rope.

And the sound. That broken, gurgling crackle comes from under the fabric as if they're trying to scream, but they no longer know how.

They're rocking, shaking, though I can't tell if it's from fear of just the freezing temperature.

"Brynn?" I murmur.

The body freezes.

No, not the body. *Her* body.

I step forward, my boot squelching into something my mind registers as human excrement. And I kneel down, ignoring the disgusting dampness that seeps into my trousers. It takes some effort to untie the bag, to get it off her head.

Her eyes are shut, and her face is screwed up in pain. There's a trail of dried blood coming from her mouth, down her lips, down her chin.

"Fucking hell," I murmur.

She lets out a whimper that sounds so strange.

I don't bother to untie her wrists. I just scoop her up, feeling how frail and broken she is.

Is it my imagination that she leans into me? That she welcomes my touch?

Maybe she's just so cold that she needs the warmth of my body to heat her up.

As I carry her out into the hallway, Antonio's men all fall silent and openly stare.

I let out a snarl, realising that my wife is completely naked right now, that all of them are getting a good view of her.

Antonio snaps his fingers, silently signalling for them to look the fuck away because I'm so close to grabbing hold of his pistol and killing each and every one of them.

I don't bother to thank him, I don't bother to say another word. I just walk out, holding her tight against me. When we get to the front of the house, I can see the SUVs are up on the drive and I place her inside.

For a second, her eyes open and I swear I see the flicker of horror on her face as she realises it's me, that I have her. But then that fear seems to go, that panic seems to ease.

I mutter about finding a driver, because I sure as fuck am not getting behind the wheel right now. No, I want to be with her, holding her, never letting her out my arms again.

But as I step away, she reaches out. She whimpers more, and I swear she tries to say my name. She tries to say the word 'Conrad'.

*My wife. She needs me. She wants me.*

As broken and as damaged as she now is, she finally gets it. She finally fucking gets it.

# CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN



*Brynn*

T it's too bright. Everything is too bright.

And the noise, the sound. I want to block my ears. To shut the world out.

I'm covered in dirt, in blood, in my own shit too.

And I can't stop shaking, I can't stop trembling. Though I know that's not from fear. I no longer feel fear, do I? My husband saw to that. He fixed me.

I'm so cold. I can't feel my fingers. *Have they gone too?*

And I'm stark naked, sitting in the back of this car, waiting for Conrad to return.

As he clammers in beside me, he wraps a blanket over my shoulders and it's the most incredible feeling. The blanket is wool but it's not soft, it's the kind you'd use for a picnic or a dog. And yet, right now it feels like the softest most incredible thing.

"I've got you." Conrad says, pulling me in.

Someone gets in the driver's seat. The engine starts, and I focus on the minute by minute of what is happening. On the sound of the engine purring as we drive off. On the sound of the gravel crunching under the tyres. On the wheels turning.

Going round. And round.

The moon is up. It's bright. It's a full sphere in the sky, and it feels almost prophetic to be rescued on a night as beautiful as this.

I stare at it, half in disbelief.

And then a voice questions in my head if I'm really being rescued right now, or simply being taken to a different form of hell.

My hands are still bound. Conrad might be saying all the right things, but then he was always good at that, wasn't he? He always knew what to say, how to manipulate me, but actions speak louder than words.

He hasn't set me free. Not truly.

I gulp, swallowing and that awful sharp wound in my mouth protests enough that my eyes water. I want to ask where they're taking me. After all, my father burnt down his house.

*Where the fuck am I going now?*

I want to ask about them too, about Xavier, about my father. Has he found them? Has he got them locked up safe and secure? Or are they out there still? Are they going to come back and do this to me again? Hurt me more?

Hurt.

Hurt. Hurt. Hurt.

The radio crackles. A man's voice comes over it, saying that my father is gone, that he's not there.

I open my mouth to speak, to tell them that he left days ago, but the words don't come out. Nothing comes out but an awful gurgle of noise and then the taste of blood that tells me I've popped the stitching again.

"It's okay," Conrad says. "We'll get you fixed. I'll sort everything."

Fix me. Fix me.

But that's not true, is it? You can't regrow a tongue, you can't fix what they did to me. I've been mutilated to the point of no return.

He cups my cheek, staring into my face with that same intensity he's always had. Should I be grateful then that he still wants me? Should I feel happy that he doesn't simply do me in now, and pretend this marriage never happened?

I'm not perfect anymore, I'm not his beautiful little doll to dress up. I'm ruined. My father ruined me, and Xavier butchered me.

Conrad can't pretend that didn't happen. He just has to look at my face, look at my body to see the damage.

I'll never be perfect again.

And yet, he came back, he came for me.

He rescued me.

I don't know what to think of it and on some perverse level, I'm almost grateful that my brain doesn't process emotions properly anymore.

It spares me the true horror, it sugarcoats what this is.

The lull of the engine makes my heart slow. The sound of it seems to hypnotise me, calm me even. My eyes grow heavy, my body seems to give in, and I slump against Conrad's chest.

His nose wrinkles enough to tell me that I stink and yet he doesn't shove me off, he doesn't act like he's repulsed by me.

He just holds me, and for once, he gives me what *I* need. What I so desperately need.



I WAKE UP, BLINKING AS I'M CARRIED INTO A HOUSE. MY HANDS ARE untied, my legs are dangling free, but I don't know when that happened.

My mind registers the ornate carvings, the fancy entrance hall, even the stiff uniform of the servants as I'm carried past.

Whispers seem to float above my head, but I'm too exhausted to listen to what is being said.

On some level, I realise where I am. Where we are.

Magnus' house.

Crystal glass glints with the first hint of sunrise. People seem to flit around, and the word 'doctor' seems to echo and echo.

I'm laid down in a room that doesn't feel warm or welcoming. It's sterile. The bed isn't a normal one, but the kind in a medical facility. Does Magnus have a whole damn hospital hidden in his house?

As his face comes into view, I whimper. It's not so much that I'm afraid, it's that I don't get what is going on. Why has Conrad brought me here of

all places?

The blanket is pulled back. My hands seem to move on their own, grabbing hold of the ends, trying to cover myself. Someone tsks, and it's yanked away, leaving me naked.

"Jesus."

I know it's Magnus who speaks, but I can see the disgusted look on Conrad's face as he stares down at me.

It shouldn't affect me the way it does, it shouldn't upset me. For so long I've wanted to be something repulsive and not an object of desire. I guess I finally got what I wanted now, didn't I?

As his eyes land on my chest, I feel every second of his fury.

"They cut it out?" He snarls.

I shake my head. They didn't cut it, they burnt it. They seared my skin until there was nothing but a mangled mess of blood and blisters and melted flesh.

They fixed me too. Everyone wanted to fix me.

I pull my hands up, feeling the sting of where it's still not healed. Is it fucked up that I want that brand back? Yes, yes it is.

A stranger rushes in. He starts flapping around, grabbing instruments, asking Conrad questions and most of them, he can't answer but I know I can.

I even try, but they simply tell me to calm down, as if my attempts at speaking are signs of distress.

I'm poked, prodded and examined as if I'm a science experiment and not a real person while I just lie there, I just let them do what they want.

It's not like I stand a chance against them anyway.

When the stranger tries to get me to open my mouth though, that's when I stop being compliant. I don't want to show them, I don't want to actually acknowledge it and hearing the words spoken will make it too real. I silently plead with Conrad. Perhaps this would be better if he wasn't here, if he wasn't seeing how truly broken his little doll now is.

No fix this time. No fix.

Magnus tries to take charge, as if he's bored of this and it feels like it's a waste of his time.

Conrad shoves him off before he takes my hand and demands I open my mouth and stop being difficult.

Fine. That's what you want. You want to see the destruction? You want to see how they took me, and they broke me more than you ever could.

I narrow my eyes, take a deep breath and open my jaw.

Conrad's face changes almost instantly. I know the man has seen and done terrible things, and yet the way he reacts, the way he takes a step back before getting control of himself? Yeah, that tells me everything.

The doctor somehow manages to master himself. He uses some cold metal stick thing to check the wound while I try not to whimper from the pain.

"It's a mess." He says. "They must have hacked it off. No surgeon would have done such a thing."

"Can anything be done?" Conrad asks.

I know the answer before the doctor speaks, so I don't feel anything as he confirms it.

"No. It's too late to re-attach. The best I can do is give some antibiotics to stem off any infection and we'll monitor the healing."

Conrad lets out a growl. Clearly, he wanted a different outcome, and I wonder if this moment here will be what does it, what makes him decide I'm too trashed to bother with.

"...She'll be able to eat, but only small amounts. There's enough muscle left that we won't need to put an NG tube in..." He continues, but Conrad isn't listening.

He's staring at me, staring at my face, my body, every bit of my ruined flesh.

And I stare back, waiting for him to say it, to order the man to give me some injection or other and to 'put me out of my misery', only, he doesn't. He just looks at me as if daring me to question him.

Once I'm given the 'all clear', Magnus orders the servants to come and bring some things to clean and dress me. But Conrad dismisses them, telling him that no one is touching 'his wife' ever again.

I gulp. I seem to shatter what tiny grasp I have on my nerves, and my tears spill down my cheeks like a waterfall.

Magnus pulls Conrad aside, growling in his ear that he's being a fool. "The girl is too damaged to bother with..." he begins, but Conrad cuts across him.

"Like you didn't damage your wife."

Magnus scoffs, shaking his head. “It’s a completely different set of circumstances.”

“Is it?” Conrad counters. “You had your wife shot, remember...’

The look on Magnus’s face says it all. Clearly that’s information he didn’t know Conrad was aware of. His eyes then dart to me and it takes all I have not to blink, not to look away.

“She’s a Founder,” Conrad states. “A Founder. You know what that means. You wanted an heir? Well, now you’ll have one. Blake blood mixed with Founder blood.”

Magnus sneers. “We have no definitive proof that the girl is a Founder,”

“That’s not how this works.” Conrad smirks. “What we say goes. And besides, you know it’s true. Why else would the Esau’s have been involved in all this?”

“To bring me down.” Magnus snaps.

“Not just you. Us. Our family.” Conrad states. “Brynn’s bloodline legitimises your leadership in a way Antonio could never have created by himself. Once she gives us a son and heir, we’ll be unstoppable.”

“We?” Magnus repeats. “Since when has it been ‘we’?”

Conrad puts his hand on his brother’s shoulder, shaking his head slightly. “It’s always been ‘we’, Magnus, you just never allowed anyone else to do anything to help you. You’ve been too determined to prove you could rule all by yourself.”

“And you’re saying you’re stepping up?” Magnus growls.

“I have your back as long as you have mine.” Conrad says pointedly.

Magnus narrows his eyes, glancing at me like he wants to argue more and then he looks back at his brother. “Your wife will never suck your cock again. You know that, right?”

Conrad’s lips curl and he moves closer to me, cupping my cheek in a way that is far too sensual considering the obscenity of the conversation. “She can still choke on it though, can’t she?”

I guess that answers the question then.

I guess that solves it.

He’s keeping me after all.

# CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT



*Conrad*

I scoop her up and carry her out, past the doctor, past my brother who's clearly still not convinced that I shouldn't just put her down like a stray dog.

As if I could.

She hangs compliant enough in my arms as we make our way through the main house to the east wing. She still stinks, and I know it's not mud covering her body.

I kick off my boots at the door to the suite and carry her through to the bathroom. From the window, I can see the sun is rising, but I've no intention of doing anything else beyond washing and sleeping.

I place her down gently onto the stool. She watches me warily as I turn the shower on and wait for the water to heat.

A noise comes from her throat. I know she's trying to say something, but I don't have the energy to figure it out right now.

She looks skinny, emaciated. In the bright light of the bathroom, I can see how bad of a state she's really in. I'll need to fatten her up, build her

back up. Make her nice and plump again.

Question is, will she let me pamper her, or will she return to being a little bitch again? Has her time with her father poisoned her mind, or made her realise how good she really had it with me?

I grab another stool, plonking it in the shower. Good thing it's so big because with her sat down, she takes up a lot of the floorspace.

The water cascades down over her and she hangs her head, staring at where it drips down.

I let out a sigh, pulling my dirty clothes off, and I toss them onto the marble floor before I get in beside her.

She instantly freezes. Her body obviously locks up at my proximity. I narrow my eyes, daring her to try anything and reach for the loofah and some body wash.

I can see her breath hitch. I can see her chest rising and falling rapidly.

In silence, I drop to my knees and I foam up the loofah before I start scrubbing. Bit by bit I wash the dirt off, the grime, the evidence of where other men's hands have been. She sniffs but beyond that, she doesn't do a thing to stop me. As I toss the loofah and grab the cloth, she shuts her eyes.

I push her back against the tiles, then open her legs, scooting her arse right to the end of the stool so she's at a better angle.

Again, I expect some sort of resistance, some attempt at a fight.

And again, I'm more than pleasantly surprised. I wrap my hand around her now clean waist, and I run the cloth right up between her thighs. This is where she's most dirty, this is where the greatest offence took place. I wonder if I could have accepted the mutilation of her tongue better if they hadn't fucked her.

I guess it's a moot point, isn't it?

But as I blink I can see it, that video, that footage. Of her being held down, of her being fucked over and over. Of her cunt opening up and swallowing someone else's cock like she wanted it. Like she enjoyed it.

It doesn't matter that she was crying, it doesn't matter that she was fighting. Her body still did that. Still allowed that.

I snarl, slamming my hand into the tile and she jumps in shock.

"Who?" I ask.

She doesn't answer. Of course she doesn't fucking answer, they stole her damn voice. Even if she does know, she can't speak the damned words.

I shake my head, slamming my fist into the tile again and this time, I hear the crack as the ceramic gives way. There's a circular fracture now on the tile, a perfectly neat representation of what they did to our relationship, how they fractured it into tiny little pieces.

Her hand reaches out, she touches my arm and I jerk, shoving her away.

I don't want her touch right now, not when she's still dirty. Not when she's still tainted.

I rub the cloth harder, covering it in more soap. I scrub away all the muck, all the marks that cover her. Her skin is a nice pink shade now. All flushed and pretty.

Her cunt needs a shave. Her armpits need a shave too, but I don't care right now. Besides, I don't think I could keep my hand steady enough to do it without cutting her, and I don't want that. She's lost enough blood as it is.

The towels are hanging up too far to reach and I step out, yanking them roughly off the rails. As I turn back, I can see she's reached up, turned the water off and she's just sitting there, facing me, clearly waiting for something.

I dry her off and then carry her through to the bedroom. It's not fair to take my anger out on her. It's not right. She's a victim in this, and yet I dump her on the bed, leaving her there while I go back and mull it over.

In silence, I dry myself off and then I stand there, just breathing, just taking it all in.

I could give her up. I could just walk in there, snap her pretty little neck and end this bullshit.

But what would be the point then? What would all my fight to get her back be for?

No, even damaged, even destroyed, she is still my doll. My plaything. I'll have to patch her back up, stitch her back up. But she's worth the effort, she always has been.

I wrap the towel around my waist before walking out to the bedroom.

She's on the bed. Sitting, facing the bathroom door. She looks up and meets my hard gaze, and her eyes look forlorn. Perhaps she understands this, perhaps she understands my pain.

I open my mouth to speak but she shakes her head slightly and then lays back, on her elbows, spreading her legs wide.

"Brynn..."

She makes a growling sound, one of defiance and then she moves her hand, running her fingers right down her centre.

I take a step, then another and before I realise it, I'm on my knees before her, staring at her cunt.

I don't want to touch her, I don't want to do anything to break this spell. For the first time, I've not had to ask, not had to manipulate.

She's touching herself. But she's doing it for me, for my entertainment.

Can this really be happening? Or have I smacked my head? Imagined this entire scenario while I'm out cold?

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# CHAPTER SIXTY-NINE



*Brynn*

T t's the only way.

I know it.

Even if I don't like it.

He's rejecting me, he doesn't want me anymore. I can see it in his eyes, I can feel it in the way he washed me.

I'm tainted now. Ruined.

I never wanted this man's love. I never wanted his attention, or his touch, or anything from him.

And yet, without it, what am I? What purpose do I have?

My own father proved I'm nothing but a thing to own. A thing to use. My maternal family despises me. I have no value beyond what my body can barter, and Conrad, my husband, he used to want that, he used to crave that.

I have to make him remember. I have to use the one thing I have left, the one option open to me, if I'm going to survive.

"Conrad." I whisper his name. Not that he realises that's what I've said, since it comes out in a jumble of noise.

But my hands are doing all the work here. All the enticing.

I run my fingers up, being so gentle, partly because it hurts too much to do otherwise and partly because that is how I like it, how I touch myself. My face heats when I realise that it's a habit now, that I masturbate. I'm one of those people. Those sinners.

But this man here, he made me into this. He's just as sinful as I am.

I stare back at him. He's not looking at my face but the expression he has, it's turning me on more. It's making me continue, it's proving everything I'm doing is right.

My body leaks out more arousal, my heart thumping loudly. I can feel myself literally throbbing as I work away.

And I'm moaning, moaning deep in my throat. Showing in every way that I can that I want this, that I'm submitting. That I can be what he wants me to be now, that I won't fight him anymore.

My upper back arches, my breasts push out and I throw my head back as an explosion seems to go off behind my eyes. I scream, I push my fingers deep inside myself and I start thrusting, dragging this performance out.

"Fuck," He groans, leaning in, planting a kiss on my useless left leg. "You're so beautiful, so beautiful Brynn."

Those words send me over the edge, they make me combust.

But I'm crying too, sobbing, hating the fact that this part of me was tainted, that it was ruined.

As I collapse back onto the bed he gets in beside me, pulling me up into his arms, and then drags the covers over us.

For so many months I hated the touch of him, the feel of him, the smell of him. And yet, now, I'm lying here, accepting it. I don't know if this is peace I feel, or disgust at myself, at my surrender.

But I can't keep fighting. I'm too tired now. Too broken.

Conrad can help me. Conrad can protect me. I just have to sacrifice the parts of me that don't want him, the parts that whisper of freedom and a life outside the Brethren. I have to bury those words; I have to burn them from my memory.

Fix me.

I have to fix myself now, I have to do the work that no one else can.

I can hear his breathing; I can feel the warmth of it on my skin.

For a second I think he's fallen asleep, but then he moves enough to tell me he's definitely still awake.

His eyes narrow, and I see that same flash of anger that I saw back in the shower.

“How many?” He growls.

For a moment I don’t understand what he’s asking me, what the hell he’s talking about, and then it hits me.

He wants to know who else fucked me. Who else has had me.

I gulp, grateful for the lack of emotion in this instance because it spares me feeling the revulsion I know should be there.

“Just him.” I reply.

He doesn’t understand. Of course he doesn’t. This conversation is completely pointless because I can’t fucking speak in any way that makes actual sense.

And then it hits me, what to do, how to explain it.

I make a gesture with my hands, and he moves quickly out of the bed, rifling through the desk in the corner before he comes back with the notepad.

He passes it to me, and I take the pencil before I hesitate. Because on some level, writing it, seeing it there on paper, feels even worse than saying the truth out loud.

“Tell me who touched you.” He says more angrily, like he’s going to hunt them down and skin them alive.

I scrawl the words, but I can’t look at them. I can still barely process what happened.

He snatches the pad, then stares at what’s written there.

“...the fuck?” He says and I can hear the disbelief. I can hear it loudly. Does he think I’m lying, that I’d make something as abhorrent as that up?

I grab the pad back, adding to the line that reads ‘Xavier and my father’ and I write, I scrawl, I scramble to try and explain what it was, what he did, and why.

That my father didn’t see me, not his daughter. That he didn’t see his child, but the manifestation of the girl he loved and groomed years ago. That he was so obsessed with my mother that he couldn’t think beyond his own warped mind.

He stares back at the paper when I give it to him, and I can’t look at him. A voice in my head already tells me that this will be it, the final straw. I’m not just ruined; I’m disgusting on a level I’ll never come back from.

My hands curl into fists. My tears begin to stream down my face again.

The sound of the pad hitting the carpet reaches my ears and I look up to see Conrad staring back down at me.

“No one must know.” He states. “You tell no one else. Do you understand me?”

I nod so quickly that I think it rattles my brain.

But the warning in his voice, the threat, it’s loud enough for me to understand. If I tell anyone, then that will be it. That will be the end.

Apparently, there’s no comeback from that sin.

# CHAPTER SEVENTY



*Conrad*

I leave her sleeping.

No, I don't want to. But what choice do I have? I can't lay here, pretending that I don't know what I know.

As soon as the door shuts, I pull out my phone and I'm calling Antonio. The bastard picks up immediately, just like always.

"You can't change your mind now," He teases.

"Fat chance of that," I growl.

"Then what do you want? I expected you to be balls deep now that you have your wife back..."

"Who the fuck is Xavier Heeps?" I growl.

"Ahh," He sighs, "You mean, who the fuck was he? Because he didn't make it out of the house."

"He's dead?" God, the relief I feel just knowing that fact.

"He is, Conrad, despite what I said. You killed him."

Me? When the fuck did I? My eyes widen as I realise exactly when. So the man wasn't bluffing then, he had fucked her. He'd fucked my wife.

“I wanted him alive, Conrad.”

“Too fucking bad,” I sneer.

I hear something crash, something big. Has he really lost his temper? Him, the man who’s always in control?

“You just don’t get it.” Antonio snaps. “You’re still acting like this is some petty rivalry, when it’s far bigger than that.”

“Who the fuck is he?” I ask.

“Wrong question.”

“Fine, what the fuck is going on?” I retort. I’m sick of being kept in the dark, being used as a nice bit of fodder for him and my brother. I said I was in, that means I need to know everything. Every tiny, minuscule detail.

“The Esau don’t just want to take over this Chapter, then want to take over all of it. They want to undo hundreds of years of rule, hundreds of years of stability. They want to create a two-tier system, them versus us. The old blood, versus the new...”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning you, your brothers, most of the Brethren you know would be out, would be turned into an army. Only the elite would remain, and they’d get rid of the Chapter Lords as we know it. They’d replace them with Founders.”

“My family is elite.” I snarl. We’re fucking Blakes for god sake. We’ve been Brethren for nigh on five hundred years or more.

Antonio lets out a bitter laugh. “You’re scum compared to the real elite Conrad, and you know it.”

“And Xavier?”

“He was going to replace Titus once Titus was made Chapter Lord. There was no way the rest of us would ever have considered Xavier for the role but once Titus was in, once a year or so had passed, then they’d change everything. They’d pull the rug out right from under us...”

“How do you know all this?” I ask. He’s so damned knowledgeable on everything the Esau do. Who’s to say he isn’t playing us? Planning the exact same thing, planning on putting Magnus in charge and then taking over afterwards.

“Now, that would be telling,” Antonio snorts.

“We had a deal,” I state.

“We do. And I got you your wife back. Don’t forget your part, Conrad.”

“Grace?” I mutter.

“That’s right. As soon as she’s at Oblivion, you’ll hold the auction. And no one is touching her, you hear me?”

“You want her that badly? One fucking girl?”

“Didn’t you all but sell your soul to me for Brynn?” He laughs.

Yeah, I did. And I’d do it again. Even knowing everything I do now, knowing what she went through, knowing that she’s damaged goods.

“So, what about her father, what about Lucas Asher?”

“Leave Lucas to me,” Antonio snaps. “He might be on the run now, but he’ll rear his ugly head sooner or later, he always does.”

“I want in,” I reply.

“Give me Grace first, and I’ll consider it.”

He doesn’t wait for the reply. He hangs up, like the arrogant fuck that he is. I narrow my eyes, scrolling through my phone to find the picture of her.

Grace Ratcliffe. She’s a pretty thing. Not as pretty as my Brynn, granted. But I bet those long golden locks would look really good wrapped around your fist as you shoved your cock down her throat.

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# CHAPTER SEVENTY-ONE



*Brynn*

**H**e's not here, I can feel it. I can feel how empty the bed is, how empty the room is.

I try to roll over, to see through the darkness if the door is open, and then I realise that it has to be shut because otherwise the light from the hallway would be too bright.

My bladder feels full. Too full.

I try to move, to alleviate the pressure, and then bile rushes to my throat.

I practically fall out of the bed, slamming into the carpet. Vomit fills my mouth, and I don't want to puke. Not here, not in this room.

My legs lay like lead weights, holding my back and I drag myself, an inch at a time until I finally reach the toilet.

It feels like half my guts come up. It burns my throat, and it stings that awful wound in my mouth.

Sting.

Sting like a jellyfish. Sharp and nasty.

My hair is still stuck to my forehead from how hot and sweaty I got from having to drag myself. I want to rinse my mouth with water to get rid of the foul taste, but I don't have the energy to even try to do it.

I feel exhausted, defeated. And the fact that I'm alone makes my heart thump louder and louder.

*Where is Conrad? Has he left me? Has he decided that I'm not worth it after all?*

I lay there, curled up on the floor, and that cold marble feels almost comforting. At least it does for a moment, It does until the true reality of my situation hits me.

*I'm pregnant.*

I don't know how I know it, but I do.

After everything he did to me. Everything else I've gone through, this one fact seems to break the last of my resolve.

I start sobbing, heaving, crying for the person I was, crying for the girl who's mum she can't even remember, crying for the unloved child that my family never wanted, that my family despised. And crying for the adult that should have found some sort of happiness, some sort of peace.

Fix me. Fix me.

Everyone always wanted to fix me. Even when I was a child, I was still wrong.

“Fuck you.” I whisper. “Fuck you.”

I know those words are for God, I know that the hate I feel inside me is for him too. Because he did this, he allowed this. He created a world where the Brethren rule, where the men dictate and all of us, all the women are mere pawns, collateral damage, things to be used and not considered actual people.

What kind of a God does that? What kind of world is this?

My hands wrap around my belly. It's not as flat as it was, but if you didn't know you probably wouldn't realise either.

But I do know.

I know it in my heart.

I'm pregnant, and this child in my belly is almost certainly not my husband's.

I don't know what to do, I don't know how to fix this. But there is no fixing this. No answer. If I were braver, I would kill myself, kill us both.

Spare us whatever pain is coming.

But I'm a coward. I've always been a coward, and that's half my problem.

At the sound of his footsteps, I freeze. The door creaks open further and he's there, staring down at me with concern in his eyes.

His nose wrinkles and I know he can smell it, the acrid smell of vomit.

And then he looks down, down to where my hands are, to where my stomach is cradled, and that realisation morphs his features into shock and disgust.

Will he kill it? Will he drag me out now and realise that I truly am worthless to him?

Will he force me to abort it and then put his own in its place? Expect me to give birth and smile, and raise a new child as if my first had never existed?

“Please,” I beg, even though I know it won’t make a difference. That it’s never made a difference. Conrad has always done what he wanted, has always put him and his great family name first.

He might not understand the word coming out of mouth, but he knows what I’m asking, what I’m pleading for.

He crouches down, letting out a low breath. “It’s his, isn’t it?”

I gulp back the reply, knowing whatever words I say will condemn my poor unborn child.

His fists turn into tight balls, and any minute now they’ll become blows.

*He’s going to beat me. He’s going to beat this child out of me and force me to miscarry.*

He scoops me up, carries me out and I start sobbing as I realise he’s going to take me somewhere, have this child murdered right now, before I can do a thing to stop it.

“Please,” I beg again in my pathetic broken voice. I’d do anything, would promise anything, will give anything.

He lays me down, puts me back into bed and he pulls the covers up around me before he once more wraps me into his arms.

“It’s a bastard.” He says with his face turned up in disgust. “It could be deformed, it could be disabled, it could be...”

“It’s mine.” I say. “My baby. It’s from me too.”

He snarls, slamming his head back against the headboard like he’s actually heard me for the first time.

I don't know how he can understand my words, how he can take the twisted sounds of my tongueless mouth and turn them into anything comprehensible.

I don't dare to speak more, I don't dare to move. I just stare up at him, silently begging for the one thing I know he won't ever grant me.

"I need an heir." He states. "My brother needs an heir. Our family needs an heir."

I nod, scrambling to grab the notepad, scrambling to write a response back to him. "And you'll have one." I state, practically shoving it in his face before I scrawl more. "Please, once this child is born, once I can get pregnant again, then I won't fight you. I'll give you a child. I'll give you a son, so many sons..." I know I'm rambling, I know I'm making promises that I can't possibly guarantee I can keep, but I'll say anything right now. I'll do anything.

"This child..." He spits, shaking his head.

"Please."

He shakes his head more before he pushes me back, pushes me away and then he's up, crossing the room, slamming the door behind him. That action, that sound, all of it seems to seal my fate.

I crumble, I collapse, I weep into the duvet because I know where he's gone.

And soon my baby will be too.

Gone.

Gone. Gone. Gone.

# CHAPTER SEVENTY-TWO



*Conrad*

**S**he's pregnant.  
She's fucking pregnant.  
The one thing I wanted, the one thing I needed, and it's not even mine.

I slam my fist into the wall, feeling that old stubborn stone forcing my knuckles backwards and the pain helps, if only a little.

I should call the doctor, have this dealt with and sorted before anyone else can find out.

But as I pull the phone from my pocket, I hesitate.

I can hear it, hear her sobs, even from here. I know she didn't want my child. I know she didn't want any child, but she *is* pregnant. If I do this, if I have the brat killed, then she'll never forgive me. She'll never fully love me. It will always be there, it will always sit between us, like some festering poison.

And I can't have that. I just can't.

My pride might take the hit, but what better way to prove how much she truly means to me, what better way to make her understand that she is *everything*?

A plan seems to formulate in my head as I make my way down to the kitchens.

When I return to our bedroom with a tray of food in my hands, I know it's the right call. I know that doing this will give me everything I want. It will give me *her*. Every piece of her.

She shrinks back before her brows drop in confusion.

"You need to eat." I state, laying the wooden tray down between us, as if that simple boundary might give her a sense of courage. "Your baby needs sustenance."

From the look on her face, it's clear she thinks she's misheard me. Or she thinks this is a trick.

Perhaps it is, but it's not the one she believes it is.

"You want to keep this child?" I say, "Then this is the deal. We have the scans, we ensure it is healthy and if it is, then from that moment on, that child is mine. I put it in you, I am its father."

"Wwwhat?"

I don't have to understand the exact words she's saying to understand the point.

I pick up the cutlery, aware that without her tongue she can't chew her food, she can't even swallow decent sized mouthfuls. Silently, I start cutting it all up, making it so tiny she can simply allow it to pass back on the tiny sliver of muscle left.

As I fork up the first minuscule bit, I hold it out for her. She stares at it before opening her lips and for a second, she struggles before she gets it down.

"Do we have a deal, Brynn? You can keep this child but from now on you won't fight me, you won't protest, you will do whatever I want. You'll let me dress you up, let me do your hair, let me parade you about Oblivion as my perfect little wife and you'll happily take my cock, however I choose to give it because your sole purpose will be to keep me happy?"

She blinks, just for a second, as if she can feel the weight of this moment. As if she knows that this really is a deal with the devil. Her unborn child's life, for her own.

"Deal," She says in that strangled, awful voice.

Fucking deal. It's like a chorus goes off in my head, like the entirety of heaven empties to be right here, celebrating beside me.

She is mine now, in every sense of the word.

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# CHAPTER SEVENTY-THREE



*Conrad*

**T**It's been two days. Xavier is dead. The fallout from what I and Antonio did hasn't even spread wide enough to worry about yet. By all accounts, we've been lucky.

But luck will only get you so far, even when you're a Blake.

The Esau must know we're coming for them, they have to be planning new moves. Bigger moves. We're not just going to sit here and let them continue on.

I left Brynn with Liliana. No, I didn't fucking like it, but I've realised now that she is vulnerable. The way her mind works, the way you can manipulate her now, she can't be left alone for even a second.

And I'll be damned if we go off tonight and come back to find her taken again.

The sound of the helicopter's blade makes it near impossible to talk.

Apparently, Magnus got these from some new arms dealer the Brethren have recruited. I'll admit I'm impressed. They're new technology, the latest

tech, all armoured and state-of-the art equipment. Not even the U.S Airforce has as many of these things as we now do.

We feel invincible. We feel Godlike.

I glance across at my brother, and I can see that deadly look on his face. Is he wondering what it's going to be like? This time tomorrow he'll be Chapter Lord, and all this bullshit will be done with.

Because tonight we're going to take out Titus, we're going to take out every last member of the Esau faction. To force the Brethren's hand.

It's bold, but it's necessary. For almost the entirety of this fight, they've had the upper-hand. Yes, we've made a few moves, taking out a few of their significant players, but the time for reservation is over.

We strike now, and we strike fucking hard.

Antonio provided us with a list of Esau strongholds. Again, I wondered how he has such useful information, but when I voiced this to Magnus he just brushed it aside, which makes me think that as usual, he knows something I don't and doesn't want to share.

We've got men headed to the locations, even as we speak. The skies of Britain haven't had this much activity since the Blitz.

And it's us, the Blakes, behind it all.

I glance down at the shining lights of Sheffield. All these people, all tucked up in their beds, all blissfully unaware that right now, a coup is underway. Not that they know that their lives are already controlled by the Brethren, that almost every politician, every person of note is within our ranks. That they answer to us.

And from tomorrow, they'll answer to my brother.

In the distance, I can just about make out the house we're headed to. It's a few miles out, in the country, away from the main bustle of the city. Ordinarily we'd be more covert, but there's no hiding this force, is there?

We land with a thump. Three helicopters have already landed before us and the men are ahead, waiting for us to attack as one. We get out, ducking out heads so we don't slice them off on the rotor blades.

As we make our way to where everyone is waiting, I can't help but feel a buzz of excitement. This is everything we've been working for. Everything we, the Blake's, deserve. I may not always get on with my brother, but with him as Chapter Lord, we're going to live like kings. Literal fucking kings.

I know he has plans. I know he's going to ensure that things are put in place, that rules are changed. There's been too much disruption, too much instability in the last few decades. That has to stop, we can't have all that infighting between us. And more than that, we need to ensure that Magnus's rule lasts. That he's not simply eliminated and replaced like the last two.

Magnus meets my gaze, and I see that same determination in his face. God, I can't wait to see Titus kneeling at our feet. I can't wait to witness it; his submission. He'll have to do it publicly, of course. The Brethren won't accept anything less. But we'll offer him a nice quiet little life, a reprieve for him and his wife. Of course that won't last long. He'll be exiled and dealt with once the heat is gone and everyone forgets he exists.

And then there's Grace. Grace is a nice little bargaining chip too.

I had no intention of auctioning her at Oblivion, but it's a nice little powerplay and one that's worked to my advantage. I don't give a fuck what happens to her, Antonio can have her as far as I'm concerned. He can fuck her, torture, hell, he can marry her if that's what he decides. The girl is nothing in the grand scheme of things, because Titus is what matters. Everything hinges on that man.

"Let's go," Magnus says gruffly.

It feels like *déjà vu*. It feels like both of us are out Reaping together, and I guess, in a way, we are. This will be the final one, the final joint venture for us. After tonight, Magnus will no longer be a Reaper.

Maybe Devin will become one now that there's a gap.

I shake my head, dismissing that idea. My poor younger brother doesn't have what it takes to be a Reaper. He's a killing machine, that's true. But he's undisciplined, out of control. The fact that none of us have heard from him in weeks despite Magnus offering him a deal says it all.

Although he could just as likely be dead in a ditch, the Esau could have got to him.

I clench my fists, praying that's not the case. It's not unusual for him to go MIA anyway, and he does have a list, people that need to be dealt with.

Ahead, a shadow looms. I look up, realising that I've paid little attention as we've stalked our way towards this house. I could have had my head blown off, I could have come face to face with a gun and I wouldn't have noticed.

Good thing I didn't. But strange, too.

I narrow my eyes, looking about as something crawls up my spine.

*Something is wrong here.*

Magnus senses it too. We all do.

There's no guards, no fighting, nothing. What sort of safehouse is this?

Antonio kicks open the French doors, and silence is what meets us.

Oh, we can see there's been a fight. It looks like a hurricane has blown its way through this house. Broken glass and shattered furniture litters the floor.

"What the fuck?"

I don't know who says it. Which one of us voices it.

Antonio starts barking orders, but he barely gets the words out before someone is yelling, screaming.

We race down the hall, race to where the sound is coming from and we come to a stop, me, Magnus and Antonio.

Ahead there are two figures, tied up, bound to two chairs.

"Get the lights," Magnus orders and one of the men hastily hits the switch.

I see the mother first, I see Elaine. Elaine fucking Ratcliffe. She's in a nightie. Her nipples are poking through the flimsy fabric and she's shivering from more than just the cold. Rope has been wrapped around her body, wrapped around both their bodies. Hers and her daughter's.

My eyes move to take in Grace. She's got her head hanging low, using her long pretty hair to hide herself.

*What the fuck is this? Who is this?*

"Where is Titus?" Magnus growls. "Where the fuck is your husband?"

"He's gone," Elaine says, her voice trembling.

"Gone where?" Magnus snarls.

She flinches more, dropping her gaze like she's afraid to speak the next few words.

Magnus lets off his gun, shooting right through that vaulted ceiling and bits of debris come spiralling down, landing at our feet.

"He, he took him," Elaine all but whimpers.

"Who?" Antonio snarls.

Fucking hell. Is this another moment of getting our arses kicked? I clench my fists, waiting to hear that inevitable fucking name.

"Your, your brother," Elaine stammers, "He, he took him, and he said, if you want him ber-back then you have to ha-hand over the girl."

"Excuse me?" Magnus snarls.

She lifts her hand as much as she can in the bindings; it shakes so violently you can barely see the slip of paper in it.

I step forward and snatch it up before anyone else can, seeing Devin's scrawly handwriting. 'Give me Paitlyn and I'll give you Titus,' it reads, clear as fucking day.

"Are you fucking kidding me?" Antonio snaps, clearly reading over my shoulder.

Magnus rips the note out of my hand and he reads it quickly, before screwing it up.

We all know what this is, that Magnus can name himself as Chapter Lord tomorrow if he wants but without Titus, it means nothing.

"Get the girl," Magnus orders, but I shake my head.

It won't be as simple as that, Devin won't let it be. He's planned this out. Played us all.

My phone fumbles over the buttons and my mind races as I hear that monotone ring in my ear. When it picks up, it's almost a relief because I half expected him to be there already.

"Is she safe?" I ask.

"Yes boss."

"Then get her sedated and ready to go," I order. "I'll be there within the hour."

My eyes meet my brother's but there's nothing else to say. Nothing that can be done. Devin must know. He must know *everything*, so how the fuck do we manage this now?

# CHAPTER SEVENTY-FOUR



*Brynn*

**W**e've sat here for hours, for what feels like all night. Me and her. She keeps trying to start a conversation, but I'm too jumbled in my head to manage it.

In the end we sit in silence, reading while the clock ticks by every single second.

If this goes wrong, if this backfires on us, then I know the Esau will be here not long after. My father will come back. I think they'll kill Liliana because they have no other use for her, but me, will my father hand me back to Xavier again?

I try to focus on the pages, on the words, but I'm too flustered to manage it.

I keep resting my hand on my stomach, wondering when this baby will start moving. Magnus and Liliana aren't meant to know yet. That's

Conrad's plan. To tell them I'm pregnant in a few weeks and then schedule a c-section when it's time, so it looks like my baby came early.

But she keeps glancing at me, looking at where my hand is resting, and I know I'm not smart enough now to hide this.

I lift the board, thinking that maybe I can explain this, that I can make her believe that this baby is Conrad's. Only, we both hear the sound of cars.

"They're back," I say, in that awful broken sound and Liliana nods like she understands it.

I roll the wheelchair and we both rush out to meet them. Clearly, Liliana is as anxious as me in this moment.

Magnus comes storming in, his face screwed up. He looks absolutely furious.

Conrad is just behind him. He glances at me for a second before focusing back on his brother.

With a roar, Magnus starts lashing out, smashing up what must be priceless antiques.

"Betrayed!" He hollers. "Fucking betrayed. First you and now him..."

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?" Conrad retorts, getting right in his face.

"I brought you up, I brought you both up." Magnus snarls. "I sacrificed for years, and this is how you repay me? You, marrying that child after I already arranged the perfect match..."

"She's a Founder," Conrad interjects, but Magnus clearly doesn't hear a word of it.

"...And Devin, fucking Devin."

"We can fix this." Conrad states.

Magnus pushes him back. "Fix this? Fix this?" He turns around, grabbing Liliana by the throat, dragging her by it, "This bitch is the only one loyal to me, the only one I can truly trust."

"Fuck you," Conrad snaps back, "You could trust me, you just don't want to."

"She took a bullet for me," Magnus continues, flailing his arms, waving her about like a rag doll. "You, you wouldn't even cross the street to lend me a hand..."

"And we all know why that is, don't we?" Conrad replies. "We all know who orchestrated that situation, who was the one pulling the trigger..."

“Don’t you fucking dare,” Magnus snaps, yanking Liliana, pulling her away before they both stumble and land with his arms around her.

“You’re the only one,” Magnus says, holding her head so that it’s pressed to his. “The only one.”

I can see she’s petrified, that she’s physically shaking but she doesn’t shove him off, she just lets him manhandle her however he wants.

“Magnus,” She whispers.

“It’s okay,” He replies, stroking her cheek over and over. “It’s okay. I promised, didn’t I? I promised you...”

He wraps his arms around her, but it looks more like he’s entombing her, holding her prisoner and I guess in a way, that’s exactly what he’s doing.

“We’re done here,” Conrad mutters, walking up to me and taking the handle of my chair to push me along.

As we get to the door, he pauses, looking back with such an expression on his face. I can tell he wants to say something, to say what he’s thinking, but he just scowls and walks out instead.

Outside, there’s a car waiting. Conrad lifts me out, placing me in my seat and leaves the driver to pack the wheelchair up and put it in the boot.

He’s still so riled up. So angry.

I need to calm him down, I need to do something.

I unclasp my seat belt. I shift so that I pretty much fall into the footwell and he raises his eyebrows, watching me as if he thinks I’m about to do something that would warrant a punishment.

As I reach for his trousers, his jaw opens, just a little.

“You want to suck my cock, Doll?” He asks.

I nod back, holding his gaze. I know it’s the right call, the logical move.

It’s our thing now, it’s my way of pacifying him. Soothing his anger.

He undoes his belt, then his trousers, pulling himself out and he looks like he’s all ready to go.

I rub my lips together to get them moist. It’s not nearly as effective as my tongue would be, but what choice do I have now?

As I open my jaw, I make sure to cover my teeth, to ensure I don’t accidentally catch him.

I suck him slowly. Now that my tongue is out of action I have to make up for it with my lips, by creating as much pressure as possible with my cheeks.

He groans as I work him the whole way down my throat.

With my hand, I fondle his balls. I'm learning now that he likes my touch, that he needs that, that it confirms to him that I'm a willing participant.

"Christ, Brynn," He growls, and I can hear how his voice has changed. How that anger seems to be dissipating.

*This is working, but I knew it would.*

I take hold of the base of him, pumping him in and out of my mouth. He hits the back of my throat hard enough that my eyes water.

And again, I know he likes that too. I know he likes the tears, he likes to make me choke on him, so that's what I do. I force him down as far as he can go, breathing through my nose.

I can smell him, I can smell the dirt and the sweat of him.

His fingers twist through my hair, and I make a noise deep in my throat.

"Filthy little doll," He says, sliding further down in the seat, bucking his hips now as he starts to ride my mouth.

I blink back, holding his gaze, knowing that too turns him on. Yeah, he likes that, he likes that a lot judging from the smug look on his face.

"You want my come?" He growls, "You want my come down your throat?"

I nod back, sucking harder. This position isn't exactly comfortable, but I'll also stay here all night, stay here as long as it takes to get him off, to make him happy.

He leans down, grabbing hold of the neckline of my dress and he rips it right down the middle, pulling it apart so my breasts are on display.

He fondles them lazily while I suck and moan.

"Put your fingers in your cunt," He orders. "Put them in yourself, then bring them to my mouth."

It's hard to do that. Not the cunt bit, that's easy enough, and we both know I'm wet but to reach up, to move with my useless legs... he grabs my arm, wrenching it up as he bends down to meet it. His tongue swirls around the digits, licking off my arousal.

"Fucking beautiful," He says, though I don't know if he means the taste of me, or how I look in this moment.

I guess it doesn't really matter. Nothing matters now, only my husband. He matters. His wants, his needs, his pleasure.

Pleasure. Pleasure. Pleasure.

He groans again, he starts panting, and his hips become more merciless as he grinds against me.

His fingers dig into my scalp as he growls, pouring his salty, deliciously hot come down my throat before he slumps back into the leather.

I sit back, sink back into the tiny space, smiling up at him while I wipe the last of his taste from my lips.

He stares at me for a second like he can't quite believe his luck and then he pulls me up, into his lap, and starts twisting his fingers around my nipple.

I arch my back as best I can, I throw my head back with such force it bangs against the glass.

"You're such a good wife, now, aren't you?" He says as his other hand buries itself in my pussy and he begins teasing out what I know will be the first of many orgasms.

That familiar desperate need thrums through my body, I reach up, teasing my breasts for his enjoyment and I nod.

I am a good wife. The perfect wife.

Because he fixed me. He made me into this. His perfect, little doll.

THE END

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# BONUS CHAPTER

## BRYNN



We walk through Oblivion. Well, Conrad does the walking, I'm being carried. Like a princess, like an angel of death.

I'm there, in his arms, dressed up exactly the way he likes.

This place has become our home now.

It feels right, it feels normal. There's an old suite of rooms that his family used to inhabit years ago and Conrad had them all fitted out, all decorated to my liking and all wheelchair friendly too.

He's done the same with every floor, every part of this building. He's installed new lifts, ramps, everything to ensure I can go wherever my heart takes me.

He said it was my wedding gift, a belated one, granted.

There's still the matter of getting our marriage sanctified, but neither of us have spoken about that. It's better not to. Not with everything going off between Devin and his brothers.

"We have new stock arriving tomorrow," Conrad murmurs into my ear.  
"I wondered if you'd like to take a new slave to practise on,"

My heart picks up at that. I should say yes, it's what he likes. He likes to see me hurt them, to watch me whip them, and cut them, and electrocute them too.

It doesn't do much for me, at least, not much for my head anyway, but my body seems to like it, my body always responds.

And the way Conrad fucks me afterwards, I like that too.

Like. Like. Like.

I nod back, resting my head against his shoulder. It's like we're attuned now, like he understands everything that I need, without me having to ask. Not that I can.

As we make our way through to the private cells, the two guards nod to Conrad as they open up the great armoured doors for us.

You aren't allowed beyond this point without his permission. Most Lords never pass through these doors. Only those who can afford the very best, or a very particular kind of play are permitted down here.

Conrad told me that this was where they held Paitlyn. I don't know much about her, I don't think I want to know. I know he has her tucked away somewhere, that he and Magnus are hunting Devin but what I don't understand is why they don't just hand her over and be done with it.

I guess that's not my concern anyway. I'm here to look pretty, to serve my husband, to reward him.

But right now, it feels like he's the one rewarding me.

He shifts my weight, freeing up his hand to put in the code to the lock.

The door opens silently, and we step inside as the bright lights flash on.

In the corner, the figure huddles up, covering their face and I can't help but laugh. It comes out like a rattle. A death rattle.

A rattle snake.

Maybe I'll turn around and bite...I shake my head, trying to focus my thoughts.

Conrad places me down in the ornate throne like chair. He then walks over and yanks the bitch up, hanging her chains off the hooks so she's spreadeagled on the rack.

I can't help but watch him, watch the way his muscles flex, the way his body moves, the way that ink hints at the monster just beneath the surface.

He is a monster.

But he is *my* monster now. All mine.

He turns, catching my gaze and my cheeks heat.

“A little or a lot?” He asks, in the deep, dominating voice.

I settle my eyes on the cowering figure and my hate rises. “A lot,” I declare.

She cries out but Conrad backhands her before raising up the handle and those big rollers start churning.

I can hear her body stretch; I can hear her body tense. Every time we dislocate her limbs, we put them back and then let her heal enough so we can do it again.

“Fuck,” Conrad murmurs stepping back, moving to stand behind me.

I look up at him and smile, like a full-on sunbeam.

We’ve been doing this for weeks now. Coming here, slowly torturing Giselle more and more. Conrad told her that he wanted me to witness her death, but I don’t think she’s quite ready for it yet.

He picks me up, sits down, and then lays me across him so that I’m sitting on his lap.

One of his hands comes to rest on my swollen belly and as my aunt glares at her, I know she sees it, she sees what I have, what I am.

That I’m giving Conrad a child. An heir.

That I’m living the life she so desperately wanted, she so desperately schemed for.

I meet her nasty gaze and my lips curl more. *I beat you, bitch. I fucking beat you.*

Conrad plants a kiss on my cheek. I shut my eyes, welcoming his caresses.

Is he going to fuck me here, fuck me in front of her? God, I hope so.

His hand slides around my hip, I use my hand to shift myself and I can feel it, his cock so hard, pressing into my back.

I let out a moan, a sound of wanting, of needing.

“You feeling needy, wife?” He asks, like he doesn’t know the answer to that.

Of course I’m needy. He made me needy. He made me into this.

His fingers brush over my pussy. He dressed me in tights and suspenders, with a cut out bra that shows my breasts off to perfection. It makes me feel sexy, it makes me feel like the perfect little fuckdoll.

“So wet,” He whispers into my ear.

I turn my face, lifting my hand to cup his cheek and I give him a long, deep kiss. I can't use my tongue, obviously, but his tongue is enough for both of us, it slides into my mouth, caressing me while his fingers start thrusting away inside me.

But I need more. I want more.

I clench my fists, curling them up into tight little balls as my body demands he gives me what I deserve, what he knows I should have.

"Demanding little bitch," He tuts.

Yeah, that's right. I am demanding. I am very demanding.

He lifts me up, spreads my legs wider and then pushes his cock in to replace where his fingers were.

I know she can see it. I know she can see all of this. She can see how my body takes him, how he slides in and out, fucking me so deliciously I'm barely able to think.

I'm so wet I'm dripping over us both.

Conrad brings his fingers back, pinching, squeezing, abusing my clit so damn well.

And all the while I'm staring at Giselle, because I got this. I have this. Conrad loves me. He wants me. He's fucking me right now.

"You're so beautiful," he growls. "So fucking perfect."

It's like a demon possesses me, like some evil spirit hell bent on revenge takes over. I want her to realise that I have won. That after so many years of enduring their hatred, now I have someone who worships me, who loves me.

It maybe a fucked-up way of showing it, but Conrad will do anything for me.

And after so long of just fighting by myself, barely surviving, it's an incredible feeling to realise, I'm no longer alone.

I lift my arm, wrapping it around my husbands neck.

"I love you," I murmur those words into his ear. I know he can't understand the noise I make, but he knows what I mean, what the intention behind it.

What we have is not a normal love.

What we have defies normality. This man has ruined me, and then somehow, he's managed to rebuild me from the broken parts he created.

His lips crash into mine. He starts fucking me harder, like his need now has overtaken mine. I can hear how our skin is slapping against one another.

How much pussy is squelching with every brutal thrust.

I turn my head, tilting my chin and star down at my aunt. I want her to see this, I want her to see all of this, to see what I've become and what my life will be from now on.

She and my grandfather made my childhood a living hell. They bullied and abused me and treated me like shit. I want them to know that my time has come. That my suffering is over. That I'm the winner here.

I want her to see it all, to see how much my husband loves me, how much he worships me, how much he wants *me*. I bet no one in her entire life has made them ever feel like that.

That's probably why she's so bitter and twisted and angry.

Well, fuck her. I've won. I've beaten her, even though all the odds were stacked against me.

Conrad's hand twists to cradle my belly and I smile the biggest grin. I'm having a baby, our baby. I may not have wanted to be a mother, but I know I'll make a damned better parent to this child than my parents ever were, than my grandfather ever was.

I'll cherish this baby, love this baby, and it'll grow up safe and happy.

And we'll have more. We'll have so many babies. I'll give Conrad whatever he wants now because he has done the same for me.

As another wave of pleasure soars through my body, Conrad passes over a gun and puts it into my hand. I can barely hold it, can barely focus on anything other than the euphoria of what he's doing to my body.

"Do it." He murmurs, into my ear.

My finger fumbles around the trigger.

I can't take the weight enough to aim it properly, so my husband does the hard work, pointing it exactly where he wants it to go.

And as his eyes connect with mine, I pull the trigger.

My Aunt screams, she jerks against the chains that hold her. I can see the blood pouring out of a wound in her shoulder. I can see her pitiful tears streaming down.

How she used to mock me for crying. How she used to torment me.

Now, she will spend her days here, in the dark, petrified of every sound, of every creak and every flicker of movement. We're not going to kill her. No, we're going to keep her alive, keep her here, until her body gives out from old age.

We're going to keep torturing her, keep hurting her. Conrad will have the doctors remove every bullet we put in her rancid body and we'll fix her up after every time we slice her open. She's going to know nothing but pain and despair. Nothing but horror.

And that will be my justice. That will be my revenge.

I lean back, letting my husband's arms take my weight and it's that thought, that knowledge that sends me right over the edge.

I've won. I've finally fucking won.

And now I can be the perfect wife for Conrad. The wife he deserves.

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# DEGRADATION



I never lived a day until he came along and found me...

Forced to compete for our Chapter Lord's hand in marriage, I silently pray through each and every degrading ritual that I will not be chosen. When my nightmare becomes a reality, my life turns into nothing short of hell, and I spend my days with silent submission in public, and brutal assault in private.

My dear Lord husband chose me because he needs an heir, A Founder heir. He doesn't care for my needs, he doesn't even see me *as* a person.

I'm a thing to own, a vessel to use.

But amongst the horror, amongst the abuse, there's one shining light; Devin, one of my Chapter Guards. I'm not meant to look at him, let alone know his name.

And as the months drag on, my apparent lack of fertility pushes my husband to more reckless measures. Measures that throw us all into a web of lies, deceit, and danger that can only end in one outcome.

And when it all comes to a head, I'm left with a choice; save myself or save the man I love?

Ultimately, there are no winners here. After all, the Brethren never forgive and the Brethren never forget...

- WHAT TO EXPECT:
- Pitch black plot
- Serious on page NC / Group NC
- Forced sharing
- Think Sansa and the Hound vibes... only the Hound is younger, hotter, far more dangerous too.

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# SNEAK PEAK OF DEGRADATION



I'm standing in a room with six other girls, all of us from the Founder families. The only family missing here are the Ashers, but they haven't produced a girl in years.

All of us naked.

The flimsy gowns we were permitted to wear to this hall have been tossed at our feet, and we're on show, standing like statues for the entire Senate to appraise.

There's a little table in front of each of us with our details. Our names, weight, health, family history, and our pedigree; as if Gunther doesn't know it all.

I do my best not to shiver, to stay still and silent. If I can hold my nerve, there's a good chance I'll get through this entire thing unnoticed and unscathed. After all, the girls beside me are just as beautiful and odds are, he'll pick someone else.

With each step the Chapter Lord takes, the room seems to grow more tense. Our families are standing opposite us, watching this entire thing play

out as if it's the proudest moment of their lives.

I can see my mother silently wringing her hands with anticipation, and her eyes haven't once left my body. No doubt I'll be chastised once we're alone for whatever transgressions she thinks I've committed.

Gunther takes another step, barely looking at the first girl or the second. The Senate echoed his every move, following him like a bad odour.

I'm in the middle, nicely hidden amongst the crowd as it were.

He stops in front of the girl next to me, flicking through her paperwork before his eyes fix on her body. She's a head taller than me, she has a slimmer nose, and fuller breasts. Perhaps it's just better genetics, or perhaps it's because I'm the youngest here but I'm also the shortest girl and I'm hoping that plays in my favour - that I'm ignored. Passed over, that Gunther wants a lithe goddess to stand beside him as his wife.

Gunther tilts his head, murmuring something we can't hear and then his eyes flicker to me.

In haste I drop my gaze, but it's a stupid mistake.

I have no right to look him in the face.

No right whatsoever.

I'll pay for that dearly, because I don't doubt my mother hasn't missed it.

My cheeks blush with shame and as his gaze lingers, I know it only gets worse.

"Little Paitlyn." Gunther says, smiling in a way that makes me shiver.  
"My, how you've grown."

I don't know how to respond. I'm not meant to. I just bite the tip of my tongue and pray that our past interactions are enough for him to disregard me. Only, to my horror he steps between the very tables, manoeuvring himself closer to me.

I can feel his warm breath on my skin as he stares down at my body.

With one calloused hand he reaches out, grips my chin and pulls my face up. Instinctively I look up, meeting his watery blue gaze and a gasp slips from my lips before I can stop it.

It's been years since I've seen this man. He used to meet with my father regularly, but that all changed when I was eight. When my father passed, when me and my mother had to go into confinement and retire from society.

His fingertips brush against my cheek as he forces my mouth open, and he shoves them in there as if he expects any other reaction beyond me

choking, but my body trembles more. Shame radiates off me and it only increases as I feel him take the weight of my left breast, balancing it in his hand.

“You’re very sensitive.” He says as if I understand his meaning.

Sensitive to what? Abuse? Violation?

“She’s never been touched by a man, Chapter Lord.” My mother says while the other families beside her scoff.

“All these daughters are pure.” Tilly’s attendant states almost flippantly.  
“Every one one of these girls is a virgin.”

“That’s not what I meant.” My mother replies boldly, too boldly considering the circumstances. After all, aren’t we meant to be the subservient sex? “No man has ever laid a finger on her until today. Not just her sex, but every inch of her is pure. Even her own father never touched her skin. Never held her.”

As she declares this, the other families seem to murmur both in surprise and resentment, as if that fact alone makes me suddenly more worthy.

Gunther certainly seems to think so as his eyes light up. His other hand comes down from my chin to grasp my other breast and, as he begins to fully indulge in his ministrations, I have to bite my lip to hold back the curse I so dearly want to say.

Surely such actions, such behaviour goes against all public decency? He’s clearly getting off on this, he’s clearly enjoying every second. I hate the fact that my nipples have hardened, that my heart is racing with the amount of adrenaline pumping through my veins.

I’m not enjoying this, I’m not, but my body is giving every signal that I am and that shame that I couldn’t believe would get any worse engulfs me entirely.

I know what this means. Even as he steps back, even as he fondles the girl next to me and the one beside her, I know that I’ve scored the highest ranking.

It’s everything I didn’t want.

It’s everything I was hoping to avoid.

My heart sinks to an impossible level, and it’s all I can do to hold back the tears. I wanted to be a disappointment. I wanted to be overlooked. Sure, my mother would have been livid, would have almost certainly beaten me for my failure but what is one moment of pain versus a lifetime chained to a man like him?

My mother steps up to me, cloaking my body in a robe and she gives me the biggest grin.

“You’ve done well.” She says. “Very well.”

Like I had any say in the matter.

I don’t want to be Chapter Lady, I don’t want any of this. But what choice do I have? What power do I have?

None, that’s what. Absolutely nothing.

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ellie Sanders lives in rural Hampshire, in the U.K. with her partner and two troublesome dogs.

She has a BA Hons degree in English and American Literature with Creative Writing and enjoys spending her time, when not endlessly writing, exploring the countryside around her home.

She is best known for her duet, 'Downfall' and 'Uprising', as well as standalone novels including 'Good Girl', and 'Vendetta: A Mafia Romance'.

For updates including new books, please follow her Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter @hotsteamywriter.

# AFTERTWORLD



Thank you so much for reading ‘Depravity’. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I enjoyed conjuring up all the twists and surprises.

In writing this book, I had to do A LOT of research into some truly horrible stuff. I know I get comments about how inappropriate books like these are, but everything I have written has been done to a person in real life. EVERY SINGLE THING. The thing I found most disturbing where the amount of lobotomies men were allowed to have performed on their wives, simply because they weren’t ‘obliging’ enough. They took women and they turned them into zombies. I watched so many videos of post lobotomy

patients, and I read so many research papers and what happened right up till the 1970's was horrific. History has a habit of labelling any woman who isn't compliant, as difficult.

While I never want this series to be 'romanticised' in a normal way, I like delving into the deluded mindset of my MMC and at times, showing how persuasive their rational can be. How well they can manipulate those around them. These MMC's are psychopaths. There's no other explanation to explain what they do. I write these books because I like to delve into the darker parts of humanity and expose what some of us are capable of, if the rules weren't there to keep us in line.

I'd like to say a massive thank you to everyone in my Romance Authors WhatsApp group – Annie Charme, Linz Vonc, Louise Murchie, Aisling Elizabeth, Billie Jade Kermack, Mel Davies, Kelly Lord, Lizzie Lioness, Lillie Alexander, and J L Reed. You're so talented, so caring, and the amount of support and love you all give cannot be measured. Each and every one of you are a queen. If you haven't checked out their books, you absolutely should because they're amazing!!

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Bree, beautiful Bree, I love everything you post, I love your support, but most of all, I love your energy and your passion. I can't wait to meet you and give you the biggest hug!!

I never want to be the kind of author who hides away and isn't accessible. If you have any comments about my books and you message me, I will always endeavour to come back to you.

If you enjoyed this book, why not subscribe to my newsletter where you'll be the first to hear about new releases and any giveaways I'm running. There will also be lots of ARC opportunities coming up so watch out for these... 😊

I would also be eternally grateful if after reading this you left a review.

Reviews really are an author's lifeblood, not just because it helps beat back the crazy amount of imposter syndrome we all have but because it

helps us get noticed / builds our community on places like amazon and ensures we can continue creating more stories for you to read and indulge in.

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