

A DARK CAPTIVE ROMANCE



DEVIAN

- ELLIE SANDERS -

DEVIANT

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ELLIE SANDERS

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CONTENT WARNING

This is an extremely dark romance book. And by dark, I mean PITCH F-ING BLACK.

The main male lead is not a hero. He's not morally grey. He is 100% a villain. If you're expecting him to have an epiphany and suddenly 'change' or become soft and kind because he falls for the heroine and grows a conscience, then you will be sorely disappointed.

He has little to any redeeming qualities. In real life, you should run, and run far from such a man—but thankfully, this is a work of fiction. :)

There are numerous and detailed rape 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.

Other triggers include:

- Abduction / kidnapping
- Abuse
- Anal sex (forced)
- Attempted suicide
- Breast binding
- Breast slapping
- Bondage
- Blood play

- Blow jobs (both consensual and non-consensual)
- Cannibalism
- Clit slapping / pinching /abuse
- Cult themes / ideology
- Degradation
- Detailed, explicit, & graphic rape scenes, including gang rape
- Dismemberment
- Drugging
- Dubious Consent
- Electrocuting as a form of punishment
- Fisting (both non-consensual & consensual)
- Forced orgasms
- Forced exhibitionism
- Forced anal sex
- Food deprivation and starvation as a means of control.
- Gang rape
- Hitting
- Humiliation
- Human Taxidermy
- Hair cutting as a form of dehumanisation
- Imprisonment
- Knife play
- Murder
- Misogyny
- Organised crime
- Orgasm denial
- Psychological abuse and torture
- PTSD
- Rape
- Religious themes / ideology
- Self-mutilation
- Sexual penetration by objects 'beyond the norm'
- Sexual torture
- Secret Societies / cultish and or/ religious themes
- Spanking
- Stockholm syndrome
- Torture

- Trauma
- Violence
- Whipping

Your mental health matters. Reader discretion is advised.

Do not read this book if you will find any of the above triggering. This is not a competition on who can “handle” what, your peace of mind is worth more than the two hundred or so pages before you.

I also can't believe I have to write this, but with recent behaviour on booktok I feel this needs to be stated... this book does not in any way intend to romanticise, normalise, or justify any of the abuse / toxic behaviour described. This is a work of fiction. Any real-life man behaving like this should be locked away and for good reason.

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For all the readers out there, who want their bad boy to stay exactly as that... no redemption, no sudden softness, just one pure messed up psycho from start to finish.

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CHAPTER ONE



Liliana

My knees slam into the hard floor. I don't want to cry out, but I can't keep the sound in either, and it comes out like a strangled noise from behind the gag that was stuffed into my mouth.

My wrists are tied behind my back so tightly that I swear my fingers are going to drop off from lack of blood. I try desperately to move them, to ease the pressure, but it makes no difference. It's too tight a knot for me to have any effect.

Something beats into me. It might be a stick, it could be something metal, whatever it is has no give whatsoever and I double over in pain.

Then a boot slams into my side, forcing out the final bit of air from my lungs.

My top is pulled back from behind and something sharp drags down my skin as I realise they're cutting my clothes off.

I jerk out, I try to fight, but what can I actually do when I'm practically hog tied? Within seconds, I'm stripped naked and I shudder, trying to curl

up, trying to do anything I can to hide myself from their gaze.

A hand gropes my breast. I scream out, ramming my head back into whoever is stood behind me, but they obviously see it coming so it has no effect.

“Stupid fucking bitch.” I hear the curse above the rough fabric sack they’ve wrapped around my head.

I don’t know where I am but I can make a damned good guess and it’s hard to contain the fear I feel.

As if answering that thought, the sack is ripped off. My eyes dart about, I desperately try to adapt to the sudden brightness.

I’m in the hall. Their hall.

I knew it and yet my heart sinks all the same. It’s so much worse seeing it in real life and not just from the few stolen images Ronin gave me.

I am so fucked.

Maybe if I’d left sooner, maybe if I’d been better... no, they would have found me anyway. There’s no escaping this. No escaping them.

They’re the Brethren, after all, they run the entire world, control all of us, we’re just too dumb to realise it.

This hall is normally filled to the rafters. It looks like a church, with a high vaulted ceiling and ornate, gothic carvings. It must be sixteenth century, but I know it was never used for worship, at least, not worship of anything beyond their own greed and power.

My mind flickers to the photos, the ones Ronin managed to take during one of their ceremonies, and a chill runs up my spine. I don’t know what they have instore for me, but I know it’s going to be horrific.

There’s ten of them, ten men, all masked, all robed, surrounding me like I really am some sort of sacrifice to their cursed altar.

“Someone’s been sniffing around where they don’t belong,” one of them says, nudging by me.

I glare back, unable to hide my derision. It feels reckless, but then, what does it matter? They’re going to kill me. I know that much. I know I’m not making it out of here alive.

From above, something drops.

It’s been dropping, no, dripping, for a while but up until now, I’ve ignored it.

I glance up and pure, unadulterated fear grips me.

I fall back, shaking my head, losing all sense of reason, but I can't tear my eyes from the horror suspended above me.

It's Ronin. So they got him first.

He's strung up, dangling between ropes that span the width of the roof. His skin has been flailed. He's been tortured for what must have been hours.

And it's his blood that keeps dripping down onto the flagstone beneath us.

He doesn't even have any legs left, Christ, what have they done to him?

"Please..." the word escapes my lips, but it comes out as a desperate, pathetic wail beneath the fabric.

One of the men starts laughing. Another tilts his head, takes a step forward, and grabs my face, digging his nails into my cheeks.

"What other end did you expect? You think you can poke the dragon and not get burnt?"

I gulp forcing the bile back down my throat. I knew what I was doing was risky, I understood that, but it wasn't about me, was it?

One of them yanks the gag from my mouth as if he really does want an answer. As if he's expecting me to beg for mercy.

"Fuck you." I spit as soon as I can get my tongue to work.

All my fear is still there, but I refuse to let them see it, refuse to give in. They want to kill me, fine, but my pride won't let me die a coward. No, I'm going to go down fighting, prove that even if they have won, I'm not giving in entirely. I refuse to give them that power. I refuse to give them that satisfaction.

Cold metal presses against the back of my neck. I still, recognising instantly that it's the barrel of a gun. Could I be this lucky to simply meet my end by a bullet? Have a quick, painless death? I don't want to die but considering the alternatives, considering what they *could* do, I'd take this any day of the week.

"The Brethren do not forget. The Brethren do not forgive." Those words are stated like it's a mantra, a vow they've all taken.

"Blow her fucking head off," someone else orders, but another steps forward, into the streaming, stained glass light.

"Wait," he says.

And I know that voice, I know it was well as my own. I can't keep the tremble as it sinks in exactly who he is—Magnus Blake.

So he's here, too.

The others turn to look at him. With all their masks on, I can't see their expressions, but I know he holds enough sway to get whatever he wants.

"The crime was against me, was it not?" Magnus states.

"It was against all of the Brethren," the main man replies.

Magnus shakes his head, producing papers, *my* papers, and he flicks through them. "Most of this is about me, about my activities. If this were actually published, I would be the one most damaged by it."

"What does it matter?" someone else asks.

"It matters," Magnus says, staring right back at me now. "Because I want my own justice."

"Justice?" I splutter. What justice does he think he deserves? He's got more blood on his hands than the entire population of Rikers.

He closes the distance, grabbing my face in a vice-like grip. "This woman insulted me, I demand recompense."

"Fuck you," I snarl, but no one else is paying attention to me, not when Magnus is commanding all of it.

The others are all mumbling, discussing between themselves. There's no way they can agree to this. No way at all. He might be powerful, but he doesn't control all the Brethren. I draw in a ragged breath, reminding myself of that fact. They won't agree, there's no way they can.

"Her sentence still stands," the main man says.

"Of course." Magnus replies, keeping his eyes firmly fixed on me through that golden mask, watching my reaction as he speaks, "I'm just going to take my time before I carry it out."

No.

No.

This can't be happening.

I flail, I jerk my head back and smash it into his stupid mask, but someone grabs me and holds me tight.

"The more you fight, the worse it will be," they taunt, whispering into my ear.

Worse? It can't get any worse.

I'm dragged out, hauled out and tossed into the back of a van. My face slams once more into a hard surface, and for a second I lay there, dazed, immobile, while pain explodes behind my eyes.

My arms are pinned under me by my own weight, my legs feel like they're refusing to cooperate.

In my head, all I can hear is the same word screaming over and over, 'run' but it's not like I can.

And then I realise that he's here, watching me from the still open door.

"I wonder how long you'll last." Magnus murmurs.

He's ditched the mask now, and as we stare at one another I can see all the ruthless, arrogant, perfect features that make up his face. He's neatly shaven, enough to show stubble but like everything else, it's organised, precise. His eyebrows are thick, shaping his sculpted face, and highlighting those deadly eyes that are so black you wonder if you really are staring into the abyss.

I don't reply to his jibe. I just glare back. If he thinks I'll break down and start crying, if he thinks I'll beg for my life, he's got another thing coming. He may be able to bully this entire world, but he won't bully me, he won't.

He grabs my hair, wrenches my neck so that I'm forced to face him full on, while he drops his gaze to take in my naked, exposed body. From the angle he's at, I don't doubt he's got a perfect view of everything I have.

I shift, shutting my legs as best I can, and he tuts with annoyance.

With one hand, he leans down and pinches my nipple and I whimper with the sharp hit of pain.

"Not bad." he says, like he's sizing up a cut of meat.

"Get your fucking hands off me." I hiss.

Only that just makes him smirk and I realise that this is a joke to him, isn't it? He's so fucking used to doing whatever he wants that even now, even my kidnapping and potential murder is just another day at the office. But then, what can you expect from a man who apparently murdered his own wife on their wedding night?

"Do you know how long I've waited for this?" he asks, finally taking his disgusting hands away.

I frown in confusion. What the fuck is he talking about? I know the Brethren has only just found out about me, there's no way they would have let me continue, no way they would have risked it.

"I'm going to break you..." he says so calmly, it makes the words coming out of his mouth even worse. "I'm going to carve away every little piece of what makes you, you, I'll destroy every tiny bit of hope you have, and only when I decide you've suffered enough, will I grant you your death..."

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BEFORE



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CHAPTER TWO



Liliana

Alcohol burns my throat as I knock back what must be the tenth shot of the night and then that hit of sweetness makes my mouth feel almost clammy. God, what I wouldn't give for a nice, sharp, bitter whiskey.

But then, whiskey is sadly not the drink of choice for an evening like this, and seeing as I've not managed to get past the heaving bodies to where the bar is, I should really be grateful for anything I'm offered.

"I can't believe she did it." Mia whispers in my ear, her voice barely audible above the heavy bass.

I give her a warning look, but Frankie plonks himself the other side and says way too loudly, "More fool her."

"We're meant to be celebrating." I remind them. True, this is technically a work night out, but that doesn't change the basic facts.

"Right, just like we'll be celebrating their divorce come Christmas." Mia retorts.

It's hard not to roll my eyes. Hard not to agree with them either. I glance at the newlyweds in question, Rosie is, as usual, dolled up to the nines, with perfectly dyed blonde hair falling in big waves over her bronzed shoulders. In one hand, she's clutching a glass of champagne and the other is busy flashing the massive vintage diamond ring for everyone to admire, like we haven't been ogling it all evening.

"Even if they do divorce, she'll be set for life." I state, and the cynic in me says that's got to be the main reason she married a man like Lou Rogers, because let's face it, his personality is not his strongest asset.

Frankie snorts, gulping down more of his drink.

"I just don't get it." Mia mutters, tossing her long-braided hair over her shoulder. "They barely know each other. It's been, what, six months?"

"Maybe that was enough?" I reply. Though I have no idea why I'm defending the couple. It's not like me and Rosie are friends, hell, I'd go so far as to say the only thing we have in common is our place of work, and even then, she barely acknowledges me most days, not that I particularly mind it. I can't deal with people like her, people who live off drama.

"Seven," Frankie grins. "It's been seven months." He tilts his head, studying the woman further. "Maybe she's preggers."

Before I can reply, someone shouts out for another toast and a new shot glass is shoved in front of everyone.

The happy couple stand before us and everyone 'awws' as they start shoving their tongues down each other's throat.

Frankie pulls a face, Mia sniggers, and after knocking back another disgustingly sweet drink, I decide that I've had enough and head to the bar, pushing through the crowd of people.

But my eyes land on Rosie again. On the way she's clinging to her new husband, on the way they look genuinely happy. Sure, it could all be the alcohol, or simply the honeymoon phase and in a few months they may decide they hate everything about each other, but some silly, old romantic in me wants to root for them anyway. Wants them to defy the odds.

Jesus, I'm getting old.

And then my mother's voice suddenly echoes in my head, that old taunt about how men don't want women with careers, with ambition—women like me.

No, men want women who are simple, who smile, who know how to behave.

Rosie is the walking definition of that. She's beautiful, even under all that makeup, and she's obviously willing to dull herself down, to make herself small, to fit that neat little box of 'polite, respectable, obedient' even. In a way, I almost envy her, that she can be content to bend, that she can be so comfortable folding those parts of herself away and pretend that they don't exist.

I've never been that.

I've never wanted to be that.

To be a trophy wife, to hang off someone's arm, and wait patiently in the confines of a house while they're out, truly living and I'm stuck in the kitchen bringing up their brood of crotch goblins.

No, I wanted to be there, I wanted to live, to see the world, and to change it too. I wanted to know that on my deathbed, I'd made my mark, that everyone would remember my name. That every newspaper would have my death published as news, that people would mourn me, that I'd have awards in my honour, prizes named after me. That's the legacy I wanted. Not just children, not a cookie cutter life.

No man I ever met, no man I was ever in a relationship with, wanted that future. Wanted my sharp edges and intelligence. They wanted the smiles, and submission, superficial parts of me and yet they were all things I wouldn't give.

It's why I don't date, why I don't waste my time. If I want to fuck then fine, I know all I have to do is head down to a bar, find someone who ticks the boxes on the attraction scale and then head off to a hotel for the night because in no rational world would I ever let some stranger into the sanctuary that is my apartment.

I don't want more, I don't look for more.

On a certain level, I'm content with that, happy with that. I have my work, and my books, and my space. Why would I rock the boat? Why should I be so greedy as to want more?

My stomach grumbles, bringing me back to the present and I'm half tempted to order some food, but it's late, I doubt the kitchen is even open. A nice little spread was put on for when we arrived, but those canapes feel so long ago now. God, what I wouldn't give for a kebab.

"Liliana." James, my editor's voice rings out at the exact same moment I get the bartender's attention.

With my best fake smile, I turn to greet him, biting my tongue before I correct him for the millionth time that my name is ‘Ana,’ not ‘Liliana.’ We’ve never really gotten on. Oh, he likes me well enough, when I’m bringing in the accolades. When I’m bathing his paper in the glory, but our outlook on life is so at odds.

We have different politics, different views—at least that’s the polite way of defining it because he classes any unmarried woman in their late thirties as a raging, feminist lesbian, and one as outspoken as I am must be doubly so. If he had his way, there wouldn’t be any women at the paper at all, except the young ones, in tight little skirts to make his coffee while he pats their pert behinds and murmurs on about ‘the good old days.’

As he meets my gaze, I can’t tell if he actually wants to talk to me or is simply forced to by circumstance. His mouth is turned down, his face showing that same disgust he always has when he looks at me, but he still drops his gaze, lets his eyes linger a little too long over the curves of my body and it makes my stomach turn.

“Did you want something?” I ask, clutching my bag just that bit tighter, as though I might need to whack him firmly around the head with it—although that would almost certainly get me fired, wouldn’t it?

“You did a good job on the Zani Trial,” he says. His voice empty, flat.

I nod in return. That was over a month ago. Yeah, it was headline news, but I’ve had numerous big hitters since then. Is that really all he can think to talk about?

I cast my eyes about, landing once more on Rosie. “This is a nice evening.” I state, more than aware that my attempt at small-talk is, apparently, just as shit as his is.

He grunts back, adding that, “It’s nice to see people do still settle down these days...” and it’s all I can do to bite back the retort. I order a drink quickly, focusing instead on the barman and all but pretending James isn’t really there.

And then, my sub-editor appears, wrapping his arm around me in a far too-familiar manner.

“Ana, may I borrow you for a moment?”

“Sure,” I smile, letting Saul lead me away and once we’re out of earshot, I thank him politely before shrugging off his touch.

“Don’t mention it.” he says with a knowing look.

For a second I believe he really was just rescuing me, but he murmurs again about needing a word.

“What are you working on right now?” he asks.

I frown, with the glass poised at my lips. “Why?”

“Tell me it’s not *that* story?” he says before casting his eyes about like he’s afraid someone might overhear.

I don’t know how he knows. I certainly didn’t tell him, but it makes me nervous all the same because some one knows. Someone has clearly been talking.

“It’s none of your business.” I murmur.

“I am sub-editor of this...”

“It won’t be published in the Gazette.” I state. Like I’d be stupid enough to take that route. I’d be the one dispatched before the copy even got sent for proof.

His jaw tightens, as does the hand that wraps around my wrist. “Ana, I know you’re not an idiot, but...”

“Then why are you talking to me like I am one?” I retort, my pride overriding my more rational thoughts. Oh, I know it’s a failing, I know I should work on it, but hell, when you’re constantly surrounded by egotistical a-holes who seem to bathe in their entitlement like it’s an artform, well, it’s hard to not to dial up your own sense of worth to match it.

“Ana,” he says, before leading me further from the crowd. “You know I care about you...”

“This has nothing to do with us.” I half-hiss, half-whisper. As if what we are, what we stupidly were is even relevant. Besides, there is no ‘us,’ there never was. One stupid mistake does not change that. “This is about doing what is right.”

“What is right is keeping your mouth shut.” He snaps. “What is right is turning a blind eye to the things that could get you killed.”

“What about the things that have got others killed?” I retort. “What about the fact that everything we do, everything we think we have is a lie? What about that?”

He tuts. He actually just tuts. “Ana, you can’t be seriously considering this.”

“Do you know why I became a journalist?” I ask.

He rolls his eyes like this is old news, tedious news, something not worth his time. “I know, the music teacher.”

“Yeah, the music teacher.” I say, my mind already going right back there, to when I was fourteen, when I witnessed something horrific, something no child should know about, and then when I’d spoken up, I’d been told I was wrong, mistaken. That Mr. Brett was a great teacher, a great man, respected. That the kid involved was a bad kid, from a bad family, that no doubt they’d lied to me, and I’d been confused and misunderstood the situation because it was all above my tiny child brain.

Only, I knew I hadn’t.

I knew what I’d seen.

And it took another five years, five years of that man abusing more kids, getting away with it all until it finally ended. Only, he didn’t serve time. He wasn’t prosecuted. No, he got to die peacefully, pain free, just went to sleep one night and never woke up.

And as everyone told stories of what a great man he was, I swore I would do something about it. I would be the one to give a voice to those who get ignored, those who are too poor, who don’t have the right background, or the right family. Those everyone ignores and laughs at.

I know people think I’m self-righteous, stuck up even, that I’m on some moral crusade, but I’ve seen what this world does, I’ve seen how it chews people up and spits them out and no one is more culpable than the Brethren.

“I can’t just sit by and...”

“You can, Ana, you can.” Saul states as if he has enough authority over me that he simply has to snap his fingers and I’ll obey him.

I glower at him, wondering if he’s even listened to a word I’ve just said.

“Look, it’s been a long night, why don’t we go get a drink, talk about something else?”

I shake my head at the tone he uses, the hint of a beg underneath it. I know what he wants, what he’s after. One stupid night, months ago, we hooked up. It was nothing, purely physical on my part and mostly fuelled by alcohol. I thought it was the same for him, but clearly he wanted more. Still wants more.

“I’m good.” I say withdrawing, as that voice inside my head chastises me for that stupid reckless mistake I made so many months ago. “I’m actually gonna head off, get some sleep.”

“Let me walk you out,” he says, so keenly.

“No,” I say, clutching the bag, putting a firm boundary between us, “I’m good.” I repeat darting quickly into the crowd, praying that he won’t follow.

Out on the street, it's pissing it down with rain. I did bring a coat, but in my haste to escape I left it behind. If I'm lucky someone will see it and take it for me, but if I'm not then I guess that's another item of my belongings lost forever.

I groan, wrapping my arms as best as I can to conserve heat. The bulk of my bag presses against my ribcage and I silently curse the weight of the damned thing.

There are no taxis to be had and the queue of people waiting for one, looks like it goes around the block. At this rate, I'll still be stood here when Saul comes out and then I'll be stuck, in that same pointless conversation again, so I make the snap decision to walk. It's only twenty minutes from mine so it's not unfeasible and perhaps I may be able to catch a taxi further down the road.

My heels clatter annoyingly on the curb, rainwater slithers between my frozen toes and I grit my teeth against the unpleasantness of it. I'm half tempted to ditch them entirely and just go barefoot, but the streets are filthy and besides, it'd only mean another thing for me to carry.

Cars seem to speed past, leaving a torrent of water splashing everywhere. My bleached hair sticks to my forehead, and I know that I look as far from my usually put together appearance as I can get.

I'm half tempted to stop in a kebab shop and get some chips, but as I walk from one street to the next, they all seem shut; it can't be that late, can it? Normally those places stay open right up until sunrise and I know there's at least a few hours until then. Muttering under my breath, I continue on. I must be ten minutes away now, that's halfway there. Just gotta keep going.

But as I cross over from one barely lit street to another, I feel the hairs on the back of my neck suddenly pick up. I pause, using the cover of an overgrown bush as some sort of cover and I glance back, checking to see if I'm overreacting.

I don't know what I expect to see, but there's nothing. Not a soul. The only movement is the rain hammering down. And yet...

I narrow my eyes, squinting. The streetlamps are sporadic enough to create great chasms of darkness in-between. It'd be easy enough for someone to lurk there, to hide just as I am, and remain unseen.

Water trickles down my back, I curse under my breath and suck in the gasp that threatens to give me away. I'm being silly. Stupid. Imagining monsters now where there are none.

No one knows what I'm up to.

No one has a clue.

I turn, picking up pace and continue on, just as my conversation with Saul replays. The question is can I trust him? Can I truly believe he will keep this to himself? And more importantly, who the fuck told him about it? Only me and Ronin, my source, know. That's a pretty small circle. If Ronin spilled a peep of what was going on, his head would be on the block beside mine. No, it's not him. So who the fuck is it?

I mull that thought over and over, wondering if I need to take action already, wondering if instead of going home to sleep, I need to be racing home to pack and disappear?

By the time I get to my place, I feel like I'm teetering on a knife edge, completely and utterly exhausted and yet hyper-alert. I half expect my apartment to be ransacked, to walk in and find a burly man dressed all in black with a gun pointed at my chest.

But there's nothing, no man, no carnage, just my neatly organised space. For a moment I pause, staring at my belongings, trying to figure out if someone has been in here, if they've rifled through and then left everything neat and tidy so I wouldn't notice.

My skin prickles, goosebumps spread along my arms. Am I being paranoid, or do I need to actually listen to my gut?

All that alcohol fizzles out in my brain. I go from hazy drunk to horribly sober in a matter of seconds.

I place my bag onto the marble counter and kick my shoes off, feeling the softness of the carpet massaging my dirty, frozen feet. The couch looks so inviting, half of me wants to curl up in a blanket and just sleep, only, that feeling persists, as if it's a chime, getting louder and louder and louder.

And that voice in my head repeats over and over that 'someone knows.'

Someone knows.

There's a target on my back.

If I sleep, if I hesitate now, I might as well pull the trigger myself and all of this, all this work, and this risk will be for nothing.

So I force myself to move, force my body to keep going and I grab a bag, stuffing it with essentials, the basics, underwear, T-shirts, comfy clothes. I don't know how long I'll be gone, how long I'll need to lay low, most likely I'll be watching my back in some form or other for the rest of my life and though that thought does alarm me, on some level there's a

sense of belief that I can do this. I can disappear, go off grid, hide in the wilderness and be free of the bullshit constraints that we've convinced ourselves are necessary to normal daily life.

There's a stash of money I keep under the floorboards, and it takes an annoying amount of time to prise the wood up and wrench it out. I always told myself I was being ridiculous in needing such an option, only now, this feels like I need to give Past Ana a good pat on the back.

When I get to the bathroom, I bag up the bottles, the toothpaste, all my toiletries and soap bars that I've squirrelled away at the back of cupboard, having liberated them from one hotel or another.

And then I catch a glance of myself in the mirror. My mascara is smeared down my cheeks, my hair looks a tangled nest that will take hours to sort and I know I don't have time now. I need to be going, to be moving, to be fleeing this space before the inevitable catches up with me.

"Come on, Ana," I half-whisper, as if I need someone to give me courage.

As quickly as I can, I peel off the sodden dress and towel dry my skin. Then I yank on a pair of thick leggings and a hoody, tucking my hair up to conceal myself further.

With my bag hanging over one shoulder, I cross the living room and head to the balcony, telling myself not to look back, but my eyes do it anyway. They cast over all the little treasures, the trinkets, mementos, moments of my life that are now meaningless. I prided myself in being independent, I prided myself on travelling, on seeing the world, on doing all the things my mother and her ilk would sneer at. What does it mean now? What is it worth? Surely it would be better to have never tasted such things as adventure, and freedom when they're going to be ripped so savagely from my grasp?

I let out a gasp, but it could be a sob too. I worked so damned hard for this. I sacrificed everything to get where I am. To have to run now, to have to essentially kill that part of me is not just hurtful, it's offensive.

But what else can I do? I can't just stay here and hope like some stupid fool that everything will be okay. I have to run. I have no other choice. It's that or I kill myself. Plain and simple. Only, I'm not ready to admit total defeat. Maybe a few weeks from now that might be my only option, but I have to try first. I have to do something.

I slip out of the window, sneak along the balcony and clamber down the fire exit, ensuring I avoid the security cameras. If someone is coming for me, I want them to at least work for it. I want them to think I'm still here, sleeping off a heavy night and by the time they realise I'm not, I'll be miles away and hopefully way ahead of them.

It's only when I get to the carpark that I realise I can't simply drive out of here. I groan at my own stupidity because of course my plates would be trackable. I need another option, an anonymous option.

I huff over to where the bike shed is. With a pang of guilt, I twist the code into the lock for my neighbour's bike. He used to let me borrow it every once in a while, only, tonight I won't be borrowing, I'll be stealing.

"Sorry, Bill," I murmur, as if that might make up for it.

With the bag slung as securely as possible over my shoulders, I clamber on but a hand comes out of nowhere, pulling me back and I smash into the brick wall. Another hand silences my cry and I'm turned roughly around to face my attacker.

"Ronin?" I mumble, feeling shock and relief at seeing his face. "What the fuck are you doing here?" Come to think of it, how the fuck does he know where I live? But then, the Brethren know everything, don't they?

His eyes dart about like he's expecting the place to be packed, like he's expecting the shadows to grow claws and come to life.

"They know," he says. "They know."

I gulp as my stomach drops. Somehow, hearing it from him, having him confirming it makes this situation feel all the worse. I can't pretend it's a misunderstanding, I can't pretend that this might all be forgotten.

The Brethren know.

And they're coming for me.

"What do you think I'm doing?" I reply, raising my shoulder to highlight the bag on my back.

He tilts his head, the stress evident on his normally attractive features. "You running?" he mutters. "Good. Always thought you were smart. You'll need that, need those brains, need them to keep you alive..."

"Aren't you?" I ask as he trails off.

He pulls a face I can't read, looking over his shoulder once again. "Don't tell me where you're headed," he says. "Don't tell anyone. You need to disappear. Get far away from here. Be a ghost, Ana, be a ghost, and they can't find you."

I want to ask if he'll be okay, if he has a plan, if he thinks they know about him, but he just shakes his head, steps back into the shadows, and then sprints away like the devil really is on his tail.

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CHAPTER THREE



Magnus

The music is blaring. A heavy, hypnotic beat that fits perfectly to all the moving, gyrating bodies around me.

I've never been much of a fan of this part of the prison. My tastes run a little differently from the vanilla undertones of this particular section. But then, when one doesn't want to be disturbed, this provides the ideal sanctuary.

This guarantees I can think without being interrupted.

To my right, a man is feasting between the legs of a woman who must be half his age. His grubby little hands hold her petite thighs wide apart and though she's not fighting it, you can see from the hazy dullness in her eyes the reason why.

But then, the mask covering her face signifies what she is.

All the women on this level wear masks, as do some of the men. Black like the one the girl is wearing signifies that they're a whore. Lowest of the

low. They're there to fuck, to be used and in truth, they hold little interest to me.

Above them are the bronze masks. Brethren Women. Ones who've fallen foul of our laws, or, more likely, have fallen foul of their husbands.

To wear a bronze mask means your time is limited. That your punishment is temporary. It adds a little fun to the mix, especially when you don't know whose wife or daughter you could be playing with.

But it's the people in red masks that are truly fucked. Man or woman, for those unlucky few, there's no escape, no limit, both to their sentence or to what can be done to them. It's a free for all.

As I sink back further into my chair, my eyes land on the figures in the distance and the little scuffle that's taking place. A bronze masked woman, who clearly hasn't adjusted to her new place in society, is surrounded by two men who force her to her knees as she struggles and jerks. She's a curvy thing, with big, bouncing breasts and nicely dark nipples, the kind you can truly knead and bind up beautifully. Every time she jerks, her tits bounce more, and emphasise what a truly soft, malleable body she has.

One of them rips off the flimsy see-through excuse for a dress, while the other laughs before slapping her enough to force her compliance. In unison they fuck her. One in her arse, one in her mouth. The woman gags and jerks, but there's nothing she can do but take it.

And when they've finished, she's hauled off, dragged away, no doubt to be given a few lashes for her bad behaviour. If she's smart, she'll learn, she'll adapt. But if she isn't, the next few months are going to be a brutal learning curve.

My lips quirk at that and my hands itch to do something. Anything.

It's been months since I've indulged. Months since I've played. Oh, I go to the lower levels every now and then but seeing as this is my prison, it's not the done thing to be the one to break our merchandise in. A Lord will pay a small fortune for such an honour. I can hardly turn them down in favour of my own selfish desires.

And besides, work has been demanding, Brethren work that is. This place provides the means, and the Elders are more than happy to provide the fodder to fill it. Stupid Lords and Ladies who think they're above the rules. All of them are collected and brought here to receive their rightful punishment along with the riffraff.

From the corner of my eye, I see the movement, I see my brother crossing the room, heading directly for me as a pawn darts about behind him.

“You’ve been summoned.” Conrad says quietly as he gets within earshot.

My eyebrow raises and I glance at the skittish man beside him. Pawns are usually more sedate, more controlled. It makes me wonder what shitshow is going down to elicit such a response. He rubs his hands like he’s barely holding it all together and for a moment, I relish that fear in his face.

I get up, following them both out to where more men, more Lords are stood, waiting for me.

“This better be good.” I state. I’m not one for theatrics. I’m not one for drama. And when I said I didn’t want to be disturbed, I meant it. Whatever is going on, it better be earth-shattering to warrant going against my explicit instructions.

“You need to hear this.” Conrad murmurs.

I shoot him a look that tells him to shut the fuck up. He may be my brother, but that doesn’t give him free rein either. He needs to understand that even our name doesn’t guarantee us a free ride. We have enemies, other families who would love to see us cut down. One stupid remark from Conrad, one careless action in front of the wrong eyes could spell our downfall.

He rolls his eyes, showing a flash of disobedience that I’m starting to notice more and more, but I don’t have time to deal with that now.

“What is it?” I bark back.

The men stood before me part and I can see up ahead a man fidgeting, clearly out of place. One look tells me he’s not a Brethren. And yet he’s been permitted entry all the same—that’s a breach I won’t take lightly.

“Flew him up here as soon as I heard.” Maxmillian murmurs into my ear.

“From where?” I ask. Whatever this is, it has to be big for such an action.

“London.”

My eyes narrow on the figure and then they land on the man behind him, the one with the smirk.

Anthony Wallis. Another reaper. One I know by reputation as well as face. This night is getting more interesting by the minute.

He's not quite as tall as me, and though our jobs mean we're meant to sustain a high-level physical fitness, it's clear that he likes to indulge.

"I, I..." the man on his knees stammers as if it's just sinking in exactly who he is talking to.

"You, what?" I ask.

He gulps, ducking his head, revealing a bald patch on the crown where his light hair is thinning. He's at least a decade younger than me, at a guess I'd say mid-thirties, but nothing about him suggests he's anything of worth. His suit is cheap, his shoes are at least polished but nothing to note. This man is a nobody. Nothing. I could pull out my gun, blast his head off, and no one beyond his family would even notice his passing.

He pulls out a folder, shakily hands it to me and I snatch it up, half expecting there to be little of interest, but what I see makes my jaw drop.

Apparently, some journalist is writing an expose, planning to reveal to the world not only that we exist, but that half the world's leaders alongside CEOs, actors, hell even the US President himself is a damned part of it. And the information she's got is good. Too good. No way she stumbled upon this by herself, no way she just figured it all out. No, she had help. Inside help at that.

"What the fuck is this?" I ask.

"We found it on her computer." he half-whispers.

"We?"

"I," he says. "I found it. I tried to talk to her, to make her stop..."

The look on my face silences him. That's not his place. He's not there to act on our behalf. He's there as an informant. He's there to help maintain the status quo. Stupid fuck has clearly gotten too big for his boots. Perhaps he's convinced himself he's one of us? One of the Brethren, when he's so low down the pecking order even the black masked girls in my club hold more sway.

"Get out." I say.

He blinks, looking to Anthony as if he has a say in this.

With a jerk of my head, I have him hauled out. I know he won't do anything, I know he's too much of a coward to say a word to the woman in question, but this *is* serious. At least, on some level. Oh, we've had threats like this before, stupid people who somehow think they can outwit us. But every time we've been quick enough to eliminate them before any serious damage occurs.

But the information here is extensive, the bitch has clearly done her homework.

I snap the folder shut, turning my back on the bunch of them.

Of course, this story will never be printed. The paper would have to have a death-wish to even consider it. But that doesn't mean it can't grow legs and as a reaper, it is my job to ensure that does not happen. I'm charged with keeping the secrets of the Brethren as just that—secrets.

In my office, I drop the folder, and pull up the woman's details on our database.

Conrad sits opposite me. In many ways he's the only one I truly trust. Certainly, the only one I'd be alone with. Enough of the Lords covet my position, enough of them would kill to be sat where I am.

"Well?" he asks.

I let out a sigh, we've only just cleaned up the mess from the Matiss debacle. I'd rather hoped I'd have a reprieve before I'd be off, reaping again, but I guess that is life.

"Name is Liliana Edwards." I state, reading out loud. "Lives alone, both parents are dead, one brother but he's in Sudan..."

"Sudan?"

"Medicines sans frontiers." I reply, mentally appreciating how convenient that little fact is. If he's abroad, I doubt they talk all that much. It'll be far easier for her to disappear if there's no family to shout out about it. And it'll also be easy to remove him from the equation should he prove to be an issue. After all, no one bats an eye when someone dies in a warzone, do they?

"Well, I've requested her medical records." Conrad says. "We'll have the file within the hour."

"Good." I doubt there'll be anything of note, but I like to have all my bases covered. I like to know everything about my prey, every tiny detail.

"No need..." Anthony says as he strolls in. With a thud, he dumps another wad of paper onto my desk. "I already sorted it."

"We don't need your help." I reply. How the fuck he got up here I don't know, but I'll add that to the list of fuckups and someone's head will roll for this.

"I'm not offering it." he says, folding his arms. "I'm here to make a request instead."

“A request?” I repeat. What makes him think I’ll agree to anything he has to say? He may be a reaper too, but we are miles apart in terms of power and ability, you can see that just by looking at us.

“I want the bitch.”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard.” he says. “I want her. She’s not unattractive...”

Conrad snorts like he’s already made his mind up what this Liliana woman looks like.

Anthony narrows his eyes, glancing at him as if he’s beneath his notice. “Why don’t you let the men talk?” he says softly.

I shake my head before my brother can reply. “Conrad stays. He’s a reaper, just like we are.”

That makes the man smile, and that scar in his eyebrow seems to wrinkle up more. “Is he? What kills has he made? What contracts has he completed?”

I don’t know who the fuck he thinks he is by barging in here, challenging us, does he really think I’ll just let that slide?

As I open my mouth to put him back in his place, he places a photograph on the desk.

“I want her.” he says, jabbing his finger right into the centre of the paper.

My eyes drop and I take the image in slowly. The woman I see isn’t some frigid, dumpy old hag like I’d imagine most of her ilk to be, no, she’s far more pleasing than that. She’s late-thirties, soft in all the right places, but there’s something about the no-nonsense vibe she gives off.

She’s no wallflower, that’s for sure, but then, she’d have to have some balls to even dare write this expose in the first place.

“Why?” I ask.

He shrugs. “I’m not allowed to take a slave.” he states like that might endear me to him. Like I might just hold out my hands and congratulate him on such a sentence. That he managed to piss someone off so much that he got himself barred.

“I deserve a little fun,” he adds. “I’ll see that she’s punished, but I want to play first.”

I shouldn’t do it.

I shouldn’t give a fuck either way, but the thought strikes me and I let it take hold before I can consider the consequences.

Anthony is like me, a monster dressed up in a smart suit. We're constrained, controlled, we get to occasionally feast on the nice little morsels dropped in front of us but even then, those feasts have a limit. Those feasts are under their terms.

It's satisfying enough at the time, but it doesn't fully scratch the itch. And it lingers. It festers.

"Let's both of us have a little fun then." I declare. "Let's make a wager. Whoever catches the bitch, can keep her."

"Fine." Anthony cuts across me, his eyes lighting up because he obviously loves the chase as much as I do, and adding a little competitiveness to this will only make it that more enticing.

"And..." I add.

He pauses, his eyes not moving from the photo before us. "And what?"

"The loser pays the fee."

"What?" he snaps.

Oh, we both know the Senate will demand a fee when we don't produce her head as proof. But to make the loser pay the ten million will certainly add insult to injury, especially when I'll be the one enjoying my prize and he'll be the one coughing up the dough.

He grunts out, straightening his jacket. "Alright," he says as though such an act can magically fix his sudden dip in self-confidence. "Loser pays the fee."

I watch him leave with a genuine smile on my face.

"We need to find out who her source is." Conrad says as soon as the door shuts. He's right of course. It's as necessary as hunting this woman down. There's a snitch in our ranks and we need to root them out.

But my mind already feels distracted, I pick up the photograph, and look at my new quarry in more depth.

If I lose, it won't be the money that bothers me, ten million is neither here nor there. But to lose this opportunity, to lose the chance to beat a fellow reaper, yeah, that'll sting for quite a while.

CHAPTER FOUR



Liliana

As the morning light pours in through the trees, I rub my eyes and try to relive the stiffness in my bones.

I rode all night, or at least for as long as I could manage, and then, when I thought I might just fall off from exhaustion and crash, I hunkered down, made a makeshift shelter and slept on the hard ground like an animal.

Leaves stick to my face.

Bits of stone and twigs poke into my back.

I used my bag as pillow, but that seems to have resulted in jarring my neck.

With a groan, I get up, stretch as best I can then pick up my bag and toss it over my shoulder. In a few weeks I can maybe risk staying in a motel, but right now I need to get as far away from the city as possible. And to ensure that, I have to move about unseen, unnoticed, as a complete ghost.

I've got a woolly hat on, and as I readjust it, I say a silent thanks to my past self for thinking of grabbing it. The warmth it's providing right now

feels like a miracle.

With a deep sigh, I grab my stuff, forcing my legs to work. I have to keep moving. I have to get further away.

With every turn of the wheels, my legs protest. My back throbs as I curl up over the handlebars. But I know this will be nothing compared to what they do to me.

If I'm smart, if I'm careful I *can* do this, I can make for the countryside, for the hills, somewhere far from human inhabitants and I can live there, I can build a shelter, make traps, become a proper hermit. Yes, it'll be tough, yes, I'll probably struggle for a while, but I'll be alive, and more importantly, I'll be safe.

I just have to take this one step at a time.

Focus on getting far away first. Then I can consider next steps.



BRISTOL. IT'S NEVER BEEN ONE OF MY FAVOURITE CITIES. NO OFFENSE TO the place, it's just too hilly for my liking.

But then, London was hardly the dream, was it? I lived in a cramped, dingy space that took most of my salary to pay for and grew mould in the winter. Work was the only reason I stayed, work was what got me out of bed, what kept me awake, what drove me.

And now work is gone.

Everything I busted my arse for, all those years at university, all the subsequent years grafting away after, all of it counts for nothing now.

I have nothing to show for any of it. In a few years' time no one will even remember there was a journalist called 'Ana Edwards.' My name will be forgotten. Everything I did, my entire legacy will fade to nothing.

I let out a low breath, burying the wave of emotion that hits me. It is what it is, isn't it? These are the cards I've been dealt. I can't dwell on them too deeply right now, I can't allow myself to become despondent and depressed, because then I'll become that mess of a person who can't function, who can't think, and then I'll be caught.

Besides, I still have one card left to play.

One last fuck you before this all ends.

With my head down, I make my way to the bus station. It's a risk being here, but I have to take it. I've crossed enough distance as I can by bike and by foot. I need to go further, I need to get to Wales, get to a place where I can disappear.

I clamber onto the bus, handing over the money with my head as concealed as I can make it. All I can feel is the surveillance cameras, the CCTV, as if every single one is focused directly right on me.

I take a seat near the back, but not too far. I need to be able to escape—but there's only one door, if they do stop us, I don't stand a chance. Gulping back the bile, I try not to think about that fact.

When it pulls away, the relief I feel is palpable. It feels like I'm one step closer to victory.

I lean my head against the cold glass, letting that relief sink in. The seat isn't exactly plush, but it feels like luxury compared to the hard ground floor I've been sleeping on.

My bag is beside me, pressed against me, and I keep the strap wrapped around my arm.

Out the window, the streets start to whirl past, houses begin to blur. I could almost cry with relief as we start to pick up speed because it feels like I've made it. It feels like freedom is just around the corner. I just have to hold my nerve a little longer.



IT'S EVENING WHEN WE ARRIVE. I RUB MY EYES, MORE THAN AWARE THAT I drifted off and that my tiredness could well have put me in danger. As furtively as I can, I cast my eyes around, trying to gauge if anyone is here, if anyone on this bus is watching me.

But they all seem blissfully disinterested. Instead, they're all jostling and shoving to be the first off.

I hold back, not wanting to be swept up in a crowd and then miss the sign of attack if it does come. When I make my way down the narrow aisle, my legs protest after so many hours of little movement.

Each step down sends a jolt of burning through my muscles. I wouldn't say I was unfit before, but I was hardly a gymaholic, and days of non-stop

cycling has been more than a shock to the system.

I take a step, then another, putting distance between me and the bus, and as I try to get my bearings, I let out a small low breath. By now, they must have gotten into my apartment. They must know I'm MIA, but surely, they wouldn't realise that I'm here? There's nothing to link me to this place, nothing to suggest this is where I would go.

And yet I can feel those hairs on the back of my neck standing on end. I can feel my heartbeat picking up.

I hoist the bag on my shoulder and start walking. I don't dare look back. I need to get on, to disappear and not stand around like a bloody idiot.

One street turns into another. I pick up pace, striding as fast as I can without attracting attention, but it's not long before I realise my suspicions aren't unfounded.

I'm not being paranoid.

I really am being followed.

I really am in trouble.

A fist slams into my stomach making me double over. This could of course be a coincidence, just some nasty shits that I unluckily ran into, only, I catch a glimpse of the gold ring as the asshole removes his hand and that confirms what I already know.

They *have* found me.

Someone grabs my bag, tossing it away and out of my reach before I can stop them. Stupidly, I freeze, letting my eyes focus on where it lands and a blow to the head is the punishment I pay for it.

I swing my leg around, slamming my boot into one of their faces. Bet they didn't see that coming, did they?

Without waiting to see the bastard crumple, I turn my focus on the other two. One aims a punch at my face, but it's easy enough for me to dodge it and land my own. I take his legs out next, kick them right out from under him so he lands on his arse beside his mate, leaving me one final man to face off.

He's bigger, both in fat and muscle, and clearly more up for this fight. There's a scar that mars his right eyebrow like someone ran a razor through it, only just avoiding taking out his eye. Pity that.

I raise my fists, preparing for him to make his move.

"Stupid bitch," he spits. "Really think you can outrun us?"

I narrow my eyes but avoid answering, besides, what would be the point? It's a waste of my energy.

With his right hand, he pulls a knife, nothing too big but enough to do serious damage if he stabbed me in the right place.

He throws himself at me, slamming his body into mine and we land on the ground, him on top of me and his entire weight pushing all the air out of my lungs.

I jerk beneath him, trying to get my legs free. One of his hand gropes me as he lowers his face right into mine. "I'm gonna enjoy turning you into my whore," he taunts.

But that's all the time I need, the moment I need. I pull my head back before slamming it into his nose. I know I've hit my target when his blood splatters onto me.

Shouts echo behind us.

I can't tell if it's more of the Brethren coming to help or strangers inadvertently coming across the scene. Either way, I know this won't help me in the slightest.

But the noise is enough of a distraction to my assailant to allow me to wrestle the knife from his hand and stab him in the stomach.

Oh, I know it's not deep, I know it won't kill, but it might just slow him down and that's all I need. Just a few precious seconds, just some advantage here.

I scramble up, hating the fact that my bag is too far to get to, and with my heart slamming into my chest, I run for my life.

CHAPTER FIVE



Magnus

I can't keep the laugh in. A few of my men glance at me, no doubt confused as to why I'm not more pissed, but Conrad meets my gaze with a smirk.

"Stupid fuck thought he had her." he murmurs.

I'll admit, the more I see of this woman, the more I see Anthony failing to catch her, the more I'm starting to relish the moment we finally meet.

She's a firecracker and one I'm going to enjoy breaking.

From the cameras, I see one of the men lean down and pick something up. It's her bag. So she's lost her supplies, then. That'll certainly turn the screw a little tighter.

But I'm annoyed we missed this opportunity. She was there, within our grasp, all we had to do was reach out and grab her, except we didn't, did we? We fucked up, just like Antony did. We also let her escape.

I start barking orders, after all, we know where she is now, and it has to be me that wins this. Me that beats Anthony.

When I walk out, I don't go to sleep, despite the late hour. Instead, I head back to my basement, to where my soon to be plaything's accomplice is currently locked away.

It wasn't easy to track him down. He was clever. Careful. He knew exactly what our limitations were because he was one of us. Too bad he made one mistake. One stupid little fuck up.

If he hadn't run, if he'd held his nerve, stayed in post, we'd never have spotted him in the first place.

Sadly for him, he didn't have the balls and now he's paying for his crimes, just as that bitch will pay when I get hold of her.

"Well, Ronin," I say, as I enter the room. He's been hanging for a few days. The ropes have soaked up so much of his blood that they now blackened with the congealed mess of it all.

He's not let down to piss or shit and instead, is forced to defecate where he is and my nose wrinkles as I take in the stench of him.

Both his legs are gone. Hacked off. As is his dick. It took hours to do it, hours to saw away inch by inch, cauterising as I did to ensure the bastard didn't bleed out and end his suffering early.

And then I took great delight in barbecuing his legs up for him and forcing the man to eat it all, piece by piece, while his dick I've put on ice, having another idea of what to do with it.

Maybe I'll fry his fingers next, create little kebabs out of them, or I could mash them all up, bones and all, create a smoothie of his hands for him to guzzle on.

My lips quirk at the prospect, though somehow, I doubt he'll live long enough for me to be able to follow through on either.

He lets out a little whimper as I get closer.

He's always been a stupid fuck. An arrogant one too. Not sure when he grew a conscience, but more fool him for not simply putting a bullet in his own head and dealing with it the simple way.

As I hold the photo of Liliana up, in front of his eyes, I can see his pupils dilate.

"Want to watch as I fuck her?" I ask him.

He narrows his gaze, blood dripping down his chin from where I was forced to rip out his teeth one by one to get him to talk.

"You know you had a good thing going," I add, walking around him, enjoying how his entire body flinches at our close proximity. "All you had

to do was keep swimming, keep plodding, sure you were never going to get any higher up the ranks, but your life wasn't so bad..."

And it wasn't. He had a good job. Good car. Nice house. Just enough power to make things easy.

He mumbles something incoherent. I haven't allowed him any pain meds. The only thing I will permit is what will keep him alive. Adrenaline. Fluids. But pain, no, he will feel every moment of this. He will endure every second.

"Was it worth it?" I ask, shoving the photo right in his face. "Was your inability to keep a secret worth this bitch's life?"

He chokes, spitting blood all over the glossy paper and I tut, wiping it clean on his filthy, sweaty, hairy chest.

"Justice." He gasps. "Justice."

"Justice?" I repeat. Is that what he wanted. Was he as idealistic and naive as this journalist apparently is?

"The world doesn't work like that, Ronin." I murmur. "There's no such thing as good and bad, right and wrong. There's only power." I state. Power granted by God. Power proving who is favoured and who isn't.

He lets out a gurgle, that blood spraying more from his mouth. He's been doing it more and more these last few hours. It's another reason why I keep checking in. If he's going to die, I want to be there to witness it. I want my face to be the last thing he sees on this earth.

I click my fingers, signalling for the medic to take a look. But as I step back, I realise what this is, what is happening.

His heart *is* giving out.

His body is too weak to continue.

I shove the photo back into his face. "She's going to be my new toy, Ronin. She's going to suffer, she's going to be hurt much worse than you have, and it's all your fault. You did this. You created this..."

His body starts jerking. Blood starts leaking out of wounds that should be stitched tight.

And then he slumps, his head lops forward, and the medic shakes their head as if I'm too stupid to understand.

"Gone," they say quietly like it's a shame, like we should all mourn his loss.

I turn on my heel and leave without saying a word. He might be dead, but that doesn't mean I don't still have a use for him. He'll help set the

scene, establish boundaries if you will.

I've still got that photo in my hand, it's smeared with his blood still, and, as I wipe it clean, I realise she'll be getting desperate. She'll be getting reckless. She's lost her belongings, probably all her money. Her options are narrowing by the second and I know the type—she won't go quietly. She's already proven that fact from her interactions with Anthony.

I pull out my phone, dialling a number I've used only when is absolutely necessary.

The voice that answers wavers just a little. Oh, he may be a big name, he may, on paper, hold a lot of power and influence, but we're the reason he is where he is, we're the reason he's grown his businesses, become the billionaire he is.

"There's going to be a situation..." I begin, giving only the necessary details. After all knowledge is power and this fucker here, one day he'll grow too big, too egotistical and forget who put him on his pedestal. I'm not going to help sow the seeds that may come back to fuck us all.

He replies quickly that it's all in hand. That he'll have measure put in place. The bitch's account will be locked down, she can try and post as many times as she wants but nothing will go through.

Only, I doubt that will be enough of a deterrent. No, we'll need to block all mentions of a cult. We'll need to censor everything that goes live moving forward.

He huffs, pouts, starts listing reasons why that isn't a great idea. That it'll cost money, and a lot of it, as though considerations like that are my concern. The man is technically a billionaire. He has the funds. And we, the Brethren, are the reason why.

When I state that, the line goes quiet. Beautifully so. I can hear the way he's squirming on the other end.

"You wouldn't want to bite the hand that feeds now, would you?" I add, knowing that he'll understand the threat. We are chosen by God, favoured by him. What fool would go against that?

"No."

"Then see to it that my orders are carried out." I say icily.

"I'll get it done."

Yeah, you will. Or I'll have your head on a platter before sundown.

CHAPTER SIX



Liliana

I can't believe they found me so easily. I don't even understand how. I was careful. I was good. Damned good.

How the fuck did they find me?

I drag in a long, panicked breath, one filled with the smell of soil, dirt, damp. I'm hiding in a ditch, under a bush, praying to God I made it far enough away before I sought this refuge. My hands dig into my hair, it's a mess of knots that I know will take hours to get out. Not that that's exactly a priority right now.

They found me.

They fucking found me.

Was I stupid to believe I could hide, that I could get away? Was I naïve to even think that was possible? My stomach groans with hunger, reminding me that all I've eaten today is a handful of blackberries. It's hardly enough to keep a rat alive and it certainly won't sustain me long term. No long term, I am fucked. Even if I somehow, miraculously, manage to elude

capture, I need to find proper shelter. I need to find a proper food source. I need to do *something*, or I will simply waste away and die and all of this, all this running and fighting will be for nothing.

But a voice in my head tells me that this is about more than just my survival. That it always was. The whole reason I wanted to write this story in the first place was because it was about more than me, it was about justice. About making the world wake up and see what was really going on.

If I stay here, hidden, hell, if I live or die it makes no difference to that end, does it? Either way, no one will learn of the Brethren, no one will realise what is happening. They'll simply continue on, pulling the strings in the shadows, manipulating us all through fake elections, and pretend wars, and all of us stupid, ignorant, nobodies will continue to be none the wiser.

No, I have to get this story out. I have to.

I pull out my phone, power it back on, and see that it only has a little battery life left. I need to find somewhere to charge it, but I don't even have a cable now that my bag is gone. It's another thing to add to the list and right now, it just doesn't really matter.

Opening up the app, I quickly type away. My thumbs are so cold that it takes me twice the time it should to create the post. And then, without a moment to reconsider, I hit the button.

My account isn't huge, but I have a decent enough following considering what my job is. Twenty thousand or so people who I know will read this, and if I'm lucky it will spread like wildfire.

Only, nothing happens. The post just sits there. It doesn't go live. It doesn't work.

I hit the button again and again only to be met with the same response. What the fuck is this?

My breath seems to pick up. My heart starts to race. Surely not, surely they don't have that much power? But how could they not? How else would they be able to control everyone? Was I naïve to think I'm the first to try to break this story? There must have been others, other reporters, other whistleblowers. I guess it's obvious that they'd have systems in place, controls. Hell, they probably have all the CEO's of these social media companies working with them, colluding, that is, if they're not a Brethren Lord themselves.

I let out a scream. It's a desperate, pained, drawn out noise that only exemplifies how truly fucked I feel and it hits me now how futile this entire

thing has been.

I never stood a chance.

I never would have gotten this story published.

All Ronin's sneaking around, all my fear and hope, and every single thing I've endured has been for nothing.

They have won. They always win.

My tears sting my face as they start pouring down. I'm not one for crying, I'm not one for showing emotions and yet I feel so desperate, so utterly hopeless.

They know all about me, they've been hunting me, and yet I have nothing, no weapons, no protection. I'm caught in their trap and any second now, the thing is going to spring shut and I'll be done for.

In my head, I know what I have to do, what my last resort is. But I hate it, I hate how defeated I feel, I hate that I have to ask for help, but I just can't see any other option.

I type the message fast. Vomit fills my mouth as I see the words there in black and white on the screen.

And then I hit the send button before I can talk myself out of it.

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CHAPTER SEVEN



Magnus

I look up in surprise as a man I thought was dealt with stands, wavering on the threshold. Judging from the bags under his eyes, he's obviously been questioning his life choices, perhaps even regretting them entirely.

"Why is he here?" I ask.

The guard beside him nudges him in the back and he flounders forward. "I, I got a message," he says in that weak, pathetic voice.

My eyebrow raises, I get up slowly from my desk, wondering if this isn't some sort of trick.

When I extend my hand, he places the phone in it with a more than obvious shake.

I click the standby button, then flash it in his face. "It's locked," I comment, "what's the passcode?"

"07, 05, 1952," he states stupidly before adding, "my mother's birthday."

How very touching. I make a mental note of that code as I tap it in, ensuring I commit it to memory. The screen comes to life, all those messages spill forth like dirty little secrets. It's all there, her desperate words all typed out.

It's a delicious insight in her mind. I can practically taste the panic in her words. Poor darling is so confused as to why her posts won't go live.

Did she really think we wouldn't be on top of that?

Did she really believe that was some sort of 'get out of jail free' card?

I let out a low, satisfied sigh. It's all here. All his sweet little comments back, his words of reassurance, telling her that it'll be okay. That he's going to help her. I guess in a way he has, he's helped lead her right to me.

I tap out a message, using the same lingo he does, keeping it short, brief. Giving her instructions to be at a certain service station later that day. In her mind, Saul will be travelling from London anyway, so that explains the delay.

Once the message is delivered, she types back immediately, stating she'll be there. That she's so thankful. My lips curl at that. Oh, she will be thankful. By the time I'm finished this bitch will be thanking me for every second of life that I grant her.

"Well?" Saul asks, cutting through the mental image already seeping into my brain.

"Well, what?" I reply.

"Is she..." He glances to my brother then back at me. "Is she agreeing to meet?"

"Yes," I state, before pocketing the phone and turning away. We may have a few hours, but I want this all executed perfectly. I want her tied up and gift-wrapped, and more importantly, I want everyone who attends her deliverance to already know what the deal is. I want them more than aware that this bitch is mine.

My property. My plaything.

And I want Anthony to witness it, to look in his eyes as he sees the physical manifestation of his loss and my victory all there, in blazing colour.

Saul's hand grabs my arm, jerking me back.

I raise an eyebrow at the level of insolence. He really thinks he's in a position to even touch me?

“I, I promised she wouldn’t be hurt.” he says, wrangling his hands together.

“Right.” Like he was ever in a position to make such a comment.

“I...” He glances to my brother then back to me. “Look, if you agreed I could take her, keep her quiet.”

“Excuse me?” I retort.

He shrinks at the tone but the stupid, snivelling fuck continues as if he thinks he has some leverage here, “I have a place, with a basement, look, I could keep her there, no one would know. She’d be secure. And I’d never let anyone see her, meet with her, I’d keep her isolated...”

My, my, how this woman seems to lure men in. I take a step back, assessing him and all the things he’s not saying.

“You’re in love with her.” I state.

He gulps, “I am. Was. I...”

“I see.” I cut across whatever bullshit he’s about to say, only, he continues anyway,

“I, look... I know she has to pay. I understand that. But I can ensure she pays, I can ensure that whatever the cost is...”

“You don’t have anywhere near the money needed to make such statements.” Conrad taunts.

“You just need her dead.” He snaps back as though he’s suddenly realising exactly what he’s done. As though he’s Judas, stood here, with those thirty pieces of silver in his hand, seeing everything that’s precious to him being nailed up on that cross. “I can do that. As far as the world will know, she is dead.”

“Why did you do it?” I ask curiously. “If you care for this bitch so much, why did you come to us?”

He shrugs. It’s a pathetic gesture, one that sums up everything he is. Every cowardly cell of his body. “I, I didn’t have a choice. The Brethren are too powerful to go against...” he begins. “But she deserved it. At least, she deserved to be brought down a peg or two. I offered her everything, gave her everything and she spat it back in my face.”

“I see.” I murmur. So that’s what this is, a lover’s revenge. She rejected him and he found a way to make her suffer. I can’t say I’ve not felt that very same need before. No, I understand the want to hurt, the drive behind it. And I’ve got enough enemies of my own to know how good the taste of revenge is when you finally achieve it.

It's the next words that seal his fate. Not that he was ever getting out of this alive but still. He doesn't speak them to me, he says them to my brother as if Conrad would ever lower himself to such a request.

"I want my reward. I deserve a reward." Saul hisses. "I gave you the woman I loved on a silver platter. I've offered her up as a sacrifice for you people. I want something in return. I damn well deserve it."

Conrad looks at me and I can see he's itching to smash this man's face in.

"A reward?" I repeat.

"I deserve recognition. I deserve money too. I've helped you people. You owe me."

"Oh, we owe you alright." I murmur, before clicking my fingers. "And Liliana owes you, too." I add with a smile. "I wonder how prettily she'll show her thanks once I'm done with her. Do you think she'll forgive you for what you've done, or do you think she'll plead with me to put a bullet in your head?"

His eyes widen just as two of my men grab hold of him.

"No." He gasps.

I jerk my head for them to get him the fuck out of here. Just the sound of his voice is grating.

"No, please," he begs, "I helped you, I helped you."

"Put a gag on him." Conrad orders. Apparently, he's sick of his shit, too.

Once the snivelling waste of space is gone, I turn to Conrad and explain how this has to go down. I can't be there at the snatch. I have to be with the other Lords. I have to make sure Anthony doesn't pull any last-minute tricks.

It'll be up to Conrad to get our precious cargo to the deliverance ceremony and in truth, it's a responsibility he should be more than capable of taking on. He can have as many men as he wants, he can swarm the service station if that's what he thinks is needed.

However he wants to play it, I don't care. I just want that bitch, on her knees, at my feet before the day ends.

CHAPTER EIGHT



Liliana

I can't stop shaking. I must look like a junkie, or a convict, probably both. I've got the hood of my jacket up over my head, but I can still feel all the people side-eyeing me as they walk past and it's enough to make me more on edge.

I'm lingering to the side, by the trees, hoping that I wouldn't be too visible, but I also need to see Saul when he turns up.

My phone is almost dead. I don't know what I'll do if he gets delayed because I'll have no way to contact him then.

I'm chewing my lip, shifting from foot to foot, getting more and more agitated as the seconds go by.

Where the fuck is he? I know he said 'be here at three,' but it doesn't take that long to get here from his place. Maybe I'm being paranoid, maybe I'm overthinking this. Any minute his faded old SUV is going to come around the corner, and I'll be able to get in and everything will be okay.

Even if he does show, I know it won't fix everything. If I'm lucky he'll let me stay for a bit, let me sort myself out while we come up with a real plan. Maybe the Brethren will forget about me entirely. They'll be another scandal, something big, something that demands their attention and they'll forget all about the silly little journalist who thought she could change the world.

My face contorts at that thought.

I was silly, wasn't I? I was silly, and stupid, and damn right bloody reckless. Saul told me that, Saul warned me. He tried to help and, in my stubborn arrogance, I thought I knew better. When I see him, the first thing I'll do is apologise for what an absolute fool I've been. I'll tell him he was right. I'll tell him that from now on, I'll do what he suggests, because, apparently, I can't be trusted to make decisions.

A lump forms in my throat at how badly I've let myself down. I thought I was better than this. I thought I was rational, logical, but everything I've created over the last week shows I'm anything but.

As a car pulls up, I feel a flash of hope only for it to be dashed as a family burst out from all four doors.

He's not coming, is he?

Or maybe they got him. Shit, what if they got him?

I stumble back, crashing into a corner of the building as I realise that's the only logical explanation.

They got him.

And now they're coming for me.



I DON'T MAKE IT FAR. I BARELY GET A FEW METRES AWAY BEFORE I HEAR the only too inevitable sounds of footsteps, boots, people chasing after me.

My feet are blistered and battered from the amount of walking I've done, my body is exhausted, but as the adrenaline pumps through my veins, I run as fast as I can. I pound my shoes into the uneven ground, and I give it everything I have.

Dogs bark, shouts echo.

I've never been on a hunt, but that's exactly what this feels like.

I'm the fox, and they're the hounds, chasing me down, and when my legs give out, when I can go no further, I know they'll rip me to pieces.

My coat flaps in the wind. I shrug it off, needing every bit of speed I can get in this moment.

Something springs at me. Teeth snarl. As I roll into the dirt, it's a dog that's snapping at my face, all but biting it off.

More shouts erupt. Another dog joins the battle for my life, sinking its teeth into my calf as I shriek.

I try to kick it off, try to defend myself, but it locks its jaw, shaking me about like a rag doll.

And then the men arrive. Six of them.

A gun is shoved in my face, the dogs are pulled off and I'm dragged up by my hair.

I scream out more, I thrash, trying to cause a bigger scene, not that I think anyone would help me, but what other cards do I have to play now? I'm desperate, petrified. This is my last chance at escape, and I will do everything I can.

Some dirty fabric is stuffed into my mouth, and I bite down on the fingers that accompany it.

"Fucking bitch," the man spits, backhanding me hard enough that I go flying into the mud.

The others laugh, one decides to kick me in the back, while telling me to behave myself, as if I'll just suddenly comply with all of this.

My face is pushed further into the dirt, my arms are forced behind my back and they tie them tight enough that I feel my fingers almost immediately start to go numb.

I'm hauled over someone's shoulder, carried like a damned sack of potatoes, and when we get back to the service station, nobody even batters an eyelid as I'm thrown into the back of a van.

Two men get in with me. The rest jump up front.

I start kicking out, jerking, doing everything I can to prove that I'm still not going to be taken that easily.

Someone slams their boot into my face. My lip splits, spurting blood all into my mouth. Another grabs my hair, wrenching me around, and he jabs a needle deep into my neck.

"Night, night, bitch," he says with a snigger and then others join in like it was such a funny joke.

I fall back, my head slamming onto the metal floor. My eyes almost instantly blur, and, as I feel myself giving into whatever sedative they've drugged me with, a man's voice rings out,

"All done, brother, we've got her."

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CHAPTER NINE



Magnus

I t's taken a lot of effort to get to this point. A lot of work on my part.

And while on some level, I've known how this would end, how God would favour me, it's more than satisfying to watch as she's dragged into the church and thrown at our feet. My eyes dart to Anthony. The prick is openly glaring at me but then, who can blame him? Nobody likes to lose, do they? And when the prize is as delicious as this one, well, let's just say he'll be nursing those wounds for quite a while.

They've bound her arms, stuffed some fabric into her mouth, no doubt to silence the obscenities spewing from those pretty lips.

But even now, even in defeat, she's still putting up a fight.

I stay back, watching, observing, seeing as the others battle her.

And battle it is. The bitch refuses to kowtow. I could almost admire her for it, but such antics won't go down well with my colleagues and though I've already brokered a deal, it's a fractious one, I need to tread carefully, play the game, and this bitch is ruining everything.

“Someone’s been sniffing around where they don’t belong.” Seth says, jabbing her with his foot.

She jerks back, but he’s quick to grab her hair and wrench her head back into a nearly impossible angle.

As her clothes are cut away and that delicious body beneath is revealed, I’ll admit my mouth waters just a little at the prospect of how I’m going to mould that perfect flesh, how I’m going to mark it, maim it, bruise it, and make every inch of her mine.

But I’m clearly not the only one to appreciate her.

It’s Anthony who grabs her breast, kneading it between his pudgy hands as she grimaces. I’m not a jealous man, in fact I’d go so far as to say I enjoy sharing my toys—but only when the occasion is right, and only when I decide to do so.

Besides, I won the race, who the fuck does he think he is taking such liberties?

I glare at him, and he meets my gaze with what I know is a smirk under that mask.

If he wants to play this game that’s fine. He can have his moment now, he can take this tiny gift, but in the not too distant future he will pay a high price for insulting me.

I take a step, then another, closing the distance a little and ensuring no one else fucks with what is mine.

On some level I expected her to plead, to beg, to turn into a pitiful, pathetic mess, but she does none of that. Oh, she’s shocked enough when she spots Ronin’s body dangling from the rafters, but there’s still defiance in her eyes, beautiful, angry, raging fury.

It takes all I have not to fuck her right here and I can feel my blood pumping, urging me to do it.

Seth pulls a gun, points it at her head, signalling my moment to act because this to, like everything else has been predetermined.

“The Brethren does not forgive. The Brethren does not forget,” he states.

“Blow her fucking head off...”

“Wait,” I say, knowing that’s exactly what they will do. That I’m the one pulling the strings here, just like always.

The men around me pause. Seth knows the real game here, a few of the others may be oblivious, but they’re followers, sheep, they’ll do as they’re

told and seeing as I outrank them, they won't dare to challenge me.

"The crime was against me, was it not?" I state.

"It was against all of the Brethren." Seth replies.

That may be true on some level but the stories she had, the expose focuses heavily on me. I could almost be flattered at the amount of time she's devoted to studying me.

Don't worry, pet, that attention will all be reciprocated in due course.

Almost lazily, I pull some of the papers, making a show of flicking through them like this isn't a done deal. "Most of this is about me, about my activities."

"What does it matter?" Quentin says. He's always been one with no imagination, no manners either. That's what makes him such a good little soldier, he follows orders well enough without the brains to ever consider questioning them. Too bad I can't just declare what this really is and skip this entire charade all together.

"It matters," I say, "because I want my own justice."

My eyes meet hers as I finish that sentence, and for a second, for the briefest, most beautiful moment I do see a sliver of fear, and then that fury comes rushing back.

"Justice?" She gasps, and we all hear the contempt in her voice. God, I'm going to love working that out of her, turning that tone into something far more respectful.

I grab her face, pulling her so that she has to properly look me in the eyes and as the distance closes, I can smell the sweat on her skin, I can smell the stench of her. She hasn't washed in days, she absolutely stinks. I tilt my head dropping my gaze to see the perspiration pooling on her skin.

The hall is hot, stiflingly so. It's like the very fires of damnation are here, surrounding us.

God, I want to run my tongue along her collarbone, taste the fear that she's concealing so carefully.

"This woman insulted me, I demand recompense."

"Fuck you," she spits, but her words are drowned out. Forgotten.

So I take in a deep breath of her, savouring the smell of her filling my lungs as I watch the pieces all fall into place. As I witness the puppets behave exactly as I planned.

"Her sentence still stands." Seth says.

"Of course." I reply. Of course this bitch will die. That's a given.

But unlike my small-minded friends, I don't want it to be quick. I don't want it to be a tick box. No, I've never permitted myself to take this step, to truly lean into what I am. Oh there have been moments, treats if you will, but I've always had to hold back, to taper my needs.

As I stare at my new plaything, I know I don't have to do that this time. I can indulge in every fucked-up desire, every twisted want that pops into my head.

I can mould, and bend, and break as much as I want.

I can kill this woman in so many ways, over and over, and only once my needs are satisfied will I deliver that final, lasting, sentence.

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AFTER



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CHAPTER TEN



Liliana

It's cold. Dark. Pitch fucking black but that's the least of my worries.

I've been down here for a day, maybe longer. Time seems to move funny when there's no way to keep track of it. And your mind seems to latch onto every sound as if there's more to it than just a drip of water or a creak in the floorboards.

I know this is part of his game.

That throwing me in here and leaving me to wallow in my fear is all part of his nasty little plan, and yet there's a bit of me that's relieved. At least I've got time to get my bearings, time to clear my head, to lose the fuzziness of being repeatedly drugged and knocked unconscious.

There's a bucket in the corner. The level of disgust I feel when I finally have to use it is indescribable, and now, afterwards, the whole cell has a faint aroma of piss, enough to catch in your throat and make you gag.

When I finally do hear the sound of footsteps, I can't keep the fear from radiating through me.

He's here. He's coming.

I force myself to my feet. My legs are shaking, but I do everything I can to still. I don't want him to see my fear. I don't want him to think that simply locking me in this basement or wherever the hell I am, is enough to break me.

My arms are still bound but I managed to manoeuvre my legs around so that now they're at least in front and not behind. I doubt it'll make much difference, but I have to hope, don't I?

The door springs open. It's almost alarming that there's no noise except a slight whoosh.

If this were a horror movie there would be a creak of rusty hinges, there would be some sort of dramatic moment.

But this isn't a movie. This isn't a dream either.

This nightmare is my life and it will be until the monster standing before me grows bored and decides to end it.

My breath hitches at the thought, my adrenaline spikes even more. I feel like this moment here will set the scene for all my days to come. I have to make a point now, I have to prove that I may be caught, but I am not beaten. At least, not yet.

I've stared at photos of him for so long, that to be here, to see him in the flesh feels almost surreal. It's as though I'm finally face to face with the devil. Even in the limited light, the glint in his dark eyes is obvious as is the trademark smirk and dimple. He exudes charm, and privilege and everything you'd expect from a man born into an obscene amount of wealth. It practically reeks out of every damn pore.

For a moment, it's like my brain can't compute this, like I can't do anything. I'm paralysed by my fear and I stand mute, pathetic, as he prowls into the space, getting far too fucking close.

"Not gone all shy on me now, have you?" he says with what sounds like a hint of disappointment.

I turn my lip up and sneer back, only that makes him actually laugh.

Slowly, he undoes one cuff and then the other, rolling his sleeves up his arms to reveal tanned, toned, beautiful skin beneath.

"Wouldn't want to ruin a perfectly good shirt," he explains, like the fabric is worth more than my life.

It feels like a taunt, a challenge, and before I can truly consider the consequences, I throw my head back and spit, ensuring it lands right onto

that precious white silk he's so concerned about.

His features morph into anger and he springs forward, grabbing me before I have a chance to get away. His hand wraps around my throat, he slams me back into the concrete, and a flash of pain explodes behind my eyes as my skull takes the impact.

My legs kick out. I'm not even trying to fight at this point, I just need to get some damned oxygen in.

"You really want to goad me?" He taunts.

"You think I'm just going to roll over and make this easy for you?" I hiss back as best I can.

He grins more, dropping his gaze to stare at my naked chest, at where my breasts are heaving with the struggle to just breathe. As quickly as I can I pull my arms up, covering myself.

"No need for modesty," he murmurs. "Every inch of you is mine now, so I'll look where I like, touch what I like, break what I like, too."

"Like hell you will." I snarl.

He grabs my hair, yanking me from the wall by it and he slams me down onto the floor so that I'm bent over, almost completely incapacitated with his body right over mine.

"You're going to learn very quickly that I do not like to be contradicted," he says into my ear.

I jerk my head, ignoring the searing pain of my scalp, and slam it into his nose. It's not hard enough to break, not hard enough to do anything but make his eyes stream, but it's all I can do in the circumstances, and I revel in that tiny victory.

He growls, slamming my face into the floor hard enough that for a few moments I think I black out. When I come around, he's no longer on me, his weight is no longer holding me down. I must have split my lip at some point because my mouth is filled with the coppery taste of my own blood.

I try to crawl away, try to force my body to move, but he grabs my ankle snatching me back.

"Where do you think you're going?" he asks.

I whimper. I hate that I do it, I hate how pathetic it sounds, but I'm still too dazed to think properly, to think rationally.

He grabs my hair again and it feels like there's a thousand tiny daggers ripping into my skin. I scream, trying to lash out with my bound hands, but he's quick to pin them down, to pin me back down under the weight of him.

And then, I hear the sound of a motor. It buzzes as it comes to life and he drags it over my skull, over my scalp, grazing it as it bites inch after inch while I stare in horror as one long mass of bleached hair drops to the floor. I can feel the metal now, I can register the back-and-forth action as he starts hacking away, shaving off my hair bit by bit and leaving it to cascade down to the dirt around me.

It shouldn't matter.

It's just hair.

And yet it feels violating.

It feels horrific.

I jerk, I snap my neck from side to side and all that does is grant me a blow to the face and more cuts from the blade.

I don't understand why he's doing this of all things, why he's destroying my looks.

When he's done, when it's all gone, he tosses the shaver, and gets back to his feet as if he's an artist admiring his work. I scramble back, scramble away and as far into the corner as I can get.

"Curious," he says, tilting his head to get a better look at me, as if he hasn't stared enough. "I knew the drapes didn't match the carpet, but I'd never have pegged you as a redhead."

"Fuck you."

He laughs again, undoing his belt slowly, like that too is a taunt. "Since you're asking so nicely..."

He lunges at me, and I scream out. I slam my bound wrists into his back and I pound it over and over, but it's like he can't even feel it. Like it does nothing.

His entire body weight swamps me once more. I'm strong but this man's strength seems otherworldly. As if he really is possessed by the devil himself.

With one hand he gets himself free, and with the other he wrenches my legs apart. As he forces himself into me, he groans.

"Fuck," he gasps. "Who would have thought Miss Goodey Two-Shoes would feel like this?"

I can't think.

I can't speak.

My tears start to stream down my face even though I knew this was coming, I knew this violation was going to happen. I'd even tried to

reconcile myself to it, tried to reason that it wouldn't matter, that whatever he does to me, it wouldn't matter.

He slides himself out, I'm not wet, not in the slightest bit aroused and, as he slams himself into me again, I can feel my insides ripping with the brutality.

Can he feel it?

Can he feel how he's violating my body or is all this pleasurable to him?

"Ahh fuck," he groans as if answering my unspoken thoughts. "This tight little cunt is too much."

He starts slamming into me harder, he's so big that every movement tears me more.

I scream out, I continue to fight, even though it's pointless now, and all the while he's groaning as though he's never had better sex before in his life.

"You're a fucked-up piece of shit." I curse, refusing to give in, refusing to become just another victim, even though that's exactly what I am now. What he's making of me.

He laughs. "Am I, now?" he replies, grabbing my throat, forcing me to look right at him. "How does it feel, then? To know I'm your future, that every breath you take, every moment of pleasure, of pain too, everything is decided by me. I'm your God now. I'm who you worship."

I screw my face up, wanting to reply, wanting to say something hateful, but the way he's assaulting me is stopping my brain from functioning. It's all I can focus on, all I can see. Even when I try to close my eyes, it's like he's there, taunting me, hurting me.

His thumb brushes against my cheek and I realise I'm still crying. I don't want to cry, I don't want him to see it. I want him to think I'm the hardnosed bitch I've pretended to be. I want him to see me as defiant, strong, not something he can simply take and break within a day.

"Your tears are so beautiful." He groans. "Do you know how much it turns me on more to see you cry?"

"Fuck you." It's the same insult. Same pathetic line. But it's all I have right now. It's the only defence left to me.

He snorts before moving me around, trying to position my body so that I'm no doubt angled better for him. Every thrust feels like a knife tearing me up. He continues to fuck me, harder and harder, like he's trying to

actually split me open and when he finally comes, I almost want to feel relieved.

Relieved that it's over.

Relieved that he's going to get his god damn body off of mine.

But as he slides out, I feel a wave of shame. Shame and revulsion too. I can still feel him, the heat of him, the pain, all of it.

He keeps me there, pinned down, staring between my legs while I lay there, trying my hardest not to tremble.

"I think I like this version of you best." he comments. "Your big mouth silent for once and your cunt bruised and battered and leaking out my come like you couldn't guzzle enough of it."

"Like hell." I spit. "It doesn't matter how many times you rape me, how many times you beat me either. It doesn't change what you are. If anything, it only proves it."

"Proves what?"

"That despite all your advantages, despite all your money and power, at your core, you're a piece of shit. You don't have any decency, you don't have any morals. There's nothing about you that anyone wants. That's why you do what you do, because deep down you know the world hates you, you know that without your name and the Brethren, you'd be a nobody. You're pathetic..."

He grabs my throat, tightening his grip to the point that he cuts off all my blood supply and my eyes bulge.

"But I do have money, I do have power. God has granted me everything, while you have nothing."

"I'd rather have nothing than be like you." I gasp.

His hand loosens. I splutter as I try to catch my breath, heaving over into the dirt. And then I realise he's stood right over me.

"You think you're so good, so noble, so fucking self-righteous." he states. "I'm going to break you down piece by piece." He bends down, picking up a clump of my discarded hair and he tosses it at my face. "Don't you get it, Liliana? You're no longer a person, you no longer have an identity, you don't have any rights, you don't get to control how this goes. You're a toy, a pet. You'll stay here as long as I decide, you'll entertain me in whatever fucked up ways I wish, and you'll thank me for it, you'll thank me for every bit of attention."

I shake my head, snarling back at him. Like hell I'll ever do that.

He squats down, with that smirk right across his face. “Wanna make a bet on how long it will take before you’re begging to suck my cock?”

I shouldn’t do it. I shouldn’t react. That’s what he wants and yet I refuse to take this lying down. I throw myself at him, landing one good punch before I’m slammed to the floor, and his boot meets my ribs with a sickening crunch.

I cry out, gasping for air as it feels like my lungs have suddenly collapsed and I can’t get enough oxygen in.

“Let’s start with the basics,” he says. “From now on, whenever I come down here, I expect you to be ready for me. I want you on your knees, back arched over, thighs spread wide open, ready to receive me, do you understand?”

I gulp as that mental image plays in my mind. Like fuck I will ever do that.

He tilts his head like he’s expecting me to agree, only I don’t think I have enough fight in me right now to argue. Instead, I drop my gaze and he must take that as some form of submission.

“If you behave yourself, you’ll find I can be kind.” he adds.

“And if I don’t?” I know I shouldn’t ask, I know I should just keep quiet but I can’t.

His eyes glint like he gets off on my disobedience in some way. “Then you’ll be punished severely.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN



Magnus

It takes everything I have to walk out and not simply fuck her again, just because I can.

Only, I shouldn't have done it the first time. I didn't mean to do it. I told myself to hold off, to wait a little, but her defiance was too much. Too tempting. Too damned delicious to ignore.

She thinks she's better than me? She thinks she still has a chance to fight this? Like she's not tied up, naked, in my cellar.

My dick stirs. Considering I've only just emptied my balls it's curious that I'm this turned on already. But then Miss Goodey Two-Shoes is more than just a fuck. She's a game. A new toy that I get to break over and over.

As I blink, I can see her, lying there, with those silent tears streaking her cheeks but her pride too great to make any pitiful sounds.

I'm pleased she didn't ask for mercy.

I'm pleased that she didn't try to bargain either. That even though she's defeated, she refuses to give up.

I wonder how long that will last, how far can I truly take this? I want to break her, I want to see the very moment she cracks and watch as she crawls to me, as she begs me to use her.

But that's gonna take time. At least, I sincerely hope it does. The last time I tried to play this game, the girl gave in within twenty-four hours, but then the circumstances were entirely different. She wasn't a true adversary, she was merely an unfortunate, caught up in something. She was a prototype. A trial run, if you like.

It's been years since I've truly faced off against a woman. Since I've truly had a challenge. I'm going to revel in every moment we spend together before she becomes too damaged and boring to keep.

"Having fun already?" Conrad asks, bringing me out of my thoughts.

I glare up at where he's stood at the top of the staircase waiting for me.

"What is it?" I reply. Obviously, there is something or he wouldn't be lurking. He'd be off, having fun.

"New meat," he says.

"Excuse me?" They weren't due for another week.

He gives me a knowing look before stating that the car is ready and waiting, as are apparently, our new merchandise.

"Tell Gabe to feed my pet." I order as I head to my room to clean up. I won't have the bitch starving to death before I've had my fill.



ONE BY ONE THEY WALK IN. TWELVE WOMEN, THREE MEN. ALL THEIR FACES are staring down at the floor, their shoulders are hunched over, everyone looks as though they're trying to make themselves invisible. Only, that's not the purpose of them being here.

I tilt my head, staring at the nearest woman. She's got a thick, woolly, floor length cardigan wrapped tightly around her body like it's a shield. Her black hair is a mess of tangles and the way she's shaking tells me all I need to know about her state of mind. But she barely looks old enough to be out of training bras, what could she have possibly done to warrant such a punishment? It's not my place to question. No, I'm the executioner, not the jury. I know my lane and I'm more than happy to stay in it.

Beside me, Conrad tuts. “Nothing of note.” he says, loud enough for me to hear, with that usual boredom dripping from his voice.

“How can you tell when they’re all so covered?” I reply, clicking my fingers and the guards around the room spring into action, yanking, clawing, tearing off fabric as our new merchandise scream and try to fight.

Within seconds, we have an entirely different view before us. One far more entertaining. Breasts and cunts are hastily covered by hands. Whimpers fill the room. Two of the men don’t even bother to hide their dicks, they just stand there, glaring.

They’ve all been tested already, had their blood taken. Those who have infections, diseases, STI’s, are quarantined until they’re clean. The Lords and Ladies who come here, who visit and play, expect a certain level of service, they’d hardly thank me if they left with an infection or worse.

I step forward, clearing my throat, and all those scared little eyes snap to me.

“Welcome to Oblivion.” I say.

A few of them react to that. One woman starts crying, shaking her head, as if this is all a bad nightmare and if she tries hard enough, she’ll wake herself up.

I don’t care for their hysterics, they’ll have time to make peace with this. I’m kind enough to grant them a week of training before my customers can have their pick. Besides, most of them are only here for a few months, six at best. They’ll take their punishment, they’ll serve their time and then they’ll return to their nice little lives, hopefully with a lesson or two learnt in the process.

But the man at the end, my lips quirk as I stare at him. He was once like me, a big name, a man to watch, before his big fuckup put him out of God’s favour and he ended up here.

“How far you’ve fallen.” I murmur.

He does me the courtesy of flinching and then he’s handed his mask. Red.

He looks back at me, his eyes narrowing, and I can see he’s already contemplating his escape. But there is none from Oblivion, that’s the point.

You’re sent here to serve, sent here to learn.

You leave when your sentence is done and not before.

But this man here, he has no limit. He has no end. He’ll stay here, he’ll be used, abused, fucked within an inch of his life, and forced to do all

number of unspeakable things until he's no longer fit for purpose. And when that happens it'll get even worse, he'll go to the lower levels, the ones where they don't crave sex, where they crave blood and pain.

And he'll bleed for them, alright. He'll bleed, and he'll cry, and he'll beg for mercy just like they all do.

"A life sentence," Conrad says, "Guess I'll know how that feels soon..."

I roll my eyes, turning my attention back to my brother. "Don't be so dramatic." I sigh. "Anyone of these people would happily switch position with you."

"They can do it. Perhaps it would be better to be here, with my arsehole fucked for eternity than be forced to marry..."

"You're thirty-eight." I state, growing irritated. "High time you were married, and high time you produced an heir, not just for yourself but for me, for our family."

Conrad glares at me. "Make your own heirs. I'm not your stud you can rent out."

"I found you a good bride. A pretty bride. A young one too." I add. It could have been so much worse. In many ways he should be thanking me for landing such a prize.

He scowls like none of those things matter.

"Not to mention, she's rich. Joining our two families will strengthen your position."

"I'm not worried about my position." Conrad mutters.

"You should be." He's a reaper, he's a Blake, and yet he has no accolades, no merits, the man is the epitome of a rich playboy, and such a reputation will not bode well with the Brethren. We both know he needs to settle down, he needs to behave, present himself as a respectable member of society, even if he does continue to play in private.

"She's a bitch. A stuck up, self-centred..."

"I don't give a shit." I cut across him. "You will marry her, you will fuck her, you will make sure she pops out a son or two and then, if she's still giving you a headache you can lock her away and be done with it."

He grins, swigging on his hipflask as if my words have planted a seed.

"Devin is more suited to that part," he says quietly. "Why not have him married and producing heirs?"

"Devin is not under discussion." I retort. And for good reason too. He may be our brother, he may be a Blake, but right now, the man is

uncontrollable, a liability. There's a reason he's not a reaper, even though it's his birthright. Most days it's all I can do to keep him away from the Brethren's ever reaching eyes.

"You could do it yourself." He taunts.

Only, we both know why I don't. I've been down that particular road already. It didn't end well the first time. I have no intention of making a second attempt.

I give him a withering look before turning on my heel. We all have our parts to play. It's about time Conrad accepted his.

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CHAPTER TWELVE



Liliana

He comes back the next day. At least, I think it's the next day. I'm lying there, half dazed, freezing cold, and starving hungry despite the meagre food I was given, when I hear the sound of his footsteps.

"...whenever I come down here, I expect you to be ready for me. I want you on your knees, back arched over, thighs spread wide open, ready to receive me..."

Those disgusting words echo in my head, but I don't move. I refuse to. If he thinks I'm going to make this easy, then he's got another thing coming.

When the door opens, I can see from the way his eyes meet mine that he's ready for another fight. Another round of this twisted, fucked up little game.

I get to my feet, not in a show of respect, but because I want him to see that I'm ready for whatever shit he has planned.

His eyes linger on my body, to where the cool air is making my nipples harden. What I wouldn't give for something to cover me. Just a T-shirt would be enough. But I know I'll get no such thing from him.

"I should say I'm disappointed..." he says as he takes one slow step forward. "I half expected you to heed my warning, but then, where would be the fun if you had?"

"Fun?" I splutter.

The word barely leaves my mouth before he's pouncing on me. Grabbing me.

I slam my bound fists into his side. He grunts as I make contact, but the aim is soft, weak, my strength is failing even in this short time of being here.

He slams me back into the wall and my head smashes into the concrete making stars erupt behind my eyes and a cry escapes my lips before I silence it.

"I will teach you obedience." He growls, leaning right over me. "I will beat it into you."

He drags me from the room. His hand is round the back of my neck, digging into my throat, and my feet stumble with every step. It's a mark of how weak I've already become that such a hold has any impact. We don't go far, just along the way, to where another room has been prepared.

I'm thrown onto my knees and as I scramble back up, I see a man in a white coat, stood, waiting for me. He looks to Magnus who simply nods and together, they manhandle me onto a gurney and force my legs into the metal stirrups.

I scream out. I lash out too, but I'm strapped down and rendered immobile almost immediately. Magnus tightens a belt like one right across my abdomen and it's so tight I have to restrict my breathing so my stomach doesn't expand fully.

The way my legs are bent up leaves me wide open and exposed and the significance isn't lost as the balding man turns his back, fiddles with something, and then moves right between my thighs.

"What the fuck do you...?" My words turn to a scream as something is pushed into me and forces me even wider. It feels like my actual core is on fire and now I don't dare move for fear that whatever he's doing will hurt more.

I don't know why I do it, I don't know what stupid response this is, but I look to Magnus hoping to get some hint of what the hell is going on. He's stood, leaning against the wall as if this is all so tedious to him. When he meets my gaze, there's nothing, just those dark, empty pupils staring back at me.

"You'll feel a little bit of pressure," the man torturing my insides says.

Only, pressure is not what I feel. I gasp, my body physically locks up with the searing pain that reverberates from my core to my hips. What the fuck is he doing? What is this? My eyes water, I blink rapidly refusing to cry and then that pain just stops. Whatever is wedging me open is removed, and my body shakes with the after-effects of whatever they've just done.

"Finished?" Magnus asks.

"All done," the man in white says before slipping out the door and leaving me here, still strapped down, at the mercy of this psycho.

"What the fuck did you just do to me?" I hiss.

Magnus's lips curl as he crosses the room. "We wouldn't want any accidents, now would we?" he replies.

Accidents? What the... his hand grabs my thigh just as it hits me what it is, what's inside me. I should feel relieved, I should feel some sense of reprieve considering what he's already done. He's already raped me once and he didn't wear a condom that time, did he?

"You put an IUD in me." I state. I'm not even sure if that's how you'd word it, but my mind feels frazzled. My stomach is alternating between what feels like butterflies and mild cramps. I thought I felt like shit before, but right now, I feel like I'm teetering over a ravine and any second I'm going to fall.

"Disappointed you won't carry my child?" he says in that taunting tone.

I spit back at him. It's not a mature response, but I'm just so disgusted it feels like the only act of defiance I can make.

As if I'd ever want that.

As if I'd ever desire such a thing as that.

I expect him to react with violence, but instead, he runs his hand down where the saliva has hit him and he licks it up. "Delicious," he murmurs. "I wonder if your cunt will taste as good as this?"

The thought of it, of him touching me like that, makes my insides lock up. What would he even get from such an act anyway? Everything he's done so far has either been to humiliate me or hurt me. Eating me out would

hardly fall under those parameters, and yet, it would still be violating, wouldn't it? It would still be just as dehumanising as everything else.

I draw in a ragged breath, wishing to God I could just clamber off this damned gurney and regain a tiny bit of dignity.

Magnus squirts something over me, something cold and wet. It makes me jerk in shock and the whole gurney creaks with the movement. Then he takes a can, shakes it up and covers my labia, my thighs, my pussy in something thick and clinging. He produces a razor, one of those old fashioned, metal safety ones that men use to shave their faces and he drags it up my thigh in a manner I know is meant to taunt.

Apparently, he's going to shave me? Does he really think I'm just going to lay still and let him run that blade over me?

I jerk as it gets close to my most sensitive part and there's a tiny hit of pain, a nick that lingers on after the metal is removed.

Magnus tuts with irritation. "Do you want me to cut your clit off, is that it?" he asks.

I shake my head quickly. No, I don't want that. Of all the awful things he's done to me, I would do absolutely anything to ensure he does not mutilate me in such a manner.

"Well then," he continues, planting one finger on either side of my entrance and spreading me wider still. "Quit moving or your pretty cunt will end up sliced to pieces."

Quit moving. Simple words. Simple damned instructions. I curse him under my breath. I whisper those hateful words because I'm half-convinced he will do it; he will make me bleed just for the fun of it.

When he's finally done, he washes me down, dries me, and then runs his fingertips up between my lower lips, tracing every humiliating inch of me. "So smooth," he comments, clearly admiring his handiwork. "I think this pussy deserves a little reward, don't you?"

I glare back. He's acting like we're playing some sort of scene, like we're two consenting adults and he's not simply taking what he wants.

"No?" He muses, leaning closer between my thighs. "You want to be punished instead, is that it? You want to be used like a dirty little slut, instead of rewarded like a good girl?"

I don't know how to respond. Whatever I say feels wrong. He's tricking me, I know that much, forcing me to play whatever this twisted game is.

Maybe I should goad him, maybe I should piss him off so much that he pulls out his gun and in a moment of anger he ends it for both of us.

“Get the fuck off me.” I hiss.

His hand lashes out, striking me right on my clit. A jolt of pain makes me gasp and then my stomach immediately starts cramping again. Only, that clearly isn’t enough for Magnus. He hits me again, harder this time. I try to close my legs, I try to move but the leather straps hold me so tightly.

Tears start streaming down my face. I bite my lip, silencing the sound that tries to escape. No way will I give in. No way will I cry, or make a sound, or in any way beg that bastard to stop as he continues to abuse me.

My pussy is throbbing, just breathing makes me wince with pain. By the time he’s done, I know I’m more than just bruised.

And then he does the unthinkable.

He lowers his face, gripping my thighs as if they’re not strapped down and he drags his tongue right up my centre.

My breath catches. I glare at him, half in shock, half in pure hatred. Is he seriously considering what I think he is?

“She’s all pretty and pained, and ready for me now,” he murmurs.

My adrenaline spikes. I buck my hips trying to throw him off, but I have such little movement it means nothing. Within in seconds, he buries his face at my core and starts devouring me.

I scream. I curse. I curl my fists into the tightest balls I can manage, impaling my ragged nails into my palms.

After the beating he gave me, now that he’s lapping at me, it feels almost soothing, but I refuse to acknowledge that thought. I refuse to admit that there’s any pleasure to be had. He spears one finger and then another, twisting them against the tears he made from raping me only yesterday.

Perhaps he’s admiring his handiwork, perhaps that’s what this is, him feeling the physical results of what his body inflicted on mine.

And then his lips clamp around my clit.

I jolt.

My whole body locks up.

I will not come for him. I will not give him this.

I shut my eyes tight, reminding myself over and over of who this is, who is touching me, that I don’t want this. That I’m not enjoying this. He can force himself onto me as many times as he likes, but I will not give him this piece of me. I will not give him this satisfaction.

Perhaps he senses it.

Perhaps he can tell where my head is at.

He withdraws his fingers, sliding them out tauntingly slowly, and then he hauls me off the gurney like he hates me just as much as I hate him.

My legs are shaking so badly I can't hold myself up, and I collapse onto the concrete floor.

I hear the sound of something clicking on.

"You're filthy," he states. "Disgusting. And you stink of shit."

Like I've had a chance to wash over the last God knows how many days they've had me, or even before for that matter.

I look up just as the first wave of water drenches my face. It's freezing cold. Ice cold. He hoses me down like a dog that's puked over themselves. I huddle up, throw my arms over my head and curl up, but he merely kicks me over, forcing that jet over every inch of my body.

It feels like a mercy when it finally ends. I can't breathe, I can't stop shaking. It feels like I've endured hours and hours of torture though in truth, it couldn't have been more than a few minutes at best.

He grabs me by my arm, dragging me out. My legs refuse to cooperate. My feet are so cold they're more like solid blocks rather than individual toes.

And then he throws me back into my cell, tosses me onto the floor like discarded trash before he slams the door shut and pitches me back into the darkness once more.

I'm still soaking wet.

I can feel the last of the water trickling down and with my hands I try to sweep it off while a voice in my head says there's little point bothering. Maybe if I'm lucky I'll get pneumonia and die. How ironic that would be, to simply slip away in my sleep after everything this man has done to capture me.

The lack of smell that tells me my bucket has been emptied. I crawl over, glancing in to confirm that fact and figure that he must have sent a servant or someone to do it while he was abusing me in the other room.

And right next to it is a bowl of water and some meagre looking soup.

For a moment, I briefly consider not eating it. I briefly consider starving myself, but my thirst gets the better of me and I lap it up, barely tasting the soup as I gulp it down.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN



Magnus

“We have a problem.” Dustin, my Head of Security says, as he meets me by the entrance to Oblivion, barely letting me get inside.

“And what is that?” I reply.

“One of the new girls. She’s a Turner.”

Of all the things I expected, that was not it.

Micah Turner is the head of our Chapter. He’s as close to a God as you can get. Everyone thinks the Brethren operate with one chain of command. One single unifying leadership but we’re spread all over the world. It just simply wouldn’t work like that. No, we have Chapters, local leaders if you will, and they all report into the Higher Lord—a man no one knows the name of, a faceless God who rules as though he were Zeus atop of his mountain.

“A Turner?” I repeat.

He nods, looking like he’s already shit himself over that fact.

“What’s her full name?”

“Mary-Anne.”

“Mary fucking Anne?” I growl. His actual damned daughter? How the fuck did she end up here? How the fuck did no one even realise?

“We didn’t know. She was on a list. We were just following orders. How were we supposed to recognise...” He doesn’t finish that sentence before I’ve beaten the words from his lips.

Christ, this is a mess. I push past, storming into the building, ignoring everyone that tries to stop me, that fawns at me, all the bodies fucking around me, everything.

When I get to my office, I can see from the doorway that it’s already occupied.

“This is her?” I ask as my eyes land on the girl. And girl she is. It’s the same one who wore the woolly cardigan. Only, she’s wearing nothing now except the damned collar around her neck. She’s on her knees, covering her body as best she can, alternating between shame and glares when she thinks we won’t notice.

“This is her.” Dustin says from behind me.

I let out a low sigh, crossing the distance and haul her up till she’s on her feet. “Tell me what your sentence is.”

She shakes her head which only pisses me off more.

I dig my hands into her arms, ensuring she feels just enough pain to comply, and she starts weeping as if I’ll just give in and start comforting her.

“She’s refused to talk to any of us.” Dustin declares. “Apparently, she demanded to see you.”

My eyebrows raise at that. “Fine.” I murmur more to myself. “Get me the paperwork. I want to see who made the orders.”

“That’s just it.” Ivor, Dustin’s second in command pipes up. “We can’t find it.”

“What do you mean you can’t find it?” I growl, letting her go and she falls into a heap at my feet.

None of this is making sense. There’s always a paper trail. A clear sentence laid out by the Chapter.

My eyes move from one man to another and everyone stares blank at me.

“I didn’t do anything.” Mary-Anne starts wailing. “They picked me up, they tossed me into a van and I was brought here...”

“Who?” I ask.

She shrugs but in reality, it doesn't fucking matter who it was. Someone brought an innocent here, and my men, instead of checking, just rolled her out. In all the time I've managed Oblivion, I've never once had an incident. Never once had an issue. Call me suspicious, call me paranoid, but I doubt this was a mere accident. And the fact that a Turner is involved? Jesus, her father might well have our heads for this.

My eyes narrow as I land back on the girl. She can't be more than sixteen. She's got a woman's body, but that face, it's obvious, she's still a child. Too bad, I guess.

As Dustin meets my gaze, he knows what I'm thinking. He knows what has to be done.

“Come on,” he says gently, kindly, helping the girl back up, and he wraps his jacket around her. “Let's get you sorted...”

She falls for it, leaning into him for reassurance, but she must see something on the guard's face as she passes and she turns back, reality suddenly hitting her like a ton of bricks.

“No,” she screams.

I tut, folding my arms. Like fuck I've got time for this. I need her gone. Sorted. I need all the evidence erased. I want every bit of footage of her destroyed. I want every room she's been in wiped. I want her every existence scrubbed out.

“No,” she screams louder, starting to fight.

Bloody Dustin tries yanking on her arm as if she'll suddenly capitulate, but I'm done with this. Done with it all.

I strut over, grab her head in my hands and as quickly as I can I wrench her face to the side, snapping her neck in one.

Her body slumps, Dustin grabs her arm to hold her and I turn back, once more focusing on the next steps.

Someone is setting me up. Someone is stitching me up.

I call Conrad; as typical, the man doesn't pick up. No doubt he's busy fucking, or drinking, or God knows what, but I leave a voicemail telling him to call me back. We need to be careful, we need to watch ourselves.

And I need to find out who the hell is behind all this so I can skin them alive.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



Magnus

When I get back to the house, I'm more than wound up. I need an outlet, I need a way to vent, and luckily, I have just that down in the basement.

She screams as I drag her out. I'm not gentle. If she had any hair I'd be pulling her along by it. It's almost a shame that I did shave her, but needs must, and taking such steps was necessary for the psychological effect, if nothing else.

She stares up at me as I plonk her down in the middle of my playroom, though it resembles more of a medieval dungeon with all the torture devices I have.

For a second, our eyes connect and I'd love to know what she's thinking, what that determined little mind of hers is plotting. I know she still thinks she can beat me, I can see it in the defiant way she acts.

I hope that lasts.

And I want it to.

I want to keep fighting, to keep pushing, to truly indulge in every little fucked up thing I can think of before she finally cracks.

As I grab her right arm, she lashes out. One hard punch that hits me in my ribs. But it makes no difference. She's strung up, stretched, spread eagled on rack, with every inch of her on perfect display. In truth, I've never seen anything as beautiful as a woman's body when it's displayed like this. No art in the world, no fine jewellery, nothing compares to the magnificence of a woman forced to comply.

I made an adjustment to the original design so that there's a bracket to hold the head upright, and, as Liliana stares right back at me, I know it was a genius move.

Too many of my past toys have ducked their faces, dropped their gaze, drifted off when they're exhausted or their shame has taken them.

Liliana will be permitted no such mercy.

No, I'll get to witness every moment of her pain, of her ecstasy, of her emotions too, as she's forced to watch what I do to her from the giant mirror on the opposite wall.

With my hands, I run them down both her thighs. Already I can feel the way she's turning to softness and while I like the idea of her being pliable, I do wonder how much I'll miss her strength when it's finally gone.

With one firm push, I wedge the toy inside her.

She gasps, giving me a delicious hit of her shock before her face turns once more to stone.

She's tough, I'll give her that. Tough. Stubborn. Absolutely perfect.

A quick tap of the control makes the egg come to life. The ropes creak as her body responds, but it's only a low vibration, enough to tease, not to satisfy.

Yesterday, she had the audacity to think she could deny me an orgasm.

Today, she'll be learning that she isn't permitted such a decision.

She'll come when I decide. She'll come as many times as I choose.

I'll make her body submit over and over to her shame and eventually she will get the message that I am her master. I am her everything.

I move to stand behind her, marvelling at how well we fit, how our bodies seem made for one another. Destined for one another. With a raise of my hand and a sharp flick, I bring the leather whip down onto her back.

And she hisses.

Oh, how she hisses.

“I gave you orders, pet.” I say calmly. “I told you exactly how you were to greet me when I entered your cell. That you were to be ready for me, and yet, so far, you’ve not obeyed once.”

No, the little minx was curled up, half asleep when I walked in. Even when I’d cleared my throat and made my presence known, she’d made no attempt to move, no attempt to do as she was told.

Through the mirror, our eyes connect and I can see that defiance flashing in her brown irises. Did she really think I would let it slide? Did she really think my words were empty, that they meant nothing?

I bring the whip down again. I slice it across her skin and, as the flesh erupts into tiny welts, I flick the button, just for a moment to increase the tempo of the toy.

She moans. Not a sound of joy. A pleading, guttural sound that dies as quickly as it leaves her lips.

She’s got her jaw clenched so tightly. She’s gritting her teeth so hard I wonder if they’re not smashing. But she won’t deny me my chorus. No, she’ll sing for me. She’ll sing loud enough that the entire house all hears her.

I strut back to the far wall, the one where all my instruments hang in a neatly, organised display, and I pull off the gag from its hook. As I walk back up to her, I take a moment to enjoy the scene before me. To feel her breasts, to pinch her nipples and slap them hard enough that my hands leave a nice print behind.

It’s not easy to pry her mouth open. She fights, trying to thrash her head, but the bracket keeps her right where I want her and in the end, I pinch her nose, half suffocating her before she finally gasps her submission.

Two seconds is all it takes to shove the thing behind her teeth and then I fix the strap behind her head to ensure she can’t simply spit it back out. While an ordinary gag is designed to keep a mouth silent, to stifle the words and cries of a captive, this one does the exact opposite.

It prevents her from shutting her mouth. It prevents her from biting her tongue too. Every delicious breath she takes, every cry, every moan is amplified now and will become a battleground that she has to fight through.

And every noise I draw out will be a victory I claim.

When I look back at her, she keeps her gaze fixed ahead and I know what she’s staring at. That it’s her own image now haunting her.

So I return to my position, I raise the whip and once more bring it down on her back.

Only I'm met with silence. Still, she defies me.

I draw myself up, straighten my arm, and punish her further.

Over and over I strike. And eventually, my efforts are rewarded by a whimper. One tiny hint of pain.

"You will scream." I snarl, feeling sweat covering my own brow. "You will scream, and you will cry, and you will beg."

With every lash I delve out, I hit that button, mixing the pain with the pleasure, fucking with her senses more. I can see the tears streaking down her face, dropping off her chin and onto her heaving breasts.

Perhaps I should clamp them. Bind them. Take this even further.

Only, she's hanging off the ropes, and I know from the little food I permitted her to be given last night, that such action might be too much.

Slowly, I must go slowly.

Besides, I have all the time in the world to break my toy. I hit the button again, increasing the tempo and her entire body jerks like she's been electrocuted. She lets out a whimper and I know from the desperate sound of it that I am making progress. That my ice-bitch is starting to melt.

"Lord Blake."

I turn, snarling at the interruption. Did I not say I didn't want to be disturbed? Did I not make myself abundantly clear?

The servant keeps his eyes on the floor, flinching as he murmurs the words, "We have a guest."

"Fine," I hiss.

I guess my plaything has been granted a reprieve, a moment's rest.

I glance back at her as I reach the door and I can see the relief etched in her face. Maybe it's because I'm a sadist, maybe it's because I want to leave her as fucked up and depraved as I am, but I hit a different button. One that leaves the toy inside her pulsating. One that will keep taunting her, torturing her, getting her so close to coming but never allowing her that release.

Perhaps a few hours may be enough. Perhaps when I return, she'll beg me to fuck her.

Either way, her cunt will be dripping with need.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



Magnus

“I ’m sorry, sir.” Gabe says quietly as soon as I enter the room.

Ahead, I can see them, two Lords, my brother, but it’s Antonio’s presence that makes me pause. Something truly awful must have happened for the higher-ups up to deign to get off their seats and come visit.

I bat my butler away and turn my focus to the man they call the Kingmaker.

He inclines his head as I approach and I pour two whiskeys, already knowing the way he likes it. Single Malt. Neat. No ice. Just a double measure.

“Magnus,” he says, shaking my hand before taking the drink.

“What do we owe the pleasure?” I ask.

“Not a pleasure, I’m afraid.” he replies, giving no other hint in his voice.

I gesture to the chesterfield and he takes his seat before I do mine with a slight creak of the leather.

“We have a situation,” he states. “A delicate one.”

“Tell me.”

Antonio glances around, waving his hand and all but dismissing the other Lords from the room. Conrad glances at me and I give the slightest nod for him to follow them out.

“Girls are going missing. Notable girls. Notable families.” Antonio says as soon as the door shuts behind them all.

“What girls?” I ask.

He lists of half a dozen, most I know only from their surname, not because they’re of any interest to me.

“Also, Mary-Anne Turner.” he says, fixing me with a look I don’t like.

I take a slow sip while deciding how best to play this. “What is it you want me to do?” I’m not a detective. I don’t give a shit what happens to these families. My role is to play executioner for the Brethren, to meet out justice. I don’t get involved in bullshit like this.

His lips curl. He sinks back, causing the oxblood leather to creak and he pulls one ankle up over the other. “I know you have her. Or at least, you did.” he says quietly. Confidently. And yet, not exactly threateningly. “You’ve probably already realised you were being set up and you’ve disposed of her if you have any wits about you.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.” I reply calmly, before taking another delightful drink. Like I’ll admit what I’ve done with such little evidence to accuse me.

“No?” He muses. “I happen to know the girl was brought to Oblivion, and I happen to know she’s not there anymore.”

“If she is...”

“Hold that thought.” Antonio says, raising his finger slightly. “Hear me out first.”

I shift, making myself comfortable, but all the while I’m aware of the knife I’ve got tucked into my ankle. If this man tries anything, I’ll gut him before he can even make it halfway to the door. I don’t give a fuck who he is. I don’t give a fuck that he *made* the last two Chapter Lords. I will rip his throat out before I give in.

“Turner is failing.”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard,” he says. “He’s got health issues. It’s need to know. We thought we could contain it, keep it under wraps. But the man is

deteriorating and someone outside the circle obviously knows.”

“Why are you telling me this?” This is dangerous talk. This is exactly the kind of treasonous shit that gets you sent to Oblivion.

“You’re a smart man, Magnus. Clever. You have the right credentials. With the right support you could do it.”

I blink. Not quite sure I heard him right, but then, what else could he be suggesting?

“They took his daughter, literally pulled her off the street,” he continues. “If that isn’t a sign, then what is?”

I put the glass down, leaning forward, glancing behind to double check that we are still alone, that no one is there to hear all of this. He may be the Kingmaker, but that doesn’t make him completely infallible.

“What about the other girls?” I say. It’s not just Mary-Anne. He said it himself, other notable girls are going walkies, too.

Antonio waves his hand. “They’re nothing. Just jabs. They’re meant to get us riled up. It’s all part of a plot to create upheaval.”

“And you think you can get ahead of this?” I ask.

He nods. “With you as Chapter Lord.”

Jesus, this is happening. He actually means it. It’s hard not to revel in the thought of it, of having that much power. Of having that much authority. God, the things I would change. The things I would do. My mind drifts to Conrad and Devin. Being Chapter Lord would help them, would help us. We’d be the leading family then. We’d be unmatched, unrivalled.

And we’d also put a massive target on our heads.

I grin at the idea. Wouldn’t it be fun, to truly have a fight, to truly feel danger? God, the adrenaline rush alone from such a fight would be worth it.

“So you agree?” Antonio asks. “If Turner is removed...”

“How?” It’s not exactly an easy thing to achieve. It’s not meant to be. The only reason Turner became Chapter Lord was because the old one died in such shocking circumstances we all had to move quickly to maintain calm. To simply put Turner aside now will cause a riot.

“That’s none of your concern.” Antonio says. “As long as you trust me enough...”

His words fade out as my thoughts focus on that; trust. Do I trust him? He’s never been an enemy, but he’s never been an ally, either. Could he be the one behind this, pulling the strings, setting me up for failure and using my own greed to hang myself?

“Let me do my job, Magnus. And in a couple of months, you will have it all.”

He holds out his hand like an offering, an agreement. I have no cause to question him and yet, if he is up to something, I can take my own steps, I can ensure me and my brothers outlive it.

We shake, both of us crunching the other’s knuckles, and as he’s shown out, I stay there, mulling it over.

But this is proof, isn’t it? This is more proof that God favours me, favours our family. It’s not like I really need it, I mean, you don’t get to where I am without God on your side. You aren’t just granted honours like being a Blake, being a reaper, just because you go lucky. Things like that, they’re bestowed on those who are worthy. Those who deserve it. Men like me.

With a satisfied sigh, I take a final swig of my whiskey and mull my future over. Just because my path is God-given doesn’t make it any less taxing to achieve. And besides, if I’m going to do this, I will need to tighten my ship, I need to protect my assets—starting first with the loose cannons.

I pick up my phone, scroll down quickly, then hit the dial button.

“It’s me,” I say as the line picks up. “Put him on.”

There’s a momentary pause, a shuffle, and then I hear the phone handed over.

“Devin,” I say and my brother grunts down the other end. He was never much of a conversationalist before, but this last year has done nothing to help that.

“I have a task for you.”

The silence tells me he’s listening.

“There are some loose ends I need sorted.” I state. “Do this, clear the way, and you can come back.”

“How many?” my brother asks, already understanding what I’m not saying.

“Fifteen.”

Fifteen people I need eliminated. Fifteen people I need to disappear. Not all of them are technically a threat right now, but they could be, given the right incentive and I’m not going to let that happen.

“I want her back. That’s my price.”

I let out a frustrated sigh because, still, the man is obsessed with her. It’s been five years. Five fucking years.

“She’s not worth it.” I state.

“To me, she is. Give me Paitlyn. Give me her, and I’ll do what you want.”

It’s the most the man has said in more than a year. It’s hard not to react, not to lose my patience entirely. “Dev...”

“Give me Paitlyn,” he all but screams down the phone at me.

“Fine,” I agree. “But you do the task first. Then you get her.”

I’m not so stupid as to hand her over. For all I know, he’ll snap her neck in five minutes and then the job won’t get done at all.

He hangs up on me, which tells me enough that he agrees.

And in the silence that follows, I pull up the screen, watching the girl in question on my phone. She’s huddled in a corner, on the second lowest level of Oblivion. The one where every mask is claimed for. Every person has an owner.

Paitlyn is lucky enough that her owner isn’t into the more physical types of torture. No, he’s more about the psychological; though I guess we have that in common. Brute force will only get you so far, and besides, where’s the fun in achieving what any man can do? Breaking a mind is far more satisfying, breaking a person, watching them alter and bend to your will, that is the finest delicacy, the greatest art a person can achieve.

Darling Paitlyn, here, has been on the receiving end of that for long enough that she’s clearly lost her mind entirely. Perhaps it’ll be a mercy to hand her back to Devin so that he can finally have his few hours of revenge and close that chapter once and for all.

God permitting it will be as simple as that. Devin will do what is necessary and then he will return, become the brother he was before. Become the brother both I and Conrad need him to be.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



Liliana

He leaves me there. Hanging, strung up like a piece of meat.

My back is agony. It feels like he's torn every inch of flesh from my bones. My jaw aches from the way my mouth has been forced open. But none of that compares to the awful thing inside me. The way it keeps building and building, and worse, the way my body responds. The way it desperately chases each new wave like my very existence is dependent on it.

I need to come.

I want to come so badly.

And yet every time I get close, it stops. The vibrations cease. Everything stills.

My face is strewn with tears, saliva drools down my chin. I'm a wreck. A complete mess. And that's exactly how he wanted me.

No doubt he's imagining strolling back in and me begging to suck his cock. Well, I won't do that. I'll chew my own tongue off before I ever utter

those words.

When the door finally does open, it isn't Magnus stood there. It's a stranger. He blinks in surprise and then quickly recovers as if this is all perfectly normal. From the clothes he's wearing, I guess he's some sort of servant, or butler.

In silence, he unties the bindings and catches my pathetic body.

I half fear he'll remove the toy but mercifully, he doesn't seem to be aware of it, or at least isn't paying it any attention. With fumbling hands, he undoes the buckle behind my head and that awful gag is yanked out. My jaw protests as I force it to move, hot pain shoots through my teeth as if they've all been chiselled down to nothing.

He carries me out, lays me back in my cell and then places a tray of food on the floor by my face.

I'm too hungry, and too exhausted to care what anyone thinks, and I crawl closer, eating it right off the plate like an animal. With shaky hands, I raise the cup and gulp back all the water. It tastes like heaven. It tastes like the most incredible drink I've ever had.

When it's all gone, he scoops down to remove the tray and I can't hold back the words.

"Why are you helping him?"

He turns, meeting my eyes for the first time. "It is my duty to serve," he says stiffly. As if he too has been tortured, broken, remoulded into a brainwashed shell with no moral compass. "God has ordained it."

"What God?" I spit back. "He's a monster. He's a psychopathic piece of shit and you're no better than he is by helping him."

He tuts, shaking his head like I've just blasphemed and shuts the door. As soon as the darkness envelopes me, I bury my fingers inside myself, pulling out the toy and I toss it as hard as I can against the wall. My back protests at all the movement but it's worth it.

And yet that humming, that vibration continues.

It reverberates in the silence of the room.

I throw my hands up, trying to block it out but it makes no difference. It continues on, jarring my senses, slowly making me feel like I'm going mad.

All I can feel is his hands still on me. His stench still on me. I can smell it, thick, heavy, some stupidly expensive aftershave that makes my head feel dizzy and intoxicated.

I fall into a daze. Neither awake nor asleep. My head feels like I'm on a carousel and I'm spinning around and around. There's a laughter ringing in my ears. His laughter. He's taunting me even now. I roll over, I try to get away from the images, but I must be hallucinating because it feels like I'm floating, like I'm no longer in this cell at all.

I gasp out, I kick, I thrash and that searing pain slices down my back making it feel like he burnt off all my flesh with fire instead of simply whipping it.

I expect him to come back, my ears are pricked, poised, ready to hear those awful footsteps but they don't come. Instead, it's like a phantom is in my head, like he's possessed my mind. Every time I blink, I can see his face, every time I breath in, I can taste him.

I wretch, trying to throw up the contents of my stomach, but my body refuses to cooperate.

Maybe I am mad. Maybe they put something in my food. Drugged me, even, but there's little I can do about it now.

So I lay there, face down in the dirt, with the icy stone-cold feeling almost therapeutic and for the first time, I truly give in. I fall apart. I weep every last tear and I let myself feel every moment of my terror, every moment of my fear.

I let it all out, telling myself that it's okay, that in the darkness it's safe to give in, but by the time he comes back I'll need to be strong again. I'll need to pretend. I'll need to put that stoic mask back on and prove that I'm not as easily broken as all that.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



Liliana

It's late when I hear those tell-tale footsteps. At least, I think it is.

My head feels fuzzy, my body feels pathetically weak. I didn't have the strength to even sit up and instead lapped from my water bowl like I really was a dog.

But as those sounds continue, I realise something is off. The weight, the strut, it's not Magnus.

I guess I've grown so used to the monster now, that I've learnt those little details. Things a lover would know, the sound of his breathing, his taunting laughter, the way he groans when he comes. I curl my face up, feeling every bit of disgust at that notion.

And then the door sweeps open, bright light pours in, invading every part of my cell, and I have to throw my hands up to protect my eyes from what feels like the very heavens coming down on me.

"Fuck."

That word, it's not said in shock or sympathy. It's gasped the way someone does when they've just found an unexpected prize. I can almost hear the smile behind it and my body quivers, already predicting how this is going to go.

Whoever it is, takes a step, then another.

And instinct has me springing up, moving away, only a hand latches around my ankle, anchoring me in place.

I scream out, using my other leg to kick at them and the laugh he gives me, the laugh is just as cruel as Magnus's. I squint back, staring through the awful brightness at the man before me and with a shudder I realise I know who it is.

It's the man from the alleyway, the man whose nose I broke, and who I stabbed when I was still trying to convince myself that I could run from this, that I could escape my fate.

Did Magnus let him in here? Is that what's happening? I can barely form that thought before he's lunging at me, dragging my body, clawing at it.

"Fucking whore," he spits.

I'm too weak to fight. As much as I lash out and try to get away, I don't stand a chance.

He pins me down, wedges his knee right up between my thighs, and he wraps one hand around my throat while he slaps my breasts for the sheer fun of it.

I scream out, choking on the little air he grants me.

With his nails, he claws at my skin, grazing it like he's trying to tear it off piece by piece. My eyes feel like they're going to pop right out of my skull, a high-pitched scream is filling my ears, and I can't tell if it's me actually screaming or it's all the blood rushing up to my brain.

I jerk my head back and in a desperate attempt to get him off I headbutt him, slamming my face into his.

My nose explodes, blood pours down, filling my mouth, but it has the desired effect; the bastard lets go.

And then his fist slams into my face. Stars erupt in my vision. White hot pain shoots along my cheek. He hits me again, harder, and it feels like he's trying to crush my very skull in.

I can't fight him. I can't do anything. I'm too broken from what Magnus did to me before to even stand a chance of defending myself now.

When he realises it, he yanks my body, drags me by my legs until I'm laid out how he wants me.

I hear the sound of his zipper, I see him get his cock out, but it's like I'm not really here.

Oh, I can feel it, I can feel the pain, and the fear, and everything that is happening but I'm also floating. I'm also above this, witnessing it as if I've already died. As if God has finally granted me some mercy.

He lines himself up, one hand holds my left leg up so I'm wide open, and he says something disgusting as he works himself inside me. Clearly, I'm too battered and bruised because he has to spit on his cock, trying to create some lubrication as he pushes himself inside me.

My mouth hangs open. Blood is still streaming from my nose and I can taste it. I'm drowning in it. My heart slams into my chest as it pumps so violently, I fear it might explode.

He forces my leg around, bends it further, and rams himself into me, complementing me on how tight I feel, as if I've done it on purpose. As if I'm consenting to any of this.

I need it to stop.

I need this all to stop.

I shut my eyes, I gulp down the taste of my blood and once more my brain tries to take me away, tries to pretend that I'm not here. That this isn't happening.

But I can feel it.

I can feel the violation.

I can feel the abuse.

I can feel the way he is driving his cock in and out of me.

My insides are tearing, my body is bruising beneath his punishing grip.

I'm gasping for air and though there's nothing around my throat, I can't get any in. I can't breathe. I'm suffocating.

And then someone comes barging in.

My eyes dart up. For one stupid second my heart leaps, and I fool myself into thinking that this is my salvation. That I'm going to be rescued. Saved.

Only, my eyes meet his and I know that he is none of those things. He is not a hero. He is not my saviour. He's my captor. My rapist. Whatever this man is doing to me now, Magnus has done and will do far, far worse.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



Magnus

“**M**ove the girl.” I order.

It’ll ruffle feathers I know, especially considering she’s bought and paid for, but it is what it is. I gave my word, made a deal, and that’s the end of it. Her owner may have enjoyed her, but she’s easily replaceable enough and that fact was proven by how little a protest he made when I suggested it.

From my chair, I watch the screen as the door opens and two of my guards stalk in and unlock Paityln from where she’s chained to the wall. She’s so compliant she doesn’t seem to react but then Guthrie, her owner, walks in and her entire body language changes.

Even I can see how the chains are rattling from her trembling.

He’s a big man, over six foot. What was once muscles has turned to fat, but that doesn’t make him look any the weaker for it. No, the man could still have you with very little effort. His hair is thinning at the back, but his beard is thick enough that it makes him look almost viking-esque.

He says something and the guards respond.

And then he turns, looking directly at the cameras as if he doesn't know what's happening. As if he wasn't more than happy to take the millions in payment. Not that the girl is worth it, far from it. But it was what was necessary. Devin wants her back. Well, he can have her gift-wrapped and ready. Though I doubt he'll find her to be the same girl she was.

My eyes linger on the emaciated figure, practically hanging there between my guards. We'll have to feed her up or she might very well die and I can't have that.

I bark into the radio, ordering them to take her down to the medical bay. I'll have her accessed, treated, then they can come up with a suitable feeding plan to ensure she's fit and healthy and ready for whatever the hell my dear brother has planned for her.

Guthrie makes a big show of saying goodbye, cupping her breasts, grabbing her arse like he's trying to store up the memory of how she feels in his mind.

"Get the other one in there." I bark, already growing impatient with this nonsense. This was meant to be a simple process, why is everyone making it so much harder than it needs to be?

I hear the screams, the yelps, the pathetic attempt at fighting as a newer, chubbier model is dragged in. She's got a collar around her neck, just like all the inmates here do and the guard is dragging her along by the chain.

Guthrie's attention immediately snaps to her and it's like Paitlyn no longer exists. Like she's vanished. It's almost curious how he can care so little considering who she is, what she's done to his family as well as mine.

But instead, he stalks over to his new toy, pushing the guard out the way and he yanks the chain forcing the girls face to come right in front of him.

His eyes drop, he clearly starts scrutinising her as if this isn't all a done deal.

"I said I wanted to pick," he hollers loudly.

I roll my eyes, knowing those words are meant for me.

"Get the girl to medical." I snap, ignoring the jibe, wondering why my guards are still fucking around with all of this.

Did we not plan this out? Did I not make myself more than abundantly clear?

Guthrie steps forward, blocking the path and hollers again before yanking his own phone from his pocket, and within seconds, my own is

ringing.

“We had a deal.” I say as soon as I pick up.

“I’ve changed my mind.”

“So quickly?” I taunt.

He growls into my ear, “I want more.”

“More what?”

“Money.”

For fuck’s sake, I’ve already paid more than the whore is worth.

“You know what she did, you know what she is to me...”

“And you’ve had more than enough time to get your revenge.”

“She killed...”

“Guthrie.” I bark, silencing those words, killing them off before he can speak them. There are too many ears here, too many loose mouths as well.

“Five,” he says, coming to his senses. “Five million.”

“That’s enough?”

“And another girl. I want two now. Two toys.”

“Fine,” I sigh, losing my patience. Does he really think I’ve got all day to play silly buggers with him?

His family may have been the big hitters but not anymore, now all that power is gone, and Guthrie himself is responsible for it, all that drinking, all that gambling had to have repercussions.

“Fine,” he shouts up at the cameras, hanging up on me at the same time.

The guards look between themselves then finally come to their damned senses. But as Paitlyn is hauled from the room, the entire screen in front of me flickers and then goes blank like someone cut the electrics.

“What the fuck?” I mutter, but I’m up, out of my chair, and already out the door before my brother even looks around at me.

I don’t know what the fuck is going on, but I’ve had more than enough. If you want a job done properly, apparently you really do have to do it yourself.



I STORM DOWN THE CORRIDOR, PUSHING PAST THE FEW GUARDS WHO haven’t noticed my presence. This entire section where my office is, is

blocked off, private, as far removed from the carnage beyond as it possibly can be.

The lift chimes merrily as it opens and I step in, folding my arms, wondering how much bullshit one man really is expected to put up with.

The doors close silently and I stand there, staring at my reflection on the polished chrome walls. I look tired, I look overworked. It's not the kind of impression I'm used to presenting and already I'm contemplating how best to work off the stress of today's proceedings, how I can meek out every inconvenience, every annoyance, on the flesh of my plaything. My hands itch as if she's already here, already on her knees, waiting for it.

She's going to have the beating of a lifetime today, despite what my previous plans were.

The lift comes to a stop. The doors slide open, and smoke comes billowing into the space.

I'm quick to pull my sleeve up, and I step out, gun in hand, already prepared for whatever the fuck is going down.

On the floor ahead, I can see one guard lying in a pool of blood. I can hear screams before they turn silent and for a moment, I fear it's Paitlyn, that someone has killed her.

If they've done that, I don't know what I'll do. I can hardly tell Devin that she's gone. I can hardly hide it either.

I rush through the carnage, it looks like a bomb has gone off, and a guard stumbles into me, with half his face hanging off.

He cries out, murmuring something I can't understand, and I push him away, because he is not my priority.

Guthrie is lying face down, his massive bulk taking up half the corridor. He's not moving which tells me that he's dead, so I guess that extra five million won't be his after all. I don't bother looking for the girl, the new one, I don't give a fuck if she's alive or dead.

Ahead, movement catches my eyes. I can see figures, two men and something else being dragged along.

It's them, it's her. Fucking Paitlyn. Someone is either trying to help her or steal her.

I raise my gun, pulling the trigger and shoot right into the spine of the man on the left. He crumples, landing in a heap. The man on the right turns to face me, yanking that chain to force Paitlyn's body into his as if she's a human shield, as if I wouldn't hurt her if it was necessary.

I let out a laugh, barely hesitating, before pulling the trigger once more.

He falls, pulling her down with him and she jerks, trying to get away as if this moment here is her opportunity for freedom.

“Not so fast,” I spit, yanking her up by her greasy hair.

She whimpers, and then her eyes go wide as she realises exactly who has her.

“Dev, Dev, Dev.”

With one hard blow I pistol whip her face with the handle of the gun, knocking one of her teeth out and sending a spurt of blood from her mouth.

“Keep my brother’s name out of your mouth, whore.” I snarl. As if she thinks she has a right to even speak it. In all honesty, I’m surprised she still has the mental capacity to even remember him, to remember any of it. You think she’d be smarter, though; you think she’d play dumb considering her past.

She sobs harder, shaking more violently in my grasp. “I need him.” She cries. “I have to tell him...”

I don’t wait to hear anymore. She can say all she wants, beg all she wants when she’s kneeling at his feet. I don’t need to witness it.

I wrap my hands around her throat, tightening enough to restrict her airflow. She jerks, she gasps, she claws at me with her jagged, broken nails like she believes this is the end. Like she’s convinced she’d have as pain-free and easy a death as mere strangulation.

When she passes out, I sling her over my shoulder, but as I turn back and truly see the carnage before me, I realise that she can’t stay here. She can’t stay in Oblivion.

Oh, she may have a life sentence, but it’s not technically official by Brethren standards. Guthrie and I did a deal behind closed doors, we came to an agreement to ensure nobody knew what happened that night. Though it benefitted Paitlyn, it spared her life, it wasn’t her I gave a damn about. It was my brother, Devin. I did it for him, I kept my mouth shut and hid the truth, risking my entire family’s destruction in the process.

As I stand here now, though, I wonder if the secret is out, if that skeleton is about to come crawling out of the closet. But surely not; surely, it’s too late for such a thing?

Hair prickles at the back of my neck. Consequences I long thought null and void seem to suddenly haunt me.

Someone got in, someone got a bomb past our security and very nearly got their hands on a very valuable bargaining chip. At the very least we have a breach. I'd be a damned fool to leave her here knowing that face.

With a snarl, I storm back up to my office, tossing the damned girl onto the floor where she lays, immobile, and still passed out.

When I left, my brother was here, fuck knows where he's run off to in my absence.

"Conrad," I growl as he picks up his phone.

"What is it?"

"I have a task for you."

He sighs as if he has far more important things to do than aid his family.

"Get here." I order. "I need you to watch over something for us."

"Us?" he repeats, but I can hear his steps in the background as he's clearly making his way.

I hang up, deciding that's enough of a reply and when he walks in, he stops, staring at Paitlyn like she's some sort of apparition.

"She's—she's alive?" he says in obvious surprise. "Does Devin know?"

"He knows." I confirm. "And I need you to take her, hold her somewhere secure. Make sure the little whore is locked down and nobody can get to her."

He frowns, meeting my gaze. "What the fuck is going on here?"

"Devin is coming home." I state, just as she starts to stir. "He has a few chores to do and then he's going to close this chapter once and for all."

Conrad looks back at Paitlyn just as I do. She's awake, wide eyed, staring from one of us to the other.

"I need—" She begins, but I'm quick to grab a handkerchief and ram it into her mouth. Every word past her lips is a lie. I won't stand here and listen to it. Not after what she did. Not after the way she ruined our brother.

"I'll sort it." Conrad says walking over, slamming his fist hard enough into her face that she's once more rendered unconscious.

Once he's carried her out, I watch on the cameras, echoing their steps until he's thrown her into the trunk of his car, and he's sped off. Then I call the guards, ensuring that all the mess is cleared up.

I need to know who's behind this, I need to know who exactly knows about Paitlyn and what the whore means to me and to my family.

But that's going to take time. A lot of time. I need to cover my tracks, up my security detail. Technically, this is the second attack on Oblivion, if you

count the Turner incident as one. Someone is playing silly buggers with me, and I'll be damned if I'm caught in their bullshit.

I set my Dustin onto it, charging him with pulling all the footage, going back through every tiny detail until he finds who the culprit is.

When I get into my car, I turn the massage feature on my seat on and nod to the driver to take me home. Maybe my pet is ready to be more compliant, maybe she's ready to behave. Either way, I know I'm going to have some fun.

For a few seconds I close my eyes, relishing the brief solitude and then I jolt as if I've fallen asleep for hours.

My hair prickles on my neck as if in warning—would someone be so bold as to attack me?

My car is part of a convoy. I have two up front and two behind. With guards armed to the teeth. If someone were to try it, they'd need a bloody armoured tank to be successful, but then, we're the Brethren, getting our hands on such a thing is hardly a difficult task.

I clench my fists, contemplating my next move. If someone were merely looking to destabilise the Brethren, they wouldn't just go for Oblivion. They'd do something far more reaching. Unless this was part of something bigger. Take out Oblivion, take out the University, remove all the structures that keep us in place and create total anarchy?

I narrow my eyes, almost revelling in the way my heart pumps in my chest at that notion. True, there would be carnage. True, there would be chaos. But the sheer fun of what that would create, I'm practically salivating at the notion of it. I feel like Nero, dancing in the flames, watching as Rome burns and delighting in the fear of all those pathetic people caught up in the ensuing inferno.

Maybe I should stir the pot myself, let it be known that Turner is on the way out. It would certainly be interesting to see who comes out of the woodwork and tries to make a bid for Chapter. And it would take the heat off me if someone does know what I did.

My lips quirk and before I can consider the reasons not to, I make a call, make an anonymous tip, knowing that long term it will play to my favour. Most men can't deal with unpredictability, they can't deal with the unknown. Most men like their safe little lives. But not me, I know how to thrive in pandemonium, how to harness it, how to turn chaos to my advantage.

As we pull into the drive, I take out my phone, connecting with the live feed. I've left Liliana alone. Left her to wallow for a few days. Having watched the footage of her interaction with Gabe after he cut her down, I have an idea brewing, only I need her recovered. I need her in better strength, before it can materialise.

But as the screen comes into focus, I realise exactly what I'm seeing and my whole body reacts.

She's not alone. She's not huddled up, pretending to be all defiant in the darkness.

No, *someone* is there with her. *Someone* is touching her.

"What the fuck?" I growl, before demanding my driver speed the fuck up.

I pull my gun out, giving an order for my security to do the same. Apparently, Oblivion isn't the only place under attack today. Someone really is gunning for a fight.

On the screen, I can now see exactly who it is, and I realise that this *is* personal.

This is an intentional move against me.

They want a war? Then so be it.

CHAPTER NINETEEN



Magnus

I pull the trigger before we even come to a stop. I don't give a fuck if it's my guard or an outsider. Either way, they shouldn't be where they are, so that makes them a dead man.

We bundle out. My men immediately moving to secure the house. But it's a bloody big house to do so and frankly, right now, I don't give a fuck about my valuables, my antiques, any of it.

Someone is in my basement, taking what is my most treasured possession.

I storm down, my feet slamming onto the limestone flagstones as I push past every servant, every person.

When I get down the stairs, I can hear it. I can hear her screams. That bitch has never once screamed for me, and yet she does so easily for him? I feel a streak of jealousy at that.

And then I get to her cell and he's there, his body engulfing hers, just as I saw in the footage.

He groans, thrusting away, forcing himself inside her as her legs jerk and kick out.

For a second I just stand there, watching, almost intrigued. Is this how I look when I fuck her? Is this how she cries and whimpers?

No, when I fuck her it's more majestic, more devastating too.

When I fuck her it's not just for dominance, it's not just for my pleasure, it's so much more than that. It's about the shame, the degradation, I need her to feel every bit of my hate, I need her to endure it, to drown in it. To truly suffocate.

What Anthony is doing right now is a piss poor attempt. It's pathetic. Amateur, just like he is.

I snarl, stepping forward, and I haul him off while he's still mid-rut. Stupid fuck looks around half confused and then his eyes land on me and that only too familiar grin spreads, morphing those features into a clownlike image.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" I ask.

He tilts his head, his cock starting to go flaccid already and, as my eyes glance down, I can see the few streaks of blood there. So he made her bleed, too? More jealousy unfolds. I swear I'm so close to cutting his dick off for the insult.

She whimpers, scooting away, only he's still got one hand on her and he's apparently refusing to admit defeat.

"I deserved a go." he says, yanking hard enough that she almost falls face first on his cock. "This bitch cost me enough..."

"We made a bet. Just because you ended up on the poor side of it..." I grind out.

"Poor side?" He spits, "Poor fucking side? This bitch cost me ten million. The least I deserve is a good fuck."

I can't hold in the snigger. He thinks that was a good fuck? No wonder he is the way he is. Clearly, he doesn't even know how to satisfy himself properly.

"Get out of my house." I retort. He's lucky the rules are what they are. If I had my way, he wouldn't be leaving at all, but I'm not so stupid as to do something right now. I don't know who the fuck he thinks he is, but he won't get away with waltzing in here, messing with my things like there won't be repercussions.

“I want more,” he practically pleads. “You’ve clearly had some fun already, I want in.”

My hand wraps around his throat, I haul him out, tossing him onto the unforgiving flagstones and with one hard slam of my foot, I give my reply.

It’s not that I’m adverse to sharing, but why would I even consider with someone as disrespectful as him? And besides, the guy can barely fuck, what would be the point in bringing him along for the ride? I’d die of boredom before he even got himself off.

“I said get the fuck out.” I bellow, just as the guards come racing down the steps.

One grabs hold of him, pulling him away and his bare arse drags along the floor. I’ll have to get the maids to clean that. I don’t want his disgusting remnants left anywhere on my property.

When I walk back into the cell, I can see she’s curled up in the corner, her face screwed up like she’s doing everything possible not to cry.

I crouch down, grabbing her chin and see the obvious signs of bruising along her cheek.

So he beat her, too. That pisses me off more. Now, I’ll have to look at those marks, knowing he put them there. My eyes drop, examining her body, seeing more evidence on her breasts, her hips, the smear of blood on her thighs, all of it screams at what happened.

I tut, a part of me blaming her for this. She’s a fighter, we both know that, if she’d been better, then maybe we both wouldn’t have to live with the knowledge that Anthony fucking Wallis was inside her.

Her eyes seek out mine. I don’t know what she’s expecting to see. Guilt? Sympathy? She’ll find none of that here.

“He, he...” she stammers as if I’m some sort of knight in fucking armour.

“He raped you.” I state, and she nods, as if I’ve not done the same. “He took what wasn’t his.”

Her face turns into even more of a scowl. “Are you actually serious?” she hisses back.

God, I want to hurt her so badly. To erase every bruise, every mark, to replace it all with my own.

Before I can think not to, that urge overtakes everything, drives everything. She cries out as I pin her down and she realises what I’m up to. What I need. Her fists slam into my back, pound into it, and I revel in the

fight, in the way she too is hurting me, marking me, making this even more brutal than I'd planned.

I get my trousers undone, forcing her legs apart, she might have bled a little for him, but she'll bleed a hell of a lot more for me.

As I slam into her, all I can focus on is punishing her cunt with everything I have. She screams enough that goosebumps sprout along my arms and I need that sound, I need it to ring out, to continue again and again.

"This is mine." I growl out. "My whore, my toy, my cunt."

She shudders, those cries turning to furious silence as she once more becomes that stubborn bitch we both know she is.

With every thrust, I erase the traces of him. I replace them with deeper wounds, deeper marks, practically ripping her apart as she claws and scratches and desperately tries to stop me.

My tongue delves into her mouth, devouring the taste of her, claiming the very air from her lungs.

It feels too good, it feels like we're both paying for our sins. Drowning in our damnation. My body draws closer and closer to my climax and, as I drive myself inside her, I want what I always want: to feel her body giving in, to feel her shame and submission as she loses a tiny bit more of her dignity.

Only, as usual, the bitch refuses to cooperate.

I reach down, pinching her clit as tightly as I can, abusing it. Who the fuck does she think she is? Who the fuck does she think she's messing with? I snarl out, slamming her head back, seeing with delight as her eyes roll back for a second with the impact.

"Submit." I command.

She glares back so I do it again, slamming her head harder. If I have to crush her damn skull in, then I'll do it.

"Submit."

She gives me no response. Nothing. It's like she refuses to register the pain I'm inflicting on her.

I lower my mouth, baring my teeth and I tear out a chunk of her flesh. She screams then, she slams her fist into my face and I love the feel of her knuckles crunching against my cheek.

"Hurt me, you little bitch. Hit me like you mean it." I curse.

And she does, she curls her fist, striking me once more, and my face erupts into a delicious bruise that I'll wear with pride.

I groan, picking up pace. I'm so close now, I'm almost delirious. I dig my nails into that delicate skin around her throat and I give one last brutal thrust.

When I pull out, I can see all the livid blood, I can see the way it mingles with my come.

I dip my finger into the mess, swirling up the pretty marbling and then I grab her jaw, forcing her mouth open, before I make her choke on it.

"Mine." I declare, scooping more up, shoving it down her throat until she actually does gag.

I get to my feet, towering over her. "All fucking mine, and don't you forget it."

My foot jabs at her side, she lays there, not quite broken but clearly far from alright, and as I turn to leave, she moves, scrambling to her knees.

"I'm not yours." She screeches. Her blood and my come is dripping from her lips like she's half spat it back out already. "I'll never be yours. You're a fucking monster. The day you die will be the best day this world has ever seen."

"Is that right?" I sneer. God, how I love the way she goads me, is she after another round? Is she wanting further punishment? I could do with a moment's rest, but for her I'd dive right in, prove once more who has the power here.

"You're like a disease. All you do is create death and destruction. You think you'll break me but you won't. I'm better than that, better than you."

Better than you.

Those words echo in my head. Repeat in them. Who does this bitch think she is? Does she not realise that God is on my side, that God favours me, rewards me, protects me. I tilt my head, seeing all the cuts, all the marks, all the grime too and the dirt.

She's filthy, disgusting, I should have her scrubbed clean. I should have her skin rubbed raw. She's only alive because I'm choosing to keep her that way.

But better than me? I let out a laugh, I'll show her who's in charge. I'll show her in the most humiliating ways exactly why I'm the victor in all of this.

I grab her throat, hauling her up the wall, and with my other hand I reach down and pinch her clit so tightly I know it'll hurt like hell.

"Listen very carefully, pet." I say. "You have one role, one purpose. You're here to serve me, to entertain me. You still breathe because I allow it. You think you can fight me, but you're already giving in. Bit by bit, you're going to break, you're going to submit. It's inevitable. You're going to become a desperate little whore for me, and you're going to enjoy it."

She spits something back. In truth, I don't give a fuck what she has to say, but I twist my fingers, the ones holding her clit and she screams out in pure agony.

When I release my grip, I let her fall and she crumples, her legs moving quickly to try to get away, but I still see that glare, that defiance.

God, it's addictive. She's so fucking angry and stubborn. I can feel myself growing hard again, I can feel my cock already begging to fuck her again. She thinks she can fight me, she thinks she can refuse me? I'll force that bitch to submit in a manner that makes it more than clear who has the power here.

I take a step towards her, and her body stills.

"Get some rest." I snap. Because God knows, she's going to need it by the time I'm done with her.



WHEN I GET UPSTAIRS, CONRAD IS THERE, WAITING, AND HE TELLS ME THAT everything is sorted. Paitlyn is secure and Anthony has been removed from the premises.

I know we should have sorted him, rid ourselves of him permanently, but a man like him, he wouldn't have come here without covering himself. No, if we'd killed him, it would have come back on us and I'm not so stupid as to make a mistake like that. I'll deal with him on my terms. When there will be no repercussions. No evidence.

Conrad has rounded up all the guards, every single one that should have prevented Anthony's entry in the first place. I don't know who took the bribe, I don't know which one of them turned a blind eye, but I don't need to know.

Dissension in the ranks is like rot, it seeps in, it spreads. They'll all pay the price for this fuck up.

"Get them out." I order.

Conrad is quick to follow, his own personal guard herding them out like sheep to the slaughter, and slaughter it will be.

They're thrown onto their hands and knees, left to huddle in the dirt. And then one by one they get a bullet to the back of their head.

It's a simple death.

An easy one.

The kind we all dream of. Pain-free. Quick. Uncomplicated.

They'll be taken away. Their bodies cremated and the ashes used to fertilise the roses. Waste not want not, right?

"There's something bigger in play here." Conrad says.

I turn my eyes on him and nod. Perhaps it's about time he's fully brought up to speed. Maybe then he'll stop rebelling and accept his duty if he knows the full story.

He stares at me wide-eyed, almost innocent, as I quietly recall my meeting with Antonio, and what we're planning.

"Are you serious?" he says, as if I'd ever make such a joke as that.

"We have to be ready." I reply, not bothering to actually acknowledge his question.

"But Chapter Lord?"

"You'll have to step up." I say. "As will Devin."

"That's why you got Paitlyn," he says as if it suddenly all makes sense.

"Yes." I say.

"I'm ready," he states like he has a clue what he's talking about. As if he even understands what's involved with achieving such a goal.

"No, you're not." I murmur. But he will be. I'll make sure of that. It's family first. It always has been. And becoming Chapter Lord will ensure our family will triumph over every other family here.

CHAPTER TWENTY



Liliana

It was stupid to goad him. Stupid to open my mouth.
But how could I stay quiet?

How could I just lay there after all he'd done, after letting that man rape me and then raping me himself as if I'd somehow betrayed him?

My arm is throbbing where he took a chunk out of it, the blood is trickling down my bicep, and I can't even look at it without feeling sick.

I stink of sweat, blood, and come.

It turns my stomach so much that as I try to sit up, I realise that feeling isn't just that, a feeling. I really am going to puke.

I barely make it to the bucket before I spew the meagre contents of my stomach everywhere. Only, I make the mistake of opening my eyes, of seeing it, my blood, and his come, all mixed together and that memory comes flooding back of how he forced that vile concoction down my throat. Even with the taste of vomit fresh in my mouth, it still lingers on my tongue, in my teeth.

I would give anything for a bath right now. Anything to scrub myself clean and wash away all the disgusting evidence of what's been done.

I start dry heaving, sobbing, giving into the pain, and the fear, and the abject terror that comes with the knowledge that this is only going to get worse.

That my words will have repercussions.

Every point I score, becomes a stick for Magnus to beat me with later.

I collapse onto the floor, not even bothering to move away from the filth I've made, and I shut my eyes, trying to will my mind to disappear, to retreat, to fool me into believing I'm somewhere else, somewhere safe, somewhere warm, somewhere far away from my current hell.

When the butler comes, he doesn't even look at me, he just places the tray down and leaves as quickly as he can. I can't say I blame him considering, but I still hate him all the same because he could help me. He could. He's just as complicit by turning a blind eye.

I drag my body over to where the food is. I'm not hungry, but I'm gasping for water. Gasping for anything that will rid my mouth of the taste of vomit.

As I pick the cup up and take a huge swig, I immediately wretch and spit it back up. It's not water. At least, not entirely. It tastes like salt. It tastes like come.

That bastard spunked all in my cup. He fouled it. I toss the entire contents in anger and wipe my mouth as those tears fall even harder.

I thought the taste of vomit was bad enough, but now I'd do anything to rid myself of the one that's replaced it.

Only there's nothing else. No food. Nothing but that come filled mess and it drips down the wall, collecting in a pool that I swear I can smell from the other side of the cell.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE



Liliana

I don't know how long I sleep for. I know it wasn't long and it certainly wasn't peaceful.

Magnus strides into my cell, turning his nose up at the sight of me like he expected me to be smelling of roses and dolled up to the nines.

My skin prickles as he gets nearer and that jolt of adrenaline in my stomach makes me so close to puking again.

God, I can only imagine what he would do if I hurled up all over his shiny oxfords.

He clicks his fingers and two women appear, both of them are dressed in the same plain uniform that suggests they're maids. With barely a reaction, they grab hold of me and I'm practically dragged from the darkness.

"Clean her up." Magnus commands behind us. "I want her immaculate. I want her cunt so smooth I can eat off it."

The reaction I get to that, the way my stomach suddenly heaves up bile, is uncontrollable, and before I can do anything I really do puke, all over me, all over them.

All over his pristine damn leather shoes.

He lets out a sigh as though I'm nothing more than an irritation. A fly he needs to swat. And then he waves his hand before leaving us to it.

In a way, I should be grateful for that. Grateful for the bath I'm given too. It's hot, comforting. So much of me wants to give into the heat, slide into the water and pretend, but I can't because my mind is already focused on what's coming next.

The maids scrub at my skin, gently erasing all the smears of blood and grime. They exfoliate, they massage, it almost feels like I am at a spa. One holds my arm up while the other shaves me. Then they do the other armpit.

When it comes to my legs, I wobble, and I'm forced to lean on one while the other makes sure I'm presentable.

I shut my eyes when they start waxing my pussy. Every strip they pull off makes me jolt, but the pain is nothing compared to what I've been through. I don't doubt they can see all the bruising, all the cuts, the way I'm swollen from all the abuse I've suffered, but they don't say a word. They just carefully manoeuvre my labia around as if this is all perfectly normal.

And then they help me out, rub the softest towel I have ever felt against my skin and work moisturiser into my skin. It stings like hell when it gets into the bite that Magnus gave me, but I need that pain. I need that hit of reality because I'm so close to shutting my eyes and pretending, giving into the illusion of what this is.

But even this tiny bit of peace is quickly erased. I'm forced down, pinned down, and something is inserted into my arse. I scream out, trying to stop whatever the fuck they're now doing, but they don't stop, they just hold me there, keeping one arm twisted behind me in a pressure position to make me obedient.

Water or fluid or something is forced into my arsehole. I hate the feel of it, I hate the indignity, and I don't want to dwell on what the fuck this might mean. On and on they fill me up. It's uncomfortable, it's completely degrading, but there's nothing I can do but lay here and endure it.

When they finally drag me over to a toilet, I'm so grateful to be able to get it all out that I don't even care that they're witnessing this, witnessing another level of my degradation.

They fix a collar around my neck, securing it with a buckle—one exactly like the thing a dog would wear. I gulp, feeling my throat push against the tightness of the leather, but I barely get a moment to come to terms with it before the door is opened and Magnus is there, holding his hand as if I'd willingly take it.

Perhaps he sees it on my face, perhaps he has more sense than that because he walks in, grabs my arm, and takes away any last of my limited freedom.

"We're going to try a new game, Liliana," he states, dragging me down the corridor and up the steps. "Let's see how long you dare to defy me now."

I don't know how to respond, but that fear grows at what awful thing he now has planned. Hasn't he done enough? Hasn't he hurt me enough? Christ, when will this end?

He tightens his grip, hauling me along, and my feet fumble, my toes slam into the stone forcing me to bite my lip to hide the noise.

Outside, I'm all but hurled into the back of a van.

For a second my heart leaps, is this it? Has he decided he's done with me now? Am I'm being driven to some discreet place, to be disposed of and buried in a shallow grave?

The journey seems to take forever, the roads feel windy, uneven, all signs that this is the end. That I am being driven to my death. I only pray that it isn't too painful. That whatever my end is, it's fast and efficient.

But that voice in my head tells me that this isn't what's happening. I'm not going to be executed. I'm going to be hurt. He wouldn't have me cleaned up simply to do away with me.

No, wherever the fuck we're headed, Magnus has something truly horrific planned.



MY EYES DART ACROSS THE BUILDING IN FRONT OF ME. THE WALLS ARE high, imposing, and I can't see a single window. The way the light hits the brickwork makes them look as though they're actually bleeding. Who the fuck would want a building like this?

“What is this place?” I ask, even with all I know about the Brethren I’ve never heard any mention about this.

“Oblivion.” Magnus says, as if that’s meant to mean something.

“Oblivion?” I repeat.

His lips curl. “This is where we bring our Lords and Ladies to be punished. This is where those who have offended the Brethren can do their penance before they’re allowed to return to the light.”

I gulp, not quite understanding why I wasn’t sent here, if that’s the case.

“Only those who are righteous can come here.” Magnus adds, answering that question for me, because I’m not righteous am I, I’m not Brethren. By their rules, I’m nothing. Nobody. I don’t get a chance at redemption. I’m not worthy of such a thing.

“Then what am I doing here?” I ask.

No one replies to that.

All the men around us keep their eyes ahead like they’re expecting something to go down. As though this place is not fully under their control.

My heart picks up a beat. My breath starts to turn ragged. I know Magnus has a certain level of power, but if this place is what he described, what’s to stop those held here from rioting, from rising up, from taking over?

Inside, it’s even more foreboding. Dark corridors and dark rooms. All I can hear is the heavy beat of some awful music but filtering through is the sounds of cries, screams, and the unmistakable sound of people fucking. Grunts, groans, sounds of people trying to fight, it’s like we’ve arrived in the very pits of hell.

I come to a sudden stop, not that I was being all that compliant.

Magnus glances at me and lets out a sharp laugh. “Don’t worry about them. Where we’re headed will be much more fun.”

Fun? What the fuck is this? My body starts trembling worse than ever, my heart is racing so fast now I think it might actually give out entirely. God, please let that happen, let me just die here, right now and end it all on my terms.

I try to turn, to get away and I’m snatched back, dragged along and then thrown into a room that feels far too empty. One chair seems to dominate the space. Ornate, cushioned, the kind of thing that you’d imagine a king would sit on.

Magnus struts over to it, plonking his immaculate arse down while I'm then held in place in front of him like an offering.

For a moment, we just stare at each other. Me glaring at him and him, sat so fucking smug. Both of us refusing to blink like this is some sort of competition, though I doubt I'll get any prize if he gives in first.

The sound of the door opening breaks this match off and my head turns to see a group of people shuffling in, with chains around their ankles and wrists, and what looks like dog collars around their necks, only theirs are complete with actual chain leads.

My eyes widen, I stare in horror then look back at Magnus whose eyes are positively sparkling with amusement. The man leading them steps up, handing over all the leads as if they're not human at all but a pack of animals.

"You want to play hard to get," he says. "You want to be a stubborn bitch, let's see how much your pride is worth."

"What does that mean?" I gasp. None of this makes any damned sense, and I'm too exhausted to even try to figure it out.

He looks from me to them, and then he tosses something at me. It hits my stomach then makes a thud as it lands on the floor.

When I look down, I can see it's a dildo. Not just any either, this thing is grotesque, far thicker in girth than a normal man's penis, with weird bulbous lumps and a head that looks like it would split you in half. I've heard about monster kink, I've heard about all those spicy paranormal books, but to see this in real life is something else.

"Fuck yourself." Magnus says, placing his hands on the ornate goldleaf arms as if he's making the most normal of requests.

"Excuse me?" I snap back.

He grins, jerking on the chains and one of the men is yanked forward. Magnus produces a gun, pointing the thing right at the man's head. "Fuck yourself or I blow his brains out."

"You, you wouldn't dare..." I stammer, but my words are silenced the second he pulls the trigger.

The sound echoes in the room, I throw my hands up, covering my ears as if I can somehow drown it out. Something wet hits me, something covers my skin, and, as I realise I'm screaming, I can also taste what it is.

It's in my mouth.

In my eyes.

It's covering my chest.

I'm drenched in his blood and brain matter.

The man hits the floor like a dead weight, and I guess that's exactly what he is now. Dead.

I don't know how my legs keep me up, I don't know how I don't pass out. I thought seeing Ronin hanging there, above me was bad enough but this, this is so much worse.

Magnus yanks on those leads and another one, a woman this time, is dragged in front of me.

"Try again." Magnus says, pointing the gun.

I shake my head. I stumble back, slamming into the mass of the man who's preventing me from running.

With a tut, Magnus pulls the trigger, and the woman cries out as she lands on the ground, barely a metre from me. Her eyes find mine and I can see the fear, the desperation, all of it reflected in them.

There's blood streaming from a hole in her chest, millimetres above her heart. It pools around her, rapidly filling the dark void between us.

I scramble to her, desperately trying to stem the bleeding, but all I have is my hands and it's not enough. It's not nearly enough.

It's so warm, so thick, as it covers my fingers.

"Don't die, don't die." I start repeating over and over like it might mean something. Like I can do anything.

"So caring." Magnus sneers. "So fucking pathetic. You think this woman matters? You think any of them matters?"

"They're worth more than you." I spit back, fighting the furious tears that threaten to erupt.

He throws his head back and he laughs. "You just don't learn, do you?" he says before pointing and aiming at the woman in my arms. Her head instantly turns to mush. Her face becomes unrecognisable.

Once more I scream, but no noise actually comes out, despite the high-pitched ringing in my head.

"How many more?" Magnus barks. "How many more will I have to kill to make you obedient?"

I shake my head, feeling my tears stream down my face. I can't let these people die. I refuse to be as selfish as that.

But I also can't give in either.

My pride is still there.

I won't simply bend to this monster's will and become the obedient pet he wants me to be.

Magnus yanks on the lead again, and a girl who must be half my age is dragged into the mess of blood and death around me.

"You do it." Magnus says and I frown, confused by those instructions before I realise they aren't meant for me.

The girl reaches forward, grabbing the monstrous dildo and she spreads her thighs, sitting back on her haunches as though it's a rehearsed position, one she knows well. Slowly, she starts to push it inside herself. Her face screws up, she whimpers as each nasty bit of rubber forces her wider, but we can all see how much the thing is hurting her.

"What a good little slut." Magnus murmurs. "She's been such a quick learner these last few months."

I narrow my eyes, but I can't look away from the scene in front of me. It's like a car crash, it's like an actual horror playing out. The girl is sobbing, but her hips are moving, and she is doing it, she is fucking herself as we all watch.

Will he spare her life? Will he grant her some sort of reprieve after this? Is that why she's playing along? Perhaps if I knew that was the result, I'd be more inclined to do it myself.

One awful, horrific moment to spare me from more horrors.

"Harder." Magnus snaps.

The girl whimpers, tightening her grip and picks up speed.

Magnus pulls the trigger, narrowly missing her knee, and she screams in terror with the thing half out of her.

"I said harder, not faster. Learn the fucking difference," he says.

"Don't." I gasp, reaching out, trying to stop her. "You don't have to do this."

Magnus laughs, as do the men stood around, watching this all play out. "Yes, she does. Because she knows what the consequences are."

"What could possibly be worse than this?" I snarl, as a tiny voice in my head tells me that perhaps I can push him enough for me to be on the receiving end of that bullet.

Would I get that lucky? Can I offend him enough in this moment that he's forced to do it, forced to kill me to save his own pride?

Magnus doesn't reply. Neither does the girl. No one answers that as if it's something so horrific no one wants to even contemplate it.

I can see the blood starting to drip from where the toy is doing so much damage. But the girl doesn't relent, she just keeps raising her hips, slamming it inside her and from the length alone, I know it must be ramming into her cervix.

But her cries do turn to moans. Perhaps she's faking it, perhaps she's the world's best actress, but we can see the way her body is starting to jerk, the way her cheeks are now so flushed. She is getting off despite the pain.

"Harder." Magnus commands again.

I don't even know how she can. Her arm doesn't have the strength. She whimpers, desperately trying to obey and just as she starts climaxing, Magnus does it again.

He takes aim and pulls the trigger.

Her body slumps. She lands beside the second lady, her face falling into the armpit of the man, with that toy still buried to the hilt. It's as undignified an ending as I could ever imagine.

For a moment I just stand there, blinking, as though my mind can't register the scene before me. And then it clicks, that she's dead. That he killed her, even though she was doing what he wanted.

I want to scream. I want to launch myself at Magnus because she was being obedient, why the fuck did he kill her?

I'm on my feet before anyone can register the movement, but Magnus is there, and he grabs my face, stopping my attack before it even begins. His fingers dig into my cheeks, and I can feel all the blood and grime beneath his grip.

"Your turn," he says so quietly. "Unless you want more people to die for you?"

I can't think. I can't formulate words. It's like something inside me shuts down and I become some sort of robot.

All my sense of reason, all the parts of me that would fight this, seem to curl up, fold up, disappear as though I've locked them away for safe-keeping in some nice little treasure box.

I shut my eyes, but I'm falling to my knees, reaching over the body of a dead girl, reaching between her thighs and grabbing the awful thing that's buried inside her.

As I pull it out, I can feel the resistance, the way her muscles are still gripping it so tightly and it gives off an awful squelching sound as it finally comes free.

It's covered in her juices, in smears of her blood, too. Nothing about this can be sanitary, but then I guess that's the least of my problems right now, isn't it?

But the feel of it it's not rubber, it's not plastic like I first thought. It feels like skin, like leather. I stare back at Magnus and his lips turn into a curl.

"It's his cock," he states. "Ronin's. I cut it off, tanned it, turned it into something useful."

I gasp, half choking on that knowledge and revulsion slithers through me. Who the fuck even thinks of doing such a thing as that?

"Of course it wasn't quite big enough to cover it, I had to stretch the skin to make it fit the entire circumference."

I shut my eyes, trying not to dwell on how horrific those words are, trying not to imagine how the hell one stretches skin out.

"He almost fucked us by running to you." Magnus states. "So now you're going to fuck him in return, metaphorically speaking."

I shake my head slightly, disgust once more threatening to manifest as more puke. But Magnus raises that gun and points it, making it clear what the consequences are for my refusal.

God, I hate him. No, hate doesn't go nearly far enough to define what I feel. I let out a shudder, I move it between my own legs, trying to pretend that what I'm feeling is not his flesh, that it's not Ronin's actual taxidermied fucking dick.

Magnus holds his hand up to stop me. "Dip it in her blood."

"What?"

"You heard," he says.

I blink back, staring at him in total disbelief.

"Coat the thing in her blood," he barks. "You caused her death with your disobedience, it's only fair you're punished for it."

My hands shake, I bite my lip so hard to keep in the reply I so desperately want to make. But there's still half a dozen other slaves in the room. One wrong move, one stupid comment could get them all killed.

"Do you want more, is that it? You want all these people dead? There's a hundred more where they came from," he states. "You want me to kill every fucking whore in this place? Is that what your pride is worth?"

I whimper, my shoulders slump and I hate that he's right. That I am prideful, that he may have pulled the trigger, but I didn't have to fight him

on this. It wasn't like he was asking all that much, and it isn't like he hasn't already degraded me enough times for it to actually matter anymore.

I shuffle over, holding my breath as if that might make any of this better. With my right hand I dip the toy in the blood still trickling from her mutilated face.

"Coat it." Magnus repeats more forcefully.

And I do. I swirl it, like it's a damned popsicle and then I shift back, trying to put as much distance between me and the dead bodies as I possibly can.

Magnus sits back in his throne, his hands on the arms and his right ankle propped up on his knee like he's ready for the show to start now.

I want to curse, to swear, to lob this thing at his horrifically handsome face.

But I don't. Instead, I sit back, spreading my legs and I force the awful thing inside me.

Christ, it hurts. Every inch it feels like it's pushing me too wide, too open. I don't think my muscles are meant to expand this far. Nothing about this feels good. And when I remember that all that wetness isn't lubricant, that it's blood, I very nearly puke everywhere.

I keep my gaze down at the bastard's feet. I don't dare look up, but my tears are streaming anyway. I'm a complete, uncontrollable, mess as I start to fuck myself, just as he commanded.

"There," he taunts, "that wasn't so difficult, was it?"

I grit my teeth so hard I swear they might shatter. If they do, I'll swallow them, I'll choke on them rather than give him any further satisfaction.

Between him and the other asshole who raped me, my insides are already butchered. I don't know how long I can do this for, I don't know how long I'll even be able to stay conscious.

"Make yourself come."

I knew those words were coming. I knew that's what he was going to ask of me. That's clearly his focus for me, his way to prove my shame and his power over me.

I shake my head because there's no way I physically can. This hurts too much. My body is too damaged from everything he's done to, me and everything he's forcing me to do in this very moment.

"Make yourself come or I will kill every one of them."

“I can’t.” I sob. I can’t fucking do it. Will that cost them their lives? Will my failure now result in more people dying? Guilt sweeps over me and I turn my face, silently begging forgiveness from the soon to be dead people in the corner.

Perhaps he realises it, perhaps he can see what the issue is because he raises his hand, pulling the six chained up people who are left, to where I’m on my knees.

“No.” I gasp. I don’t want them to die. I don’t want to be responsible for this.

He smirks, tilting his head. “My whore needs a helping hand,” he says tauntingly. “Clean her up, get her ready for me.”

My stomach drops. I don’t know what those words mean, but apparently everyone else does.

Hands grab at me, I’m forced onto my back and I lash out, I kick, I try to fight them off. Why the fuck are they even obeying him anyway? He literally just killed three of them, why aren’t they fighting back? Why aren’t they helping me? Perhaps if we all teamed up together, we could overpower them... and then what? We can’t escape, I doubt we’d even make it out of the room.

That awful toy is removed and tossed and, in its place, a man settles himself as if this is all perfectly normal.

“What the fuck is this?” I scream into what feels like the void.

“Relax,” another whispers into my ear. “Don’t fight. You’re dead anyway so you might as well make it as pain-free as you can.”

I turn my head, staring in horror at the woman who said it. Her eyes look so glassy, she looks almost like a living corpse. God only knows what she’s been through, what she’s endured.

Her hand comes up, she pushes something into my mouth, slips it in past my lips and then holds my jaw shut like she knows I’m going to fight her.

I can taste it on my tongue. It’s sour, bitter, unpleasant.

Whatever the fuck this is, I refuse to swallow it. I twist my head, trying to get her off me so I can spit the liquid out, but she clamps my nose shut as if that will make me give in.

Something wet, something warm, something far too slippery pushes it’s way right up my core and in my shock, I gasp out, and I swallow.

The woman grins, a creepy, almost too toothy grin, and she lets go of me and then moves around to keep my head in place with her spindly hands.

The man between my thighs starts licking, lapping, literally cleaning me up and I squirm hating every second of this new violation.

Hands grab at my legs, keeping me wide open. Mouths latch onto my breasts, sucking at my nipples, teasing me.

More tongues trace my arms, my legs.

None of it feels good. None of it feels nice.

And then, to my absolute horror, it does.

Everything changes. My body seems to lurch from being twisted in pain, to being twisted in the complete opposite. I let out a gasp, forcing my brain to focus, forcing myself to fight whatever drug they've clearly given me.

It feels like a fever. It feels like I'm on fire.

I arch my hips, I stretch my back, needing space, needing air, needing more, more, more.

I'm still half-covered in blood and brain matter but inch by inch, they lick me clean. They worship my flesh like I'm some sort of goddess.

And then, a shadow falls on me, on us. I look up, seeing not one but two of Magnus, flickering, towering over us all. I blink, then blink again, and as they merge into one fully formed monster, I whimper.

"Are you ready for me now, pet? Ready to submit?"

"No."

I don't know how I even get the word out. How I even make my tongue form the syllable, or my mind stay coherent enough to even fight him.

Magnus let's out a chuckle, pushing the bodies off of me. And then it feels like I'm weightless, that gravity no longer affects me. I'm flying, soaring, floating before I land once more on something hard, cold, and unforgiving.

My eyes roll around, they struggle to focus, but I realise I'm on a platform of some sort, with Magnus now straddling me.

"Stop." I choke. "Stop."

His left hand wraps around my throat and though the grip is punishing, it sets off fireworks in my brain.

His right hand reaches down, too far, too deep, it warps as if he has no bones, and then I feel them, his fingers buried inside me, searching out all

those little injuries, feeling where that toy stretched me to oblivion.

He twists them around, pushing inside me further, pushing right on my G-spot and I scream out, shutting my eyes so tightly I think they might implode.

“Come, my little whore, submit to your master.”

“Never.” I spit.

He tuts, lowering his gaze before he bites down on my right nipple in punishment.

I scream out. Tears stream down my cheeks and he traces his tongue up to catch each and every one. “Stop being so stubborn. Stop being such a bitch.”

“I don’t want you.” I snarl. “I will never want you. And I will never submit.”

It’s like those words energise him. His eyes seem to sparkle with equal amusement and annoyance.

He withdraws his fingers, spinning me around, flipping me so quickly my brain feels like it’s doing somersaults around and around in my skull. He pushes my cheeks apart and without another word, he forces himself into my arse.

I scream out, I claw at the hard surface beneath me. I’ve never done anal, never once considered it. And this man is not giving me a second to even adjust.

“Fuck,” he groans, “your arse is even better than your cunt.”

I can feel him moving inside me, existing where he has no right.

He slides out, forcing my muscles to stretch further and then he pushes back in with all his impossible weight.

One hand is planted by my head, keeping me pinned in with his body. The other he returns back to my pussy and to deep inside where he once more pushes on my G-spot.

I hate how good it feels. I hate how much my body is screaming for this moment, this pleasure, this reprieve.

“No,” I sob. “I won’t do it. I won’t.”

“You will, pet.” He groans. “You will come right here for me, you will come in front of all these witnesses, and you will submit, like my good little whore.”

I can’t think.

I'm too stuffed, too overstimulated and far too fucking exhausted. The drugs are making me see things I know are not there. Flashes of colour, flickers of light. All the faces staring at us morph into gargoyle-like figures, all laughing, all mocking, all enjoying this perverse show.

And Magnus, Magnus continues his assault, continues raping me over and over, while those fingers try to make me act like I'm wanting this, like I'm getting off on this.

My body ripples, my sweat pools up my spine, collecting at my neck. I scream out, I try to roll him off and he grabs my hands holding them down far above my head.

"Come, you little bitch." He snarls. "Give in and come."

I bite my lip, I repeat over and over in my head that I don't want this, that he just killed three people, that their blood is still on me, in me. That he made me fuck myself with a dead man's cock, and I'd be just as fucked up as everyone else here if my body responds in any positive way.

But my body *is* reacting.

Those awful drugs are forcing me to obey.

I try one last time to throw him off, to fight, to do anything to stop what now feels so horrifically inevitable.

His fingers bring me right to the edge of my climax, my body pushes back and my need for a release takes over every logical part of me.

I bite down, driving my teeth into my tongue, refusing to give him the satisfaction of a moan. Blood spurts in my mouth from how I've practically severed the very tip.

But I am coming.

I am combusting.

I hate that I do it, I hate that I can't stop this.

I'm screaming, convulsing, giving in entirely to the wants of a psychopath.

And then something in my mind explodes. Something breaks. I fall into the darkness. I escaped into it. I welcome it like a friend, silently praying that I won't wake up, that I'll fall sleep now and never open my eyes again.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO



Magnus

She collapses. Her body slumps and all that beautiful resistance, all that euphoria at my victory, is suddenly gone in an instant.

I could keep going, could keep fucking her lifeless body, but without her reaction there's no point to any of it.

With an angry snarl, I pull out, wiping my bloodied cock on her back, down her spine.

But as I get to my feet and start barking orders, I notice the foam at her mouth. I bend down, taking a sniff, and know exactly what it is, what the smell tells me. What went on right under my nose.

Someone drugged her.

My eyes narrow, I turn my gaze on the chained-up wretches huddled back in their corner.

"Which one?" I ask.

A few look confused. One looks so fucking high I could be saying anything and he wouldn't have a clue.

“Which one of you pieces of shit drugged my whore?” I bellow, feeling my rage grow and grow.

A hand raises, a woman who looks old enough to be my mother gets to her feet.

“Me,” she says in defiance, as if she doesn’t understand the ramifications of who she is coming up against.

I curl my finger, beckoning her to me and the chain that hangs down from her collar drags on the floor, accompanying every step she takes like a little singsong.

“You did it? Why?” I ask.

Her lips stretch into a crackled, broken smile. “You’re going to kill us anyway. Why wouldn’t I want to cheapen your victory if I could?”

My hands wrap around her neck, it’d be so easy to snap it, to twist my hands at a ninety-degree angle and end her just like I did the Turner girl. But where would be the fun in that? No, far better to feel her life escaping her, far better to feel her struggle and resist as I squeeze every last bit of air from her lungs.

And struggle she does.

She kicks out. She digs her broken, clawlike nails into my hands and her eyes bulge, turning red as the blood vessels begin to pop.

Her tongue sticks out, fat and swollen, she gasps, choking on the last of her oxygen and I shake her pathetic body like a rag doll, forcing her head back and forwards before letting her drop at my feet.

Only, it does ease the anger. It doesn’t appease me in the slightest. Today was meant to be about teaching a lesson, about proving to that bitch that she’s just like the rest of us. She may look down her superior, holier than thou nose, but when it comes down to it, she’s nothing more than a whore.

Except, that’s not how this played out. Oh, she may have come around my cock, she may have given in, but it doesn’t count if she wasn’t in full control.

No, I wanted her to feel every ounce of her shame.

I wanted her to know what a filthy little whore she really is as she submitted.

It wasn’t just about degrading her, it was about fucking with her head, leaving her with the knowledge that her pathetic body has given in to me.

And I didn’t get that. I didn’t even come close.

I snarl, kicking at the body of the woman responsible, slamming the heel of my boot into her face. She destroyed my pleasure, so I'll destroy what's left of her in return.

It takes a good few stamps before her skull caves in, before those bug eyes of her pop out of their sockets and her features turn to mush. I pull out my cock, taking it in my hand, and let out a long satisfying piss to finish.

When I'm done, I stalk back over to where my pet is still lying unconscious.

Like a princess, I scoop her up and carry her from the room. I don't need to give instructions. I don't need to explain what should be done in my absence. My men know what to do. The bodies need to be disposed of, they'll be ground up for meat and used as another form of torture for those unfortunate enough to have a life sentence.

As for those who survived, well, they'll be returned back where they came from, and no doubt they'll wish they'd been the ones being carried out on a cart.



SHE'S TOSSED IN THE BACK. IT'S NOT LIKE I WANT HER BLEEDING ALL OVER my suit.

I can hear the soft moans as we take a corner too quickly and her body collides with the side. If I were a caring man I'd react to that, but I don't. As far as I'm concerned, she's gotten off lightly.

I slam my fist into the dashboard, my fury still there at how I was cheated.

"Should I have the doctor meet us?" one of the men asks.

I shake my head because there's no need. I know what she had, GHB, it's why she reacted the way she did, why she started to enjoy it, why she came. It tricked her body into thinking she wanted it, and it took away all of the shame I wanted her to feel in the process.

Give her a few hours and she'll come around, confused, and alone back in her cell.

But perhaps I need to try this a different way.

Stop jabbing at her pride, and go for something more personal. My lips curl as I realise how easy this could be.

And while she's licking her wounds, unknowingly recovering enough for our next session, I can focus on something as equally satisfying—revenge.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE



Liliana

My head throbs something rotten. I open my eyes, almost relieved to see the darkness, relieved that I'm back in my cell, alone.

My throat feels so sore that every swallow is like I'm trying to force down something too big. I'm gasping for a drink, and I crawl on shaky limbs across the floor to where I think my water bowl is.

But my tongue is too swollen, too damaged from how I chewed it, and every gulp just makes it bleed more. I let out a moan, a howl of pain that doesn't seem to justify everything my body is feeling right now.

There's food put out for me. Bread and something that actually smells good. If it was hot when they left it here, it's long since gone cold. I use my hand as a spoon and scoop it up. Only, I barely get the contents into my mouth from how swollen my tongue is.

And I'm punished with a searing shot of pain when I do manage to force some in.

My asshole hurts so badly from where Magnus raped me. Gingerly, I run my hands over it, checking for damage and I'm not surprised when I recognise that all too familiar stickiness of blood on my fingers.

Tears stream down my cheeks. I don't even try to stop it, I just give in, sobbing, curling up, wrapping my arms around myself in some pathetic form of comfort and self-soothing.

I knew this was going to get worse.

I knew Magnus was going to hurt me but what he did, killing those people, forcing me to—no, I can't think about it, I can't go there.

I rub my eyes, trying to rid myself of the memories. Ronin's face flashes before me and more shame hits me at the thought of what I did. What Magnus made me do. Will he do something similar when I am dead? Will he degrade my body even further, taxidermy my pussy and use it as some sort of flesh toy?

God, I wish whatever drug they'd given me had made me forget but then, would that be worse? To wake up, alone, confused, in pain, and bleeding from every orifice with no understanding of what shit went down? No, better I do remember, as horrific and disgusting as every second of it was.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR



Magnus

Anthony Wallis may come from a legacy family, his ancestors were, like mine, amongst the first Brethren but his wealth, his status, even his home reflects the truth, that he is a subordinate. A wannabee. A pretender at best.

It takes relatively little effort to get past his security and into his grounds, into his house.

Either he's so arrogant he believes no one would dare challenge him, or he's too stupid to realise that he's in danger in the first place.

My money's on the latter. The man's a fool. He has to be to have even contemplated coming to my home, taking what legally belongs to me, as if I wouldn't strike back. As if I wouldn't retaliate.

Inside, his house is quiet. It's not nearly as big as mine, not nearly as grand but it's still littered in history all the same. Opulent rugs cover almost every bit of floor. Painted faces leer down at you from where they hang in gilded frames from the walls. There's enough in the way of antiques and

historical memorabilia to fill an auction house and though it all looks old money, I know a lot of it is bought. Old Anthony's grandfather sold the family jewels before he was even born. He gambled it away and it was only the hard work and efforts of his father that restored the Wallis name back to respectability.

Too bad Anthony didn't take after him. After all, he had all the opportunities life could offer. They're a family of reapers. They're Brethren. He could have worked his way up, achieved far more than the mediocrity that he appears to have settled for.

I've got a handful of trusted men with me. I didn't want to take an entire army's worth, partly because I know it's not necessary, and partly because it's far harder to sneak around when there's a swarm of you.

The house is on four levels, five if you include the servants' quarters, but I'm not interested in them. Every step we take is silent. Every move we make goes unnoticed. We've already seen to all their security cameras, put them on a loop, so anyone monitoring them will not see a thing.

When we get to the third floor, we pause, listening out for any signs that we've been rumbled. We were lucky enough to come across two of his servants out for a romantic midnight bonk. After a little persuasion, they were more than happy to tell us exactly where Anthony's bedroom is. They're lying dead in a ditch now just like their master will be before the night is out.

At his door, I can hear the sound of something. It's muted, pained.

With a nod to my men, I take hold of the handle and we burst in, all of us, opting for a blitz attack.

My eyes dart around the room, taking in the four-poster bed, the chinoiserie furniture that clearly was not picked by this man, and then the girl, gagged and lying beneath our quarry.

Anthony freezes, his mouth wide, his cock half hanging out from where he's obviously been poking it. He hasn't even taken his trousers off. He was clearly so eager to be in her, that he just yanked them down enough to get the job done.

For a second, we stare at one another, like two predators finally coming face to face. Only I'm the fucking king here, and this man, he's going to learn what it means to come up against a Blake.

His lips curl, he moves quickly, grabbing the girl beneath him and he all but launches her like a damned torpedo at us. She screams from behind the

gag, slamming into one of my men who do their best to catch her, but her body crumples and she becomes little more than a dead weight, lying in an unconscious heap.

Anthony uses the fleeting seconds of distraction to try to get away, but one of my men are quick enough to block the only exit and it's almost comical to see that he thought he'd get away with it. That his escape would be so easy.

"Where are you going?" I taunt, as he's dragged back and thrown onto the rug at the end of his fancy bed.

He snarls, turning his face up. "You have no right to be in my house. I'm a fucking Brethren Lord."

"As am I." I reply, as if that alone could save him. "And I recall you made yourself more than a little at home in mine. I thought I'd return the favour."

His eyes spin rapidly, he looks from me to each of my men like he's trying to figure out how much of a fight he really has here.

"Fine," he says quickly. "You can have her. Take her, fuck her, kill her for all I care."

For a second, I think he's talking about Liliana, as if she's his to give away, and then I realise he's talking about the girl in this room, the one lying unconscious. Does he really think I'd trade so easily? Does he really think she's enough to pay for the insult?

"I don't want your leftovers." I snarl before I slam one fist into his face, then the other. It's delightful to hear the way his bones crunch, the way his teeth pop out. He spits blood, spews it all over the rug, and I haul him up, throwing him face first onto the bed.

Two of my guards grab his arms, holding him in position while I rip his trousers right off. His arse is hairy, it's clear the man doesn't work out nearly enough considering what his status is.

I draw the knife, dragging the dull end along his flesh as he starts to whimper like an animal caught in a trap.

"You enjoyed fucking my whore." I murmur, leaning down enough so that I speak the words right into his ear.

I can see the fear in the whites of his eyes now. The way he's struggling more and more. He probably thinks I'm going to sodomise him, but I wouldn't put my own cock anywhere near him, even for all the money in the world.

With a good thrust, I shove the blade right into his arsehole and he squeals like a pig, his buttocks tightening, his head lashing back and forth.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” he cries.

“That’s what I’m doing, Anthony.” I retort, dragging the blade back out, twisting it just a little before driving it back inside. “I’m fucking you, making you bleed, just as you made my pet bleed.”

He sobs, his hands clenched into fists as he tries to get himself free. But he’s not escaping this. He’s not going anywhere.

“You fucked my whore.” I state. “You took without permission. Did you really think I wouldn’t retaliate? Did you really think I’d just let it go?”

“I, I, I paid...” he stammers.

“I don’t give a fuck what you paid.” I snap, slamming the blade in harder, carving up him up good and proper, ensuring that I really am butchering his insides. “She is mine. My whore, my pet, my plaything.” I punctuate each statement with a thrust. “You do not take what is mine. Nobody takes what is mine, what is given by God. Do you understand me?”

He splutters, he sobs, his words are an incoherent mess.

“I said, do you understand me?”

I’m blind with rage now, fucking furious. All I can see is those marks on her flesh, those bruises, the way she screamed, cried, and bled for him.

He had no right to touch her. No right to claim her. No right to make her bleed.

I tighten my grip, forcing that blade deeper and deeper, and as his blood makes the handle too slick to hold, his body slumps, his pathetic cries turn to silence and I know my job is done.

I let out a sigh, leaving the blade where it is, deep in his arse.

My men let him go and he lays still, the mix of blood and shit starting to stink the room out.

I wipe my hands on the covers then get to my feet, savouring the view before me, committing it to memory, and allowing it to replace the memory of offence, the memory where he’s raping my hard-earned prize.

“Let’s go.” I say calmly.

The girl is still passed out. I know I could take her to Oblivion, sell her for a fine price, but she knows it was me here, it was me who broke in. I don’t care what her opinion of Anthony is, she’s a risk. A liability. One I’m not stupid enough to leave alive.

I lean down, snapping her neck easily and then leave her where she is.

But as I stand back up, and scan the room one last time, I see the papers on the desk and an emblem that catches my eye.

Surely not? Surely this is a mistake?

I reach over, picking it up, scanning the contents and suddenly, this all becomes clear. All Anthony Wallis's good fortune to up to now. He's far too incompetent to have lived as long as he has without being excommunicated.

No, he had to have friends in very high places.

But can he really be part of the Esau Faction? I thought those fuckers were over. I thought those fuckers were done for back when the Inquisition was raging through Spain.

It's a risk to take the letter, a risk to keep anything that links me to this place, and yet I need to be certain this isn't a hoax. If the Esau Faction is alive and well, and if they're going for Chapter as this all suggests, then we have a far bigger fight on our hands.

This isn't just a case of who'll be in power.

This is a case of who'll live to see another day.

The last time they ruled, they culled our numbers, saw any dissenters burnt on actual stakes. They're the reason everyone believes Friday the 13th is unlucky. They burnt their way through Europe, leaving nothing but scorched earth behind. And though I'd relish the chaos that would come with their potential uprising, it'd also change everything.

Does Antonio know about this? Is that why he decided to back me for new Chapter Lord?

I'm not afraid. A lesser man would be, a lesser man would quake in their boots at such an opposition but if anything this spurs me on. This gives meaning to it all. I wanted to be Chapter Lord for the power, yes, but for our family's sake, too.

If the Esau are back, then it's even more imperative that I achieve that goal.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE



Magnus

My own house is a hive of activity when we pull up.
Conrad is there, waiting, as is Dustin.

I grunt at them both, stating that I need to wash before we discuss anything. The fact that neither of them objects, tells me that whatever they want to say is not so urgent.

When I get to my room, I pull up the footage on my phone, checking in on my little pet. She's lying there, still as a statue. I can't quite tell if she's awake or not, but her breasts are rising and falling in a tantalising enough manner that I'm tempted to go down there and give her another seeing to.

My cock hardens at the thought, but life cannot always be what we want. It's a hard lesson my father taught me. It's one Anthony Wallis clearly never learnt. And it's one my little whore is starting to understand. We all have our parts to play. Some of us are born to be fodder, while some of us are destined for greatness.

I toss the phone, jump in the shower and wash the last remnants of Anthony's filth from my body. When he's found, it'll be a mystery as to what happened. His burnt remains will be all that's left. There'll be no evidence of us even entering the building. It'll be as if a ghost just strolled in and had some fun.

I can't wait to hear what the rumour mill has to say about this. I can't wait to hear all the conspiracy theories and outlandish notions of who decided to take him out. It's not like he doesn't have a whole heap of candidates and that too will work in my favour.

When I get back to my office, both Conrad and Dustin are sat, deep in conversation, but they fall to abrupt silence.

"Well?" I say as I sink into the chair.

Dustin glances at Conrad as if he's looking for his approval to speak.

"It was an inside job." Dustin states. "Two of the guards, only been on the job a few months. Reckon they joined intentional, wanted to get inside Oblivion and cause some havoc."

"Oh, you reckon that, do you?" I reply, narrowing my eyes. The man clearly thinks he's a right Hercule Poirot when it's more than obvious that that's the case.

"The question is, how did they know about Paitlyn?" Conrad snaps.

"I don't know." I reply, but that is the million-dollar question. No one outside our family should know about her. It wasn't like it was public knowledge at the time, and with Devin being where he is, or was, it wasn't like the story would get out.

"Both the guards involved are dead, so it's not like we'll get answers there." Dustin states and he's right.

Perhaps I should have been more strategic, shot them in the legs and not the head. But I needed to secure Paitlyn. I wasn't going to fuck around with pot shots and chances.

"Where is Devin?" Conrad asks.

I glance at Dustin and tell him to leave. He's done enough. He's already put more security in place, ensured that nothing like this will happen again. Oblivion was all but a fortress before. Now, it's impenetrable.

When the door closes behind him, I get up, pouring a drink for us both. Conrad may be ten years younger than me, and I may in the past have treated him more like a son than a brother, but it's time that changed. Time he stepped up. I've known it for a while, it's part of the reason I've been

pushing this marriage. He needs to step out of his playboy bullshit and become the man this family needs.

“We’ve made a deal.” I explain. “I’ve given him a list of some people I need eliminated. Once they’re gone, he can return to Brethren life.”

“And the girl?”

“He asked for her as part of it. You know what he’s planning...”

“He’s still obsessed with her.” Conrad sighs, clearly as exasperated by it as I am.

“She was his childhood sweetheart. His first crush. He needs to get it out, purge everything, and we both know there’s only one way to do that.”

He takes a mouthful of his drink, knocking back half the contents. “Well, she’s secure and ready for him.”

“Did you get a doctor like I said?”

“Yes.” He smiles, showing those perfect teeth. “She’s on a diet to build her back up. She’s sedated so she won’t be going anywhere. And I’ve got round the clock eyes on her.”

“Devin will be pleased to hear that.”

“It all seems a lot of effort considering she’ll be dead as soon as he gets his hands on her.”

“I highly doubt that.” I reply. If I know my brother, he’ll string it out, do what I’ve done with my own wife, make sure the bitch pays. “But we have bigger fish to fry. The Esau are back.”

“What?” He snaps. “How the fuck do you know that?”

“Anthony Wallis was one of them. They’re looking to go for Chapter Lord, too.”

“You have competition.” He taunts.

I can’t help but laugh at that. I guess I do. Stiff competition. But where would be the fun if I didn’t? After all, victory always taste better when it’s been hard fought over and won.

“What do you need me to do?” he asks, leaning over the desk, suddenly looking so eager to help for a change.

“Marry the Monclere girl.” I state. It’s simple, easy. If I had my way, he’d already be down the aisle and balls deep in her.

He scowls. “Anything but that.”

“If you want us to be the ruling family, then sacrifices must be made.”

“Says the man who murdered his own wife.” He sneers.

I guess in some ways he's correct, but that wasn't the plan. No, I'd married the woman happily. Had taken my vows seriously when I made them. It was her that ruined it, her that destroyed everything we had.

And in many ways it was her who made me who I am now, strong, smart, prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure the Blake family always comes out on top.

He gets up, leaving me to it, and I pull my phone out, once more connecting to the camera in the basement. I can see she's clearly asleep now. I can see from the way she's lying that her exhaustion got the better of her.

I'll give her a little time. Give her space to lick her wounds.

And then I'm going to fuck with her head even more than I already have. Poor little thing won't have a clue what's hit her, and if it goes to plan, she'll be so shocked, she'll be putty in my hands.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX



Liliana

He gives me a week. One week.

And then I'm dragged out, pulled from my cell, and I try to prepare myself for the next round of this horror show.

To my relief, we don't go up, we don't go out, we walk down the corridor so at least we're not going back to Oblivion, though I doubt whatever is coming will be any less unpleasant.

When we enter the room, I freeze, staring at the man strapped into the chair, then back at the psycho holding my arm.

Is this real? Is this happening?

"What is this?" I ask, my voice sounding strained from lack of use. My tongue is not exactly healed but it's less swollen, and I'm at least able to eat properly, which on some level is a blessing.

"Don't you want to know who set you up?" Magnus murmurs into my ear as I shudder at our proximity. "Don't you want to look at the man who told us exactly what you were up to?"

I gulp, staring at Saul, not believing a word of it.

As our eyes connect, I feel a flash of guilt that I haven't even considered what might have happened to him. After all, we were meant to meet and he was a no-show. I knew the Brethren had something to do with it. I knew it, and yet I never questioned if he was okay, if he was safe, not once after they caught me. No, instead I focused on myself like the selfish asshole that I am.

"An, An, Ana," Saul stammers, no doubt taking in the state of me, though he looks just as bad as I do.

"Not a word," Magnus snaps, cutting across him.

I take a step forward, seeing all the bruising, all the ways in which he too has been beaten and tortured.

"What have you done to him?" I gasp. His shirt is torn, hanging limply from his body. His hair is stuck to his head from both grime and sweat. I know I'm hardly one to talk but he absolutely stinks.

As I get closer, I turn back to face Magnus. What is he trying to achieve with this? What's the point in showing me this? Does he think this will cower me?

"You don't get it, do you?" Magnus taunts, keeping his eyes on me. "You don't get it at all."

"Get what?"

"He loved you. And he hated the fact that you rejected him."

I shouldn't blush. I have no reason to feel shame, and yet that memory comes back; waking up, realising what a stupid mistake I'd made, fuelled by one too many drinks, and the awkwardness of having to sneak out. Of having to creep out like I was some teenager. And then we'd bumped into one another at work and the look he'd given me, oh I'd tried to ignore it, I'd told myself I was reading too much into it. He was a nice guy. He meant well. He was harmless. He didn't like me like that. I was imagining it, seeing something that wasn't there.

But he's looking at me now, staring at me.

My hands go up, covering myself.

I'm just as naked as ever and I hate how exposed I feel in front of them both, but for some reason it feels worse that Saul can see all of me, that he's looking at all of me.

It feels like two worlds collide. It feels like something explodes. Something cataclysmic goes off.

“It’s not true.” I cry. “It’s not true.”

I know it isn’t. My friend wouldn’t do that. He wouldn’t betray me like that. He wouldn’t fuck me over when I needed him. No, my friend would have helped. Did help. He did everything he could, but the Brethren got there first.

Magnus lets out a laugh. It’s sharp, twisted, it echoes around us both and Saul flinches as if that sound means more than just derision to him, too.

“He did it, pet.” Magnus states. “He sold you out. He handed you over and then demanded recompense. He wanted to profit from your demise.”

“No,” I gasp. It can’t be true. I refuse to believe it. I refuse...

Magnus shoves a phone into my face, hits the play button and with one hand he wraps it around my throat, holding me in a headlock as he forces me to watch the security footage.

It’s all there. All in grainy, horrific detail. Saul offering me up like a piece of candy. It feels like my world shatters. What little hope I had left seems to die. How could he do this? How could he betray me like this?

“He did this to you.” Magnus murmurs. “He wanted you to suffer. He wanted you to pay.”

I shake my head, I jerk violently against the arms that hold me, but he doesn’t relent. No, instead the bastard tosses the phone away and starts to undo his trousers.

“No,” I shake my head as if I have any control. No, not here, not like this.

“He’s the reason.” Magnus says kicking my legs wider, like I’ll just take this abuse.

I lash out, trying to fight him off and he’s quick as a flash, using his foot to take out my ankles. I slam down onto my knees and he’s there, behind me, holding me down as he lines himself up.

“No,” I gasp, shutting my eyes, refusing to acknowledge that this is happening. That any of this is real.

He shoves himself into me, pressing all his weight onto my hunched over body. With his hand he grips my face, forcing me to look up, to stare back at my betrayer. Back at Saul.

My body has somewhat healed from its last assault, the pain is there, but it’s muted, as if my nerve endings are all getting used to the brutality, as if they’re adjusting too.

“He did this.” Magnus whispers into my ear as I begin to hyperventilate. “This man. He’s the cause of all your pain.”

I let out a scream, I dig my nails into the concrete, feeling the way every single one snaps off. What I wouldn’t give to turn around and claw the man’s eyes out, but he holds me too tightly. He overpowers me too much.

“How does it feel, huh? How does it feel to watch me fuck her?” Magnus taunts. “Her cunt feels so good, so tight.”

I gulp, I swallow back the bile. Repeating over and over that I won’t let him win. That whatever happens I won’t do that.

He groans again before running his tongue along my skin. “So fucking delicious,” he murmurs. “Tell me, Saul, when you fucked her, did you get her off?”

Saul shouts out something incomprehensible. I doubt he’s defending me, though I doubt he gives a fuck about what is happening beyond the damage to his own ego.

Magnus grabs my breasts with his free hand, pinching them, rolling the nipples as I jerk.

“Did you suck on these? Did you feast on them, huh?”

Saul shakes his head, but I can’t tell if it’s in answer to his question, or simply him trying to deny that any of this is happening.

And my shame multiples as that memory comes back, as that awful, pathetic drunken evening stirs. I don’t even know how I got so drunk, how I ended up at his in the first place. It wasn’t like me to behave like that, it wasn’t like me to be so stupid or so reckless.

“Did you fuck this pretty mouth? Did you shove your cock down her throat?”

He doesn’t wait for a reply, instead he pulls out, forcing me up, and before I have a moment to even catch my breath, he forces my jaw open and rams his cock in. My tongue is still swollen and there isn’t enough room, but he clearly doesn’t give a fuck.

No, this is about proving his dominance, proving he’s got one up on Saul, and degrading me all at the same time.

I can taste myself.

I can taste my blood, and his precum, and all of it.

I start gagging and he groans, slamming harder so that his dick slides down past my tonsils.

“Such a good girl.” Magnus compliments, holding my face, brushing his hand over where my hair once was.

Tears are streaming down my cheeks, all I can do is take ragged breathes through my nose but each one is filled with his smell, his musk, his odour.

He starts fucking me harder, moving my head back and forward so fast I keep smashing into his pelvis.

And as he comes, he groans out as if this was the best damn blowjob of his life.

His come spurts down my throat, it hits my stomach, and I swear I’m going to wretch, but he holds me there, forcing me to deal with it, forcing me to swallow down the bile and, only when he’s certain I won’t puke, does he let me go.

I stumble back, almost falling right into Saul, and it’s a miracle that my legs manage to keep me from doing so.

But he did this, the man in front of me. He gave me up, he told them where I was. The betrayal feels so much worse than I could have imagined.

Saul drops his gaze, shaking his head. “It wasn’t... It wasn’t...”

“Wasn’t what?” I scream as I scramble to my feet. He did this. He’s responsible.

He looks up, stares right at me as if I’m a ghost and not a real person at all. “I want my silver,” he suddenly says. “I want my silver.”

He repeats it like a mantra. Like it’s supposed to mean something. Perhaps he has gone crazy, perhaps all this captivity has made him mad.

That same cold laugh rings out again.

A flash of something catches the limited light and I see as Magnus tosses some coins right at the bound man’s head.

“Here you go.” Magnus states, as though Saul can use it to buy his way out of this. “All thirty pieces.”

He’s pitiful, a snivelling, pathetic excuse for a person as he jerks in the chair. His hands flapping wildly like he’s forgotten his arms are tied down.

But any ounce of sympathy I had for him, any ounce of concern is gone. He did this, he did this to us both.

“Kill him.” Magnus whispers the words into my ear, acting every inch like the psychotic devil on my shoulder.

I gulp. I stare wide-eyed at the man who helped destroy me.

“Kill him.” Magnus urges. “He’s the reason you’re here. He’s the reason you’ve been beaten, whipped, raped. All of it is because of him.”

Tears start to stream down Saul’s face. He’s muttering something that’s too incomprehensible to understand, but as it turns into a yell, I can make out every awful syllable and my stomach turns once more with bile.

“I loved her. I loved her. I loved her.”

He keeps saying it. Over and over.

My fists clench. My jaw tightens. I need him to stop. I need it to stop. I need everything to just shut up.

“Kill him.” Magnus says again. “Make him pay.”

I can’t think. I can’t even see. Everything seems to flip in my mind and nothing makes sense.

Nothing is logical.

“I loved her.”

My hand grips the blade, but I don’t know when the hell I got hold of a knife. Why would I be given a weapon, anyway? I stare at the metal, stare at my reflection in it. If I were smart, I would bury this deep into my stomach. I would slice my chest open and end this on my terms.

“I loved her. I loved her. I loved her.”

I snarl, shutting my eyes, raising my hands to my ears, needing those words to stop.

“Kill him.” Magnus repeats. “Prove that you are like me, prove that you are *just* like me. Let your hate out. Let your anger out. Fucking do it.”

I can’t. I can’t.

“You were tortured. Beaten. Raped.” Magnus states. “He did that. He ensured that would happen. He led you to the slaughter...”

Something snaps. Something twists.

I scream out, matching the high-pitched noise ringing in my head and I launch myself. My arm slices through the air, I’m slashing, cutting, butchering the man before me.

Blood covers my body, blood fills my mouth, and seeps it into every pore.

But I don’t stop.

I just keep slashing and slicing until my arm grows too heavy, until my exhaustion takes me, and I collapse into the pool of it congealing at the dead man’s feet.

My chest heaves, my breaths sound like they’re catching in my lungs.

“I loved her. I loved her. I loved her.”

I know the words are gone. I know I’ve silenced them forever and yet they keep repeating in my head, over and over.

“I loved her.”

“You didn’t love me.” I shout, even though he’s way past hearing me. “You never loved anyone but yourself. It was your ego I bruised, not your heart.”

A hand settles on my shoulder. Another grapples the blade from me before I can do anything more with it.

I deflate as I realise I’ve just missed the only real opportunity I had to escape. That Saul wasn’t the threat, Magnus was. I should have attacked him. Taken him out. Killed him first and left Saul here, while I made a run for it.

Once more, my stupidity hits me like a tidal wave.

But I had to do it.

I had to get that pain and the anger out. Saul betrayed me. He set me up, lured me in and left me to the vultures.

I’m helped to my feet. Magnus brushes the smear of blood from my eyes and, for a moment, he looks at me not with derision, or lust, but with pride.

As if I’ve done something he’s actually pleased with.

“Come,” he says, taking my arm, not giving me the opportunity to do anything but obey.

And he leads me not back to my cell, not to the room where he delights in torturing me, but up a set of stairs into what must be the main part of the house.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN



Liliana

My feet leave bloodstained prints on the pristine carpet. Even in the frantic state I'm in, I still flinch at all the damage I'm causing.

Magnus leads me past what must be a dozen servants—none of whom dare look at me. They all keep their gaze ahead, staring onwards, as if I'm a mirage, a ghostly apparition they can simply ignore.

When we reach the top of another set of stairs, we come face to face with a man. He's dressed in a crisp white shirt, black suit, exuding the same kind of arrogance as my captor. Hell, they even look the same, though this man is obviously younger than Magnus.

"Conrad." Magnus says, pausing.

The man glances at him then lets his eyes linger on me, on my breasts, on the way a trail of blood is trickling its way down through the middle of them—and that tells me that he's someone, someone of power, someone of danger, someone who isn't afraid of Magnus, at least, not in this moment.

"I see you've been playing." Conrad says with a slight smirk.

Magnus narrows his eyes just a little. "Do you have business?"

"No, no, nothing urgent. Wouldn't want to stop..." He waves his arm, gesturing to me.

"Then I will see you at dinner." Magnus states before dragging me onwards.

Whatever room he brings me to, it's more than obvious this isn't *his* room. It looks too simple, too basic. I doubt a man who's full of his own importance would sleep in a place that looks more like a bland B&B, albeit a fancy one at that.

No, someone like Magnus would have every luxury going, the thickest rugs, the biggest bed, probably would have some fancy oil painting of himself right over a marble mantelpiece too.

He shoves me into the equally nondescript bathroom and hoses me down, only this time at least the water is warm.

I guess it's a good thing that I don't have any real hair because there's nothing to dry when I come back out.

He dabs over me with a towel, then discards it for someone else to pick up.

When we go back into the bedroom, I start to shake, because this all feels too normal, too intimate. When I was in the basement, I could at least define what was going to happen. Now, it feels like the world beneath me has shifted and I have no idea what is going on.

"Lie down," he orders.

I should fight, I should say something, do something. But it's like my mind is in a haze, like I'm not fully aware of everything. I'm still so frantic, so overwhelmed by what I've done, by what Saul did, by all of it to even begin to react rationally now.

So instead, I walk over to the bed, like I'm some docile, obedient little thing and I lie down on my back, placing my arms on my stomach while my eyes fix on the ceiling above me.

The sheets are silk, the bed is so soft, and all I can think about is the fact I can't remember when I last was in a real bed, with pillows and a duvet.

His hands are what bring me back, draw me from my head but even then, I just lay still, feeling what he's doing, allowing it, being compliant because my mind won't allow me to do otherwise.

He pulls my legs wide, settles himself between them, and though my adrenaline spikes, I don't outwardly react in the slightest.

Hot air, hot breath hits my core, I whimper at the first lick of his tongue. But he's not being aggressive right now, he's not doing this in a way that in any other circumstances would feel threatening.

And yet, I'm not consenting.

He's my captor, my kidnapper, my rapist.

Nothing about this situation is okay.

None of this is what I want.

"Obedience deserves a reward," he murmurs, as though that is simply it. As though I've simply performed a task to his satisfaction, and now I'm being given a nice little thank you cookie.

I blink back, not exactly making eye contact because I don't want to know what I'll see reflected back at me.

He spreads me wider with his fingers, opening me up more and he delves his tongue right into my core.

My body locks up, my toes curl, and I hate that it feels almost nice, soothing even, as he penetrates me over and over.

His thumb brushes against my clit, it's not aggressive, it's not forceful, he's toying with me, playing with me, eating me out the way a man does, not because he's focused on the destination, but for the sheer enjoyment of the act itself.

I shove my head back further, sink my body into the mattress as if that might save me.

He's fucking me with his mouth, licking, swirling, covering me in his saliva and so much of me should hate this. Should despise this.

Only, my head is fucked, my mind is lost.

Whimpers turn to moans. With horror I realise that it's me, *me* making those noises, *me* actually enjoying this.

His hands caress my body, his tongue does ellipses over my clit. I can't think. I can't even form any logical sentences.

And oh gods, do I need to come. I need to feel this pleasure, it's been so long since I've endured anything but the worst kind of pain.

Before I can do anything to stop it, I'm there, I'm lost, I'm writhing in what feels like ecstasy. I arch my back, I grab at the sheets, letting that delicious orgasm shatter me entirely.

My feet kick out, my body explodes. I lose myself in what feels like something too pleasurable to even comprehend.

And when I open my eyes, it doesn't feel like a demon looking down on me, no, it feels like my messiah, my reason for existence.

But it can't be. He can't be.

He's a monster. A psycho. So why does he look so good right now? Why does his tongue feel so good, why the fuck did I want him? No, not want, it's so much deeper than that. It's far more insidious, far more complex.

I shudder, I shake, I fold myself up into my shame and I withdraw entirely, as if my mind can escape the horrific reality of what I've done, what I've consented to.

What, in my weakness, I've allowed to happen.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT



Magnus

I know I'm pushing it, that the poor thing needs rest after everything I've put her through, but I can't resist the urge to see how far I can take this.

Today, a part of her soul fractured.

Today, she took a tiny step towards her damnation.

I need to ride that wave, ensure she doesn't turn back or rethink it. I'm finally making progress and I refuse to hesitate.

She kneels so beautifully at my feet. Sitting still, like the perfect little pet that I'm making of her. Every so often I lower my hand, stroke her head, let her know that her behaviour is appreciated.

Conrad sits opposite, glancing at her occasionally, but I can tell his attention is elsewhere from the more than apparent scowl on his face.

"Spit it out." I sigh.

"She's a fucking nightmare," he growls.

I don't need to ask who he's talking about. I already know from the way he's been badmouthing her to all his friends, as if I wouldn't get wind of it.

“She’s your fiancée.” I state.

“I won’t marry her.”

My fist slams onto the table. Beside me, Liliana gasps before quickly shutting her reaction down.

“You will.” I say. “You’re damned lucky to be making such a match, considering your age, considering your reputation. Besides, she’s rich, her family alone own...”

“If she’s such a great catch, why don’t you marry her?” Conrad snaps back before he looks once more at Liliana. “Or are you too distracted by your little whore?”

“I’m not distracted.” I reply. “And it’s not me who needs this marriage. It’s you. You know the rules. You want to be one of us, to continue enjoying all the power and privilege, then you have to follow them.”

He scowls, picking up the pepper pot, rolling it in his hand. “I’d happily marry anyone else but that woman.”

“That’s not the deal.” I retort. I worked damned hard to get him a suitable bride. He should be thanking me, not making things harder. Besides, we know there’s bigger things at play. I need the power and prestige of her family, I need their strength behind me if I’m going to go for the Chapter. We both need it, if this fight turns as ugly as I think it will.

“She has a niece...” He begins.

Once more. I slam my fist down and, once more, my little pet reacts. “Enough.” I order. “I have made the decision. You will do as you’re told and marry the Monclere girl I picked for you.”

He glares back, taking a swig of his wine and knocking it back like it’s a cheap shot of whisky.

“You’re becoming ungrateful.” I add. “Spoilt, reckless. We have a name to maintain. You are jeopardising everything.”

“I’m doing nothing of the sort,” he says dismissively. “I just want...”

“I don’t care what your wants are. Do you think I got to choose my bride? Do you think I had such a luxury? No. That’s the way of our world. That’s the price we pay to not end up like this woman, here.” I say gripping my pet’s neck, pulling her head to an almost impossible angle as I make my point clear. “You want to end up in Oblivion? You want to end up as nothing but a fuck-hole?”

“No.”

“No.” I repeat. “So play your part. Fuck your wife when you have to, and the rest of the time you can ignore her.”

He grunts back before ordering another bottle to be brought up, and I eat in silence as he practically drinks the entire thing.

With my hands I pick up some meat, offering it to Liliana. She doesn't meet my gaze, but she takes it from me, using her mouth the way a dog would, and she chews quietly before swallowing.

“Good girl.” I murmur.

See, it wasn't that hard, was it? A little bending on her part and she's getting the niceties I offered her in the beginning.

If she considers a reply, it doesn't show on her face, which is good. I'd hate to have to hurt her after all the progress we've made today.

When my meal is done, I pull her up into my lap, and I lazily start playing with her breasts through the little coverup I dressed her in. They may have lost some of their fullness from her weight loss but they're still plump. I force her back, force her to lean flat against my front and I can see all the tiny marks, the lines, the proof that this woman here is exactly that, a woman.

My fingertips trace the silvery stretchmarks at her hips, laying claim to them the way I have the rest of her body.

Oh, I know most men lust after twenty somethings, that they see them as easy to control, to manipulate, to mould. But me, I enjoy the challenge, I enjoy the maturity of a woman's body as she ages, I enjoy the proof that she's lived, that she's experienced life before I take it all away and lock her into a nice little cage.

Conrad glances at me, then at where my hands are, with a raised eyebrow.

“She's beginning to break.” I state.

“Is she?” he asks, as if he doesn't believe it.

I run my nose against her neck, savouring the sweet smell of her clean skin. “It's a slow process. One that takes patience.”

“And you think you're winning?” Conrad grins, leaning over his plate, staring at her more openly and I can tell where his head is at.

Perhaps it's the wine. Perhaps it's just that I'm an asshole and my pride is at stake, but I want to prove that I am.

I wrap my hand more firmly around her throat, snaking the other between her thighs to spread her legs wider.

She whimpers, her head shakes, but she doesn't show any other attempt at defiance.

I grab her hand, placing it where her exposed pussy is. "My brother wants some entertainment." I murmur into her ear. "Play with yourself and prove what a good little pet you're becoming for me."

She gasps, shaking her head more violently, and her legs start to jerk out. Only, she's pinned between me and the long dining table. There's no escape.

But the little bitch *is* showing me up, isn't she?

I showed her a moment of kindness, I proved what rewards obedience would give. Right now, she's spitting all of that back in my face.

I grab the knife, shoving the blade close to her eyes. "Make yourself come, or I will fuck you with this."

"Go ahead," she retorts. "Fuck me with it. I'm not your performing monkey."

Oh but you are. And the sooner you accept that, the more fun we'll both have.

I snarl, shoving the blade deep into her and she lets out a shriek of pain. It's not sharp enough to do any real damage, only surface level, but her blood starts dripping down, making the handle slick, while my cock is straining to force her submission in another, far more satisfying way.

Conrad sits back, watching the interaction in silence.

When I toss the used knife in his direction, he picks it up and licks the thing, savouring all her body's juices, blood and all.

"She tastes good, doesn't she?" I state.

He nods, that hunger as evident in his eyes as it is in mine.

Lilianna is still fighting, still trying to act like she has any semblance of control over this. I lift her up, spin her and slam her body onto the table. It's a sign of how much weight she's lost that I'm able to throw her body around as I do now.

Plates and glasses go flying. The sound of crockery breaking mixes with her protests.

Her hands are slapping out, hitting me, hitting Conrad, she's doing everything she can to try to stop this.

"She really is a fighter." Conrad grins.

"Why do you think I've been enjoying myself so much?" I reply as he grabs her arms to hold her down.

Any other woman would cry, any other woman would start begging, pleading, gasping for mercy. But not her. No, she starts swearing, cursing, fighting back with words now that she's unable to do anything physically to help herself.

My cock weeps with needs as I pull it out. I only fucked her hours earlier and yet it feels like I've been a starved man, that I've been abstinent far too long.

I force my way inside her, feeling the way her muscles contract, the way her cunt welcomes me in, despite the butchery of the blade only moments ago.

She snarls more. She jerks her hips, only, that gives me a hit of pleasure I know she didn't intend.

"Keep going." I taunt. "Keep resisting."

She screws her face up before spitting at me and I groan. Doesn't she realise the more she fights, the more she turns me on?

"Need to block up that mouth." Conrad mutters, undoing his own trousers. With one look to me for the go-ahead, he forces her jaw open and rams himself into her.

Her protests turned to muffled moans and each one she's forced to choke on as he starts brutally fucking her mouth.

"Little bitch." He groans. "Take my cock, fucking enjoy it."

I watch her lips get bruised, I watch her mouth as it's forced to submit and it's a beautiful thing, a majestic thing. It's a work of art and a punishment all in one.

With his free hand he holds her down, keeping her in place while I carry on fucking her cunt.

Her tits are bouncing back and forth. The little dress I put her in has slipped enough that even if the fabric wasn't see-through, we'd see everything.

I reach up, tearing it off her. "Clothes are a privilege." I state, slapping the side of her face for good measure. "And right now, you have none."

She glares back at me. All the defiance I thought was tamed is back full force, but I know how to manage that, how to deal with that and to revel in it.

I lower my hand, finding her clit and she shuts her eyes as I begin manipulating it.

“No,” she moans beneath my brother’s cock, but I can feel the effect I’m having. I know she came for me earlier. I know in her half-broken state she submitted, but this time will be so much worse because she has no excuse.

This time she is fully aware of herself, she isn’t blinded by shock, or by anything else for that matter.

The servants stand still, all twelve of them, like mute little statues, watching on as we violate her.

Conrad starts to jerk, slamming more haphazardly and as he comes, he pulls out, covering her face, smearing it over her lips where it clings like syrup.

She lets out a muffled cry, but I can see the flush on her cheeks. I can see the way she’s starting to react to my ministrations.

Yeah, my little whore is going to come. She’s going to perform.

“Come on my cock.” I order. “Come on my cock like the good little slut that I’m making of you.”

“Fuck you.” She gasps.

I can hear it, the way she speaks, the hint of breathlessness. I knew I was making progress. I knew I was succeeding.

She starts, biting her lip harder, shaking her head, trying to silence the sound, but she can’t hide how her body feels. How it’s clenching around my dick so tightly it might just snap.

God, she feels so good.

She feels incredible.

I could die right here, and I’d be a happy man.

“Miss Goodey Two-Shoes.” I taunt, slapping her breasts hard enough to leave a livid mark behind. “Look at you now, what a whore you’ve become. And you’re a murderer, too. Just like me.”

“I’m nothing like you.” She spits. “I’m nothing like you.”

I groan, slamming into her harder. It’s just too damn good. I never want to grow tired of this, I never want to lose this feeling, I want to tether her to me, keep her by my side so that whenever I need her, I can simply pick her up and within seconds I’ll be in the heights of nirvana.

I lean down, capturing her breast in my mouth and I bite as hard as I can.

She screams out. She bucks and it’s enough to send her cascading right over the edge. Her orgasm makes her eyes roll back, her body flails like it’s

suddenly lost all coordination.

And as I fill her up, I revel in the knowledge that once more, I've won.
Once more, she's submitted.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE



Liliana

I'm dumped back into that same awful cell.

Maybe I ruined it, maybe I should have played docile. I could have been so clever, pretending that I'd given in and when the moment was there, I would have gutted him just as I gutted Saul.

Only, I couldn't do it.

I wouldn't do it.

I'm not going to simper, take his cock, and pretend that I want it. I refuse to do that.

I wipe my face, wipe the disgusting remnants of the last few hours as best I can.

But Saul, fucking Saul.

I can't believe he would do that. I can't believe he was that vindictive. My eyes drop to my hands. The blood may have been washed away, but it still feels like it's there, sticky, coagulating between my fingers, marring my skin.

I *am* a killer now.

I'm a murderer.

I don't know how to reconcile that fact. I don't know how to be at peace with it. Saul may have betrayed me, but that doesn't make what I did okay, that doesn't justify stabbing him over and over.

And why the fuck did I not just kill Magnus instead? I had the damn knife in my hand. I could have killed him, then killed myself before I had to face any repercussions. It would have been the perfect fuck you, the perfect ending.

I let out a frustrated scream, throwing my head back, clenching my fists so tightly. It feels like I'm losing my mind, it feels like I'm starting to crack. I know all about Stockholm syndrome, I know all about the 'falling for your captor' bullshit.

I don't want to do it, I don't want to break like this, to become everything Magnus plans, and yet, how can I fight this? How can I do anything to stop this?

My fists lash out, I slam them over and over into the wall. The pain helps. The pain focuses my mind.

I won't give in. I refuse to give in. I'm better than that. I'm better than him. He can fuck my body, he can do whatever he wants to me physically, but I will not let him fuck with my mind.

I will not be that person.

With my teeth, I tear into the skin of my arm, biting at that same wound that Magnus inflicted, mangling it enough that it bleeds, and then I delve my fingers, spreading the blood further. My body trembles, my legs feel like they might collapse, but my hand is steady as I start drawing onto the wall, as I start covering it in words.

I hate him.

I hate him.

I hate him.

I don't care how many times I have to repeat it. I don't care how much of my blood it takes. I will not forget this fact, I will not give in.

I am not his plaything, I am not a toy. I am Ana Edwards. I am stronger than that. Better than that.

I will fight, and I will beat him the only way I can.

I have to fight. I have to.

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CHAPTER THIRTY



Liliana

He comes again two days later. He hasn't fed or given me anything to drink, and I guess in his mind that's meant to be a punishment, but I'm used to the feeling of hunger now. If anything, it's helping me to focus on the reality of this, that I am a prisoner here, I'm a thing he's going to use and discard.

I cannot blur those lines. I cannot allow my own head to become confused, and decide that any form of survival is okay, because it's not.

I would rather die than submit.

I would rather die than give in.

I would rather die than lose all the parts of me that are real, and instead, become some vapid, empty vessel, some toy for his amusement.

His eyes stare at the words on the walls. The words written in my blood.

I can see his lips quirk; apparently, this too is funny to him.

"Get up," he says as he fixes me with those piercing black eyes.

I grit my teeth, force my body to work, but my legs shake worse than ever. Maybe if he gave me a decent meal for once, I'd actually have some strength.

He doesn't give me a moment to even get my bearings before he's yanking me out, hauling me along and back into that same room I washed in before.

My eyes meet those two women, and a whimper escapes my lips before I can do anything.

Magnus steps back, folding his arms across his chest, but this time he doesn't go, he stays, watching as they bathe me, as they shave me, as they force me to bend over and shove water up my arsehole and inside me again.

When they're finally done, he stands in front of me, appraising me. He pinches my nipples, slaps my breasts lightly, and then fixes a different kind of collar around my neck. A thicker one. One that feels even less forgiving than the previous.

As he steps back, he meets my eyes, holds out a tiny remote and pushes it.

Pain surges through my body. I can't think, I can't breathe. I'm on my knees, doubled up in shock, but a second later the feeling ceases. My hands grab at the thing around my neck and my heart slams into my chest, beating far too fast. But I realise what it is, what he's put on me. He really is treating me like a disobedient dog.

He lets out a chuckle before clicking his fingers for me to get up and follow him.

I glance back at the two women. Neither of them meet my gaze but in my head, I curse them all the same, I scream at them, I damn them for their part in this, and I make a promise that if I ever get out, I'll get my revenge on them, too.

I'll make them pay.



I CAN BARELY GET OUT OF THE CAR.

Magnus has to drag me out and my legs refuse to work.

All I can do is stare up at those same awful blood red walls as my head repeats that I'm here again. That whatever horrific things he did to me last time, he's going to do it again.

How many more people will die tonight? What disgusting, unimaginable horrors will he make me do, will he force me to endure?

When we finally get inside, he doesn't take me down, instead he hauls me up. My feet slam into the stairs as he all but drags me up one flight and then another. I guess I should count myself lucky that he's not turned the collar on yet as a punishment. Silver linings and all that.

Around, I can hear those same awful sounds. That heavy, heady, constant beat, and those same moans and groans.

My eyes dart about as we make our way through a large hall. The room is filled with people. Half are wearing masks, and half are clearly not hiding themselves at all, as if they have no shame.

It's like an orgy, though from what I can see not all the participants want to be there.

I shudder, I shut my eyes, and I pray to whatever God might listen that I will give them my soul, I will give them whatever they want if they just let me die right here, right now. If they just grant me this mercy, I will do anything. Absolutely anything.

Enough of the room stills, enough of them turn their heads and they stare at Magnus, at me, at my body. Revulsion creeps up my spine, settles into my stomach and as I try to hide my body, Magnus forces my arms down to show me off like a trophy.

"Keep fucking moving," he says, his voice piercing through my desperate pleas to just make this all stop.

As we make it to a door, I don't know whether to be relieved or not. Too many faces were watching me, too many people were clearly enjoying my shame as I was paraded through. But beyond this space, behind this door, is whatever Magnus has planned.

Would I rather be stood naked in front of a thousand strangers than be forced to endure his sole attention? Yes. Yes, I would. If that was the price, if that's what it took, I would stand here, and I would endure that, rather than face whatever the hell is coming next.

But of course, I'm not granted such a reprieve. Such a mercy.

I'm pushed inside and my feet meet the confusing softness of a plush, luxurious rug.

I glance down, feeling like this luxury is so out of place and my mind can't reconcile it. Ahead, I can see figures, people. The room looks like a lounge. Two couches face one another. The rug spans most of the room. There's a drinks cabinet on one wall and a fire is burning enough to take away the chill.

"You took your time," someone says.

I look up, meeting the gaze of a bearded man, dressed in that all too familiar robe. He folds his arms, tilts his head, and stares at me.

"Did you not request entertainment?" Magnus says, dropping his grip and striding in past me, just as I hear the door close.

"You needed to see to it personally?" Another man laughs. "Like we couldn't have just plucked any whore from the hall?"

"This one does not belong to Oblivion." Magnus states, taking the glass being offered to him and for a second, he clearly relishes the tastes before he adds, "This one belongs only to me."

More eyebrows raise. Someone lets out a laugh that sends a shiver right down my spine.

"Surely not?" the first man says, stepping up to me and I immediately take a step back, putting as much distance as I possibly can in the circumstances. "Is this her, the journalist, what's her name..."

"Liliana Edwards." Magnus says, as if he's laying claim to my name as well as my body.

I glare back at him and he responds immediately by putting the drink down, grabbing hold of me, and throwing me to my knees right in the centre of them all.

"She's still learning to be obedient." Magnus says over me. "But even in her resistance, there is a lot of fun to be had."

I can't look up. I can't do anything beyond clutch at the rug as if I could dissolve into it. I can already see what's coming. I can see how this is going to play out. Clearly, these men are Brethren Lords too.

Is he going to let them all fuck me?

Is he going to have them line up one by one, or will one rape my arse, while another rapes me vaginally?

Some tiny voice in my head whispers that maybe if I beg, maybe if I plead, Magnus might just step in. That's what he wants, isn't it? He wants me to play his obedient little pet, maybe if I do that, if I play along, he'll

change his mind and I'll only have to endure his savagery instead of the entire hoard of them.

I open my mouth, I try to force the words out, but nothing comes.

A hand lands on my shoulder, I scramble to get away but another wraps around my wrist, twisting it behind my back so that I'm spun around. My other hand lashes out, my fingers curl into a fist and I slam it into the man's face.

He lets go, blinking back in shock, while he rubs the mark that's already appearing along his jaw.

"She's a feisty bitch." the man behind him comments, and there's no amusement to his voice at all.

"That she is," Magnus says, closing the distance, grabbing my hands, yanking them behind my back, where he ties them off so I now have no real form of defence at all.

He then pushes me, watching as I stumble back and lose my balance before landing awkwardly on my arse.

The older man, the grey-haired one leans over me, grabbing my ankles and forces my legs apart so that I'm entirely on show for them all, and, from how my hands are bound, there's little I can do to stop it.

"Who gets first dibs?" he asks, not looking at me, not looking at my face, just staring at my pussy like he's never seen one before.

I try to kick out, to aim for his face, but a bolt of electricity bursts from the collar and I scream out, arching my back, paralysed by the sudden pain. All those cuts along my back, all those welts where Magnus whipped me seem to reopen and it feels like my entire skin is aflame.

"No kicking." Magnus says almost lazily. "I may enjoy your protests, but my friends here prefer a more compliant whore."

I stare back at him completely dumbfounded. Does he really expect me to just give in, to what, become some sort of robot, to lay here, and allow them to use me and not even respond?

"That may normally be the case," the grey-haired man says, digging his nails into my skin. "But who doesn't like a little fight, every now and then? If we wanted consensual, we could just fuck our wives."

The other men murmur their agreement, a few laugh too.

Grey hair yanks my legs, dragging me closer and then he swaps his hands so that both my ankles are now trapped in his one hold. How the fuck

does he have this much strength? It's a sign of how weak I've become that he's able to overpower me like this.

With his free hand, he spears two fingers into me, exploring, examining. I yelp at the brutality of it but then bite my tongue, reminding myself that every protest, every cry, gives them something and I refuse to do it.

He starts widening his fingers, widening me, before he forces another one in, and then another. It's impossibly tight. There's no lube and I'm not in the slightest bit wet so every movement tears my insides more.

The other men, all six of them stand there, watching silently as though they're taking notes.

I force back the tears just as he forces in his entire fist, but it's too much. Too much pain, too much pressure, too much everything. I let out a scream, I jerk so hard that my ankle slips free, and I slam my foot into his face.

He groans, falling back, with his hand now out of me. I scoot away as fast as I can, but another hand falls on me and though I don't look, I know exactly who it belongs to. I'd know his touch anywhere.

"Fucking bitch," grey hair curses.

One of the other men laughs. "I thought you said you liked the fight?" He teases.

Grey hair gets to his feet, shaking his head, before examining his hand. "Her cunt is tight, I'll give her that," he comments and though I know I shouldn't look, I know I shouldn't, I do it, and I can see it, the streaks of my blood, the evidence of what he's already done.

I don't want to think about how much this night is going to hurt, how much pain and how much they're going to make me bleed. My body starts shaking violently and Magnus's fingers dig a little deeper into my shoulder as if he's trying to comfort me in some silent, unspoken way.

"I want her mouth," the larger man with the beard says.

"I'm having her arse," the man with the tattoos adds.

"You take her arse, I want her cunt," grey hair states, staring once more between my legs.

My breath starts to pick up even more, I gulp down, I try to breathe but nothing can calm the fear, nothing can help, because nothing will stop this.

"Before we do anything," Magnus says, "I'm going to bind her."

Bind me? What the fuck does that mean? Aren't my hands already fucking useless? Hasn't he already seen to it that I'm pretty much

defenceless?

“Antonio,” Magnus says, holding his hand to gesture to the one man who’s been stood apart from everyone else. “Would you do the honours of holding her still? I imagine she’s not going to be docile for this.”

My head spins, I look from Magnus to this new man, desperately trying to figure out what the fuck is about to happen.

He inclines his head, stepping into the space and grabs my arm, hauling me to my feet. With one arm, he wraps it around my neck, holding me in a headlock, and the other he presses against my hips, keeping my pelvis flat against his body. I can feel how hard he is. I can feel his cock pushing into my back.

I curl my face up in revulsion but what difference does it really make? He’s going to rape me. Every man here is going to rape and sodomise me. It doesn’t matter how I feel about it, it doesn’t matter what I do. The only thing I can try to do is survive, is to get through it.

Magnus steps up, grabbing my jaw, running his thumb along my lips the way a lover would. In any other place that gesture would feel so entirely different to what it does right now. It would feel caring, considerate and not one of ownership.

He forces a gag into my mouth. I’m almost relieved as he does it because if that’s all the binding is, then fine, I’ll put up with that. It’s not like the one he used before, this one keeps my mouth open, it sits behind my teeth so that my lips make a perfect ‘o’ and I guess what its intention is. The larger man groans, rubbing his hand across his groin like he can’t wait to force his cock down my throat.

Magnus looks up, meeting the eyes of the man holding me and he gives him a nod. Just a tiny one. It’s subtle. But it’s enough.

My heartrate spikes. My adrenaline skyrockets. I jerk, suddenly aware that he’s about to do something unspeakable.

The man holding me, tightens his grip just enough to tell me that that’s what’s happening.

Magnus grabs my breasts, he kneads them, pushing them both together, and I hate that my nipples harden. I hate that my body gives such a response.

He slaps one, then the other, but he’s not his usual aggressive self. It’s like he’s building to something. Taunting me. When he holds up a strip of leather, I frown. My mind can’t put it together, but then he wraps it around

my left breast and I seize up, I panic, I kick my feet out, I fight in every damned way I can.

That arm around my throat suddenly constricts and my airway closes up. I can't breathe. I can't move. My body shuts down, giving in, exactly as they intend. My eyes bulge out their sockets, I can hear the blood rushing to my ears, to my brain. Something high-pitched, something loud screams in my head.

And all the while Magnus is wrapping that strip tighter and tighter around my breast. When he finishes with the left, he does the right, repeating the exact same routine. My breasts are forced out, sticking straight ahead, with the banding so tight that I can already feel my nipples throbbing in protest and my pain radiating from the very middle. Antonio releases his grip just enough that I can finally get some air in and I slump against him.

But when I look down, I gasp in horror through the gag and the sound is so distorted. My breasts are already so swollen, already bright red. If he leaves them like this surely the flesh will die for lack of blood supply?

Magnus tilts his head, grabs my jaw and Antonio removes his hold so that he can do what he likes. I tremble, unsure how I'm even standing now.

"Magnificent." Magnus murmurs, staring down at me. His thumb brushes my nipple and I whimper at the feel of it, at the pain. He isn't even doing anything right now, but just his touch is enough.

He then pinches one nipple, twisting so that I scream. Tears stream down my eyes, I all but collapse onto my knees, burying my face into the rug. My arms are still as good as useless though and it makes me so much more vulnerable in the position I'm in right now.

"Now she's ready." Magnus says.

Fear erupts in me. Abject terror takes hold.

I can't do this. I can't just take this.

I try to scramble away. I don't care what they think of me. I don't care how pathetic I look now. My pride counts for nothing in this moment. All I can think about is survival. Escape.

But it's like a pack of wolves descends on me.

Someone grabs my right leg, hauling me back, and I land with a thump on my front. I scream out as more pain radiates from my chest and I have to roll over immediately to get my weight off.

Another hand wraps around my waist, forcing me once more back onto my knees. A hand yanks my arms up, which in turn slams my face into the rug and another forces my arse cheeks apart.

I brace myself, I mentally try to calm but nothing can prepare me for that brutal, searing pain as the tattooed man forces his cock into me.

“Fuck,” he groans, slapping my arse to force my body to accept him.

As if that’s not enough, grey-haired man pushes his way through, manoeuvring himself so that he’s under me. The man holding my arms raises them enough so that my body is taut, held at an angle above him. My breasts push against his body and I cry out, hating the feel of it, hating that his skin is touching mine and most especially that his mouth is inches away from my nipples.

“You’re right, Magnus.” he says as he grabs hold of my chest with both hands. “These are magnificent like this.”

I scream out as he sucks one nipple into his mouth. The pain is unimaginable. He isn’t even being gentle, he’s sucking on it like his life depends upon it. He pulls off with a pop, then does the same to my left, only this time he bites down, and I know from the way his teeth cut into my flesh that he’s made me bleed.

“Please,” I sob. “Please.”

I can’t take this. I can’t take any of this.

Magnus tuts, sipping at the damned drink in his hand. “Too late for that now, pet.” he says. “You had your chance, you’ve had more than enough chances. You want mercy, then behave yourself now and maybe I’ll consider it.”

Mercy? Fucking mercy? I want more than that. I want this over with. I want this done. I need it to end. I need everything to end. I can’t do another day of this. I can’t do another moment.

I try to jerk my arms, try so desperately to get them free and tattooed man grabs hold of the rope pulling them up so they’re as far up as they’ll go without dislocating.

“Dance for me, bitch.” he says as my body jolts and tries to do everything it can to relieve the horrific pressure he’s created.

“Get your cock out of her ass.” Grey hair growls. “I can’t get in her cunt while you’re taking all the space.”

Tattoo man laughs back, saying something I can’t make out.

And then grey hair grabs my hips, lines himself up and rams himself into me anyway.

I scream. I scream so loudly.

I don't know how on earth my body can even fit them both inside me, but within seconds something inside tears. I can feel the way my insides rip apart and give way.

"She's so fucking tight." Grey hair groans.

"On three." Tattoo man says like this is a team sport.

I can't think, I can't move. Every breath hurts too much. Every second is absolute agony.

Only, it gets worse, so much worse.

They start thrusting, they start fucking me and every jolt sends a blaze of agony inside me. Whatever they've torn, rips further and my blood starts dripping out.

"Filthy, fucking slut," tattoo man says, running his hand down to feel it as it pools between us. "She's dripping wet."

I sob harder at his words, because we all know that's not my arousal.

"Fucking whore obviously needs more than one cock to satisfy her," grey hair says, slapping my right breast and making me scream once more.

A hand grabs my jaw, raises my face and I look up to see beard man holding his erect cock right before my mouth, clearly wanting to get in on the action. There's a bead of precum already starting to drip down the head of it.

"Think another dick will make her come?" He taunts before ramming himself in through the gag and down my throat.

I choke almost instantly. His dick isn't particularly big, but with everything else, it's still too much. And what's worse is I can taste that he hasn't washed. I can taste his sweat, and the remnants of his last piss still there.

"Suck on it, you whore." He groans, sliding out, slapping my cheeks, before slamming back in. "Fucking choke on it," he says like he's giving me any other options.

I start retching, my throat catching and closing every time he rams himself down.

But he barely lasts a few minutes before he's coming, and I don't know if I should be grateful for that fact or not. He groans, gripping my head,

forcing my face against his pelvis and the overwhelming scent of body odour makes me almost pass out.

When he releases me, grey hair grabs my face, forcing me to look at him, while he and tattoo man continue to rape me.

“You liked that, whore? You liked his come down your throat, filling your belly?”

I spit at him. I may still have the gag on, but with everything now in my mouth a damned good amount of it lands on his face.

“You filthy fucking bitch.” He snarls, punching me hard enough that my body collapses.

Tattoo man groans and starts protesting that I’m fighting too much for him to enjoy it.

“We’ve got hours yet.” Grey hair laughs. “You don’t have to blow all your load at once.”

I shut my eyes, I force myself to pretend, to breathe and it’s like my mind does that shift again. Everything flickers as if this were a movie screen and not reality.

I blink rapidly trying to figure it out, but it’s like my mind withdraws, retreats.

Oh, I’m still here, still enduring this. Still being raped.

But I’m floating, too. I’m above it. Witnessing it. Watching the horror play out as if I were some sort of ghost and not part of this at all.

I can still feel the pain, I can still feel every awful thrust, but it’s different now.

I gasp, blinking, as my eyes seem to lose focus. My body slumps, my heart seems to slow just a little. I can still feel the panic and the fear but it’s also almost calm now. It’s as though my mind has wrapped me up, taken me away and is protecting me the only way I know how.

Tattoo man comes, filling my arse and when he pulls out, it drips down onto my thighs.

Grey hair keeps going longer, clearly enjoying the moment now that he’s got me all to myself. He manoeuvres my body around, pushes me onto my back, and starts calling me more names, spouting more degrading insults about what a whore I am while the others cheer and join in.

He pushes my legs apart, and then forces his entire fist into my arse.

“Fucking slut. Not so tight now, are you?” he states as he starts penetrating me over and over and over.

Tears stream down my face. My body rocks back and forth, and with every brutal thrust, my breasts protest so excruciatingly. When I glance down, I can see they're no longer red. They're blue now, almost black. Will they fall off? Will my nipples shrivel up and die? Is it even possible to survive such a thing?

Just as my panic starts to soar again, my mind steps in and that haze takes me.

I stare up, unblinking at the ceiling. It's so much higher than it should be. These rooms must be twice the height of a normal one. I don't even understand what this place truly is. What its purpose is, why would the Brethren need such a hell as this anyway?

"Make her come."

The words linger, hang about me. Every time Magnus tried before I would fight, I would do everything to stop it, but this time I'm not worried. I know my body is too damaged and too broken for there to even be a chance of it.

"Come, you whore." Grey hair's fingers pinch my clit, I can feel him trying to get me off, but it does nothing.

I stare on. My body takes the pain and the abuse, but I don't respond. I just lay there. After all, isn't that what Magnus wanted? Isn't that what he ordered after he shocked me? That I wasn't allowed to fight, that I wasn't meant to retaliate in any way.

I guess he got his wish. I guess this is his victory.

Right now, I don't care. Right now, on some level I feel almost at peace. My mind is free, my mind is saving me.

A slap to the face jolts me just for a second and then I slip back under.

Grey hair starts picking up pace. It's clear the man is finally there. When he comes, he pulls out, covering me in his semen, smearing it over my body and then he pulls his hand out of my arse, wiping my blood all over my skin too.

I don't move. I just lie there, with all my bodyweight now pushing down on my arms cutting off even more of the blood supply.

Three of them have had some fun. There are three left. Will they do the same? Will they tag team it? What if they want something else? What more could I possibly endure?

Magnus bends down beside me, grabbing my jaw. As he moves my head to look me in the eyes, I still don't react. I still give him nothing.

He mutters something. I don't know if it's meant for me or for them, but no one replies.

He says something else and Antonio answers. Magnus smirks, his eyes illuminating like he's just had an idea.

He steps back, Antonio reaches down, hauling me up and I slump against him, hoping that at least my blood will ruin his fancy suit, if nothing else.

Magnus strides away, picks something up and puts it into the fireplace.

When he comes back, he grabs my face again.

"You think I'll let you pull that trick?" he murmurs, like I have any idea what that means, like I'm in any state to even respond.

"Hold her." he orders.

Antonio's arms wrap around me again, in that same headlock. For a second, I pray that he's going to remove the bindings, that he's going to take them off and though I'm fearful about how much it's going to hurt I want it so much I almost thank him.

But then he comes back, and I see what's in his hands and reality comes back with a vengeance. I scream out, fighting harder than I ever have. Fear rips through me.

In my head all I can hear is the same word over and over, run—as if I can. As if I can simply walk out and escape.

He holds the brand up, right in front of my face. I can feel the heat of it, I can see the way the metal is glowing bright red.

He straightens the angle, moving it right to the soft skin on my breastbone and pushes it there in one firm, confident, movement.

I scream, I scream so loud I swear my voice box shatters.

Antonio holds me perfectly still.

It burns into my chest, it sears my skin, and the pain is even worse than everything else they've done to me, everything else I've endured.

When he pulls it away, I stare in horror at where my flesh is melted and marred. It's Magnus's crest, his insignia. He's branded me with it.

"Now you won't forget your place and what's expected of you," he says.

Antonio lets me go. I collapse onto the floor, barely feeling the pain in my breasts, or the agony between my thighs, because this new injury overrides absolutely everything else.

Blood is still dripping out from me, I know I can't physically take anymore.

The others laugh and shout. A few kick at me, calling me a whore.

One produces a knife, asking if he can carve his name into me next.

My body won't stop shaking. My mind fractures entirely and all I can think is that this has to be over. I can't wake another day like this. I can't take another second.

I don't care what happens, I don't care what I have to do. I can't take any more pain. I just can't.

Beard man hands out drinks, starts describing in detail what he wants to do to me next, how he wants to clamp my clit and pierce my nipples too. Apparently, there are some nails on the side that he's going to use, driving them in slowly, one by one like little daggers.

Grey hair states that he's going to fist me again, that clearly, I need the girth to get off on and that'll make me come harder, as if I did the first time.

But Antonio stands there, watching me silently, like he's got a plan so fucked up even he's afraid of following through.

My eyes dart to the others, to Magnus, and tattoo man, and the two men yet to rape me. If I don't do something, I won't survive this. But then, that was always the plan, wasn't it? That was the deal Magnus made all those months ago, back in the cathedral. I have a death sentence, it's just a question of when Magnus decides to carry it out.

Is that how this night will end? Them fucking me over and over, hurting me, beating me, raping me until I'm so broken that my body actually does give out. The thought of my ending being so near doesn't feel me with any relief because I know every second will feel like an eternity between now and then. Magnus will make sure of it.

No, I need to end this my way.

The thought hits me like a tidal wave.

I'm done trying to fight, I'm done trying to prove that I'm better than him. He broke me, he's won. The only thing I can control is this moment here, is my death.

I stare rapidly around the room, trying to find something, anything, a knife or a gun, or something that I can use, something that will be quick, decisive.

But there's nothing here. Nothing except the thing Magnus used to brand me with and that won't do.

And then my eyes land on the windows. They're huge, ornate, so out of place with the rest of this space. When we came in, we must have climbed at least two flights of stairs. That puts us on the second floor by my reckoning. Would a fall from this height be enough? Maybe if I jumped with enough force?

I glance to the men, none of them are watching me now, not even Antonio. They're too busy having their refreshment break.

The windows are a good few metres from where I'm lying. I'm not sure I have the strength for this, but I have to take the chance because any minute, they're going to put those fancy glasses down and start abusing me again.

I force my body up, moving slowly at first. Still no one takes any notice.

It's hard to get to my feet, my body protests so much that I have to swallow the cries because I know if they hear it, they'll look my way and it'll all be over.

I take one small tentative step, then another.

And then I turn, racing with every last bit of energy I have left. I spring from the floor, throwing all my weight into the jump and I crash into the glass, feeling it tear into my skin as I fall through and down.

I land in a broken heap of limbs. My shoulder is wrong. My legs feel like they're not angled right. But I'm alive. How the fuck am I still alive? I wanted to snap my neck, break my back. I wanted to be dead already.

I squirm, feeling a jolt of searing pain from my shoulder. My arms are still tied, but there's enough glass here to do something about that. I snatch at a long-jagged piece, cutting into my palm as I hack as quickly as I can.

And then I realise what else I have to do. What has to be done. With a deep breath, I drag it up from my wrist the whole way to my elbow, cutting deep enough to ensure I sever the artery.

It takes almost all my strength to do it. I know I need to cut my other wrist too to be sure, but with my shoulder as it is I can't move my arm around enough to get the angle right.

The glass slips from my hand, it chatters almost merrily as it drops beside me.

And as my blood starts to spurt out, I pray that it is enough. It has to be enough. Please, God, just let it end.

Exhaustion overwhelms me. I lay back, I shut my eyes, and I give in with a small smile on my face because it is over. Despite everything that

bastard has done to me, I have beaten him in my own way.

I can feel my life ebbing away. I can feel my body getting colder and colder. I don't even care if there is nothing beyond this. If death is all that awaits me, I'm okay with that. Content with that.

I would welcome that nothingness with open arms.

Because I can be at peace now. I can be free.

And Magnus Blake will never be able to hurt me again.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE



Magnus

It's fast. Too fast for me to react in time.

I reach out, try to snatch at her with my hands, but she's already gone.

And then it's like everything slows, the world goes silent, and yet it's so damned loud at the same time.

All I can see is her, the sheer panic in her face, the fear but the defiance, too. She flings herself out the window just as I shout for someone to grab hold of her.

The glass shatters, the frame gives way from the force at which her body slams into it.

But she doesn't scream, she doesn't make a sound as she falls. No, even now she's too damned defiant to give me that little bit of satisfaction.

She lands with a thud and a crack—that only too recognisable sound of a body hitting something hard and unforgiving.

My feet move before I can register them. I push past everyone, desperate to get to her. My heart thumps in my chest, but I can't tell if it's excitement or fear... but then what would I have to be afraid of?

By the time I reach her, there's a few strangers surrounding her. She's landed right into one of the courtyards and a crowd is gathering to watch this spectacle play out.

I shout out, barking for them to get the fuck away and to leave her alone.

She's mine. My pet. My plaything.

Her chest is rising slowly, her body is trembling in a way that tells me she's already gone into shock.

She's dying.

My little pet is dying.

I kneel down, glaring at her as I take her hand. How fucking dare she? How fucking dare she think she has the power to make such a decision? Her death belongs to me. She has no right to claim it before I've decided it's time.

I yank the gag from her mouth, tossing it away.

Something wet soaks into my clothes, the hand that I'm holding feels slick, sticky. I glance down and realise it's blood. She's bleeding heavily.

I guess I shouldn't be too surprised by that fact, after all, she did throw herself out of a window, didn't she? She must have a thousand cuts and slices from the broken glass.

But the amount of blood... it's too much. Too much to simply be a graze.

I turn her over, ignoring her pitiful cries of pain. She did this to herself after all, she deserves to damn well suffer for it.

My hands run all over her, feeling for hurts, and then I stop as I find the wound I've been searching for.

"Fuck," I hiss under my breath. "Fuck, fuck, fuck."

It's on her other arm and it's deep, very fucking deep and it runs all the way up from her wrist, creating a cavernous split through her flesh. The stupid bitch has probably severed an artery.

She lets out a gurgle, like she's actually enjoying my fury and as I meet her eyes, she holds up a piece of jagged glass and that tells me everything I needed to know. That it was intentional. She did it. She cut herself open. She tried to end this.

I raise my hand, smacking her hard across the face because how fucking dare she? She has no rights, she has no autonomy.

As she lies dazed, I shout out, demanding someone get me a damned doctor, or a surgeon, or someone to deal with this. I'm not just going to let her die. Not here. Not under her terms.

No, Liliana is mine, every part of her is mine, even her death belongs to me and it will be at my choosing, exactly how I plan it out and execute it.

With my hands, I tear at my shirt, ripping the fabric into a usable strip and I wrap it around her upper arm like a tourniquet, trying to cut off the circulation and stem the flow. Behind me I can hear the sound of more bodies approaching, but I don't have time to wait.

I scoop her up, holding her so that her head is resting against my chest, and I carry her back past the shocked, gawping faces. I don't give a damn what they think, I don't give two shits.

But I'm not losing my favourite toy, not like this.

Down in the basement there's a medical bay. As I storm in, a doctor meets me, his face screwed up in concern.

And he should be.

He should be very fucking concerned.

A nurse lays her out on the gurney, and she starts to fight like she's using the very last of her strength to ensure she gets her way. But she's not winning this. Not today. I won't let her beat me.

I push past, holding her down, pinning her broken body as she screams, and I force her to comply. It's impressive that someone so close to death is still so able to fight, but then, Liliana was never one to back down, and right now she's got everything to lose.

"Sedate her." I snarl over my shoulder and as soon as her body goes limp, the pressure seems to ease.

When I let go, I can see the marks where my hands dug into her flesh. Where the livid bruising matches the cuts and tears like a pattern across her skin.

"She's lost a lot of blood." the doctor says like I'm some sort of idiot.

"Fix her." I reply keeping my gaze on her. They're putting in some sort of fluids, no doubt because they can see how malnourished she is. Someone else walks in with a bag of blood and hangs it on a separate hook.

"She's in a bad way," the doctor continues. "I'll do my best..."

He doesn't get to finish that sentence because my hand wraps around his throat and I put my face right up into his. "You will fix her. You will save her. Because if she dies, so do you. I'll rip the damn flesh off your bones, do you hear me?"

He gulps, stumbling back as I release him.

"There, there," Conrad says as he saunters in like this is some sort of circus. "I'm sure your precious toy will be just fine."

I roll my eyes glaring at my brother. Clearly, he doesn't understand the enormity of the situation. I've hurt her, raped her, beat her, tortured her in the most delicious ways I can imagine and yet, my dear pet has never once given in. Oh, her body may have surrendered. Her body may have betrayed her but her mind, no, her mind has still refused me.

Even now, even after tonight's games, she didn't break, instead, she chose to fight in a different way. She chose to deny me what is rightfully mine.

I huff, leaning back into the cold hard wall. I've never met anyone as bloody minded as her, as defiant, as truly perfect.

And I fucking hate it.

I hate that I'm impressed.

I hate that in some way, I admire this bitch.

I should be gloating right now, I should feel victorious that I've pushed her to this point, but that's not what I feel. I feel furious.

"You could just let her die." Conrad says quietly.

"No," I growl.

"You can't keep her like this forever, Magnus. Sooner or later you will go too far."

"But it will be on my terms, when I decide." I state. If she dies now, then she wins, and I can't have that. I refuse to have that.

"What will you do when the others realise how you feel?" he asks in a low voice.

"What?"

"You clearly care for her..."

I let out a laugh. It sounds twisted, completely inappropriate considering the circumstances and a few of the nurses glance at me in obvious confusion.

He thinks that what's driving me in this is love? He thinks that I've been so stupid to fall for my captive?

“I’m not capable of love.” I spit. I know that’s true. I know such emotions are beyond me, but I can’t deny what I *am* feeling. I can’t deny that the thought of not seeing her, of not being able to reach out and touch her, it’s too much.

On some level she has wormed her way in, has conditioned me as I was conditioning her.

No, it’s not love. But it *is* something. A compulsion. An obsession. Call it what you will, it is there.

I’ve moulded this woman, I’ve carved her anew and I refuse to say goodbye to the perfect creature I’ve now created.

“Save her.” I repeat again. Feeling more desperate this time. Feeling more helpless too.

Conrad squeezes my shoulder and we stand, mute, watching as they work away, as they stitch her back up and mend her broken body, not just from the fall but from the hours of abuse she’s endured at my hands.

When she’s all done, I step forward, taking her hand, needing to feel her pulse, needing to prove that she is alive, that she is here, that I am not losing her.

Her eyes flicker open, only for a moment before they close again.

Does she see me? Does she realise it’s me holding her hand?

Would she shudder and cry if she did? Or would she feel relief that I’m here, that I’ve got her, that she is still, as she always will be, my pet, my toy. My plaything.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO



Liliana

My head feels hazy, my eyes struggle for a moment to open, and all I can focus on is the softness of what is surrounding me.

It smells good too. I feel like I'm floating. Like I've somehow lost all sense of gravity and my body has no weight whatsoever.

And then it all comes back. Every horrific moment.

I blink more rapidly, realising that that comforting embrace is a duvet. That I'm in a bed, an actual bed. As I roll over, as I take in the fancy surroundings, my mind still can't commute what is going on. It's like I'm so used to the darkness I can't even register the light.

"You're awake."

His voice sends the fear of God into me. I gasp, whimpering, as my eyes immediately find his across the room.

He's sat in an armchair, looking like he's been there for some time. As he gets up and moves towards me, I shrink back, but my body still won't

obey me. My left leg feels like it's too heavy, and my shoulder joints are so painful every slight movement is torture.

My breath hitches, my heart thumps in my chest as he closes the distance and leans right over me. With one hand, he slaps me hard across the cheek.

"Only I get to decide when this ends," he says. "Not you. Your life belongs to me. Do you understand?"

I want to reply, to say something clever, or defiant even, but my words seem to get lost on my tongue and it's all I can do to hold his gaze. So much disappointment swirls inside me because I'm still alive, still here, still stuck in this horrific situation.

He grips my face, tightening his fingers around my jaw as he silently demands an answer.

Through my puckered lips I whisper the word 'yes,' but I hate myself for that syllable. I hate myself for the brief moment of submission.

With a small smirk, he drops his hold, but he stays where he is, towering over me.

Something on my chest burns. I can feel the way my skin protests.

He branded me.

God, that happened, too. Right before I fled, right before I threw myself out of that window.

My anger flares, perhaps my stupidity does too. I clench my fists, knowing that he's going to make me pay for this, but I don't care, even now, even after everything he's done, I'm not broken, at least not entirely and I need him to know it.

"I hate you." I hiss.

His lips curl. Like always, I wonder if those words are music to his ears. That he enjoys my hate as much as he enjoys abusing my body.

"I would rather die than let you touch me again and I will do it, I will kill myself."

He tuts, grabbing my jaw once more. "Unfortunately for you, you don't get to make those decisions. You're my pet, my plaything. You'll live as long as I decide, you'll endure..."

Whatever words of torment he says seem to fade as my mind starts to drift. It doesn't really matter what he says anyway, this all remains the same. I am his plaything, his pet, I'll endure whatever he does to me because there are no other options available, no escape to be had.

He loosens his grip, moving to the end of the bed. “You’re to stay in this room, there’s a bathroom beyond that door you can use. If you take one step outside, you’ll be punished, do you hear me?”

Punished more than I have been? Tortured more than he’s done already? His threats feel almost empty, only, I know they’re not. I don’t doubt Magnus has far more creative ways of hurting me, he’s just waiting for the opportunity.

I sink back into the pillows, grateful at least for this tiny improvement in my situation.

When he leaves me to it, I let out a low breath. I half expected him to drag me back down to the basement, to that same dark prison he’s kept me in, and I can’t seem to understand why I am here, what the purpose of this is? Is this a new game, give me a tiny glimmer of hope, and then snatch it away? Or does he feel guilty? Has my suicide attempt actually affected him?

No, it can’t be. The man has no conscience. I know that much.

My eyes dart about the room, taking in the polished furniture, the marble fireplace, the ridiculously ornate mirror, just the sheer luxury of the space. It’s so different from the other bedroom he took me too. I guessed most of his house would be like this, grand, opulent, but it still surprises me that I’ve not been put in the equivalent of the servants’ quarters. Stored away somewhere discreet until I’m recovered enough to return to my basement hell once more.

As I try to sit up, my arms protest, my leg refuses to cooperate, but I’m busting for a wee. My bladder feels so full that I might actually lose all control of it, and I doubt Magnus will be pleased to come back and find that I’ve pissed all over the bed.

With all the strength I have, I swing my legs around and push off the mattress, but within seconds the floor comes hurtling towards me and I faceplant into the softest, plushest carpet I have ever encountered.

White hot pain shoots up my leg, I let out a defeated cry but I drag myself up, practically crawl across the room to where the bathroom is and, with the little strength I have left, I manage to finally clamber onto the toilet and mercifully relieve myself.

I guess the doctors must have fixed me up down there too because I can feel the stitches, I can feel the way all those awful tears are now healing inside me.

I don't know how long I've been out, but it's clear that it's been a few days. Did Magnus keep me sedated all that time? That thought is not comforting in the slightest.

Once I'm done peeing, I realise I have to make it the whole way back and right now, that feels as unachievable as climbing a mountain. Baby steps. That's all I need. One step, then another...

I freeze as my eyes catch sight of myself in the mirror. It's the first time I've seen my reflection since they took me, since *he* took me. My skin is so pale, I have great dark circles under my eyes and my left one is still slightly swollen from where I was punched. You can see I've been starved. My breasts are bruised from how they were bound up but my nipples look normal, they don't look like they're going to drop off anymore. My hair, my beautiful hair is gone, and though it's started to grow back, my scalp is still clearly visible under the tufts of red that seems to have sprouted.

I look horrendous.

I look as bruised and battered as I feel.

And then my eyes drop to appraise my body, to see all the scars and damage that's been inflicted there. There's a bandage over my breastbone and the constant throbbing beneath is another reminder of what's been done. That he branded me, he seared his family's crest into my skin like I'm some object he can possess.

I guess in his mind that's exactly what I am. A thing. A belonging.

I clench my jaw and even my teeth feel brittle like they might crumble if I bite too hard. There isn't a brush on the side, but I'd give just about anything to clean them right now. I guess I'll just have to settle for rinsing my mouth out.

With my hands, I shakily catch the water as it flows and gulp it down, suddenly so aware of how thirsty I am. Obviously whatever drugs I've been given are starting to wear off, that or I'm just coming back to my senses.

Telling myself that the drink was enough, I turn and stumble towards the doorframe, using it to keep me up. My left leg is pretty much useless, and I have to put all my weight on my right only I don't have the strength or the bravery to hop.

God, this was stupid. I should have just stayed in the bed. I should have just ignored my damned bladder, but if I had, I very well could have pissed myself and I know Magnus would have been furious at that.

I can feel the sweat on my brow, I can feel what little energy I have seeping away. The bed feels like it's a million miles from me, that I have to cross an entire desert to make it. I gulp, repeating over and over that I can do it, that it's not that big a deal, that once I'm there, I can sleep.

But another jarring step stops me in my tracks and my chest heaves with the bitter realisation of how utterly broken my body truly is, while a snide voice in my head whispers that I'll never recover, never be the person I was before.

That I'm irrevocably damaged now.

That even if these wounds heal, even when my leg is mended, my soul will still be fractured.

My right arm has a long, awful wound that traces right up to my elbow where I tore my flesh open with that broken fragment of glass. They've stitched it back up, stitched me back up, patched me up like a rag doll. Once it heals fully, I know that scar will be there for life, acting as a constant reminder of where I failed. Of the chance squandered.

"You should be in bed."

I jolt, my eyes darting up in fear, even though I know it's not *him*.

"What, what are you doing here?" I gasp as I meet his butler's gaze. He shakes his head slightly, taking in my naked body and though I should be used to it now, I still feel another wave of shame. That I'm exposed, that I'm no better than an animal right now, with everything on display.

He holds out his arm, taking my weight and practically carries me across the room while I try my best not to recoil or fight. As he helps me get into the bed, I swear I see a flash of something akin to pity, but that could also just be my desperate mind clinging to something I know no longer exists.

"You need to keep off this leg," he states.

"Why are you here?" I whisper.

He shakes his head again, murmuring that he's not meant to be talking to me. That he's under strict instructions not to utter a word.

"Please..." The word escapes my mouth, but I'm not begging for help, I'm not asking him to get me out of here, I just need to understand what the fuck is going on.

Why am I here? Why am I not back in that basement? What the fuck does this mean? And more to the point, what does he have planned for me now? What awful things lay in my future?

I can't speak those questions out loud, I can't form any articulate words and yet, I know that he knows what I'm thinking, what I need.

He lets out a low breath, walking over to where he's placed a tray of food and he brings it back, making a point of gesturing for me to eat. My mouth waters at the sight of it, even though it's pretty basic. There's a small bowl of soup, some boiled vegetables, and some plain looking chicken. All of it looks measured out, as though someone has specifically decided the portion size. There's no cutlery either. Just tiny bite-sized pieces.

Is that Magnus's new plan? Feed me up. Fix me up. Make me as shiny and new as he can before he once more shatters me into a million pieces? I can't help the shudder at that thought.

The butler raises an eyebrow at me as if silently questioning my reaction, but I decide not to respond. If he won't speak to me, then there's little point divulging my thoughts, is there? So instead, I eat in silence. I have to pick the soup bowl up and slurp it. I chew as quietly as I can, fearful that perhaps this isn't actually permitted, and any minute Magnus is going to storm in here and snatch this precious meal away from me like he's snatched everything else I've ever held dear.

When I'm done, he takes the tray and leaves. He doesn't say another word. Doesn't utter a single syllable.

And then I'm alone again.

Relief, confusion on some level, and grief hits me as I lay back down. I don't understand what is happening. I don't understand any of this. My mind feels like it's running at a million miles a minute trying to figure this, desperately seeking an answer so that I can prepare, so that I can be ready.

But hours past. The whole day seems to pass and no one comes back. No one breaks the solitude. I lay there, too afraid, and in truth, too weak to do anything but simply feel each second ebb into nothing.

I guess I should be grateful for this brief reprieve and on some level I am.

But I was happy to die.

Content with it. I'd made my peace, I'd come to terms with the fact that this was how I would go, that I'd lay there, bleeding out and while the pain was unbearable, on some level it was calm. It was okay.

I was at peace. I was ready.

I wanted to die.

And yet again, he wouldn't let me.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE



Magnus

She's fast asleep when I walk back in. Curled up in the duvet with her hands balled into tight little fists as if she's ready to fight even now.

For a moment, I just stand there, observing her, listening to the almost silent sound of her breathing.

I may have adjusted the sails, may have course corrected, but that doesn't change a few facts. She's still my plaything, still my toy to break.

Only now, I've done enough breaking, enough torment.

And besides, I like the idea of fucking with her head by showing this other side of me, by showing that I can be nice when I want to.

In silence, I cross the room, crouch down by her face and brush the wisps of her hair aside.

As expected, she jerks to life, recoiling back, with that flash of fear and then defiance that I'm enjoying so much.

But she doesn't cry out, she still doesn't make a sound, she just gulps as if she's swallowing all the hateful things she wants to say.

There's a part of me that wants to tease them out, to force them out, to reach down and snatch at her arm and hurt her just a little so that she bites back, like the bitch I know she still is.

But that would be unfair, unkind. I'm trying to play nice, I remind myself, as I yank the covers back and she jerks even more.

I could explain what I'm doing, I could simply tell her, but it's more fun to hear the way her breath turns to panic as I pick her up and carry her into the bathroom.

"Piss." I order as I plonk her onto the toilet.

She glares at me but only for a millisecond before she gives in, and we hear the merry little tinkling sound that tells us both she's being obedient.

I don't need to give her the respect, but I turn away while she wipes, allowing her a tiny bit of dignity, and instead move to run the bath. The nurses gave her a washdown while she was out, but she still looks filthy. And if she's going to be sleeping in my bed then she will damn well be civilised about it.

As the bath fills, I hum a tune, staring at my face in the mirror, fixing my hair, noting the new streaks of grey in it.

She lets out a cry as I plonk her unceremoniously into the water, but she's quick to muffle it and I see her jaw tighten in unspoken fury.

"Why are you doing this?" she murmurs after some clear deliberation.

"Doing what?" I reply.

"This." She gestures to the bath, then to the room. "Why am I here and not in that cell?"

"Are you not content with your current surroundings?" I ask, letting the edge slip back into my voice. Is my bedroom not good enough for her, is that it?

"That's not..."

"Do you want me to return you to the dark? Do you want me to hurt you again?"

She shakes her head quickly. "No."

"Then be content." I state. Be fucking grateful too because I don't have to give her this. I don't have to do anything of the sort.

She glares at me for a second then drops her gaze, staring at the bubbles and I wait, expecting more fight back, more words, more bullshit.

When I realise there won't be any more, I turn, grabbing a washcloth from the side and I slowly start rubbing at her skin. She gasps, shudders,

physically recoils before it dawns on her that like everything I've done so far, she cannot escape this.

As I move between her thighs, she lets out a whimper of fear. I know she must be sore there. The medics had to spend more than an hour fixing the damage to her anus because she tore right through. It's another reason why we've kept her sedated this past week. Better she wake half-healed than I have to deal with her tears along with everything else.

With one hand, I grab her injured leg and hoist it over the edge. It's undignified, it's wanton, the way she's splayed open for me and she flushes with shame.

"Don't." I chastise as she moves to cover herself with her hand. I don't know why she even bothers. I've seen every inch of her, tasted every part of her. There is no part of her body I don't know.

She grits her teeth turning her face away, and she stares at the marble floor like she's disassociating again.

And that pisses me off more.

I didn't like that she played that card last week, I hated how she could just withdraw when it was meant to be a teaching moment. But now, with me, she thinks I'll just let it slide? Did she learn nothing from her branding?

I rub the cloth, moving it down her pussy in a deliberate manner that has nothing to do with cleanliness.

"No," she whispers so quietly I wonder if I've imagined it.

So I do it again, only this time I drag it back up, spreading her lips wider before I start circling on her clit. Oh, I know she hates it, I know in her head she's fighting, but her hips are rising just enough, and the way she's biting her lip tells me it's working. I've trained her so well. And after all the pain she's endured, she's desperate for any bit of pleasure no matter where it comes from.

Her cunt wants more, her cunt is begging for it.

But doing this, forcing her so soon, doesn't exactly fit with the new plan.

Just as she lets out what could be a whimper of need, I move on, I focus on her lower legs, on her feet. Her left leg might be out of action, but I knead my thumbs into the soles of her right foot. Again, she lays there, sullen and silent, but I can tell that she likes it. I can tell that she's enjoying it.

Stubborn bitch just won't admit it.

I'll admit I was pleased that she didn't come for them, that despite their best efforts, she didn't perform. No, my pet performs for me and me alone.

After a few more minutes of taunting her into making some noise, I toss the cloth and pick up a jug. Her hair is still more whispers than a full head, but I pour the water over her anyway and then grab a small portion of shampoo.

She shuts her eyes, clenching her fists under the water, as though she doesn't want me to see, and she tolerates my manhandling in more stubborn silence.

When I pull the plug, she looks relieved, as if I'd simply towel her down and be done with it. Only, I force her to stand on her good leg and then I perch her on the bath ledge while I rub some scented oil into her skin.

She hisses as I do it and I realise it's probably making all those cuts on her skin hurt like hell. Well, tough fucking luck for that, after all, she's the one who decided to jump out of a window.

When I reach the white plaster stuck on her chest, I pause. We both know what's beneath it. We both know she'll carry my family's chest on her skin as a marker until the day she dies.

With a little teasing, I tear the plaster off. Beneath the skin is blistered, bright red, and angry still.

The instant the air hits her flesh, eyes dart to the mirror, to her reflection, and I see them widen in shock and pain as she sees what I've done.

I can feel her trembling, I feel how close she is to tears and yet her jaw tightens, and she doesn't give me any further reaction.

"It's an honour." I state. "To bear my family's seal like that."

Oh, I know I'm goading her but how can I resist? She looks so magnificent right now, such a perfect, obedient pet. The complete opposite of what she was in Oblivion.

She refuses to take the bait. She simply drops her gaze, staring at the white marble beneath our feet. So I scoop her up, carry her back, and I return her once more to my bed.

Once I've stripped off, I clamber in beside her. Her body tenses, her breath stills, but there's no other show of emotion. My little pet lays there, playing docile, but I know her mind is racing at a million miles an hour.

I doubt she'll sleep much. I doubt she'll dare too. Me, however, I know I'll have the best night yet.

With a quick flick of the switch, I pitch us into darkness. And as I pull her body into mine, I set the scene for how our nights will be from now on. That even in sleep, my body will still lay claim to hers.

She'll get no rest without me.

She'll have no reprieve.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR



Liliana

He wakes before I do. How I manage to sleep at all, I don't know, but I guess my body is so exhausted that even the monster beside me cannot keep me awake.

He shuffles around, moving in the semi-darkness while I lay still, and then he disappears into the dressing room before coming out in a suit.

"Stay in bed," he instructs like I've now morphed into a lady of leisure with a dozen other options on how to spend my day. "Gabe will bring you breakfast."

I don't react. Don't even open my eyes. Oh, he knows I'm awake, but it all feels pointless. It's not like I want to wish him good morning, to smile, to say I hope he has a great day. Whatever business is pulling him away at this hour I don't know, but I'm pretty certain I'm happier here, in ignorance and alone.

Once he's gone, I physically relax, my body seems to calm. Everything seems to ease. I stay still, I lie almost content in this bed and by the time the

butler comes in, I've fallen into a deep sleep and jerk awake in shock.

He gives me that fleeting sympathetic look as he holds a tray, and the whiff of food makes my stomach growl so loudly.

I drag my body up, grabbing the covers to keep myself decent and he places the tray on my lap like this is all perfectly normal. Like this is the new normal.

I can't get my head around it. I can't process what the fuck is happening.

But the food looks too good to care and in this moment, I decide to take the good where I can.

I've been given bacon and eggs and some French toast on the side. I gulp down mouthful after mouthful, not bothering with the cutlery, just using my bare hands like I truly have become savage. Once the plate is clear, the butler, who I'm guessing is Gabe, takes it away and I curl up once more in my captor's bed.

Only, my eyes keep darting to the door. And my mind keeps drifting to question where Magnus is.

What is he doing? Is he planning something, something awful to do with me? Or is he going to wait until my leg is healed and then he'll parade me out, dress me up once more, and then lay me out for his friends to rape and abuse?

By the time he comes back, it's dark. He must have eaten dinner somewhere else because Gabe brought mine up on a tray.

And as he lingers by the door, I don't know whether to feel relief or fear. He's back, at least I can stop second guessing what he's up to. But now he's here, I can no longer hide either. I can no longer shut my eyes and pretend this isn't just an awful figment of my imagination.

And worse, so much worse, as he steps closer, I can feel the goosebumps, I can feel the way my body is reacting. Will he fuck me? Will he pin me down and brutalise my body? Or does this new gentleness extend to that aspect, too? Will he murmur nonsense into my ear, will he caress my skin? Pretend that he's making love and not raping me?

I don't know what would be worse, to be loved by this man or hated by him?

He scoops me up, carries me back into the bathroom just like he did the day before.

Only, this time, once I'm submerged in the water, he doesn't take liberties, he doesn't touch me in any way other than to clean.

What the fuck is he doing? What is this? Am I his plaything still? He can't care for me. No man can do the kinds of things he's done to me if he had any feelings for me.

No, that's not it. It can't be it.

So what the fuck is this? What the fuck is going on?

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE



Magnus

Her confusion makes my lips quirk. For days now I've left her alone, coming back only at night to bathe her, take care of her, and then sleep beside her.

At first, I thought I imagined it, the way her eyes seemed to almost sparkle when I walked into the room and in truth, it could have simply been her fear but now, now I'm certain there is more.

She's cracking. The bitch is finally cracking.

I shouldn't feel the way I do at that knowledge, I shouldn't feel so enthralled by the idea that she now wants me.

But I let out a slow rumble of amusement as I rub that beautifully scarred skin on her back.

"What's so funny?" she whispers, just loud enough for me to hear.

The shake of my head is all I give her in reply. It's another thing I've learnt. Don't speak. Don't actively engage. Just keep taunting her with this supposed kindness.

Her hands ball into fists below the water, but she keeps her breath steady, bites down any insults that are no doubt swirling in that intelligent brain of hers.

From the angle I'm at, I have a near perfect view of her chest. Her body has definitely benefited from the change in her prison arrangements. Her breasts are looking fuller, her rib cage has stopped protruding and that gaunt, starved expression on her face has faded.

It's all I can do not to reach out and just take her.

As I bring the cloth down over her front, she opens her legs, just a little, as if urging me to cross that line. I can't tell if it's a conscious decision on her part. Looking into those suddenly fierce eyes suggests that it's not. No, she'll still outwardly fight me if I try anything and yet that makes it all the more tempting.

Part of me wants that fight, no, needs it.

I'm dying to pin her down and force myself inside her and feel as every cell in her body fights against me.

I want to feel her anger, and her hate, I want to grapple with all those twisting emotions.

And more than anything, I want to prove to her that it makes no difference. That she can fight, and scream, and protest in any which way she pleases, I will have her, I will have all of her.

Only, I can't do that right this moment. I have to bide my time. It's a subtle war I'm fighting, a psychological battle.

I've already stripped her body down, broken it into as many pieces as I could. Now, I'm going to do the same to her mind.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX



Liliana

Two weeks. Two weeks I've been in this room, in this bed. At first, all I did was sleep.

But now I'm recovered, or as recovered as I can be. My body is physically fixed. My leg is no longer refusing to take my weight. Even the burn on my chest is healing enough that it doesn't continuously hurt.

And yet he hasn't kicked me out. Hasn't hauled my arse all the way back to the darkness.

Nor has he touched me.

He may have taken tiny liberties with the first bath, but since then he's acting more as a nursemaid than my abuser. He's washed me, massaged oils into my skin, taken care of me the way a lover would their sick companion.

It's driving me mad. It's making me crazy.

I don't want his touch. I don't want anything from him.

But why the fuck is he doing this? Why isn't he just taking what he so obviously wants? Why is he pretending to care, pretending to be someone

he's not?

Every touch he makes, every slight brush of his hands against my skin makes me shiver and I feel equal levels of repulsion and need.

I can't look him in the eyes, I can't even look at Gabe anymore. My shame is too great. My guilt and my self-hate are taking over everything. I wish I could just disappear, could just fade off and daydream the way I did when he and his mates were raping me. Surely, such an end would be better than this new form of torture?

Every night he sleeps beside me as if I won't gut him the moment I get the chance, and every morning he leaves, with that smirk on his face and the knowledge that I'll be here, naked, still in his bed when he returns.

Smug fucking bastard. I hate him. I fucking hate him.

I want to be back in the darkness. I need to be. I have to get out of this room because it's tricking me, fooling me into thinking that this man is not the monster I know him to be.

I clench my fists, curling up the stupidly soft sheets, and I snarl before I can stop myself.

Beside me, Magnus turns, opening his eyes and with horror, I realise that I've woken him. I really am becoming reckless, aren't I? Reckless and stupid.

Maybe it's a good thing. Maybe he'll react now, lash out, hurt me, and remind me once more that he is the literal spawn of Satan.

He pulls me closer, pulls me so that I'm pressed up against him. Goosebumps erupt over my skin, something crawls down my spine and it feels both delicious and horrific all at the same time.

I don't want his attention, I don't want his touch, and yet I crave it as if nothing in this world could ever compare. As if nothing but the feel of my rapist's skin against mine will do. A shudder runs through me and the contempt I feel is undefinable.

He lowers his face to mine and that look in his eyes, it's so much worse than the usual contempt he holds for me. No, this look, this hunger, it fucks with my head, makes everything too real.

His hand grazes my cheek. It's a soft, considerate touch that's so different from the way he normally behaves.

His fingertips brush against the wisps of my hair that's regrown.

I hold my breath, watching in slow motion, as his mouth moves to capture mine.

His tongue forces its way in past my lips, though in truth I don't put up much resistance. But the way he slowly explores, it's too much. Far too fucking much.

I know I shouldn't do it.

I know there's going to be consequences, but I can't stop myself from reacting.

I have to stop this.

I have to do something.

I have to prove to us both that I am still me. I am still Ana.

My hand raises up and I slap him, pouring all my pain, fear, and every other emotion he has forced me to endure into the weight of that action.

He tenses, his eyes snap open and I brace myself for my inevitable punishment that he's going to delve out.

Only, he seems almost amused rather than angry.

And then his hands wrap around my throat, tightening enough to restrict my airway but not cut it entirely. With his thighs he pushes my legs apart and in one swift movement he thrusts himself inside me.

But the noise I make, it's not disgust, it's not revulsion; to my horror, the sound that escapes me is as close to a moan of pleasure as I've ever uttered.

I shake my head, as though remonstrating with my own brain, but my body refuses to listen to the message.

No, despite everything, I'm arching my back, my hips eagerly meeting each of his thrusts as he slides his cock in and out.

There's none of the usual pain. None of that awful, dry penetration. With horror, I realise I'm wet, aroused, literally dripping for this man.

I can't do this.

I can't give in like this.

I hate the way I'm reacting. I hate the awful comfort I'm feeling in this moment.

A tear streaks down my cheek but it's full of despair for myself, despair and hate too because on some level I have submitted, haven't I? On some level, I know that I want this, no, *need* this interaction.

I need this man's touch, his caresses, hell, I'll even take his beatings too if that's what he gives me.

As his hands shift on my throat, I gasp the words ringing in my head. Repeating over and over.

“Harder.” I hiss. “Harder.”

His eyebrows raise. “Harder?” he repeats as if he thinks he misheard.

“Make it hurt. Please, God, make it hurt.”

And I want it to hurt. I want him to remind my body of everything that he is. That he’s a brute and a monster and nothing about this situation should make me seek any form of comfort from him.

He picks up pace almost immediately. Clearly, he *was* being gentle before, but now, now the gentleness is gone.

Now, it’s me and my monster again.

I let out a cry of relief. A cry of pain too. And it feels so good. So necessary. I need him to hurt me and punish me. I need him to ensure this lesson is learnt and remembered.

But my body still wraps around him, my leg curls into him as if encouraging this brutality. And my hands, my nails dig into his skin, I claw at him, I writhe against him, meeting every thrust with a moan that steadily grows louder and louder until I am screaming, I’m crying, I am falling apart beneath him.

My orgasm shatters any last resolve I have and as he groans with his own release, some stupid pathetic part of me wants to thank him.

He slumps on top of me. His weight holding me in place. Revulsion creeps into my veins and yet I stay still, docile, breathing in his scent like I’m an actual addict.

I need him, I love him, and yet I despise everything about him all the same.

A sob racks through me. I turn my face away but he’s quick to react, to grab my jaw, to force me to look at him and though the words aren’t spoken, he can see my shame, he can feel it just as much as I can.

And then his mouth comes down, he devours me once more, and I’m lost, helpless, completely and utterly ruined.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN



Magnus

“We need to talk about her.” Antonio says.

I look up from the papers we’ve been going through for the last hour. Every day for the last week we’ve been here, in my office, working through what needs to be done so that when the time is right, I can make my move with everything already in place. With all my allies behind me. With my future as Chapter Lord sealed and approved.

“Her?” I repeat. He didn’t so much as touch my pet, didn’t do anything more than hold her in place, why is he so interested now?

“Your wife.” he states.

I blink, dropping the file in my hand and sit back further into my chair. “That is not necessary.”

“It is. The Senate will want answers about your wedding night,” he persists.

“They had them.” I reply. “There was a full investigation at the time.”

He raises his eyebrows, leaning over the table to clear the distance between us. "Magnus, to be Chapter Lord, you cannot have any skeletons in your closet."

"You think I do?" I ask amused. I run Oblivion for fuck's sake, that's the very definition of skeletons in my closet.

"She was a Harrison. The very fact that her parents didn't even raise a fuss..."

"They know exactly why she is dead." I growl. "They were part of it, part of the conspiracy."

"From what I read, there was no evidence of that."

"Ah, so you do know the particulars." I reply, feeling like I've suddenly caught him out in a lie. "And here I was thinking you were ignorant."

"You need to have a straight story." Antonio says, ignoring my jibe entirely. "A convincing one. The Senate will need to believe every word of what you say."

I nod, picking up my glass and take a sip, because it's not like I haven't thought about this. It's not like I haven't seen this coming. Does he really think I'm so stupid as that?

"And I'm assuming she's no longer in Oblivion?"

That makes me freeze. I look at him and his lips are curled into a smirk. "Come now, she may have been declared dead, but her body was apparently cremated before anyone could do an autopsy."

"That was at the request of her parents." I state. Though it certainly helped me put my own plans into place.

"But she is dead, now, isn't she? No one is going to suddenly appear with her twenty years after the fact?"

"She's dead." I smile. Dead to the world at least. The person who resides in Oblivion right now is so psychologically fucked she doesn't even know what the real world is anymore. She can't even speak, she barely moves. She's a living corpse, existing only because every time her pathetic body gives out, I ensure she is treated and revived.

He nods, obviously reassured by my words and then his phone buzzes.

He sighs, picking it up, just as my own goes off.

As I read the words, Antonio springs out of his chair.

"Jesus fucking Christ," he all but bellows.

"How very curious." I murmur, while my mind already whirls on what the possibilities of this could be. But it's obvious, isn't it? I mean, I laid the

seeds, I started us all down this journey.

“Curious? Curious?” Antonio repeats, losing all show of calmness that I’ve seen to date. “Who the fuck...” He pauses, staring at me. “Tell me you didn’t do this...”

I get to my feet slowly. “Of course I didn’t.” I reply. I wouldn’t be so damned stupid as to kick the hornets’ nest so blatantly. Does he really think I’d have as little imagination as all that?

“But that means war.” I state, meeting his eyes. “If Turner is gone, then all bets are off. The Chapter is wide open, defenceless.”

Antonio shakes his head like he can’t quite believe it. “This can’t be happening. Who the fuck would even dare...?”

“It’s obvious.” I say, drawing myself up, growing bored of his sudden show of dramatics. “The Esau faction is behind this.”

“No.” Antonio says. “They wouldn’t dare, they’re too fractured, too...”

“For fuck’s sake.” I snap, losing my patience, shoving the very evidence I stole from Antony damned Wallis in front of him so that they’ll be no denying it. “Who else could it be?” I continue, “who else would benefit from such a move?”

He blinks back at me like he’s an idiot. Like his brain can’t compute it. “Do you think they know that Turner was sick, that we were going to replace him?”

“Of course they did.” I mean, I was the one who let it out. I was the one who stirred the pot. Wouldn’t say I’d have predicted this outcome, but now that it’s here, I’ll take open war, I’ll take the carnage. Better that than operating from the shadows like I’m some sort of thief.

“We need to meet with the Senate. We need to move, now.” Antonio says.

“I agree.” I smile, feeling like suddenly all the power is in my hands. “Get my driver to ready the car. I just have one thing I need to see to first.”

“Now?” Antonio splutters.

“Now.” I confirm. “And get Conrad. I want him where I can see him. I won’t have them going after him to get to me.”

I don’t wait for a response, I turn and leave him there, still half speechless.



DURING THE DAY, OBLIVION CAN BE AN EERY PLACE. OH, THE PARTY NEVER stops, the games always continue, but it never feels the same. Darkness has a way of hiding things, obscuring them. You expect evil at night, you expect horror then.

I make my way silently through the hall, noting the changes we made after the whole bomb incident. The additional security, the fireproofing, all of it.

There's a few people here and there, but I keep my gaze ahead, ignoring them, and ensuring they get the message that I'm not interested in a conversation right now.

When I make it to the lower levels, you can feel the change in the atmosphere, you can feel the way the air chills.

I walk past what was Paitlyn's cell, not even glancing in through the bars. We had the entire corridor rebuilt. It's got a new girl in there now. If I listen carefully enough, I can hear the sound of her sobbing. She's got a long way to go before she becomes anything close to her predecessor, but I'm sure her owner will get there.

At the very end, I type in a code only I know. The door appears as if from the very walls itself and silently opens. I slip through before making my way past another set of locked doors. This place doesn't technically exist. It's not on any blueprints. Nor any plans. No cameras are here either. No one knows about this except me and her.

She looks up as I walk in. Her mouth is open, ajar, just as always from the way it healed badly after I shattered it one too many times.

"Good evening, wife." I say.

She trembles, whimpering, and, because half her vocal cords are ripped to shreds from all the years of screaming, it comes out more like a strangled gurgle, like she's choking on her own fear. God, I hope she is.

There's a great silver scar that slashes down the front of her face. Her right eye is hazy from the damage, and I know she can't see shit out of it.

Her bones are all gnarled up and twisted, her hands are turned inwards at the wrists like she's permanently trying to tear her own flesh off. You wouldn't think she was the same age as me. You wouldn't think she was

mid-forties. Her long hair hangs down, straggly and grey, and there's clumps missing with glaring bald spots from where she repeatedly rips it out.

I step over the pile of human excrement that she's currently sitting in and my nose wrinkles at the stench, though she seems to be completely oblivious to it.

Years ago, she was beautiful. Years ago, this woman was all I ever thought I wanted. All I ever thought I would love.

A part of me is sad to be doing this. To be ending this. I'd planned for her to suffer for many more years to come. I'd planned for her to live as long as I did, to die here, in the darkness, long after her mind had been lost.

But I won't take the risk now. She's not worth it. Not worth losing everything for.

My hand wraps around her throat in a familiar fashion. She's so skinny, she's practically weightless and it takes little effort to haul her up. In many ways she's the same as Liliana, emaciated, scarred, completely ruined by my hands.

The only difference is Liliana is a thing of beauty while this whore here, she's nothing but filth.

Her nails dig into my flesh. Her wretched tongue sticks out of her mouth like she's trying to remember how to form words.

With one firm shove I smash her head against the concrete behind her. Her eyes go wide, her legs jerk. She starts screaming, clawing, as if her pitiful existence is something worth fighting for.

"Die." I snarl, slamming her harder, hearing her skull begin to crack on the second blow. "Just fucking die already."

She starts gurgling more, choking on what I can only imagine is her own blood.

I ram her head into the wall, over and over, seeing the remains of her flesh, her hair, chunks of her brain start to leave a greasy trace behind.

It feels like it takes forever and yet some part of me relishes how long it is. How much she suffers as her skull slowly caves in, piece by piece.

When I'm certain she is dead, I toss her body, staring at it as it lays lifeless in that same heap of shit I found her in. I always wondered how I'd feel when she was dead, I thought my heart my react, I thought I might, on some level, grieve. But now I realise that that part of me died long ago.

This woman here no longer holds sway over me. No longer holds any power.

It's a nice feeling to recognise. A nice thing to know.

I won't burn this room. I won't have her removed or cremated. She can stay here, she can rot in her own filth for the rest of time.

And it's with a sense of satisfaction that I leave Oblivion. That I walk out into the sunshine, and I see my brother waiting for me.

Perhaps I should have done it sooner, perhaps there is something to be had in eliminating your enemies quickly rather than drawing it out.

I pause, my mind casting to the other technical enemy, the one who right now is asleep in my bed.

It would be logical to do the same thing, to kill her now, to wipe the slate clean, and yet I'm so not ready for that. She's my pet, my plaything. It's an entirely different circumstance to the woman who swore she'd love me forever and then, less than six hours later, she was trying to shove a dagger into my heart, both metaphorically and literally.

No, Liliana is different. She may be full of hate, she may be a stubborn, defiant, insolent bitch but I'm taming her. Day by day, I am winning. To cut my losses now would be more than premature.

And besides, I'm starting to enjoy my little pet more and more. I'm enjoying the way her body gives in, the way her body submits, the way she herself is yearning for more and more of me.

In truth, I think she really is growing on me. If I didn't know any better, I'd say I had a soft spot—and that thought makes me come to a sudden, abrupt stop.

She is a soft spot.

She is a weakness. A liability.

I growl, realising exactly what I've created, what I've foolishly done these last few months.

I need to deal with this Esau shit, and I can hardly do that while she's at the forefront of my mind.

I grab my phone, dialling for Gabe and bark out my instructions.

He replies, obviously confused by what I'm telling him and my sudden, apparent change in treatment, but to me it's clear, logical.

I need her out of the way.

I need her locked down. Protected. Packed away into a nice little box.

Then when I'm ready, I can take her back out again, dust her off, and enjoy all the beautiful distraction that she is, without worrying about the consequences. Without having to concern myself with anything beyond my own pleasure.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT



Liliana

A hand wrenches me from the bed while I'm half asleep. My cries follow it as I land haphazardly on the floor, but I barely have time to register the fall before I'm pulled to my feet.

It's not Magnus, though. He's not the one doing this.

It's Gabe.

He locks his hand around my arm, squeezing so tightly as he drags me from the room.

"What's going on?" I shout. "Where are you taking me?"

He doesn't answer. He just keeps his face morphed into a horrible, twisted expression as if he's trying to hide behind it and he maintains his relentless pace.

My eyes dart about, desperately searching for a man I know I won't find.

"Where is he?" I scream.

I know he's behind this. I know this is his doing. Nothing happens in this house without his say so.

Gabe doesn't reply, doesn't act as if I've even spoken a word.

I'm dragged through the house. I try to use my feet as an anchor, I try to lash out with my spare arm, only Gabe just backhands me hard enough that I'm then too dazed to really do anything.

When we reach that familiar dark corridor, my legs give out and fear completely overwhelms me.

"No," I cry. "No,"

We make a turn, then another, and then I'm met with a huge open door and a strange, white space beyond.

In one brutal movement, I'm flung inside, tossed in like a thing that has to be contained.

My face slams into the floor, only it's not hard, it's soft. Everything is soft. Padded.

I blink, spinning around just as the massive door is shut and the lock loudly clicks into place.

And it hits me, where I am, what's happened; they've locked me in a padded cell like I'm some sort of nut job.

But why? Why? I did what he wanted. I did everything he asked of me. It doesn't make any sense.

"What did I do?" I scream, forcing myself to my feet, using my fists to slam into the door only the sound is near existent with all the foam stuck to it. "What did I do?"

I know I didn't do anything.

I know I was good.

I know I was obedient.

Why is he punishing me like this? Why is he doing this at all?

I start screaming out that I'll be good, that I am good, that he can fuck me and use me, and hurt me, too. That I want him to use me, that I want that. Hell, if he takes me back to Oblivion then I'll suffer it, I'll suffer it all.

Only, no one responds.

I'm met with the silence of this awful room and the knowledge that no one is beyond it.



I'M LYING, HALF-DAZED, WHEN THE LATCH ON THE DOOR POPS OPEN. A TRAY is pushed inside, and I know on the other side, Gabe is there.

I scramble forward, repeating over and over that I have to see him. That I need to see him. I know I sound manic, crazed even, but it doesn't matter.

Only, Gabe doesn't say a word.

He doesn't speak.

He just leaves me to it.

The food on the tray is no different to the meals provided in Magnus's rooms. I guess I should be grateful for that, at least I'm not being starved this time.

But none of this makes sense.

Are the Brethren doing this? Is this his brother stepping in? Have they seen the way he's been treating me, do they think that he's overstepped and have been forced to intervene?

No, if it were the Brethren, I wouldn't be in a padded cell, and I certainly wouldn't still be given nice food. I'd be given gruel, and mouldy bread, and almost certainly, I'd be lashed and beaten and raped too for good measure.

Perhaps Magnus doesn't know about this.

Perhaps he had to go away and any moment, he's going to return and let me out and be furious at the way I've been treated.

Am I stupid to think that he might react like that? To believe that he'd actually care?

I claw at my hair, breaking off the tiny bits of regrowth. My mind keeps going in circles. I can't stay like this. I can't live like this.

I need to get back. I have to get back.

I throw myself onto that ridiculously padded floor and I sob, I claw, I rip at it as if I can draw out all of my pain and confusion.

But it doesn't help.

Nothing helps.

I stare up at the walls, my hands start searching all the padded squares, trying to figure out if there's some hidden camera. Is this a test? Is that what

this is? Is Magnus sat back in his room, watching my reaction, trying to gauge how contrite I am?

My breath starts to pick up even more. What do I do? How do I pass this? I need to make this right, I need to do whatever it is he wants, but I don't know what it is. I don't know. My mind races from one scenario to another but there's no solution. No answers to be had.

I let out a scream, clawing at my scalp even more.

If this is a test then I know how to get his approval, how to get his attention, how to prove that I am obedient.

My fingers delve into my pussy, I arch my back, splaying my legs as wide as they'll go. I don't know where the camera is so I need to make sure whatever angle I'm at, he can see clearly. I raise my hips, meeting each thrust, and deep inside I can still feel those tears, those scars, I can feel every awful thing that that man has inflicted upon my body.

"Magnus." I cry.

I don't know if it's in disgust or desire, but I drag the syllables of his name out, letting my head fall back while I desperately urge myself on.

He has to be seeing this. He has to be realising that I really am giving in.

Maybe he wants the pain, maybe that's it, maybe I'm fucking myself too gently. Being too kind. He always got off on hurting me so surely that would give him pleasure now? I raise a hand slapping one breast hard enough that I yelp. My nipples are taut, poking out as neat little buds and I pinch one, then the other, wondering whether I should be twisting them more, hurting them more.

"Magnus." I cry again.

Perhaps, I am mad. Perhaps I am completely fucked in the head now. I can't decide if it's better that I've lost my mind or worse than simply submitting to my rapist?

My pussy throbs, my arousal leaks out down between the fingers buried deep inside me.

I've only put two in.

Does Magnus want more? Is that it?

I push a third. Then a fourth.

My mind flashes to when that grey-haired man fisted me, how much my blood covered his hand as he held it up. Did that turn Magnus on to see

that? Did that satisfy him? Would it turn him on to watch me do it to myself?

I'm far too tight to do it comfortably, I can barely fit my fourth finger inside me, but I won't stop now. I have to keep going. I scream out as I force my entire hand inside myself. My muscles try desperately to expand but there's nowhere for them to go.

"Magnus." I sob, as I start brutalising my insides, feeling as all that internal healing starts to tear. As the stitches start to give way, as my blood starts to stream out all over my wrist and legs.

Why isn't this enough? Why is he not satisfied?

I collapse onto the padding. I lie back as the tears stream down my face.

And with my spare hand, I start massaging my clit, rubbing it as hard as I can. My body jerks, the rush of an orgasm overtakes me and I scream out as my insides clamp around my fist.

But as soon as it passes, as soon as I get my breath back, that voice in my head tells me that it's not enough. I haven't done enough. I have to earn his approval. Earn my freedom.

I plunge my hand back inside and with the other, I'm rubbing, almost clawing, desperate to make myself come again, desperate to prove to Magnus that I am good now. I am obedient. I am worthy of him.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE



Magnus

The Senate are a crusty bunch of old fucks. Men who've sat so long in their high towers that they're oblivious to ways the world has changed around them.

I've seen them often enough at the larger meetings, but I've never had a one-on-one meeting before. Those are reserved for either the senior ranks, or the ones who've committed such atrocities they're not even sent to Oblivion, they're removed, erased, wiped from the earth entirely.

As we walk out from what feels like a complete waste of my time, it's hard not to lash out. Antonio is reassuring me that that is their way. That they always sit on the fence, seeking impartiality because that keeps them safe, but none of us will be safe if the damned Esau have anything to do with it.

No, we can't rely on them. We can't count on them. Antonio may be the Kingmaker, but I am just as efficient in ensuring my plans always come off to my satisfaction.

So I leave him to it, leave him to politics and the hand wringing and the bullshit, because I've got bigger fish to fry.

Ever since I learnt who Anthony was really working for, I've had my feelers out, I've had my spies, and I know some of them are hiding in plain sight.

A weaker man would have divulged that fact to the senate, to Antonio even, but I am not weak. I do not shirk from my responsibilities, and I know what needs to be done.

What will be done.

What is necessary to ensure the Brethren continue unaltered.



I GET TO THE FIRST HOUSE AT NIGHTFALL. UNLIKE THE LAST TIME I WAS breaking into a Lord's house, I've got a small army behind me and I'm taking no chances.

We storm the building, destroying half the outer wall before they even know what's hit them.

Of course they have their own guards and it becomes a fire fight, us pinned down with them having the advantage of the home ground.

As the bullets streak past my head, I wonder for the briefest of seconds if I miscalculated. If for the first time, I'm the one about to be outplayed.

And then shouts echo, shooting from the other end of the house carries to us and we realise that we're not the only visitors here this evening.

Someone else is clearly intent on filling up hell tonight.

I exchange glances with my men, they're all suited and booted in protection gear, but not me. You just don't get the same adrenaline rush in a fire fight if you're wrapped up like a baby. And besides, every time I walk away uninjured, it's more proof that God is on my side, that God has a plan for me and my family. That this *is* my destiny.

As I get to the second landing, I see the scuffle ahead.

Confused eyes meet mine through the darkness. It's sad to think that he was betraying me, was in bed with my enemy.

He mutters my name as if he too can't believe it and he steps out from the shadows, showing that grey streaked hair that makes him look double

his age.

“Issac,” I begin, but he’s quick to cut across me.

“What the fuck do you think you’re playing at?” He snarls.

“Games up.” I reply. “We know who you are, who you’ve been working with.”

For a second, I think he might try to play me, might try to pretend, but instead he crosses his arms, a smug look spreads across his face and he lets out a chuckle. “Oh I see,” he says. “You finally figured it all out.”

“You’re one of them, you’re Esau.” I state.

He doesn’t react to the name, doesn’t try to dismiss the accusation, either. No, he seems to grow, seems to preen as if such a thing were a compliment.

“Took you long enough,” he says. “I’ve had you all fooled for years. The great Magnus Blake.” He sneers. “You were oblivious, completely fucking stupid.”

“Not anymore.”

“No,” he mutters. “But the damage is done, isn’t it? You let me in long enough to have some fun.”

“What does that mean?” I growl. It’s true I’ve been stupid, I should have seen it sooner, but the man was clever, very fucking clever. Unlike so many before him, he didn’t try too hard, didn’t compliment me too much, he played the perfect game, right up until the last damned moment.

“Your brother,” he says. “You think we didn’t have a hand in all that?”

My eyes narrow, it could just be false bravado, him twisting the past to make himself look more impressive, but I always suspected there was more to it, more to Devin’s downfall. After all, one girl could not be so capable of such destruction. She had to have help. She had to have powerful friends. But why Devin of all people? What was the point in going after him? And does that mean Paitlyn is Esau, too? Is she one of them?

“How’s your whore, by the way?” he asks, bringing me out of my head. “Has her arse recovered yet? Bet you had to stitch her a whole new one after the damage I did.”

More anger hits me at those words. Not because of what he did, but because I allowed it, I stood there, letting a traitor play with my most precious possession, completely fucking oblivious.

That image flashes in my head, of her there, in Oblivion, surrounded by my friends, pleading, as he’s brutalising her body. I’d meant to prove a

point, to show her that my mercy is worth seeking, that without my favour all she can expect is pain.

But I guess the entire time, Issac was making his own point, wasn't he? Is that why he did it, is that why he was so aggressive with her?

Blind rage hits me, I raise my gun and though there's a million reasons why I should keep this man alive, I don't give a damn, I don't care. I pull the trigger, delighting in the way his skull seems to explode and his brain splatters on every surface.

A scream rings out, his wife comes flying out the room, prostrating herself over the still twitching body, covering her pale silk nightdress in the blood, and the brains, and the gore of it.

"Husband, husband," she wails as if her voice alone could call him back from the gates of hell.

"Get up." I order.

She looks around, her eyes settling on me and that once pretty face morphs into a sneer. "You," she spits. "You really think you'll get away with this? You really think there won't be consequences?"

"Oh there will be," I retort, dragging her to her feet, "grave consequences for you in particular."

"I'm a Brethren Lady." She cries, echoing that same arrogant bullshit that Anthony had displayed so many months ago.

"Let's see how much of a Lady you'll be in Oblivion." I state.

I can feel the way she quivers, the way she reacts.

"You can't take me there. I've done nothing wrong. The Senate will never allow it."

"I can do what I like." I smile, hoping she feels the full hate behind it.

It's true, at this moment, with the Chapter Lord dead, there are no rules, no leader, no one to hold me accountable. And besides, no one will give a damn what happens to an old bat like her. No one will even remember she exists.

"Wait," she cries, jerking more violently in my grasp as if I give a shit what she has to say. "Wait."

I all but shove her into the waiting guards and wave my hand to have her dragged away, but she starts screaming out hysterically.

"She didn't do it. Paitlyn, she didn't do it." she screams louder.

The guards pause, they stare at me as if they have any idea what the significance of those words are.

“What?” I reply, keeping my voice as calm as I can.

“She, she didn’t do it.” she repeats, gasping as if the fight is finally gone. “She was set up. She didn’t murder him. Guthrie knew, they all knew.”

“Who is ‘they?’” I snarl. What conspiracy is this? What the fuck happened all those years ago?

She draws herself up like she suddenly has a bargaining chip. “They wanted to bring you down, they thought Devin would be an easy target.”

“So what changed?” Because something had to have. If they were truly after me, then there would be no way I would have gotten away with keeping such a thing secret.

“Antonio,” she murmurs the name so quietly and it’s the last one I expected to hear.

“Excuse me?”

“He was one of them, one of us. Only he turned tail, switched sides. He made sure you were protected. He’s the reason Guthrie kept his mouth shut, even though it was his brother who was murdered.”

“Who else knows this?” I ask. Antonio can be dealt with, but if too many people are aware of this, then everything will fall apart.

She smiles, shrugging, like she’s got all the cards now. “I won’t say anything. I promise. I can keep a secret. I kept Issac’s secrets for years and years.”

Sure, she did. She was married to the man. She had a vested interest in ensuring that his success continued because it was lining both their pockets.

I wave my hand again and the guards once more begin to drag her away. She can go to Oblivion, she can be kept there, on the lower levels, where no one will know she exists. And slowly, I’ll carve out all those secrets she’s so proud of knowing. We’ll see then if it was worth her loyalty.

She starts protesting more, crying out, demanding to be treated with the respect she’s due. Oh, she’s going to have a fine time in Oblivion. She’s going to learn exactly what her life is worth, how little all her grand titles and power mean now that she’s at my mercy.

And just as she’s dragged away, our unexpected guests appear. I raise my gun, but instantly drop it as the great mass of the man walks towards me as if he’s parting the very sea like Moses.

And then everything goes silent. I swear the entire house is filled with just the sound of people holding their breath.

His eyes narrow on me, there's a flash of something in them that tells me that this brother of mine is still that dangerous, psychopath we had to lock away.

Did he hear? Does he know what was said about Paitlyn? I can't see any hint on his face, but it wasn't like the damned woman was being quiet as she screamed it.

"Brother," he says.

"What are you doing here?" I ask. Neither Issac nor his wife were targets all those months ago, maybe he did know, maybe that's why he came here, to get his own vengeance.

He shrugs, glancing about. "The list is almost done. Conrad said you were here."

I let out a small silent sigh of relief at those words. He doesn't know. He has no idea. He'd never be so calm if he had an inkling about what really went down. No, he'd be demanding her instant release, demanding retribution. Instead, he's stood like a mad man who's just finished a spree and is unsure of what next steps to take, like he didn't think he'd still be alive to consider them.

It's like we stare one another down, neither of us speaks.

"Where is she?" he asks after minutes of just silence.

"Safe." I reply.

"I want to see her."

"Have you done as I've asked?"

He shakes his head. "Ten down," he states. Meaning there are still two to go. We're running out of time, particularly with Turner dead.

"Then you'd better get on with it," I say. "The sooner your task is complete, the sooner you can have your whore back."

He grunts, stalking off without a backwards look. We haven't laid eyes on one another for two years. Have spoken only enough to be necessary and yet, even now, his whole focus is that woman. Is Paitlyn.

I shake my head, feeling more pissed than ever. Does family mean nothing to him? Do my sacrifices mean nothing? What I did for him, what I still continue to do would have me stripped and excommunicated, and yet, I did it gladly, I did it willingly. It's clear that he wouldn't do the same for me in return. No, the loyalty is not reciprocated.

But I don't have time to dwell on that. I don't have time to rue that fact.

No, there are others that must be dealt with. Other Lords, other families. I need to rip out the very soul of the Esau faction, to purge it, and by doing so, I will leave behind a far easier beast to vanquish.

I won't tell him what I know. I won't tell him that his precious damned whore is actually innocent. Besides, it won't do them any good, will it? What's done is done. Better he believe she is a murderer, better he believe she betrayed him and once she's been dealt with, he'll be none the wiser anyway.



NIGHT AFTER NIGHT, WE HUNT.

We attack.

We burn.

I know I'm creating chaos. I know that some of the people we murder may be innocent, or at least, not Esau, and yet, it makes no difference. Every innocent simply adds to the pandemonium, adds to the carnage.

And revel in it, I love it, I lose myself in the knowledge that for this limited time, another part of me is set loose.

By the time I'm done, enough great names have been destroyed to create a ripple through our world.

Those who assassinated Turner probably thought that they'd control us all, moving forward, but I've ensured that they too are looking over their shoulders, they too know that there's a target on their backs.

And when the job is done, when enough blood has been spilt to turn the very rivers red with it, I head home. I head back. And I let my mind focus once more on my little pet.

Has she missed me? Has she missed sleeping in my bed? Is she as desperate for my touch as I am now for her?

CHAPTER FORTY



Liliana

I hear the footsteps, hear the lock click, but it all happens at once and I barely have time to react.

For what feels like forever, I've just laid here, barely moving, barely eating, barely functioning.

The light bursts in. I throw my hands up to shield my face from it but as my eyes adjust, I see him.

He's stood, staring at me from the threshold like I'm some sort of apparition.

My heart reacts. It fully flips in my chest.

He's back. He's returned.

I know I shouldn't feel joy at seeing him, that I shouldn't have anything but hate in my heart for this man, but that's the complete opposite to the swirl of emotions inside me.

I throw myself on my knees, arching my body over in that show of obedience he's demanded from me too many times to count. A show that up

until now I've refused to give him.

As he takes one loud step and then another, I can feel myself trembling but it's not from fear. It's not from panic. No, it's from want. From need.

I've been so starved, so desolate, that now any show of human contact has me literally salivating.

His hand comes down, lightly touching my hair, and the gasp I let out is far too close to a moan.

"Have you missed me, pet?" he asks. His voice that usual gruff, condescending tone.

I nod quickly. "Yes, Master," it's all I can whisper because I've spent the entire week either in silence, or screaming, and my vocal cords don't seem to want to cooperate anymore.

He lets out a grunt and I hear the ring of his belt as he undoes it.

My eyes look up, I connect with his and though there's nothing but that deadly look in those dark irises, I know what he wants. I can feel it in my bones.

I crawl forward, closing the tiny distance between us, and I reach up, without the need for him to command me. Without the need for him to speak.

As I pull his cock out, I rub my thighs together, trying to hold back that need that's there, that's so achingly desperate.

He watches me without blinking. Like he's half expecting me to take hold of his cock and bite it off.

I open my mouth, suck him in so greedily while I get to work.

The laugh that rumbles from his chest heats my face with shame. I'm a whore. I'm everything he wanted me to be.

"Maybe I should go away more often," he taunts, taking hold of my head so roughly I feel a few of the fragile strands of my hair snap.

I look up, hold his gaze and, for a second, for that moment, as his cock is sliding down my throat, as I can feel the full girth of him almost suffocating the very life out of me, I silently plead, I beg, I try to convey with that one look alone, that I don't want that. That I never want that. That I can't bear the thought of more absence, more loneliness.

He growls, a sound as close to anger as it is to pleasure, and my skin erupts into goosebumps.

He starts rocking his hips, fucking my mouth like he's trying to break my teeth and I relax my jaw as much as I can, ignoring the drool that's

running down my chin.

Oh, I know I could hurt him, I know that right now, for the first time, he's not forcing this in any physical way, but the effect is the same.

He's broken me.

He's won.

I'm not that person he dragged down into the darkness. I'm not that defiant woman who would rather die than give in. Because I tried that, didn't I? I tried that and I failed.

I'm his creature now. I'm entirely his pet.

I've lost my mind, lost all control over my body too, judging by the way my clit is throbbing like a little slut. The only thing stopping me from touching myself is the fact he hasn't granted me permission, but my hands are itching to do it.

I want him. I need him.

My entire world has turned on its axis and this man is now my very epicentre.

I feel the tears sliding down my cheeks as that realisation hits.

I've submitted entirely.

He grabs the collar around my throat, constricting my airway that tiny bit more. I can see from the way his face is contorted that he's going to come.

As he tightens his grip, I relax, I go limp, and he pours himself down my throat while I moan out like I'm the one getting pleasure, I'm the one finding my release.

He drags his cock back over my tongue, spreading that delicious saltiness and then he does it over my lips, leaving a smear of it there, like he's marking me.

I stay still, on my knees, waiting for permission to move, though it's taking all I have not to lunge at him and just take what I need.

"What a good pet you've become," he remarks, smirking.

The old me would lash out, the old me would snap back. But I don't, I stay where I am, desperately needing more, desperately holding out for something I can't even articulate.

He brushes his thumb over my lips then holds it out a good few inches from my face. "Lick it clean."

I slide my tongue out, I trace up from the knuckle, tasting the last of his semen, savouring it like it's the finest caviar.

For a moment, he just watches me as if he too can't believe this is real, and then he grunts.

"Master," I gasp, pleading again for some unspoken gift.

His lips curl, he tilts his head. "You really are submitting?"

I nod quickly, so quickly my head spins, but I can see he's still not convinced, that he believes I'm still that foolish idiot I was before. The one that believed that our world was one where men such as he were punished, where justice existed, and power can be overthrown.

And a voice whispers in my head how I can convince him, exactly what I need to do to show him I really am giving in entirely.

I shift back.

He arches a brow, clearly unimpressed that I'm now going off-piste, that I'm no longer following instructions.

I lay on my back, spreading my legs wide, giving him a full view of everything I've always previously tried to keep from him.

As my fingers stretch my labia open, he must be able to see how wet I am. He must. Surely, he must.

But he doesn't move. He just stands, still as a statue, and I realise what else he wants, what he's expecting now.

My stomach flutters, more shame covers my face and that old voice rears up in my head that if I do this, if I cross this line, I'll never be able to look myself in the mirror.

But I have to do this.

I need to do this.

I want him to believe me.

I want him to tell me that I've been good, that he's proud of me, that I'm his perfect pet now.

And more than that, I want him to let me out of this room, I want him to grant me his time, his attention, his everything.

I plunge my fingers into my pussy. Even I hear the squelch and the gasp I make is undeniable. I spread my arousal, covering my entire pussy with it, despite the fact that it was already drenched.

Master has almost always been cruel when he touches me, but I want to show him now how I'd do it, how I make myself come.

And I can see he's watching, I can see he's taking in every touch, every twist, every second that I massage my clit.

I throw my head back, moaning louder, and the sound helps, the sound normalises this.

I'm so wet I must be making a pool beneath me, but perhaps that helps my cause too, because I can hardly fake such a reaction, can I?

I rock my hips, I work myself up into a frenzy, under his piercing gaze.

And all the while he's stood, motionless, still as a statue, as if I'm not putting on the very performance of my life.

When I come, I come hard. I come screaming like a thing possessed. My legs kick out. My body jerks with so much pent-up frustration, with so much desperation, too.

And then I slump down, I collapse onto the padded floor, panting, heaving, not daring to do anything now.

Master reaches down, picks me up, and I cling to his body as he does the one thing I've been dreaming of, and he carries me out.

I don't know if this is the end, I don't know if he's simply going to feed me and then return me, but right now, he's touching me, his skin is against mine and I need it so desperately.

I shut my eyes, I curl up into his body, not giving a damn where I am, where we're going. What the rest of this day may involve.



WE'RE BACK IN HIS WING OF THE HOUSE. THE SCENE BEYOND THE WINDOW is breathtaking.

A perfectly manicured lawn glistens with morning dew.

As Master puts me down on my feet, it takes a second for me to stop the shaking. Around us, are a handful of servants, all dressed in that same identical uniform, all keeping their eyes straight ahead.

I'm still naked, still wearing nothing except the collar but I don't shy, I don't even try to hide myself. I guess I learnt that lesson too, didn't I?

Master dismisses them with the wave of his hand, and then he pours himself a drink, knocks it back and takes a seat on an antique couch that looks far more like a throne.

As he stares at me once more, I chew my lip. It feels like he wants something, like he expects something, I just don't know what.

Part of me is furious that I can't guess it, that I can't give it to him without him asking. How fucking useless am I that I don't know what it is?

As that feeling swamps my body, I sink to my knees, taking that same submissive pose he likes so much.

And again, I hear that amused chuckle.

"You have learnt, haven't you, pet?"

I gulp, choosing to show my obedience simply with my silence.

He undoes his shirt, undoes his belt once more, and pulls his cock out.

"Crawl to me," he orders. "Crawl to me and show your Master how much you enjoy his body."

I scramble across the Persian rug, my hands and knees protesting at the movement, but my head telling me that nothing matters beyond Master's pleasure right now. That if I had to cross a desert like this, if I had to clamber over broken glass, barbed wire even to make him happy, then I would.

As I crawl into his lap he sits back, glaring at me like he's expecting defiance.

I place my thighs either side, my hand taking hold of his cock to position him correctly and then I sink down, burying him to the hilt.

He's taken my body so many times. He's brutalised every inch of me. And yet right now, this, this moment feels the complete antithesis of that. Like I somehow have a modicum of control.

"Fuck."

I don't know who says it. I don't know if it's him or me, but it's like an explosion goes off. I shut my eyes, I hold myself still for a moment because it feels like I might just come right this second and I don't want that.

His breath sounds ragged, his body is so tense. I can see all the scars that cover his chest. Scars that I once despised as much as the rest of him.

It's hard to do it with how I'm sat, but I lower my mouth, kissing his skin, worshipping his body while I try to get some sort of control over my own.

He grabs my hands, gripping them in one of his behind my back, forcing my body to right arch over and bear my breasts, and it renders me almost defenceless. He once more has total control over me, but that one action causes my brain to short circuit.

I stop thinking.

I stop caring.

It's like he's Pavlov'd me. I'm a dog salivating at the sound of a bell. And I need more. I have to have more.

I start raising my hips, I start riding him just as he wants. He groans, he grunts. He's sat there like a king and I'm his whore, his perfect little slave. My existence is for one purpose, my every breath is only permitted if he allows it.

I stare back at him, no longer seeing a monster, but seeing *my* monster. Seeing my beginning and my ending. Seeing my reason for life. My reason for everything.

Does he know? Can he tell?

Perhaps he can, perhaps he can see the fundamental change in me, but he's not changing one bit. He's just the same ruthless man I've endured since the very beginning.

Only, I want him to change, I want him to smile at me, I want him to cup my face and show some sort of affection. Some love.

I moan out, a sound of sorrow, a sound of desperation. I'm so close to coming and yet I don't feel like he's there. Will he beat me if I come before he does? Or will he see that as another sign of my submission? That he hasn't had to force me this time, that I've done it willingly.

His spare hand wraps around my waist. For a second, I'm convinced I've imagined it, but I can feel the way his fingers are digging into my skin, the way he's leaving bruises. He's as brutal with this as he is with everything else and yet my body rejoices all the same.

"Come, pet," he orders.

"Come with me." I say before I can think, before I can consider the consequences of such a request.

If he reacts in any way to that plea, it doesn't show on his face, he simply stays there, letting me fuck him, letting me writhe and moan against his hard, unrelenting presence.

But when I come, when that euphoria hits me, I know it's not just me, I can feel it, I can feel his cock pouring inside me, and what's more I can hear the way he's growling, the way he's snarling as his hands dig even harder into me before he's releasing his grip as if he too is exhausted from what we've just done.

As his hands release mine, I slump into his chest.

It's a step too far.

I know that.

I know right now I should be retreating, not seeking more. He doesn't give more. He doesn't give at all. And yet I don't want to lose this contact. I need it, I need his skin against mine, I need to hear his heartbeat, I need to smell his sweat as it mingles with mine.

I shut my eyes, pretending this is something different, pretending that we're not Master and pet, captor and slave, but equals. That he wants me the way I want him, that he has actual feelings for me beyond the need to dominate and destroy.

His hand wraps around my back, sneaking up my spine and coming up to cup my neck in a vice like grip.

I don't dare to move.

This feels too fragile.

This feels too precious.

I stay still, listening to his breathing, and it's soft, calm, so different to the raging monster I know he truly is.

Perhaps I'm being stupid, reckless even, but I speak the words irrespective of what the consequences are, because I need to know. I need to understand.

"What did I do wrong?"

He frowns, reaching down to grab my chin and he forces me to meet that harsh gaze. "What?"

"You locked me away. But I was being obedient. I was being good."

His eyes flicker between mine, it's like he's trying to read the desperate expression on my face, but I can't tell if it's to taunt me or to savour it.

"It wasn't a punishment," he says so simply as if negating everything I've endured over the last God knows how long.

"Yes, it was." I sob and suddenly all that emotion, all that pain and fear and every single moment of desperation explodes like a tsunami. Tears stream down my face. I'm a blubbering mess and Magnus looks almost shocked by my behaviour. "You locked me away, you threw me into that padded cell..."

He growls, his grip tightens around me and that sorrow turns to abject horror as I realise I've now pissed him off. Will he do it again? Lock me away again?

"I had to keep you safe," he says.

"Safe?" I blink back, barely believing that word has even come from his lips. Why would he keep me safe? Why would he care what happens to me?

He's beaten me, branded me, tortured me and raped me, why the fuck would he care what happens to me now?

Has he not said enough times how I am to die, how he is going to break me piece by piece before finally ending my life? Or is that it, that he wants to be the one to do it, that he can't stand the thought of another person, another man like Anthony breaking in here, beating him to it, killing me before he gets the chance to drag the knife across my throat?

And then another thought hits me, Magnus is the devil, the literal devil. If he thinks he needs to keep me safe, then that means there is something or someone out there more dangerous than him. And how the fuck can that be possible?

I start trembling, my entire body shudders almost uncontrollably and though I try to hide it, Magnus obviously notices.

With his hands he rubs them down my arms, creating friction, creating warmth.

It feels like another intimate gesture, another moment so far removed from the monster I'm entwined with.

"You are safe," he says as if he understands my fear. As if he is someone I can trust and believe.

"But you're going to kill me." I blurt out.

His pupils dilate just a little, his jaw clenches. But he nods. "One day. A long time from now."

I don't know what to say to that. How to reply. He doesn't sound regretful. He doesn't sound sad. He just states it like it's a fact.

My heart seems to lock up, my head tells me to stop being so damned stupid. That this is my captor, my abuser, my future murderer. I cannot trust him. I cannot care for him.

And yet I do. I know I do. I'm a fool. A stupid fool who deserves everything I get.

I stare back at him, silently begging him to say more, to say that I mean something, to say that I am more than just his toy now, more than what I was.

Only, he doesn't. He just stares back, meeting my gaze as if daring me to challenge him further, and that silence lingers between us.

Minutes tick by and then he shifts enough to tell me that this moment too is over.

"I have work to do," he says.

My heart sinks at those words, but I know there's nothing I can do.

I'm an amusement, a pastime in this man's busy schedule. He gets me out of my cage when he's bored, and then he packs me away when he's done with me.

"Please..." I whisper, then bite my lip so hard, cursing my stupidity. Haven't I already been vulnerable enough? Do I really need to carve my entire heart out for this man?

"What?"

"Don't lock me back there." I know I sound pathetic. I know that's what I am now, what he's made me, but then he's also responsible for this, too. He's made me dependent on him. Surely, he should face the consequences? "I'll do anything. I'll be good. I'll be obedient, I won't make a sound."

His lips quirk. He grabs my jaw again, turning my face so that I'm forced to meet that unnerving glare.

"You hate that room that much?"

I nod as much as he will allow.

He narrows his eyes, scrutinising my face like he expects to see some lie written there, but to my surprise he doesn't react with the usual fury.

"Fine," he murmurs. "But you need to wash. My come is leaking out of you and I won't have you ruin all my furniture."

I drop my eyes, feeling the insult as though I was a dirty dog shaking mud everywhere.

I force myself off him, force my body to let his go, but as he slides back out of me I still feel myself deflate. And then I stand there, unsure of what to do. It seems silly to sink back to my knees, but I don't want to be disobedient.

His come is smeared down my thighs, I can feel it wet against the cold air, but I force myself to stand, to not squirm, to be still.

Magnus takes my wrist, pulls me along, walks me from the ornate room through to a long corridor and past more servants who do their best not to stare.

When we get to a bathroom, he pushes me into the shower, but he strips off and follows right after and again, I'm rendered speechless.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE



Magnus

It's hard to believe this is the same defiant, stubborn bitch I stole away all those months ago.

She curls into me as I shower us both.

In truth, I could have just left her as she was, but I've realised I actually enjoy taking care of her. I enjoy the intimacy of it, and relishing how far we've both come. How much she has bent to my will.

She pushes her hips against me as if she wants another good fuck, but right now I have things to do and it's amusing to keep her wanting, to watch her lips pout, to know that she's so desperate for me now.

I dry us both off, then dress in a shirt and suit. My little pet, I keep as she is; naked.

And as I take my seat behind my desk, I order her to kneel, and to be silent.

Her eyes drop, her body obeys and for a while I'm so lost in my work that I almost forget she's there at all.

When I do remember, I glance down, and there's a small pool of tears on the rug. I grab her face, pulling her roughly to look at me. From the way she squirms, I can tell her body is in pain, that keeping herself in such a position is making her muscles cramp.

A spark of hope lights in her eyes, as if I might give her a reprieve, but I'm not done yet, and so neither is she.

My thumb brushes the tear from her cheek and then I drop my hold, making it clear what I want, what I expect.

She sniffs just a little bit but beyond that she stays still, she stays obedient.

When Antonio arrives, I make no move to let her up. Nor do I send her away. It doesn't matter what she hears now, anyway. She can hear all my secrets because she has no one to tell them to.

He looks weary, as though he's also fought a battle, and he sinks into the chair, sighing the way an old man would, though he's my age and far too young to be acting like that.

"Well?" I ask.

He reaches forward, swigs the whiskey I've readied for him and sighs again. "It is done."

"What is?"

"The battle lines have been drawn."

Like I don't know that already. Like I haven't already started the war.

"The Senate are still content to sit on their hands and be silent?" I reply, hoping he hears the disdain in my voice. They're so safe in their ivory towers, while they leave the rest of us undefended.

He nods. "That's what they do."

"You know, as Chapter Lord, I will be very different to Turner." I state.

He meets my gaze and his lips curl. "Why do you think I chose you? Turner fitted our needs back then, but now, now we need someone unafraid to act, someone unafraid to fight."

The way he says it makes me pause.

"I know," he confirms. "I know where you've been these past two weeks."

"And?"

"I'm assuming you covered your tracks?"

"Would you think me so stupid as to do otherwise?"

“No.” He smiles more, leaning across the desk to close the distance between us. “With the Esau back, we need to be bold, we need to act. We have no Chapter Lord to command us, this is a pivotal moment, one we must take advantage of.”

Sure, he would say that, considering he was once one of them. For a second, I contemplate revealing that I know that fact, but knowledge is power, and with Antonio, it’s far better to keep your cards against your chest and only reveal them when you know you’re winning.

“Something I am not afraid to do.” I state.

He lets out a chuckle. “No, that’s one thing we cannot accuse you of ever showing, Magnus. You’re a hard-nosed bastard, but you get the job done.”

I laugh with him, wondering if it’s an act, his friendship, his favour. Is he really on my side, or is this another move I can’t yet figure out?

His eyes drop to where Liliana is, where she’s shifting enough to relieve the pressure in her legs from how I’m forcing her to sit.

“Shouldn’t she be dead?” Antonio asks.

“She is, or she will be. There was no timeframe on her sentence.” I state.

He lets out a little chuckle, getting to his feet, and he clicks his fingers for her to go to him. I know he showed little interest in her that evening back in Oblivion so I’m curious as to why now he’s interacting with her.

Only, she doesn’t move, she stays where she is, but her eyes look to me, and clearly, she’s waiting for my instructions on what to do.

“Go.” I order, crossing my arms.

No, I don’t want to say it. No, I don’t want her to do it. But we’re playing a game here, a dance of wills. We all have our parts to play, and her especially so. If she doesn’t want to get hurt, if she doesn’t want to end up back in the darkness, then she needs to be obedient.

She gets up, her expression locked down, and she walks to him as if she’s a ghost. Serene and yet aloof, and she comes to a stop with her hands by her side.

My eyes watch every move he makes as he closes the distance and prowls around her.

I’ve never been possessive of a woman before. Never felt that inclination. If anything, I enjoy sharing what I have, proving how little they mean to me and how much power I have over them.

But Liliana is different, she's not like any other woman, she's my creation. I moulded her with my own hands, I brought her into being. Watching her, it's like understanding the way God would feel looking down on creation.

I can see she's reluctant, I can see she's uncomfortable. Her body is too stiff, too tense. I wonder if she's thinking back to that night, the last time she came face to face with Antonio. How I bound her breasts and let my friends fuck her any which way they liked.

I know I could reassure her, could let her know that that will never happen again. And yet I don't see the point. She's mine to do as I wish, it doesn't matter what her future holds, she should be grateful for every bit of attention she gets.

But I am on my feet, silently moving to the other side of the desk as if stalking her shadow, needing to be close to her like our two souls are suddenly bound up and forever dependent on the other.

Antonio makes a point of cupping her breasts, squeezing her nipples, and I hate the sharp, stifled cry she makes in response.

Those noises are mine.

Those noises are meant for my ears only.

I take a step closer before I realise I've done it, then lean against the desk as if I'm merely trying to get more comfortable, get a better look at the action.

His hands touch the brand on her chest, the sign to everyone that she belongs to me, and I feel a flash of it; pure fucking hatred.

He grabs her arse, squeezing enough to once more elicit a response.

But as he moves his hand between her thighs, and goes to touch what is mine, I see red.

"Enough." I bark.

He turns, narrowing his eyes at me. I doubt anyone has dared speak to him like that in years, but I don't give a fuck anymore.

"I thought you liked to share your toys," he remarks.

"Not her." I say before considering the consequences of those words. "Not anymore."

His eyebrow raises, he glances back at Liliana, tilting his head before he once more looks at me and this time, he's fully smirking.

"Surely not," he murmurs. "Surely you would not be so stupid as to fall for someone like her?"

Liliana gasps, a sound full more of surprise than insult.

I click my fingers, summoning her back and she quickly scrambles to obey, kneeling once more as if she could blend into the carpet and disappear.

“Do not presume...” I begin but Antonio cuts across me.

“I am not a fool. You think I didn’t see how you carried her from Oblivion? You think we all didn’t see?”

“She was dying.” I shrug. “I’ve invested months into breaking her, you think I was really going to let her have an easy death after all that?”

He tuts, waltzing back into his chair but I can see the bulk at his crotch, evidently he enjoyed the brief moment he had touching her. “Come now, Magnus, you and I have always been honest.”

Have we? I wouldn’t say I’ve outwardly lied to the man, but I certainly wouldn’t trust him with a thing like honesty.

“You care for her.” he states again. “I can see it, and considering how much time you’ve spent, it makes perfect sense but...”

“But, what?” I ask, refusing to acknowledge that statement.

“But rules are rules, Magnus, you know this as well as I. We are nothing without them, the Brethren is nothing without them.”

“I have broken no rules.” I reply.

“No. But there is a price on her head, no matter how much you enjoy her, there is a limit, a sentence, a termination that must be carried out.”

“And it will be.” I state. I know that Liliana will die. And she will die by my hand. I’m just not nearly done with her yet.

My little pet reacts to that, she gulps, dropping her gaze further, as if my words have torn out her little heart, but I keep my focus on Antonio because I know if I look at her now, there’s a good chance I might just do something I seriously will regret later.

Antonio sighs. “If you are to make Chapter, then sacrifices have to be made.”

“And she is one?” I say, keeping my voice level. Is it worth it? Money, power, to sacrifice my perfect woman all so I can become a living God?

Yes. Yes, it is worth it.

And no, it is not.

I snarl, turning my back and move to stare out the window. Actions have consequences, I knew that, I was happy about that, I just didn’t realise how deeply I would allow my soul to intertwine with hers.

“There is no immediate rush.” Antonio says coming to stand beside me. “Becoming Chapter Lord will take time, even with Turner gone. Enjoy the bitch while you can. Just remember, when the time comes, you will need to put her down, and you will need to do it publicly.”

I give a sharp nod. Of course the Brethren would demand that. She’ll become a sacrifice to my altar. The first of many by all accounts.

But she will also be the greatest, the worst, the hardest to make.

I will have to tear out her heart from her chest, knowing that mine is gone with it.

As Antonio leaves, it feels like we both feel the weight of his words. Neither of us speak. We both just stay where we are, clearly mulling over the future he presented.

It makes me wonder if her newfound devotion will crumble away now that she knows her fate is unaltered. Will she come to her senses? Stab me in the back and try to flee when I least expect it? The woman’s a determined bitch when she wants to be, and she’s proven that fact more than enough times for me to be wary.

I’m not foolish enough to trust this new docile creature she’s become. And I didn’t get to where I am now by ignoring my instincts. No, despite my apparent like of her, I cannot let her beguile me into becoming some lovesick fool. I need to be clever, cleverer than she is.

I clear my throat, turning to look at her. “What do you want as a reward?” I ask.

She frowns in obvious confusion.

“You were obedient just now, you did exactly what was necessary and you took his molestations without complaint. What would you like as a reward?”

She blinks, startles, then looks at the same view I’m facing. “Outside.” She breathes. “It’s been so long since I even felt the sun on my skin.”

She could have asked for a diamond. She could have asked for clothes. But my lips smile at the simple request she makes, one that’s so easy to grant.

And as I take her hand, I feel as though I’m a genie delivering on her final wish.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO



Liliana

The air is cool, the breeze is gentle. I can feel it swirling around, playing with the pale pink silk dress Magnus permitted me to wear. I can hear the birds singing, and as I shut my eyes I feel like I really am in heaven, like I really have died and gone to paradise.

Magnus is behind me, close, but reassuringly so. It feels like he's granting me this tiny bit of freedom and like a bird that's been trapped in a cage for far too long, I stretch my metaphorical wings and I revel in tiny bit of peace seeping into my veins.

I know he's echoing my steps, chasing my shadow but there's enough distance between us that I don't feel threatened. Besides, it's not like I'm going to run. I haven't even contemplated it.

I just wanted to see this space that I've stared longingly out at for so long. I wanted to smell the flowers and remember what it was like to feel the warmth of the sun on my skin.

I reach out, letting my hand brush lightly against the petals of a flower I once knew the name of. It's purple, bright, flamboyant even. I raise my hands smelling the light scent that lingers there.

I don't know what my future holds. I don't know how long I have left.

I doubt Magnus wanted me to hear his conversation with Antonio, that he most likely did not want me to know that that death sentence is still there, hanging over my head.

As I turn my gaze to look back at him, I wonder what he sees in me now.

Is he satisfied by my behaviour? Is he happy that I've become so docile, so tamed?

Is that enough to save me?

No, I already know the answer to that. It isn't enough.

It's out of his hands. Magnus is going to kill me, it's just a question of when.

Though my heart breaks at the thought of it, I know there is nothing I can do. If there's one thing this captivity has taught me, it's that I don't have control. I don't have autonomy. I have nothing. I am nothing. I am a toy, an object. Magnus can use me and hurt me and do as he likes, and there's nothing I can do but thank him for his time and his attention and in silence I can lick my wounds and weep for the person I was before.

It feels almost satisfying to embrace that fact, to acknowledge it.

It's liberating in a way to realise that all of it is out of my control now.

My life before was hard, I was in a constant state of fight, a constant state of having to prove myself. Now, all of that is gone. All of that is removed. Magnus took it away, he moulded me, remade me, he took all my sharp edges and he made me worthy of something.

I glance down, stare at the hands that he holds so calmly by his side. Will he strangle me? Will he snap my neck? Or will he stab me, rip my body open with a blade and let my blood pour out?

I gulp, seeing that image, that moment of when I lay there, broken with that chasm of a wound along my arm. It's healed now. Healed entirely. I run my fingers along the huge scar that remains, and Magnus traces the movement with his eyes.

Does he know what I'm thinking? Does he understand where my head is at?

I don't dare to ask him, not because I'm afraid of angering him, far from it. I'm afraid of what he will say. If he will lie and try to placate me or if he'll be honest. If he'll admit what my fate is.

No, he will tell me. Magnus is nothing if not honest with me. Has been honest with me. He's never lied to me, he's never misled me. He's done the most unforgivable of things to me and yet that one thing I cannot accuse him of.

"What is it, pet?" he asks. His tone isn't concerned, it's neutral, curious even, like he wants to delve into the darkest recesses of my mind and find all those twisted awful things that dwell there. The things he's created. The things he's nurtured.

I shake my head, deciding it's better to hold my tongue for once. I guess I am learning, I guess I am growing.

When the time comes, I know he won't hesitate, so it makes no difference now if I live for a day or a year. Magnus will do as he pleases and I have to accept that fact, even if it does mean I'm going to die.

We walk further on. The gardens are so big I feel like I could spend my entire day exploring them and still discover more. Would he ever trust me enough to be out here alone? I doubt that, especially now that he knows that I know he's still going to kill me.

And then, all too soon, his hand reaches out, he pulls me back and silently we return inside.



WE EAT IN THE HALL. WITH CONRAD THERE.

Unlike the last time, I'm not on my knees, forced to watch. No, this time I'm there, sat almost as an equal, though I'm very much aware of the fact that I'm not—my lack of clothes all but screams it out.

I don't speak. I keep my eyes down. Trying to use my cutlery in a manner that makes as little noise as physically possible.

Conrad glances at me every now and then, but most of his attention is on his brother. Magnus is listing off what else is needed for some wedding. What final pieces need to be sorted.

Conrad is scowling, his hand clasps his knife like he might just launch himself at Magnus.

The food is fancy. Far fancier than the meals I normally am served. The lamb is so beautifully cooked that it practically melts into your mouth.

While they drink some fancy red wine, I sip my water slowly. There's a niggling voice in my head telling me to be careful, to behave. The last time we were here, like this, I was laid out and fucked by the pair of them. Though I don't mind if Magnus treats me so, I don't want his brother's hands on me, or any other man's for that matter.

Am I naïve to think that perhaps that won't happen now? Perhaps, after the way he reacted with Antonio, he won't let anyone else touch me again? God, I hope so.

Magnus's lips curl as if he knows where my head is at, and that sends a nervous shiver down my spine.

But then Conrad speaks, mutters something that clearly pisses Magnus off enough that he snaps back.

I drop my gaze, worried about where this is headed, an angry Magnus is not a good thing.

"If you're so determined to have a wedding, why don't you marry your whore?" Conrad sneers.

My eyes dart to Magnus's face before I can think not to.

I imagined him to look even more pissed off, but instead he leans back in his seat, picks up his glass and takes a sip as though he really is contemplating it.

"You mean a double wedding?" Magnus murmurs. "You think Giselle would be happy to share the limelight?"

Conrad rolls his eyes, then stabs at a carrot on his plate only it shoots off, sliding in the buttery sauce to the other side.

I gulp as quietly as I can. Oh, I know it's a tease but somewhere underneath, it is also an insult to me. Whoever this Giselle woman is, she apparently is worthy of marrying one of them while I, I'll never be more than a slave to this family.

"Would you like that, pet?" Magnus says, turning his attention onto me. "Would you put on a pretty dress for me, promise to honour and obey me for the rest of your days, and become my lawfully wedded wife?"

It's a joke. I know it is. And yet, I'm still petrified of the old Magnus, the one who would trick me with his words and then hurt me when I

couldn't reply appropriately. My mind seems to lock up. I'm caught by my own paralysis, and I stupidly stare from one brother to the other.

Conrad lets out a laugh almost as cruel as his brother's.

"You're confusing her, Magnus," he says. "Poor thing barely has enough capacity left to do anything but just breathe after what you've done..."

"I'm not so stupid as all that." I hiss and then my eyes widen. Fear takes over. My entire body starts to shake because I've done it, I've let the old me out. Will there be repercussions to this? Will he return me again to that padded cell?

But I swear Magnus's eyes sparkle with delight. He takes another sip.

"And here I was worried all those sharp edges were gone for good," he says in an almost seductive tone.

My skin erupts into goosebumps. My body squirms and it takes everything I have to keep myself still. To keep myself compliant.

"Yes, yes," Conrad drawls, waiving a knife lazily with his hand. "We all see what a great pet she is. But we're not talking about your whore, are we? We're talking about me, about my cursed fiancée..."

Magnus gets to his feet like he's suddenly outraged. "You're a grown man," he spits. "I'm tired of having this conversation with you. I'm tired of wiping your arse, of cleaning up your messes, of carrying you..."

"I can look after myself thank you very much..." Conrad snaps back, slamming his fist onto the table and half the crockery around us jumps.

"This is your last warning." Magnus continues as if his brother hasn't even spoken. "Marry Giselle Monclere. Do as your family commands. Or you will no longer be a member of this family."

"What?"

Magnus draws himself up, and then he's clicking his fingers, summoning me to his side.

I immediately drop my cutlery, slip from my chair, and move to obey him.

He grasps my wrist in his hand, firm, but not enough to hurt.

"You heard me," he says to Conrad. "You either marry that woman or you'll have nothing."

"You can't..."

His angry words follow us out of the room.

I half expect him to follow, to chase after Magnus and argue more, but as the door slams shut behind us, an almost reassuring peace lingers in the hallway.

Magnus stares down at me and that strange intimacy we now have, makes me uneasy.

I open my mouth to speak, to want to clarify what I said, to justify it, to explain that I maybe obedient, but I am not a damned walkover either.

But the look on Magnus's face silences me. He seems far too riled up in this moment to even contemplate such a discussion.

His hand is still firmly gripping my wrist and he starts walking again, picking up speed as if he's in a hurry to be somewhere.

I expect us to turn left, to head down the corridor and to where our room is but we don't. Instead, we go right, out through the main gallery and down the grand stone steps onto the veranda.

A cool wind once more sweeps about me. The smell of jasmine fills my nose. I don't know why we're back in the gardens, but I'm not complaining. Though I haven't earned this reward, I'll welcome it all the same. And besides, it feels like we could both do with some fresh air.

My eyes dart up to look at him and I can see the strain in his eyes.

"You're angry." I half-whisper.

His head turns, snapping to look at me. For a second, I think he might just lose his temper, revert back to hurting me, but to my surprise he seems to soften just a little. Those deadly eyes seem to calm a tiny bit.

"It doesn't matter right now," he murmurs.

"No?" I persist, though God only knows why.

"No," he replies before loosening his grip, all but encouraging me to walk on, as if he wants some thinking space.

I take the hint and don't look back, putting enough distance between us to give him what he wants.

There's a formal bed of roses ahead and a vast fountain that has water splashing down into a circular, pristine pool of water. I've stared at this scene for so long, out past the great glass windows that have always had me locked inside. It feels almost unreal to finally be here, to dip my fingers into the cool wetness and know that this is real.

Once more, my mind flickers to that thought that this is temporary. All of this is. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon Magnus will kill me. Soon, I will be a sacrifice to his bigger dreams, his bigger desires.

A tear slips down my cheek before I can stop it. But it's pointless. All my emotions are pointless, and ruminating over this, it's just causing more heartbreak than is needed.

Movement to my right catches my attention.

I turn to see where Magnus is, fearful that if I'm now too far, he will be angry with me.

Only a figure is between us. Someone I don't recognise.

Somehow, I've wandered far enough away that I'd have to run to get back to him, but I swear I didn't take all that many steps.

The figure shouts something. I frown as the words echo in my head. Words I myself have screamed, have prayed, have cried in my darkest, deepest, worst moments.

He raises his arm, pointing something at Magnus and then I am running. I'm screaming. Sprinting. Launching myself at the stranger as I realise what this is. That he's not one of Magnus's men. That he's not security, or a servant, or a friend.

He's an assassin.

"No," I scream, throwing my body at him as if it's a weapon.

I slam into him, my weight causes us both to crash to the floor, and the gun in his hand slips out, falling a few feet away.

He shouts out, he lands a punch to my face and then makes another attempt to get the weapon.

I have to stop this.

I have to stop him.

I scramble for the gun. I scramble to get some control.

He pushes me back and I fight all the harder.

I won't let him do this. I can't let him do this. I have to protect Magnus, I have to protect my Master.

The gun goes off. Both of us are technically holding it, but I groan as that blast of unimaginable pain reverberates through my bones and I stare down, seeing where my blood is already coming out, thick, and warm, and far too damned fast.

I gasp, falling back, sinking onto that cool, soft grass I've been dreaming about. The man stares at me in shock and then Magnus is there, grabbing the weapon, taking control.

With one move, he blows the man's head off and I murmur that that was stupid, that he should have kept him alive to get answers first. How will he

know who wants him dead? How will he be able to protect himself?

But I'm suddenly so weary now, so weak. My eyes are so heavy it feels like my lids won't stay open. This feels so different from the last time I was here, the last time I was dying. There is pain, yes, but this time feels more poignant. This time, my death serves a purpose.

I stare up at Magnus as he moves to scoop me up and my lips turn into a small, sad, smile.

"It, it, it's okay," I stammer.

He frowns, clearly not understanding what I mean.

"It's okay." I say again, because this is what was meant to happen.

It's like it all suddenly makes sense.

I always wanted my life to mean something, now I realise it's not my life, but my death that will.

I'm dying so that Magnus won't. I'm dying to save him. He's had ample opportunity to kill me but this way I spare us both that pain. Not only have I saved his life, but now he doesn't have to take mine.

He doesn't have to tarnish whatever this thing between us is.

No, now we can both end this in peace.

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CHAPTER FORTY-THREE



Magnus

It wasn't meant to be like this. To end like this.

What the fuck went wrong? Why the fuck did he have actual bullets in his gun?

He was meant to scare her, to play pretend. It was meant to be a test, to see if she really was loyal or whether all this newfound obedience was merely an attempt to trick me.

Of course the man had to die. I had to silence him quickly before everyone else realised what this really was. It won't help anyone to know that he's not a real assassin, least of all the dying woman in my arms.

But as I carry her, as I realise that ultimately, I'm responsible for this, I feel fear for the first time in my life.

Fear that I've done something undoable. Something unfixable. Something truly unforgiveable.

She's smiling, staring back at me in a way that suggests she's almost content to die. And she keeps repeating that same bullshit over and over,

that it's okay. But it isn't. It is not okay. How dare she think she's allowed to leave me now?

And then she gasps out words I'd never believe. That she's happy to die, happy to sacrifice herself for me.

My hands tighten around her bloodied body, my feet slam into the ground as I run as fast as I can, as desperately as I can to get help. Not even my own brother would run in front of a bullet for me. No one would show me such loyalty. And yet the woman I've hurt the most has done just that?

I can't fathom it. I can't comprehend it.

'I'm better than that. Better than you.'

Those words ring out my head once more. Words spoken in hate. Words she spat at me so long ago and I realise now that she is right, she was always right. She is better than me. Nobler. Braver too. She offered her life for mine like it meant nothing, like she was worth sacrificing.

But she isn't. She will never be worth losing. Someone like her, loyalty like that, it's unheard of. It doesn't exist beyond the wilds of your foolish imagination, and yet this woman just proved herself as just that. The rarest of rare creatures; something a man like I could never believe was real.

God, I can't lose her. I can't—I hate that pathetic, weak, desperation crawling beneath my veins, making me panic more. But I can't lose her. Not now. Not fucking ever.

The doctor comes rushing out of the house as I reach it and he's immediately taking over, demanding I lay her down, that I relinquish her care, as if I'd do such a thing.

Instead, I carry her to the medical bay, still shouting, still calling for everyone to get here, to save her.

And then I stand there, covered in her blood, refusing to leave her side, while my mind continues to somersault over and over at what just happened.

She jumped.

She did it.

She literally launched herself at who she thought was my assassin.

Her affection for me cannot be feigned. Cannot be false.

She's as loyal as they come. More loyal than all my servants, my family, every other person on this very earth.

I gulp, considering the implications of this, of what I now have to do.

I expected her to seize her chance. I expected her to reach out and take what she believed to be her freedom with no hesitation whatsoever.

But she chose me.

She *chose* me.

No, Liliana has proven in one act that she's more valuable than all the gold in my vaults, all the jewels and antiques and all of it, all my family's legacy, all my family's namesake.

I can't ignore that fact.

I can't.

And I won't.



I STARE AT THE GLASS, MY FACE PRESSED AGAINST THE COLD SURFACE, watching as the surgeons work away.

She's laying there, with an oxygen mask on her face, but her expression is pained.

That peaceful look she had when I was carrying her is long gone, and I can't help but wonder if it's because of me, because I'm refusing once more to simply let her die.

In my head I can see it like a movie, replaying over and over. How she flung herself at my supposed attacker, how she screamed, how she fought so desperately because she believed I was about to be murdered. My heart slams into my chest, my palms feel sweaty and the bile in my stomach keeps threatening to erupt up into my mouth.

Would I have done it for her? Would I have jumped in front of a bullet if the roles were reversed? Up until recently I would have laughed at the very notion. Scoffed at the fact that any woman could ever have such a hold on me as that, because, did I not learn all those years ago, did I not see what stupid things like love do to a man? How they make you blind, how they make you weak. My dear dead wife proved that fact. She proved how dangerous feelings like love can be.

But as I stare at the bloodied, battered woman on the surgical table I feel like the very earth beneath my feet has crumbled, that my very foundations have shattered, fractured. That I'm not that same man anymore. This

woman here has not only challenged me physically, but she's challenged everything I believe in.

And the fact that she's willing to die for me, that she's that damned loyal? That can't be a weakness, that can't be anything other than the most precious of gifts.

A loud beep suddenly fills the room. The medics all start scrambling.

I know what it means and yet I'm shouting out all the same, banging my fists on the partition like a madman.

She has to live. She has to fucking live.

"Magnus."

My brother calls from behind me, but I don't turn to look, I barely even hear my name because every cell in my body, every part of me is focused on the dying woman in the room beyond.

"Fix her." I yell. "Fucking save her."

A nurse rushes from the room and comes back moments later with a fresh bag full of blood. She's quick to attach it, quick to secure it to the plastic tube running into Liliana's vein.

But even as the new blood is pumped into her, it can't replace all the blood she's losing out of the wound in her stomach.

"She's bleeding out." someone yells, like we can't see all the blood dripping from the table.

My fists slam into the glass again. More fury, more desperation, more pure fucking need drives me to do something. But what can I do? What can I possibly do to change this? I can't save her, I can't fix her, I'm fucking helpless in this moment.

I used to think that everything I did was predetermined, that every action, every move was sanctioned by God himself, because he put me where I am, he made me a Blake, a reaper, a Brethren Lord. He granted me honours and privileges that most men could only dream of and why else would he continue to reward me if he wasn't happy with the way I went about living my life?

But if Liliana dies, what then does that mean? What proof will there be of his favour if he takes her from me now?

I can't fucking lose her. I can't.

Is this what love is, is this what it means? To feel powerless, to feel helpless, useless even?

My eyes dart to her face, to where she looks so impossibly pale.

If she'd been a Brethren Lady, if we'd met in entirely different circumstances, if I'd married her instead of my dead wife, would we still have ended up here? Would I have realised how perfect she was if I *hadn't* done all those things to her? If I hadn't tortured her, and raped her, and brutalised her body? I guess God only know the answer to that. And yet, I don't regret what I did. I don't regret a single scar I put on her flesh, I don't regret the way I abused her, no, because that too was our destiny, that too was part of our story—even the brand on her chest, that was as predetermined as everything else.

“Clear.”

Her body jolts. More electricity than I've ever shocked her with, pulsates through her body and I swear she flies up off the table before landing with a slam.

“Charge to 150.”

“Clear.”

Her body jolts again, right in time to my fist slamming into the glass.

“Wake up.” I order. Wake fucking up and come back to me. Come back to your Master.

My eyes bore into her flesh, my nails dig into my palms and I stare like a madman, willing her to come back, willing her to listen, to obey, to prove this one final time that I can command her to do anything, that even the very doors of death do not have the same hold over her soul as I do.

My legs feel like they give out, I sink to my knees, staring on, and, just as that machine starts beeping in an entirely different manner, my brother puts his hand on my shoulder.

“I told you,” he says in that taunting, smug tone. “I fucking knew it. You love her, don't you? You love that whore.”

I can't utter a word. I can't even deny it. Every word he's said is true.

And it's obvious what I have to do now. What my path forward is. I'd be a fool to do otherwise.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR



Magnus

She wakes slowly. Her eyes flutter open.

I let her get her bearings, giving her a little space even though I'm desperate to just reach over and touch her and prove that she's actually alive. As our eyes connect, I expect to see that old fear there, that old Liliana, but there's nothing there but those soft, trusting eyes looking back at me.

I get up, leaving the cramped chair I've occupied for far too long and as I sit on the bed, she shifts just enough to allow me more space.

Her hair is starting to get long enough that she can almost style it. The red glow of it makes her look almost angelic in the evening light.

For a moment, we just stare at one another, with so many unspoken words, so much pain, and hate too, that's twisted into something undefinable. Something inconceivable.

I love her.

Part of me wants to confess it, to tell her the truth, but would she see me the same if she knew? Or would she reject me just like my wife did? Would she turn her face up in horror at the very notion of me actually having feelings?

I've never been a man who cares about taking risks, who plays it safe. I'll happily kick the damned hornet's nest for a bit of fun, but right now I feel like I'm the one on trial. That my very future is on the line.

But Liliana and I have never truly conversed, never needed to. The few words we've exchanged were always in anger, in the midst of a battle. And in truth, always with me being the one in the position of strength.

It's unnerving to realise that right now, it's not me but her who's suddenly in control. Who holds all the power.

I take her hand, placing the small pistol into it.

She frowns, looking from the weapon, to my face, and then back again.

"What...?"

"You have a choice, Liliana." I state cutting across her words. "It's the only mercy I can give you. I'll grant you a quick death, a painless one. Here and now. Or, you can choose me, you can choose to continue what we have. To become my wife and live on."

She blinks as her entire body trembles. "Your, your wife?" she whispers.

"It's the only way." I state. "You either die now or marry me."

I don't add what I want. I don't state that I want her to live, to choose me, to be by my side. I want her to make that decision by herself. I want her to choose me on her own accord this one final time.

But what are the chances? What is the likelihood? What kind of person would choose to marry their kidnapper and rapist?

The air seems to tense. Milliseconds feel like a damned eternity.

In silence, she slides the gun from her palm onto the duvet like she's repulsed by it, then fixes her gaze back on me.

"I know what happened to your last wife," she says quietly. "You murdered her, on your wedding night."

"I promise you now that you will not meet the same fate."

"No?" she whispers. "But what if I disobey you? What if I did something you didn't like? Would you beat me? Hurt me? Rape me again?"

I grit my teeth, clench my jaw, trying my best not to lash out the way I would normally do. For the first time in my life, I want something, not through force, or intimidation, or fear. Besides, is this not exactly the

reasons why I want her, because she won't back down, because she won't just give in and do whatever I want with no thoughts in her own head?

"I won't pretend I will change." I state. "I am not a good man, I have never wanted to be. But I will not hurt you any more than I have."

"You raped me." She hisses, before baring her chest, baring that brand that's still so vividly red. "You did this to me."

"What do you want me to say?" I snarl. "You want me to get on my knees and beg for forgiveness, is that it?" Have I not shown her the kind of man I am, already? Has she not been paying attention all this time?

"No," she gasps, and those beautiful tears start to slide down her face. "I don't need your apologies. Not anymore. But I, I need you to promise not to do that, not to share me, not to..." Her face turns back to that awful pained one again and I realise what her true fear is now.

"He's dead." I say.

Her eyes dart up, she looks at me with wary eyes. "Who?"

"Issac, the man who raped you in Oblivion, the man who fisted you while..."

"While you watched." She snaps, suddenly slamming her fists into me and God help me, I catch them in my grasp, hold them so tightly, while my head screams at me to make her pay with blood.

I can feel her body trembling against me. I can feel the way she's teetering over the abyss. Only, I can't figure out if it's from the pain or just our proximity in this moment.

"Is that your price?" I ask, searching her face for the answer.

"Price?"

"For your forgiveness." I explain. "Is that what you want? Me to have them all killed? All the men who hurt you that night?"

I'll do it. In fact, I should have done it already. Should have had every single one of them butchered because they know what she tastes like, what she feels like. No one should have that knowledge that except me.

She gulps, visibly paling even more. And then she shakes her head. "I don't want you to do it, I don't want to be responsible for their deaths. I'm not like you. I don't see killing people as an option."

"You killed Saul." I point out.

She shudders more, nodding. "And I don't regret it," she admits. "I should, I should hate myself..."

My hand presses against her lips and I silence those stupid words. “He was a threat. He was the reason we even knew about you. You were right to kill him...”

“Just as you were right to kill Issac?” She gasps, pulling her face free, cutting across me with all that anger etched into her beautiful face. “Did you not offer me up, was that not the deal? All your buddies got to fuck me. Why then did you kill him?”

“He died because of what he did to you and because of what he is.”

She frowns, clearly not understanding me, but then how could she? So much has happened while she’s been locked away for her own safety.

“The Brethren are changing. We are at War. Issac was my enemy and as such he had to die.”

“And the others, are they your enemy, too?” she whispers and I swear I hear a hint of hope in her voice. That she wants me to say that they are, that she wants me to have a cause other than just herself because she’s too cowardly to admit that she wants them dead.

“They are not.” I reply. “But I will lay their bodies before you as a wedding gift.”

It’s a hell of a risk, a hell of a sacrifice to make. One I know will have far reaching consequences moving forward but how can I let them live, how can I justify them still breathing our air, if Liliana is to be my wife? No, they have to die. And they will. It’s a sacrifice I will gladly make. A sacrifice I will carry for her. I’ll murder my friends, butcher them as I have my enemies and ensure my soon-to-be wife understands where we stand from now on.

That only I will know what her body feels like, how she tastes, only I will keep that carnal knowledge of her.

Except, that clearly doesn’t please her. Instead, she reacts like she’s going to fight me. Her hands push against me, with all the strength she can muster she tries to shove me off, and then a whimper escapes her lips because, clearly her wound is hurting her, and she’s moving too much.

“I can’t accept, I won’t let you...”

“Are you still so naïve?” I growl, finally losing some of my patience. “After all this time, are you still trying to cling onto that notion that the world can be saved with peace and cookies?”

She starts to sob, covering her face. “It’s not, it’s not, I don’t...”

I yank at her hands, growing more exasperated by her.

“I know it isn’t like that.” She snarls. “You beat that fact into me, carved it into me. I know what the world is, what hate is, what pain is. And I know what it feels like to want someone dead. How it feels to desire it.”

“You desire my death?” I ask.

She shuts her eyes, hangs her head as if she can’t look me in the face. “I did, once.”

It’s not that I expected a different answer. It’s not that I didn’t know. You don’t do the kinds of things I did to her without such feelings being a consequence. And at the time, I wanted her to hate me. I revelled in that notion. I enjoyed it.

“I am not a good man.” I say again. “The things I have done, the things I will do, I will not change, I cannot change. I will do things that will make you hate me, but I will not do them to you.”

“But why? Why do you do such things?”

“Because that is my purpose. That is what is necessary. I am going to be Chapter Lord. I am going to rule over every Brethren Lord in this country. I must be ruthless. I must be unforgiving. I must be feared.”

And for the first time in my life, I want someone to truly see me for me. I want someone to truly understand me. And I want it to be her.

She lets out a sigh, like I’m asking too much. Needing too much.

“You can’t simply kill someone just for me.”

There it is again, that bullshit. That foolish belief that she should be above her base instincts, that she shouldn’t give into what her heart truly desires, to what her mind has dreamt of in the darkest pits of her despair. As if her pain as taught her nothing.

“Just for you?” I repeat. “I will kill them for both of us. I will kill them because it will make you happy, because it is what you want, even if you’re too proud and too stubborn to admit it.”

Her eyes flash, she glares at me for a second and then she chews her lip like she knows every word I’m saying is the truth she just can’t admit it.

Her eyes drop, she stares at the weapon on the bed before she reaches out and places it back into my hand.

“I don’t want to die.” she says, and a part of my heart sinks because I wanted her to say something else. To declare that I’m the reason she wants to continue, that it’s me and me alone that drives her every thought and not just her want to live.

Does she not think that? Am I not enough for her?

“You changed me, you broke me.” She gasps. “How am I meant to choose otherwise? How am I meant to be anything but yours?”

My eyes meet hers and I can see the tears streaming down her face. She looks more broken than ever, and yet so damned fucking defiant. My cock seems to come alive, and I can feel it straining in my pants, desperate to get out.

“What are you saying, Liliana?” I growl, starting to lose my patience. Is she choosing me or not?

“I’m saying that I’ll do it. I’ll marry you. I’ll be your wife.”

“Because you don’t want to die or because you want to be with me?” I don’t know why it matters. It shouldn’t matter. It’s never fucking mattered before. Either way I’ve won this, so why do I give a fuck what the reason behind it is?

And yet, I have to hear her say it.

I have to know the truth.

Even if it is purely her survival instincts, I have to know exactly where we stand. She knows I’m a monster. She knows everything that I am capable of. But I have to know if even now, if after everything I’ve done, am I beyond redemption, am I beyond her love?

“I...” she starts, silently sobbing, wiping her tears like whatever she’s about to say is the worst thing imaginable. “I love you.” She gasps. “I love you. I hate myself for it, I hate what you’ve done to me, but I can’t go back, I can’t undo it. You, you ruined me.” She spits the last, spits it like a curse but God does it change me.

I reach out, grabbing her jaw and roughly pull her face back up so that she has to face me.

“Not ruined you.” I state fiercely. “I created you. I moulded you. I’ve made every inch of you. You’re my perfect creature. Mine.”

She sobs harder at that and I pull her in, claiming her mouth and silencing those pitiful sounds.

This woman is mine. All fucking mine. She’ll stand by my side, more loyal and more trusted than any other person. I’ll hurt her, I’ll use her, I’ll care for her, and I’ll never let her go, not until her dying breath leaves her body, just as I first declared in the cathedral all that time ago.

She kisses me back. Her tongue twists with mine and it’s that same defiant, fierce stubbornness I’ve enjoyed so much. My hand wraps around

the back of her neck and I close the little distance between us, pressing her body into mine.

I never thought I was capable of love. In so many ways I still don't believe I am. And yet this woman, she is everything I've wanted, she is everything I need. I've created my perfect partner without even realising that that's what I was doing.

When we break apart, she looks up at me with tears still in her eyes. "What about the Brethren?" she says. "Will they allow this? You're meant to execute me..."

I shake my head to silence the last of that sentence. "I'll be Chapter Lord soon enough. No one will dare challenge me on this." I state as if that is all there is to it.

She frowns, chewing on her lip, but I don't let her speak further because I'm too desperate to seal this.

I yank the covers back, revealing her battered body in its entirety. It's wrapped in bandages from where they had to operate and remove the bullet. I know fucking her right now will only give her pain, but I need this, I need her, and I don't give a fuck about anything else.

So I force myself inside her, feeling that delicious way her cunt welcomes me and, though I'm being as gentle as I can in the circumstances, she still whimpers.

"You're mine, Liliana." I groan. "All fucking mine. For now and forever, do you hear me?"

For a second, I consider taking out the IUD, forcing another thing onto her, forcing her to bear my children on top of everything else, but the thought of sharing her, of seeing her body change and morph, and sacrifice for someone other than me—no, I won't do it. I want her all to myself. Every single part of her. Besides, I don't actually have any desire to be a parent. It's never been a want of mine. And with Conrad soon to be married it's a burden he can take on, a chance for him to finally give back to our family for a change.

She digs her hands into my back like she wants to tear my flesh off and it reminds me of all those times I've had her, all those times I've forced her, all those times I've made this woman submit to me.

I've ruined her in every imaginable way possible and yet she still loves me, would still die for me.

What more could I ask from a life partner than that?

What more could I possibly want?

She is pure perfection. Created exactly the way I need.

I thought I wanted someone to simply submit, to give in to my every want, and yet I realise now that what I enjoyed all along was her defiance, her fight. She's everything I needed. And more than that, she's a true equal to me in every way.

So I'll take all those sharp edges, I'll take all those unguarded words she has, and I'll make sure future wife is seen as that, is honoured as that. Is worshipped alongside me, as an esteemed and revered Chapter Lady.

And with her beside me, watching my back, I know our future is secure, our destiny is assured. I'll be the most powerful man in England.

And with Liliana at my side, I'll also be the richest.

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**THREE MONTHS
LATER**



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CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE



Liliana

What must be a million candles flicker around us. Magnus keeps my hand firm in his and part of me is grateful for that, despite me knowing that it's meant to be a form of control, of dominance.

I can feel all the stares, all the looks. I may now technically be a Brethren Lady, but I'm still the outsider and in many ways I always will be.

My teeth bite down hard on the piece of metal resting in my mouth. It's part of the mask obscuring my face and it's the only way to ensure it doesn't slip because it has no ties, no ribbon, just this mouthpiece to keep it up. Every Lady here has one, a full face, ornate thing, each unique, each hand-gilded to replicate their individual features. Magnus had mine commissioned the day after he put a ring on my finger and sealed us both together for life.

The Lords all wear masks too, though theirs are simpler, covering only the top part of their faces, stopping above their lips, and they tie around their heads so they don't require them to keep their mouths shut all the time.

No, they're allowed to speak freely, to smile and sneer, and to show expressions that we are forbidden from doing.

We ladies are to be silent. Silent and beautiful. That is our place.

A chorus of bells rings out. The crowd of robes moves like a flock and they turn as a man walks down the centre, waving a great incense burner that billows smoke all around us.

To our left stands Titus Ratcliffe and his wife, Elaine; he's the only Lord daring enough to challenge Magnus for Chapter.

Magnus hasn't even deigned to look at him and I've followed his example, keeping my eyes ahead, off to the distance as if they're not even worthy of breathing the same air as us.

I'm wearing a long black dress that flows around my body, cascading down to my ridiculously high heels with a split right down the centre. All the other Ladies are dressed similarly, the only difference is my dress is sheer and underneath I'm wearing absolutely nothing.

I'm bare.

Exposed.

And I've caught more than one Lord already leering at my breasts.

But this is how Magnus likes me. I've realised that now, he enjoys showing me off, showing to the world what he has, what he's created. Flaunting my body and my beauty like a prize no other man can have.

The old me would hate myself for being so obliging, for standing here, as good as naked and allow myself to be effectively treated like I'm some sort of trophy, but the new me, the one Magnus moulded, she can't get enough of it.

So I keep my back straight, my head high and proud, and I stare down my nose at every single Lord who looks my way as if I really am better than them.

The front of my dress is cut low to ensure that the brand on my chest is visible. At times, I swear I can feel it tingling even though it's long since healed. Magnus had it tattooed, embedded with actual gold so now it's even more prominent, like a piece of jewellery I'll never take off.

My hair has grown back enough to look like a pixie cut. In time, it'll grow long enough that no one will ever know I was shaved.

Magnus murmurs something, and that memory, that flashback of being pinned down and raped, evaporates.

I give a slight nod and follow him up onto the dais, while our rivals move to stand on one opposite us.

The man with the incense starts circling around both the stages, chanting something in Latin that I do not understand. But today is where the official lines are drawn. Today is where the open war begins.

I know Magnus has something spectacular planned for later. I can tell both from the hint of a smile on his lips and from the way he fucked me so hard before we got here. My pussy throbs at the memory, I squeeze my thighs and I can feel his come dripping down just enough to help soothe the ache.

He tilts his head, glancing at me as if he knows that I'm feeling desperate for him again.

As the chanting ceases, the crowd around us falls silent.

Two girls step out. They can't be more than teenagers but whoever they are, they've been specifically chosen for this honour. They cross the room, coming to a stop before me and Elaine.

With shaky hands, I remove my mask and reveal my face. A tiny bit of saliva drools down my chin from where the mouthpiece is, but I bare it no mind. It's not like I won't be drooling more in a minute anyway.

The girl before me inclines her head, like I'm some sort of goddess and she takes my mask with both hands before stepping back, giving me space to perform my duties.

Magnus turns enough to ensure everyone here will get a good view of this, and I slip onto my knees, opening the split of my dress wider, just as he instructed this morning. He wants them to feast on my body, to see every inch of me as I prove to them all what a loyal, devoted wife I now am.

I don't look to Elaine. I don't even glance at her, though I know she too is on her knees before her husband.

Magnus said that though this is technically a race for who can get their husbands off quicker, he doesn't want me to be fast. He wants me to take my time, to show off my skills. To truly honour him—and to put a final stop on all the naysayers about me. Those who are still openly opposing my new status as Magnus's wife.

My hands reach up, slowly I undo his belt, and pull his trousers open enough that his cock springs free. He's so engorged already I can barely wait to get a taste of him.

His mask is firmly in place, hiding his expression but I know beneath it, he is smiling at me.

I open my mouth wide, sucking him down inch by inch, covering him in my saliva. My right hand moves to cup his balls, while my left holds his cock at an angle that ensures everyone here can see how deep I can swallow him.

He groans as I start working away. Bobbing back and forth.

We've been practicing this. Working day and night to ensure that I can deep throat him enough that I don't choke.

Behind me though, I hear the gags and the sloppy sounds of my counterpart. Lord Ratcliffe is groaning, grinding, no doubt rocking his hips and barely a second later he's coming like he's a teenager having his first ever blow job. Either he's taken steps to give himself blue balls or his wife must be left seriously disappointed in the bedroom.

I hear Magnus chuckle and it's hard not to react myself. Titus thinks he's beaten us, scored a point, but now I have the entire room's attention and I'm determined that my performance will have them all in raptures.

My husband reaches down, planting a gentle hand on my head and I pull off with a pop before swirling my tongue around the girth of him. He's a good seven inches, thick too, and I make sure to worship every bit of him.

As I get to the base, I suck one ball into my mouth and then the other. I know I'm aroused enough that my pussy is dripping and a part of me is dying to touch myself, to get myself off too.

But those are not the rules.

That is not permitted.

This is meant to be a show of obedience and servitude. A display of how perfect I am in my wifely duties. And it's meant to set an example to everyone watching too; it's a statement of what sort of leader Magnus would be, keeping his wife in check, proving that we both adhere to the family values of the Brethren.

It's misogynistic bullshit. The old me knows it. The old me hates it.

And yet, the new me loves the fact that a thousand eyes are watching, are eagerly devouring every move I make, hearing the slurps, and the moans, and all of it as I work my husband's cock to perfection.

And I'll admit it does make me feel strong, it makes me feel invincible because I have the great Magnus Blake literally at my mercy right now, and if that's not power then I don't know what is.

With a light tap that no one else can see, Magnus signals that he's ready.

I pick up pace, taking him back into my mouth, and I start bobbing my head quicker, hollowing my cheeks, sucking him further and further down my throat, while I let out one long moan after another so everyone here can hear how much I'm truly enjoying this moment.

He's not meant to do it, he's not meant to be touching me in anyway, but he reaches down, pinching my nipple, and I gasp at the tiny hit of pain.

That almost painful grip around my head tightens, he slams his hips as far as he can. His cock jerks in my mouth, his come spurts down my throat and I can feel how he's reacting, how he's becoming a complete, trembling mess as he roars his release.

I look up, meeting his piercing eyes, and I know that that power, that love, all of it is reciprocated. Oh, we may have started off as adversaries, we may have started off with him owning me, controlling me, holding all the power, but now we truly are equals.

He pulls out, dragging the very tip of him across my lips and I smile up at him, waiting until he has fully covered himself before I lick my lips and savour the last lingering taste.

With one hand, he helps me back to my feet.

And I feel like I'm some sort of goddess, some mythical creature from antiquity. I feel like Venus herself having performed some fertility rite, while I'm surrounded by my worshippers. My heart slams into my chest, my body aches with a desperate need for something that right now, I know I can't have.

My dress is still parted, my entire body is still bared for everyone to gawp at. I sneak a look at Titus and Elaine, and they're staring, open mouthed, clearly torn between shock and annoyance at how we've more than proven our point.

Magnus dips two of his fingers between my thighs, swiping enough that I can see the wet smear of my arousal as he brings them back up to his lips and he sucks them in one by one.

"Delicious as always," he says, loud enough for not just me to hear.

My cheeks flame, my body shudders and part of me is so close to just launching at him, to giving into it and fucking him now in front of them all.

But that would be too far. Far too far.

The master of ceremony steps forward, stating that the ritual is now complete and both our candidacies are accepted for Chapter Lord.

I can't tell if he knew what we were going to do or not, but as my eyes drop, I can see the hint of a bulge where his dick is.

Clearly, he enjoyed the spectacle before him. And we all know where half these Lords will be headed tonight. Oblivion is going to be filled to the rafters with them. Of course, Magnus is no longer running it. Technically, he's still in charge but he's passed the reins to Conrad, who was apparently only too delighted to step up.

That great chime rings out again, this time counting six times. They won't ring again until a Chapter Lord is selected. Until they declare that it is Magnus who leads us all.

I go to move but Magnus squeezes my hand, commanding me silently to wait.

Ahead of us, Titus and Elaine all but storm off. It's hard not to laugh at their behaviour because they clearly thought a one-minute blowjob would make them the heroes here. Too bad on that front.

The crowd starts dispersing. Two very clear and distinct groups form, and I know it's our faction versus theirs.

Through the middle Antonio walks, his eyes fixed on my husband. With a broad smile he congratulates him, silently announcing to everyone there exactly who his loyalty sits with, and a murmur spreads through the crowd and around us.

People must have known who he was backing and yet such a public display will certainly grease more wheels.

He hugs Magnus like a brother and then he leans in, speaking as quietly as he can that there's a problem.

"What is it?" Magnus asks, keeping his own voice barely above a whisper.

"Conrad is missing."

"Excuse me?"

"He hasn't been seen in days. No one has heard a thing from him."

Magnus glances at me and, to my surprise, I see a flicker of concern there.

"Have the Esau got him?" I whisper.

Magnus shakes his head like he wouldn't believe it was possible, but he pulls out his phone and types away, no doubt putting Dustin onto it, and then, as if nothing were amiss, he pockets it and once more takes my hand.

“We’ll deal with it later,” he says, though I’m unsure if it’s meant for me or Antonio.

Ahead, the Esau faction make their way out the main doors while we linger inside. I’m conscious that my body is still very much exposed, but Magnus keeps me close enough that I know no one would dare touch me.

It’s hard to think that over half a year ago I was here, stripped naked and on my knees, but not as part of some ritual, not to prove my loyalty and my devotion to my husband, but as a traitor to the Brethren.

Would I have believed then what the outcome of that night would be? Would I believe that soon enough I was happy to marry the man at my side, happy to marry my rapist and my torturer, and happy to devote my every waking moment to our happiness and success?

No, I doubt that.

But I don’t regret it, I don’t regret any moment of our journey. I happily threw myself in front of a bullet for Magnus, I saved his life from an assassin, and I know now, if one burst into the cathedral, I would willingly die for him again.

This is our future now, this is our fate. We’re tied to one another. Destined to be together. He will become Chapter Lord, he will rule over all the Brethren of this country and I will sit beside him, silent and dutiful in public, as is expected.

I’ll pleasure him, I’ll honour him, I’ll worship him with every inch of my body, and I’ll also let him use and abuse me in any way he sees fit, anyway that he desires.

I’m his wife now.

And I’ll serve him on my knees, devoted to his every whim.

THE END

Conrad’s story is coming out early 2025. Read on to get a sneak peek...

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DEPRIVITY



I may have been born into a gilded life, but that doesn't mean it's without issues. I'm set to marry a beautiful woman, a rich woman, one that will bring our family status and power as well as a much-needed heir.

But I refuse to do it. I refuse to marry that conniving, demanding, b*tch.

You see, I've got my sights on a far more pleasing prospect. One younger, one far more malleable. One who also happens to be my fiancée's niece.

My brother, Magnus, may think this is all a done deal but when I'm offered a treat I can't refuse, I take matters into my own hands. I steal away the woman I'm not allowed, lock her up where no one can find her, and I force her to marry me so that no one can take her from me.

Only, my new bride has a few secrets of her own. Secrets that could make or break both our families.

And with my brother's fight for Chapter Lord ramping up, we don't have time for more skeletons to come out of the closet...

W hat to expect:

- Pitch black plot
- Serious on-page & descriptive rape scenes, and sexual assault.
- Drugging & drug rape
- Virgin FMC
- Age gap (F:21 M:38)
- Familial abuse and trauma
- Breeding / Forced breeding
- Dual POV

Read on for sneaky chapter excerpt of 'Depravity'

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DEPRAVITY PREVIEW



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 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? As if I'd be so reckless as to do that.

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?

Her hands wrap around me, those tentacle-like nails skim 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 more 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 so 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 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. “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 golden 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, her red painted lips streaking 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. As obsessed by me as I am her.

My hand skims up the length of her thigh, she's wearing a little silk sun dress, 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?

"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 anyway.

I reach forward, rolling the girl onto her front and unzip 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 fabric.

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, 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. 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 in 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 that'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 that she's here, awake, enjoying this moment with me. Moaning, and 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, 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, I slam myself 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 so hard 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 fills like the entirety of my balls empties, 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 heaves and as my eyes follow the direction of the sound, I can see her, lying barely a metre away, her dress up above her waists 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 spoilt 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 back as that word registers. Virginity? My eyes dart back to the angel on the bed, to where her cunt is so 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, and 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, after all, that's what Giselle wanted, to ruin her, she hates her. 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.

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, 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 and 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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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
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AFTERWORD



Thank you so much for reading 'Deviant'. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I enjoyed conjuring up all the twists and surprises.

This was definitely my darkest book to date and if you found yourself hunkering for more then you'll absolutely love the next book in the series!

I'd like to take this moment to say thank you to a few incredible people who have helped and supported me in my author journey. To the Romance Authors Whatsapp group friends – Annie Charme, Linz Vonc, Louise Murchie, Aisling Elizabeth, Billie Jade Kermack, Mel Davies, Lizzie Lioness, Lillie Alexander, and J L Reed, you lot are literally the reason I get out of bed some days! 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.

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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 lifeline, 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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