

Cora sat in the rain at her mother's gravestone, tears pricking her blank eyes as she stared at the name of her mother, 'Amelia Jules', then the line that followed "A loving mother, and wife, who finally gets peace to join her husband."

Cora gritted her teeth, jaw clenching, now she has to go to a foster home, her social worker came up behind her, putting a hand on Cora's shoulder. "Cora. It's time to go" Jane, the social worker, said softly, hurling Cora to her feet. "I don't want to go to a foster home!" Cora barked.

"I know, I know, nobody ever does, Cora." Jane cooed impatiently, just then, another social worker pulled up in a car, a guy this time, his voice deep but soft, "Cora, you have two choices" he walked towards Cora and Jane, pulling Jane's hand off Cora. "Choice one: You go to a foster home." He paused letting option one sink in. "Choice two: You go and live with your sister, Jasiri. She is the last nearby living relative we could find." The guy, Yuji, finally stood straight, a soft smile playing on his lips as he watched Cora consider the offer.

"I want to go to Jasiri." She swallowed thickly, she has not talked to her sister in YEARS, ever since her sister ran away from home, the fact they located Jasiri was a miracle itself. Yuji nods, holding his hand out to Cora, way gentler than Jane's non-consensual touching. Cora took Yuji's hand cautiously, following him closely as he lead her to his car, opening the backseats door, and holding it open as Cora climbed in, glancing one last time at her mother's gravestone next to her fathers, then at Jane, who looked a little mad to be honest.

Cora jumped as the car door shut unexpectedly, she buckled herself in, the seatbelt clicking as it locked. Cora held her breath then breathed out, just like her mother taught her to calm her nerves. She watched Yuji intently when he slid into the driver's seat, his seatbelt clicking into place, he reached into one of the car's cupboards and pulled out a MP3 player and a set of wired earbuds. "It's gonna be a long drive, Cora. Feel free to sleep and listen to music" Yuji handed her the MP3 and earbuds, and she sat there, silently listening to music, gazing out the window..

It only felt like a few minutes when they arrived at Jasiri's house, Cora looked UP at the cabin, it was huge! The wood was a pretty healthy brown, the porch a nice spruce color even the stairs, the roof was a beautiful dark oak color.

Just then, a beautiful woman steps out from the cabin, leaning her hip on the doorframe, her eyes narrowing in on Cora, Those eyes already recognizable, Jasiri. Her long brown hair down to at least the back of her thighs, black tights on with shorts layered on top, motorcycle boots on, and a black tanktop, a checkered belt adorns her shorts. "Hello again, Cora." She drawled out, making Cora feel small within Jasiri's gaze, "H-hello, Jasiri!" Cora bowed at the waist, feeling the need to under her piercing gaze. "Welcome Home, I guess." Jasiri shrugged, turning her back to Cora. "One rule, do not enter the forest, it's not much, but it will help you survive." She then walked inside the Cabin, the house swallowing her whole once the door closed, Cora swallowed thickly and looked towards the forest, as if her eyes were prying it open, searching for something, a reason why not to go.

She then looked back towards the house, not risking her luck, she followed Jasiri in.

The house was surprisingly nicely decorated, and had its own old charm to it. Jasiri led Cora to her room, down the hall on the right. "This room is completely yours to decorate." Jasiri spoke softly, before leaving Cora to her own thoughts and privacy. The room was sort of.. Plain, compared to the rest of the house, She was excited to decorate once she got the stuff, there was a bed placed in the center that Cora immediately patted down, dust puffing off. Cora sighed, "Guess this is my life now." She looked outside the window of her room, seeing the forest pulling her gaze in once more, something drawing her in like a siren in the seas. She swallowed thickly, just then Jasiri called out "Cora, come here! Time to teach ya how to shoot an arrow." Cora ripped her gaze away from the forest beyond the window.

Following her sister's voice, she spots Jasiri holding a traditional wooden bow, handmade arrows in the other hand. Jasiri jerked her head to the back door, a silent command for Cora to follow, and Cora did just that. Jasiri tossed the bow to Cora once outside, and Cora caught it swiftly, glaring at her sister. Jasiri grinned and walked up behind Cora, adjusting her arms to hold the bow and position it correctly, Jasiri then lined an arrow against the string, Cora watched intently, learning. Cora hit a bullseye on the target on her first try, letting out a shriek of happiness, her eyes lighting up. Jasiri's eyes widened in shock, then she grinned "You learn really fast, Cora." She praised Cora as she beamed, a huge smile on her face, before the forest caught her attention again.

The forest didn't just sit at the edge of the clearing; it breathed, a vast and obsidian expanse that pulsed with a rhythmic, low-thrumming hunger. To Cora, the shadows weren't merely an absence of light, but a physical weight—an eerie, swirling miasma of energy that defied description and chilled the marrow of her bones. The trees were skeletal sentinels, their gnarled branches twisting into agonizing shapes as if they were reaching out to seize the sky.

Every rustle of the leaves carried her name, a fractured chant that bypassed her ears and echoed directly in her skull. It was a siren song, ancient and irresistible, narrowing her entire universe until the world outside the tree line ceased to exist. Beside her, Jasiri moved with a casual indifference that felt like a betrayal. Whether she was truly deaf to the forest's discordant symphony or simply possessed a willpower Cora lacked remained a haunting unknown, but for Cora, the forest was no longer a place—it was a summon.

Cora found herself listening to the song the forest whispered — could feel the urge to follow it, to chase it, to grasp it, to be in control of it. Once Jasiri's back was turned, Cora walked like she was hypnotized, almost tripping on roots that stuck out of the ground, racing the breeze — The trees creaked, chanting whispers, the forest seemed like it swallowed Cora alive. The shadows of the trees overshadowed her. Making her world dim and dark. She ran through, not knowing what she was chasing herself, the forest seemed to warp and turn as she kept going — Kept running, branches caught on her skin, one splitting the skin on her cheek just slightly, droplets of blood dripped down the side of her face.

From the heart of the ancient wood, a figure emerged from the murk—a human-shaped void that stood out against the natural shadows like ink dropped in water. It was a silhouette wrapped in its own private storm, wreathed in undulating ribbons of darkness that lashed out and retreated like phantom limbs. There was a gravity to it, a magnetic wrongness that made Cora's head spin. Without a word, or even a conscious thought, she felt the tether between them snap tight. She began to run, her feet barely feeling the forest floor as she chased the flickering apparition deeper into the labyrinth of trees, captivated by the swirling gloom of its wake.

The ground beneath Cora's feet suddenly betrayed her, transitioning from solid earth to a treacherous, shifting carpet of rot and shadow. Just as she reached for the swirling silhouette, the figure vanished, dissolving into a cloud of soot that tasted like copper on her tongue, and reappearing in front of her as a man, a man with jet black hair, and crimson red eyes that screamed danger. Before she could pivot, the twisted branches she had been weaving through seemed to contract. Tendrils of cold, ink-like smoke rose from the loam, wrapping around her ankles with the strength of iron shackles. She lunged forward, trying to make him save her, but the air itself grew thick and viscous, turning her movements into a slow-motion struggle. "Aww look at you.. struggling aren't we, dear?" The man's mouth turned into a sinister grin, caressing her jaw, squeezing it as he leaned in close, his red eyes boring into her green ones, his red eyes like a fire and hers just happened to be a forest.

(Jasiri's pov//first person)

I heard a sharp scream, then silence. My voice was dying out as I lost sight of Cora. I lost her, I just met her again and I already lost her. I gritted my teeth "Ryker...". He took my baby sister, now it's up to me to get her back. "Time to call up an old friend." I muttered, storming towards my house, crashing through the door, I rummaged through drawers, looking for that stupid pendant. Searching for a pendant a demon gave you is hard. I groaned, running a hand through my hair and pulling on the strands, tears pricking my eyes, something glowed behind the picture frame in the corner of my eye, I looked towards the painting, breath hitching.

That's right! I hid it there!

I rushed towards the painting, moving it out of the way, looking at the messy glowing hole in my light peachy brown wall, I reached in, past the cobwebs, and grasped the chain, pulling it out of my wall. The pendant glowed a soft light blue, the pendant itself a dark midnight blue with a silver chain, and silver engraved designs. I took a deep breath and pressed my lips to the pendant "Elijah.." I whispered into the pendant. It glowed more harshly, reflecting off my blue eyes, my pupils went white for just a moment. I gasped for air, I did not know I was missing. Elijah, a demon, appeared in front of me. Slowly opening his eyes, the second his eyes landed on me, they softened, I swallowed thickly, my tongue suddenly feeling swollen in my mouth. He took a step closer as if unsure I was real, I backed up a step, his eyes flashed with hurt but he's quick to hide it "Jasiri.." he spoke softly, "Elijah." I responded almost coldly, he flinched at the coldness in my voice.

"It's been so long since we last saw each other, Jasiri." He purred, getting bolder as he stepped closer. "Elijah. Not now. Your stupid boss, Ryker? Yeah, he took my sister, and YOU are gonna help get her back." I barked, and he flinched back and nodded, getting on one knee and bowing "Of course, I'll help you" he chirped, his demon tail swishing, earning an eyeroll from me.

(Cora's P.O.V)

I groan, my head throbbing, as I open my eyes, I can't see clearly, vision blurry, and I swear I can hear my heartbeat in my head, and suddenly I really hate my heartbeat, it hurts my head more. I look up, and just then it clicks, a chained collar connects me to the wall, and given the fact it's warm, then I obviously have been here a while. As my vision adjusts, I look around with my eyes. This place was definitely a cell, did not look like a prison cell though, it had a comfy bed, a chandelier above me, a rug beside the bed, except the part I was kneeling on right now? Concrete, cold, freezing concrete, my knees ached, not as bad as my head, but they still ached.

I heard a deep rumbling chuckle emanating from outside my cell, my eyes snapped to the figure outside, the same figure in the forest, his jet black hair draping down his shoulders, his red eyes piercing into my green ones like I was prey and he was the hunter. I swallowed thickly, shifting uncomfortably under his gaze. My head throbbing in-time with my heart. I tugged against the chains, testing their strength, they are definitely strong, won't even budge. The demon stalks towards me, his hand coming to my throat, my pulse racing beneath his fingers as he leaned in, close to my face, his hot breath ghosting over my face, I can smell the wine on his breath, not a drunk breath, but he definitely drank wine. I hold my breath as he grins, my heart pounding against his fingers. "I'm Ryker." he purred lowly in my ear, causing a shudder from me. I move away from his hand.

"What's yours, pretty thing?" He purred once more, sort of annoying me now. "*Thing*"? *How dare he! I am not a "thing"*.

"None of your damn business!!" I snap, forest green eyes glaring daggers at him. He mocks a pout "Come onnnnn, dear! Just *spit it out*." I swallowed thickly before finally handing over my name "Cora, my name's Cora." I wince at the throbbing in my head. His grin widens, and he stands up straight again, fixing his posture. "You want to go home real bad, don't you?" He estimates, and I nod, swallowing my courage, and my pride along with it. I felt worthless, belittled, *small*. "Let me go, *please*." I beg, and plead, tears welling up in my eyes. I struggle against the chains once more. "If you want out so bad, then why don't we make it a game? You complete all my challenges, and I'll let you go." I look to the ground at his words, he's a **demon**. These "challenges" won't be easy, at all, especially for a human like me. But it is worth giving it a chance. No matter what. "Alright, what challenges? I'll do them, if it means I get set free." I look back up at him, defiance shining in my eyes. "I'll play your stupid fucking games." His eyes widened in delight, then the chains evaporated around me. I tried running for the cell door, only for him to slam it shut in my face, my head bangs against the bars and I hiss, rubbing my head as I fall back. "Ah, ah, ah. Not so fast, *Cora*." he purrs, walking away, leaving me alone.

I growl, my head still throbbing, I decide to look around my room, paying attention to details, any detail, any small thing I have not noticed before. I touched down the blanket on the luxury bed, felt illegal and violating just having my hand on the soft thick pelt. The blanket was a beautiful velvet red. I crawled onto it, feeling the plush mattress beneath me, this had to be hell expensive. I nuzzled in, letting out a sigh. I missed Jasiri, I missed her a lot. Tears welled up in my eyes, I squeezed my eyes shut, tears falling and streaking my cheeks. Next thing I knew, I fell into a deep slumber.

Only waking up when I hear the door creak open, I stir slightly, the shadow of Ryker standing over me, I swallow thickly. "G-Good morning to you too.." I sat up, back sinking against the pillow behind me. I was greeted by his eyes glowing in the dark, a deep ruby red glowing against the dark, dimming the black ever so slightly with red.

He caressed my jaw just like a lover would, suddenly air is stuck within my lungs, it feels like rose thorns are squeezing my lungs, and the stem feeding into my stomach where the bud blooms, it feels suffocating. Butterflies in my stomach laced with pain, the butterflies dancing with the sharp blades of the thorns.

"Breathe, Darling." He purred, and suddenly I snapped back to reality, catching my breath. I gasp for air, oxygen. Never knew I missed it so much, I choke on the rush of oxygen flooding my lungs, the rose holding my organs hostage withers and fades.

"Breathing" I croak, raspy, lack of oxygen voice. His smirk returns, the same cocky sadistic one from yesterday. "W-What do you need?" I question him, it sounds like an interrogation, he only stares into my eyes. His voice is like a sick poet, a sultry whisper of a dying siren. "The first challenge begins, my dear." He releases my jaw, and I pull away, the warmth of his touch still evident on my jaw, it feels like it was sinking into my skin, the warmth, him. "Then let us begin." I push, challenging him and myself dead-on.

I stood, and he raised a hand and I flinched back, he let out a chuckle, and I saw the armor that had appeared on the bed, my ego shattered, I really thought he was going to smack me upside the head.. Now he was laughing at my shattered ego. I shove him away. "Out! You jerk!" I growl, he rolls his eyes and walks out. I gently pick up the chainmail top, inspecting it for any traps or casualties that will make me lose this challenge. Once I have noticed it's clear from any of the stuff I was checking for, I strip the clothes I was in, pulling the chainmail top over my shoulders.

It was like armor almost, putting the chestplate over the chainmail he gave, his smile seemed fake, I wonder if he has hidden secrets, hidden in the dark. Once suited up, I make my way out the cellar door, looking down the hallway on both sides, looking for any sign of Ryker. I wander down the hallway, because that is all that I am capable of apparently, I do not know my way around this place at all. It was dark, only dimmed by the slight light from the soft torches lit upon the wall. The lighting was soft and eerie, but the place itself is dark and gloomy, over all terrifying. I walk and walk, searching for Ryker, I still have not found him.

I was just about to go back until I bumped into his chest, I hit the ground, again. This man is always making me fall. In different ways too, it sucks. I get up once more, looking up at

him, never realizing how tall he really is. I flinch back, and he raises an eyebrow in amusement, that damn smirk coming back again. I roll my eyes, and he takes my wrist, leading me down the hallway by force now. He was gentle, but his slight grip still told me not to try anything. So, I obeyed. Listening as I always do.

He leads me to this room, with weapons, just random weapons, I look at them in confusion. I glance towards him, and he only points to them with his chin. Now it is my turn to raise an eyebrow at him. I sigh and step forward, scanning every weapon with intensity. Trying to figure out which one would be better for battle or really anything, whatever I was going to be forced to fight.

With my height, and weight. I'd probably want something lightweight and easy to use in a rush. I canceled out the axe. Which leaves me with a sword, bow, or a scythe. Before he spoke up again, I grabbed the bow, and he grins, tossing me arrows, which I catch with ease. "Nice reflexes, girl." He praises, I shoot him a glare, and he frowns, shutting up.

I test the string on the bow, pulling it back, but not releasing it, just gently following it back into place, I catch a glance at Ryker, and he looks confused. "You don't want to dry shoot. That can damage the string." I look back to the bow, deeming it good quality enough to fight, I catch the small dagger he tosses my way. "You have a habit of throwing things at me. Specifically *sharp* things." I raise an eyebrow, and pocket the dagger into the strap on my leg.

"Who even are you?" I ask him, and once more he looks confused. "I told you my name, Didn't I?" He takes his turn asking a question.

"Well, yes, you did. But who are you REALLY? Despite your name." I stood straight, looking over my shoulder back at him. His eyes glinted maliciously in the dim lighting, I swallowed my fear. "So? Who are you, Ryker?" I spoke, not letting my voice tremble, I will stand my ground. "You will find out soon, dear." He grins wider, pushing me by my lower back out to this place.. It looks like those you would usually find in cartoon movies or maybe shows. A ring. Specifically a battle arena. Nobody in the seats. Just an empty battle arena.

I took a deep breath, and stepped forward. Bow in hand, gripping the dagger in its strap. I'm eventually standing on top of the sandy dirt texture, looking behind me once more at Ryker. I grinned at him cockily, then the ground shakes, and now it is his turn to grin. My eyes widen as air whipped past me, my hair in a mess and I hear the sound of a giant beast's wings beating in the air, my eyes only get wider when I see a whole dragon above me.

I rushed to load my arrow into my bow, aiming at the dragon's chest, I pulled back the string of my bow, staring down the arrow, aiming, taking a deep breath as it came closer. I released the string, the arrow whipping and piercing through the air, it hit the dragon's chest, piercing the scales. But not cutting through the muscle, the dragon charged down, and I dodge, rolling to the side, getting covered in dirt. I panted, my knees scraped, arms scraped. I clenched my teeth together in a soft hiss of pain.

In the corner of my eye, I saw Ryker grinning down at me. I bared my teeth like a dog, a mutt in his psychological game, he's trying to break me, to tame me. But, I'm not having it. I

stood up, stumbling slightly as I regained my balance. I pulled the dagger out of its strap at my leg, clearing my blonde hair out of my face. I charged the dragon, holding my dagger strongly, a fiery glow started from the bottom of the dragon's neck, indicating I was literally about to be toasted. I put more strength in my legs, pushing them, rushing. My blonde hair whipped behind me. I take a leap of faith, sandy dirt blows behind me as I leap, the sand dusting off my boots, I jab the dagger into the soft spot my arrow created, I stabbed and slammed it in. The dragon let out a yelp, a roar and swung its tail, throwing my back against the wall that cracked behind me, I let out a yelp of agony. Watching the dragon fall along with Ryker's grin.

His eyes narrowed in amusement, twinkling with mischief as he peered down at me. I threw him a grin, I beat challenge one, now I'm a few more challenges from home and then... Finally, I can be free. Away from him. His challenges and his lovers touch the fleeting warmth of his hands. I load my bow with an arrow and pull the string back, looking down the arrow once more that I've done time and time again, aiming at his head. He looks me dead in the eye and smiles, as if daring me, egging me on, to shoot him in his stupid face. "I will shoot you! You know that right?!" I shouted, growling. He leaned over the balcony, crossing his arms on the ledge. "*I dare you too.*" he snickered, and that ticked me off. I released the string, the arrow parting the air, going for his head, then I go black but not before literally seeing my head explode off my body, blood painting the sandy dirt red.

Then I saw the light again, I saw the stupid sandy dirt ground of the battle arena, I looked up at him, and he's smiling at me, he even has the audacity to wink at me. He's only ticking me off more, I bare my teeth, my hands trembling. "What was *THAT?*!" I bark, snapping at him. "That was *death*, my dear, and I'm your grim reaper" He purred. My eyes went wide, and I was so close to snapping, to ripping this guy's head off. But, he was stronger than me in every way, I knew it was pointless. So, I dropped to my knees. "I'm sorry." I apologized, although I do not know *what* I'm truly sorry for, but here I am. Apologizing, just being an obedient mutt again.

God, I hate him so much. Someone please save me. I can't take it anymore.
"No one is coming for you, you do realize that right?" He quirked a brow at me, pity almost in his eyes, that stupid mocking pity. "Jasiri will come for me!" I hiss, and he grins. "Whatever you say, you Hellion." I growled at his tease "I am NOT a hellion!!" I barked once more. He just gives me that look that indicates "You definitely are". He's playing with my mentality. I'm just a pawn in his stupid silly game, a pawn that keeps obeying orders like a dog. A pawn that continues playing his sick twisted game, despite being aware of the consequences. "Tag your it, Darling." He grinned like a Cheshire cat, and I'm the mouse.

"Let's get you back to your room." He cooed at me like I was a child. I ripped the dagger out of the dragon, gripping the same dagger tightly. I glared at him. *He makes me want to literally die. How long will I play his game? How long will it take for me to break free, to be able to be free, I want to go back to Jasiri. I want to go back home. I want my mom to be back, I'm angry at her for leaving me alone in this place, in this world. How could she die and leave me here?*
I want-

I laid down in the cellar bed, the plush mattress beneath me once more, the thick soft pelt over my body as I laid there, wishing Jasiri was here. I heard a soft tap on the small window above the bed, I stood up on my bed, the mattress dipping below my feet, as I peered over the window, Jasiri was looking away, at a figure, but then looked back towards me, stunned, shocked like I was actually there. I smiled and opened the window, happy to see her. There was a screen bolted into the window so I couldn't crawl out, and I didn't have a sharp object nearby to cut open the screen. So I can only talk to her through the window. "Jasiri! Jasiri! How did you get here?!" She bit her lip, just then I noticed a demon behind her, his eyes a deep brown, his skin a beautiful milk chocolate color. "J-Jasiri- theres—" I stammered, she looked behind her at the demon, and sighed. "He's fine, he's with me. His name's Elijah." She smiled at me softly, Elijah's demon tail wagged, swishing side to side when he saw Jasiri smile. "I-Is he friendly?" I questioned, and Elijah's face drooped, and Jasiri looked at him. "Yes, he is friendly. He actually is a big sweetheart, a big softie at that too." Jasiri bit her lip once more. "I'll figure out how to get you out of here eventually."

Jasiri was anxious, biting her lip was something she only did when anxious, nervous or unsure of something, I remembered it from when we were little girls. That was a habit she could never break. Her sapphire blue eyes held more pain, and emotional torture than anyone else you could ever find, this is a girl whose been through hell and back, and still manages to stay sane. She smiled at me softly but forced, I noticed it. I noticed tiny things, and clearly Elijah does too. They seem to have history, something I am not aware of, but yet again, I got stolen from her the day I arrived, she didn't really get the chance to tell me anything, plus, she couldn't. I probably wouldn't believe her unless she had proof, or I saw it myself, which I already did, demons were real. But, were angels real too? If there's demons, there has to be angels? Gods? Goddesses? Were all the folklore tales real? What was real? What wasn't?

"Angels are real, and.. Very few gods exist, including goddesses, they are around but there are very few of them out there." Elijah spoke, his voice slightly deep but slightly sternly soft, like a poison addicting melody, warm like fire, but cold as ice at the same time. A perfect blend of comforting and disturbing. I flinched back as if struck, in shock, he spoke? Why did I think he was mute?

Wait a minute. "I didn't... ask that out loud.." I clasped my hands over my mouth. Jasiri smirks. "Yeah, he can read minds. Just something he has." I looked at Jasiri in confusion, and she looked at me. "Why are you looking at me like that?" Jasiri questioned me, her brown hair cascading down her shoulders and over her breasts, she's in a black cropped leather jacket with fur around the collar and hood, nothing underneath the jacket clearly, she has it zipped up, wearing dark denim blue shorts with black tights underneath, her iconic black motorcycle boots on. She was wearing a silver locket around her neck.. The letter 'E' engraved on top of it, but it remains closed. 'E'? "You seem very comfortable with Elijah, despite him being a demon.." I spoke, and Jasiri tensed, side glancing at Elijah awkwardly, he looked at her back, trying to smile but it turned into a pout as Jasiri looked away and cleared her throat.

"We are just good *friends*." She spoke almost shyly, when Elijah was about to speak, Jasiri rolled her eyes, making him shut up and glance at the ground. It was weird, something

seemed off about the two of them. But, I wasn't going to push. Jasiri holds her hand out to the side of her, to Elijah, and as if on command he puts a bow into her hand. She smiles at him and nods in approval which makes him wag his tail once more, just watching her. Her smile fades and she hands the bow to me, the bow drifting past the screen, Elijah looking at the ground again, but his tail was still wagging this time. "Take this, it will help you, a lot." Jasiri spoke sternly but gently. Elijah steps closer to Jasiri, and she side-eyed him, making him step back. It's like Jasiri has him specifically *trained*.

"Ryker will be back soon, sis. Ya gotta take care of yourself, I'm sorry you're doing this on your own. But, I cannot help you within his palace." She spoke, her southern accent slipping in. *PALACE?!* "Wait what?! What do you mean palace?!" I freak, my jaw dropping. Jasiri picks up on Ryker's footsteps, thanks to her weird strong hearing, her pupils turn into slits like cats for a *split second* I almost did not notice.. "What was tha—" I get cut off by Jasiri grabbing onto Elijah, and he teleports her and himself away. I swallow thickly and hurry up to rush to pretend to be sleeping before he opens the cellar door, I try to steady my breathing as he walks closer, stepping closer, and closer. His hand comes to stroke my hair. I have no clue why, but it's comforting in a way. I open my eyes slightly, faking the tiredness in them. "Challenge two now, Lovely." he grins. I swallow thickly "Can.. I have something to eat first?" I ask softly, I haven't eaten since I got here. "Ah, right. You human creatures need food." he scoffs, like it's a huge issue. I feel myself shrink into myself, making myself smaller. "I-I'm sorry." I stutter, stammering. Ryker panics slightly, "It is not an issue, I will retrieve food for you." I raise an eyebrow at his statement. Him? Bending to my will? Bet. "P-Please?" I sat up like I did the morning before.

Just like that, he gets up to get food. I stand up, getting dressed. I sigh softly, still pondering on my sister's friendship with Elijah. He seems close to *her*, but she pushes him away, or just turns tense or awkward. I open my cellar door, stepping outside into that dimly lit hallway that I am still not familiar with. It felt like a horror movie scene, a scenario that I was legitimately about to die in. I trace the wall with my hand as I walk, the ridges of the bricks.. "Palace..? Am I really in a palace?" I whisper under my breath, all of a sudden my hand sinks into the wall, a brick pushed into a place, it slides open a bookshelf, revealing a room.. I walk towards it, hand braced on the bookshelf as I peer inside, complete darkness.

I step inside, then the lights turn on, revealing a room with pictures, armor, and random trinkets. A painting catches my eye, Jasiri next to Elijah, her hand on his chest, his hand resting on her hip. "Maybe.. Close friends..?" I mutter, touching the old acrylic, my gaze lands on the pendant around her neck, layered with the same silver locket. The pendant was a pretty dark midnight blue, silver adorning the stone, it matched Jasiri's eyes. It was absolutely stunning. Just then I hear footsteps behind me, Elijah. "What?! Why are you here?!" I shout, he panics and covers my mouth, listening behind him for what I can only guess, Ryker. Once the coast is clear in his terms, he releases my mouth. "I work with Ryker, idiot," He whispered, adding "And be quiet. Please." He looked at me like he was bored. "Work with Ryker?!?" I shout, he smacks me upside the head. "Right, sorry.." I muttered the apology, he looked behind me, at the painting. "I remember when we had to stand still for that.." he smiled almost sadly as he spoke.

"She always complained that her legs hurt, but she only stayed because she wanted a memory. Now, it's like she wants to forget everything that happened, that deals with me and her." His gaze turns saddened.

"Let's get you out of here, Ryker will not be happy if he sees you here." His face snaps back to bored, plain expression, he takes my hand gently and walks me out of the closeted room. "What happened if she wants to forget everything?" I ask, he looks at me, but doesn't answer, he just looks away, leading me to Ryker. "Challenge two," He warned, before Ryker came into sight, I swallowed thickly, pondering on his words, holding onto them like it was a chance, a thread of life I was given. He releases my hand and I walk to Ryker. He holds his hand out with a smirk, knowing I'd obey, he expected me to obey, he knew I would, and I did. I obeyed everything he commanded. For now. I take Ryker's hand, his hand immediately gliding down to my lower back, I turn my face to him, looking him in the eyes, I was challenging him once more. Will I be able to beat him once more? Can I turn the tables and make him play into my game?

"I'm ready." I spoke, looking into his eyes still, not breaking contact. "Don't you want to eat first, dear?" he purred, raising an eyebrow. I swallow thickly, completely forgetting the factor I asked for food earlier. "Yes." I spoke sternly, acting like I didn't forget. "And I would like a shower too." My hair was greasy, and I was covered in dirt and grime from the last challenge. I probably stunk too, My ego was shattered and I was humbled enough to admit that too. "Very well, Cora." He purred. "Just this way." he spoke, as if he was a tour guide. I followed, matching his pace as he led me to the dining room.

The dining room was HUGE. There was a dining table in the center, ten chairs in total, he lived alone, well at least I thought so, until I found Elijah in here. I took a seat on one of the chairs on the side of the dining table, Ryker sat in front of me, Elijah? beside me, making Ryker raise an eyebrow at him. "Making sure she doesn't try anything, Sir." Ryker seemed pleased with Elijah's answer, so he raised his hand. I know better than to flinch now, he was probably teleporting the plates of food in front of us. Which, I was correct. Because even Elijah had a plate in front of him, and he himself seemed shocked. He glanced at me in confusion, but did not bother to complain. The scent that filled the room had me almost drooling already, I didn't realize how hungry I truly was. The warm, comforting scent of eggs, buttered toast, bacon, golden hashbrowns filled my senses, but I did not bother to touch my plate, watching Ryker and Elijah, seeing if they have a weird prayer thing they do first before eating, once I saw Elijah grab his fork, I knew it was safe to grab mine, and which I did.

The first bite had flavors exploding across my tongue, the food was better than I could've imagined, how can a demon be so good at cooking? Did he even cook it, or was it possible to just teleport food out of thin air? I wasn't completely sure but I also was still not complaining. The food was amazing so who would I be to complain? I scarfed the food down, not eating with the manners of a lady like I grew up to, I was starving and I never realized how hungry I was.

Elijah just looked at me like he was trying not to laugh, Ryker was shocked and maybe a little confused. Elijah chewed thoughtfully even as he tried not to laugh, his posture straight, and mannered, Ryker's posture was also straight where I was hunched over like an alley cat.

I eventually did sit up straight and not to hunch, I heard Elijah snicker and I shot him a glare, which he looked away holding back his laughter but I could still see his shoulders shaking. I rolled my eyes, but I'm still wondering about him and Jasiri's past, they both seem secretive about it, even if Elijah keeps hinting at something about them. I don't even know my sister, like yeah, I knew her when we were *kids*. But I never found out the woman she developed into, I didn't even get the chance to get to know her. I miss her, I miss Mom, I miss my father. I miss my family. Even if most of them are dead. At least, Jasiri isn't.

I finished eating and gently set my fork down, wiping my mouth with the napkin that was beside my plate. "I'm finished." I spoke, I do not know why I said it, but I did. Ryker stands up and Elijah does on instinct. Elijah gently took my plate from me, stacking my silverware on top of the plate, I pushed myself up from the table and look at Ryker, he intertwines his arm with mine, and I let him. He led me to the bathroom, which is pretty big for a bathroom. A big tub that looks fancy enough to have jets in it, is against the wall, then just a shower on the other side of the bathroom. He strided over to the bathtub, turning the faucet onto warm, warm-ish hot. I watched as he does so, watching everything he does, like I caught myself doing quite often.

He goes under the sink and grabs a lavender colored bathbomb, lavender scented salts, and lavender scented bubbles, this guy must really like lavender.. I watched as he sprinkles the salt into the filling tub, then gently placed the bathbomb into the water, swishing it around, I watched as he poured the bubbles liquid right onto the water pouring out of the faucet.

He then stood up straight, looking at me. "Strip and get in. clothes are resting on the sink counter." He then watched me, closing the open door behind him. He locked the door, taking a deep breath, lavender scent filling my nostrils. I shed my clothing testing the water with my foot before completely stepping in, I sat down and let myself sink into the bubbly lavender scented bath. I closed my eyes, letting myself *breathe*. Letting my mind clear, as he watches me bathe, goosebumps prick my skin. Ryker steps closer to the tub, watching my naked body beneath the lavender colored and scented water. He reaches in, touching me, cupping my breast, my nipples hardening beneath his touch and intense gaze, touching my body like it was his to claim, I squirmed, and he only grins, taking his hand out of the water, I felt violated, dizzy, my mind fuzzy and blurry as the lavender scent kicked in.. My eyes were wide as I stared at him in terror, only for him to strip his own clothes, I choked on my oxygen, what was going to happen? I couldn't think. He's been so gentle, so manipulative at the same time..

He joined me in the tub, and I could only watch as he climbed over me, spreading my legs apart, I squirmed, trying to push him off as he nestled his hips between my legs, but he overpowered me in strength, he pinned my wrists above my head, I swallowed thickly, my tongue feeling swollen in my mouth, I couldn't bring myself to scream — "N-No!.." I muttered, "You'll like it eventually, darling." he spoke as he lifted my leg up over his shoulder, I didn't even know I was this flexible, I panicked, trying to kick him away but he holds strong, using his magic to keep me wide open, for him, for him to violate me, my body..

I felt him push in, I tensed, my body shaking, his free hand trails up my spine forcing me to relax, to open, I complied, figuring it's best to comply or else he might be rougher. I let out a choked sob as he started moving his hips, I can't fight back, even if I tried. I was having my virginity taken by someone I didn't want, in a bathtub, surrounded by his favorite scent, and I just happened to be his favorite meal. I thought this would go on forever, my body being violated. I could only stare at the ceiling, my heart going miles per hour in panic. Tears streak my cheeks. Blood drizzled out of where he and I were connected by force, I couldn't stop him, I can't. He would probably kill me if I tried again. I felt disgusted, I wanted to rip my skin off, to bite his throat out for even touching me, I just felt utterly disgusted, I growled, breaking my hands free and punched him in the face, I could at least TRY to fight back. But just as I did, I was right, he grabbed my wrists and slammed them down, making me yelp, blood trickled down the split in his lip. "Don't even try" He hissed, and I could just feel myself shrinking, wanting to disappear into nothing, I closed my eyes and just.. Let him . . .

My hair swirls around my body, my hair soft beneath the water's surface. I sink my head underneath on purpose, feeling the water above my eyelids, the urge to breathe in. To let water drown my lungs, watering that rose. I sit up in the tub, water falling from my face, was it over? Was that a dream or reality? But the ache, the dull pain between my legs told me I was definitely raped. I grabbed the shampoo, putting a generous amount onto my hand and scrubbing it into my scalp. Will..this happen more often now that he has his eyes on me? scrubbing good, then putting my hair underneath the water and ruffling it, rinsing. I sigh and grab the conditioner bottle, squeezing the bottle and putting it in my hand, starting from my ends and working the conditioner up. I'm pretty sure.. Running my fingers through my hair, my blonde hair turning a slight brown shade when wet, I let the conditioner sit for a few minutes. Before rinsing out my hair, I looked at the soft pink bathroom rug. I didn't want to get out of the tub, like at all, it was comforting, warm even. I grab the loofa, or spoof as some people call it, grabbing the body wash that was scented as, guess what? Lavender. I sigh once more, I can probably guess Ryker's favorite flower at this point.. I pour the body wash onto the loofa, dipping it in the water and ruffling it to get it nice and bubbly, I then start scrubbing at my skin, scrubbing hard.

I felt dirty, so god damn dirty, so I was gonna scrub the dirt off. The dirt and grime got scrubbed off me, but Ryker's favorite scent stayed on, his favorite meal clean and already claimed as his, without permission.

I pull the plug, the water draining and swirling above the drain. I stood up, water dripping down my body, I stepped onto the pink rug, the texture soft beneath my feet, I sat on the rug, just letting the water drip down my body. I stared at the door, even as steam clouded the bathroom, soft wet mist. The mirror was foggy as I stood up to look at myself. I wipe the fog with my hand, water droplets falling from where I wiped. There was a slit on my cheek, a small one. I almost didn't know where I got it from until I remembered running through the forest. How a twig cut my skin, when I was running towards the shadow, who I later found out to be Ryker.

I look at the clothes resting on the counter, perfectly folded and stacked evenly. I grab the bra and underwear, putting the bra around my ribs, I turn it to see the clasp, clasping it myself before turning it for the cups to be on the correct side, I put my arms through the straps

and adjusted it for it to fit comfortably, I put the underwear on easily. Putting the shirt and pants on next, I really didn't want to do this challenge, I don't even know what it was, but clearly I wouldn't be fighting, given the clothes he gave me, wasn't much, but at least it was clothes. Just a simple white t-shirt and denim shorts, I grab the socks and pull them over my feet, grabbing the shoes next and tying the laces. I stand up and stretch, before unlocking the door, my hair still wet and unbrushed. "Ryker! I'm done with my bath!" I called out, stepping out into another cold hallway, I didn't want to see him at all.

Goosebumps prick my skin as I walked, looking through the hallway. I called out again "Ryker?!" I shouted, just for Elijah to appear instead. "He's busy." Elijah sighed, "Well, he told me to let him know when I was done bathing!!" I retorted. Elijah rolled his eyes and led me to my cell, well- bedroom at this point. I entered the room, already used to its looks. "When will Ryker be back?" I asked, looking over at Elijah, who just shrugs, and walks away. Leaving me to my thoughts once more.

I sighed and landed on my back onto my bed, looking up at the ceiling, I didn't realize the glow in the dark stars on my ceiling. Well, I've never really looked at my ceiling before. My eyes close once more, and I let myself think, picturing my life before this. I'd be counting trees as we pass by in cars, Jasiri and I swinging on the swings we had at our old house, Mom baking chocolate chip cookies, her green eyes glowing within the kitchen from the kitchen lights, her skin warm as the cookies, her blonde hair cascading down her shoulders, her hair was as long as Jasiri's, I also remember our dad's blue eyes as they softened whenever Jasiri and I went in for a hug, I remember his short black hair, it wasn't a buzz cut, but, it looked a tiny bit like one. I remember posing for family photos, Jasiri's warm tiny laugh, how on rainy days you would find her picking up worms, and holding them, she loved worms a lot. I remember her sneaking out of her room as a teenager, clutching a blue pendant— Oh my god. She knew Elijah when she was a teenager, then she randomly ran away..

I jolted up from my bed, rushing to the cellar door, ripping it open as I looked for Elijah, I ran down the hallway, eyes scanning for Elijah, then— WHAM!! I tackled him to the ground, him underneath me, tail tucked between his legs like a dog, his eyes wide in fear. "What are you doing, Cora?! —" I cutted him off. "Did you know my sister when she was a teenager?!" I barked "What are you on about?!" He retorted, teeth bared. "Did you give my sister that pendant?" I asked, trying to keep the bite from my words. "Well — Yes?" He answered in confusion. "Okay, so, I was correct on that thought, but did you know her when she was a teenager?!" I shouted, and he flinched at my loud words. Spit getting on his face, which he wiped with disgust. "Yes, I knew her when she was a teenager, why are you randomly jumping on me and asking me this?!" He snapped, shoving me off, and dusting himself off in the process. "Did.. Did she run away to live with you?" I asked, voice trembling, as I sat there on the ground. His eyes were fixated on me, watching my expressions, my reactions. But, he did not answer. "Answer me, Elijah." I looked up at him, getting more irritated by the second. "Yes, she did." He muttered, "Why? Why.. Why the fuck did she leave me?" I shifted to sit on my knees, staring at the ground.

"It was not her intention to actually leave you behind, she was going to come back, but she couldn't, Cora. She got caught up... In other business. It wasn't sunshine and rainbows for

her when you both were children.” He spoke softly as if comforting a child, he kneeled on one knee and rested his hand on my shoulder. “But the second she saw you actually alone with no family? She got you then. She was just waiting for you, for the right moment when she was sure she’d be free, and mentally ready.” He added, before standing up. “W-wait — what other business?! —” I was cutted off by Elijah bowing, and Ryker appearing behind me. “No-nononono- I haven’t finished talking to him — Please- she was only seventeen when she left- I was fifteen-no-” I rush to speak as I get dragged away from Elijah by Ryker’s hand.

“How old are you now?” Ryker asked me, I looked at him “seventeen, turning eighteen..” I looked at the ground, glancing at our intertwined hands, he rubbed his thumb against my hand, making me feel that same rose tangled in my organs, butterflies dancing with bladed thorns “Which makes Jasiri twenty.” He added and I nodded, not wanting to elaborate more on my sister who I thought I at least knew when we were kids.

I followed him as he pulled my hand down the hallway, leading me to another room. “How do you even have these random rooms?” I queried, and he responded “I use magic to use a specific room to turn into what I want. I can’t die easily is also a bonus, it takes a lot to kill me.” He smirked at me, cockily, like he’s stroking his own ego. I groaned in un-amusement. As he opens the door I’m greeted by a huge labyrinth, a maze. My heart sank to my stomach, Jasiri was the only one good at these, she’s the maze girl.. Her mind was specifically built for this. *“Remember, keep your mentality intact, or he might just break you.”* Elijah’s words echoed in my head. Break me. That’s what he’s trying to do. I swallowed my fear, my uncertainty. Trying to remember what Jasiri taught me about labyrinths and mazes when we were little...

I stepped forward, entering the labyrinth, Ryker smiling down at me. *“Put one of your hands on the wall upon entering, and do not take it off.”* Jasiri’s kid voice echoed in my head, so I listened to it, my left hand coming upon the left wall. If I remember correctly, I’m in the middle of it. That’s the start point. It’s not like regular mazes where you start on the outside and have to make your way to the other side.. *“Labyrinths are only one of the trickiest mazes to exist, only one exit. It toys with the mind, playing someone like a psychologically twisted game. All walls are connected to a boundary.”* Her voice echoes in my head again. I took a deep breath, and started walking, keeping my hand on the wall and walking along it, following the wall.

“If possible, try to mark the walls you’ve been at. This can help prevent dead ends.” I looked around trying to find something to mark the walls, to no avail. I sighed and kept on moving, following the left wall. *“There’s only one exit.”* So many of these can be a dead end, I swallowed thickly, and I continued following the wall. Is there a timer, is there not? How do I know when I lose? Obviously I win if I escape the maze, that much is obvious. What even happens when I lose? Do I die? Do I get released? I was terrified. I walk and walk, Dead end. *“When reaching a dead end just follow it, if it makes you change course then so be it.”* I followed the dead ends wall, changing course, so be it. I walked and walked, walked more, walking even more, it felt like I was going in circles. *“Use the other hand to get out of the loop”* I switched to my right hand, following the right wall, dead end, follow, dead end, follow. I was thinking I’d never get out. Never beat this challenge, never see my sister again, never figure out the truth

about her and Elijah, why she left me alone, tears prick my eyes, what other business was more important than me, those tears turn angry, why she ran away with Elijah in the first place, Why she waited until I came to her myself. Then, I fell forward, landing on the ground, I looked over my shoulder, behind me, I got out of the maze..

I looked forward, seeing Ryker standing in front of me, his eyes looking at me on my hands and knees, his grin manic, like he thought he was breaking me, which he almost did. I'll give him that. But he did not succeed, I stood up, dusting myself off. "I'm out!" I grinned in his face, sticking my tongue out, his gaze lingered on my tongue, probably thinking dirty things.. He flicked my nose . I flinched back, offended to be honest. "Challenge two is complete, congratulations." He snickered, walking away, I followed him and grabbed his wrist. "How many until I can go home?!" I bared my teeth, he looked behind him, at me, over his shoulder. "Well, as many as I can come up with." He laughed, eyebrows furrowing in fake pity, turning around to face me, he kissed my hand and I stood there stunned. "Y-your.. Coming up with these on the spot?!" I snapped. "How *DARE* you! I swear I'm gonna —" All of a sudden, a scythe comes swinging, hitting him. I follow where the scythe got thrown. Jasiri, window broken behind her, wind breezing through her hair, her eyes glinting with a dangerous light. The pendant around her neck glowing a light blue, her eyes matching the glow. My eyes widened when I saw her, it was night time, I could tell because of behind her. Her gaze was sharp, locked onto a target, which was Ryker. He groaned, pulling the scythe out of his side.

"*Jasiri.*" He grinned, eyes locked onto Jasiri, she jumped down from the broken windows ledge, approaching Ryker. "You have someone I care about, Ryker." She glared at him, holding her hand out and calling her scythe back, ripping it from Ryker's hand. She spun the scythe in her hand by the handle, the scythe was double sided, an arched blade on both the bottom and the top, facing opposite directions, the scythe spinned with deadly precision, like she has done this time and time again, like she's fought multiple times, like this is all familiar. I was too focused on her and the scythe that I forgot to breathe. Gasping for air, Ryker glanced at me, then back at my sister, she looked pretty cool to be honest.

She was wearing a fully black form fitting tactical suit. The suit consisting of a combat jumpsuit with kneepads, a utility belt with pockets, and strategic straps around the thighs that hold weapon holsters, also wearing black boots with metal buckles, fingerless gloves, and a mask that covers the lower half of her face, leaving only her intense eyes exposed, which were currently glaring daggers at Ryker.

Chapter Two : The First Strike.

"We meet again, Jasiri." Ryker grinned, Jasiri's eyes glowed further. "So, what happened to leaving and forgetting about me and Elijah forever?" He tested her, her eyes narrowed in response. "Well, clearly stuff has changed since you kidnapped my sister." She growled, pointing the blade of her scythe towards Ryker, the handle against her arm, going down her back horizontally, her other hand caressing the opposite end of the handle. "We were supposed to be done entirely last time we met." she glared further, Elijah took his spot behind Ryker. Jasiri glanced at him and rolled her eyes, Elijah bit his inner cheek. "Finally, Elijah, you have decided to join me, looks like your little *girlfriend* has paid us a visit." Ryker tested more, My eyes widened "*Girlfriend?*" "She is... not my girlfriend, you know this Ryker." Elijah tensed, his eyes saddened as he tried hiding it by looking at the ground.

Jasiri looked pained slightly too, but kept her composure. "See? Even Elijah remembers." She retorted before adding "Now, let's *finish this*. Get you both out of my life for good." She growled, but, just then, Elijah walked to Jasiri, her eyes widened, he took his step beside her, turning to face Ryker. Jasiri was shocked, and so was I but not by much. I've seen the way he looks at her, no matter their history, which I will eventually find out. Jasiri takes her eyes off of Elijah, doing a simple nod of acknowledgement, before she dashes towards Ryker, Elijah following suit but jumping last second, he's airborne now while Jasiri is on the ground. Ryker quickly teleported a sword within his hand, Elijah already having one, Ryker's sword clashes against Elijah's first, before his sword catches Jasiri's too, countering her attack.

Swords and scythe clash together, Jasiri and Elijah perfectly in sync, perfectly intertwined with their dance of battle, I could only stand back and watch, just then a pained yelp circled through the air, not a yelp from Ryker, nor Elijah given the shock and fear that shows on his face, everything feels like its stuck in slow motion, Jasiri flying through the air, a dark red painting her suit and the air before she lands on the ground, laying in a mini pool of blood, a fog of dirt surrounding her before falling. Elijah is quick to run to her side, her scythe landed right beside me, buried in the dirt, I grab it, not really familiar with the weapon at all, only really familiar with a bow and arrow — THE BOW!

"ELIJAH!" I shouted out, Elijah holding a pained Jasiri. "Teleport me my bow!" I exclaimed in panic, Ryker's gaze snapped to me, his eyes reading mine as he swallows thickly, but Elijah obeyed, the bow Jasiri gave me appearing in his hand, he tossed it my way, I jumped to get it, Ryker going for it too, I successfully catch it first, front flipping and landing on my feet, looking for an arrow, Elijah didn't give me arrows?! "Elijah my arrows!" I whined out loud, "You don't need them! Jasiri's bow makes itself arrows! Pull the string!" He barked, picking up Jasiri whose going pale, he's panicking, but scared to let it show.

I pull back the string, a green transparent arrow appears, I take a deep breath, looking down the arrow, aiming at Ryker, reminding me of the time with the dragon, I did this exact same thing. The difference? *I'm not missing this time.*

I let go of the string, the transparent green arrow cutting through the air, at the same time, Elijah helped Jasiri to her feet and charged Ryker, sword prepared to swing, I toss Jasiri's scythe to her, she looked stable enough for a few swings, she nodded weakly, and dashed towards him as the arrow flies, Ryker's sword clashes against Elijah's, but he cannot stop my arrow or Jasiri's swing, my arrow hits first, then Jasiri's swing, finishing him off for good.

Once Ryker hits the ground, Jasiri cheers, her arms flying to wrap around Elijah's neck, I panted softly, but a smile still gets plastered on my face, I'm free. I really am. Jasiri grabbed Elijah and I, pulling us into a deep group hug which we all thankfully accepted. Jasiri kissing Elijah's cheek, making him widen his eyes and his tail wag like a dog's, I've probably just started seeing him like a dog. "Ready to go home, ladies?" Elijah asks, looking between Jasiri and I, Jasiri nods, but I see Ryker's eyes flutter even when closed, he's faking death, defeat. "No, I have something I need to do first." I spoke, sternly. Jasiri looks at Elijah, then back at me, nodding before Elijah teleports her and him away.

I walk to Ryker's limp form, "I know, you're alive." I see him smile with his eyes closed, I kneel down, caressing his chin, leaning in, looking into his red crimson eyes. His hand comes up to cup my cheek, kissing me, I feel something take hold of me, something that was but wasn't me, I crawl on top of him, straddling his hips as he sits up, holding my waist to pull me closer, he tilts his head to deepen the kiss, his tongue pushing past my lips, my hands come up to cup his cheeks, I break the kiss panting, he only grins up at me.

"How'd you know I was still alive, Darling?" He raises an eyebrow, tilting his head, then kissing underneath my jaw, trailing his lips down to my collar bone, I shudder in response. "Your words before this challenge started, you said, I can't die easily, and how it takes a lot to kill you" I spoke, letting out a whimper as he kissed my throat. "So, what's your plan now, darling?" He asks, his eyes darkening, the red glow emanating from them once more, tinting my neck a glowing red. "I..I don't know." I groan, pushing myself off him and standing, he lays there, bracing himself on his elbows, looking up at me with those *hypnotising* eyes.

I look over my shoulder to him, sighing. "I should go home to Jasiri. She will suspect something." I groan once more, pinching the bridge of my nose, feeling myself come back slightly. Ryker stands up, quickly, pulling a pendant out of his pocket, The pendant hung from a delicate silver chain, a masterpiece of celestial craftsmanship that seemed to pulse with a life of its own. At its heart laid a diamond-shaped shard of crimson crystal, glowing with the intensity of a dying star. It didn't merely reflect the light; it seemed to breathe it, casting a rhythmic, blood-red shimmer against the shadows.

Enveloping the core were dual ribbons of polished gold, twisting into an elegant, infinite helix. Those golden bands were not smooth, however; they were etched with a sequence of glowing violet runes—an ancient, forgotten script that hummed with a low, melodic resonance.

The artifact looked less like a piece of jewelry and more like a relic of immense, slumbering power waiting for the right hand to claim it. “For you, it’s way different from Jasiri’s but.. It is better.” He winks at me, I was just flabbergasted from the sheer beauty of it. I hold the pendant, scared to touch the chain as I just stare at it. He smiles at me, stepping behind me and putting it on my neck, I lift my hair for him, and he clasps the chains together, before stepping back, his hand tracing my lower back as he follows my back to in front of me, looking at the necklace’s pendant hanging on my chest. He smirks, “My dark queen.” He whispered in my ear, kissing below my ear, earning a shudder from me, I’m already melting from a simple kiss from him, I giggle and kiss his cheek, kissing him on the lips one last time before I had to go, he melts into it, caressing my hips and leaning his face even more into mine. He smiles against my lips, before breaking the kiss. “See you soon, my beloved.” He winks before I get teleported in front of the cabin in the blink of an eye.

I look up, staring up once more at the cabin, I sigh, walking onto the steps, they creak under my weight, I look back at the forest, no longer looking for a reason to not go in, but a reason TO go into it, to delve into the shadows of the forest, the arms of Ryker. I open the door, Elijah bandaging Jasiri’s torso where she got hit, the gash sure was deep, the edges clean, a clean cut from mine truly, Ryker. How did this even happen? How did I manage to fall in love with him in such a short span of time? His loving touches, his lover’s caresses? Or the gentle way he took my virginity? God, I don’t even know. But, I miss the warmth of his fleeting caresses, the warmth of his lips, his skin against mine, his cock inside me. How he groaned my name against my skin. How he caressed my hips, how he kissed me, how he took what he wanted but gently, pried me open, used me lovingly.

I got myself out of my haze, heading to my plain room. I needed to decorate it. It was so plain it physically pained me to look at it. I dust the bed off, hitting the mattress with my palm a few times, before plopping down on the bed. I look up at the plain white ceiling, missing the glow in the dark stars in my bedroom within Ryker’s palace. I then looked towards the door, the door was that beautiful dark oak, the walls plain with not even a nail hole in sight, this room clearly was never in use. I get up, exiting the room to look for a broom, I have to at least clean up this room a little bit, walking past Jasiri resting on the couch and Elijah sitting on the floor, leaning his back against the couch as he rests, he still looks like he is on high alert still.

I head towards the kitchen, maybe she kept the broom in there? The kitchen was clean, a seasoning rack neatly organized, I opened the pantry, took a peek inside, found the broom, grabbed it, and took it to my room. I started sweeping the floor, a bunch of dust and dirt getting put into a pile, there was a lot to say the least. I use the bristles of the broom to get the

cobwebs, in high to reach places and in the corner of the ceiling. The room seems brighter now, less dull without the dirt and dust, but it still looks plain. I sigh, I wonder how close a store is, maybe I could buy some decorations, maybe Jasiri or Elijah had money to give me, she did want me to decorate this place after all. Maybe I could get a job..?

It was a rainy day, I was standing in front of the store named "Midnight Manor Decor", my black umbrella protecting my hair from the rain, water droplets dripping from the ledges of my umbrella, the rain sprinkling on the top of it. The rain sounded peaceful pounding against the concrete softly, like a whispered musical and the hushed cries of angels. I open the door to the store, a soft chime whispers through the door upon my entrance. I walk in, looking around already, what kind of theme did I even want my room to be? Why did I walk in here without knowing what theme of the room I wanted? Ugh, mind as well walk around and pick things out anyway.

I walk through the aisles, Jasiri gave me her credit card so I can shop for stuff, I spot a plastic skull decoration, probably meant for shelves, It remind me of Ryker, so I gently set it in my cart, I look around for shelves, something to stack the skull on, I eventually find these black shelves, putting them in the cart to set up later. Maybe I am going for a gothic kind of theme? That would work, I'd be fine with that. Does this store also sell paint? Hmm, I should get a soft grey by chance, that would contrast well against the black shelves and the whitish yellow skull, but I kind of wanted some lights..

I headed over to the lights section, looking for a light that piqued my interest or matched the vibe I was going for. I picked up a few that didn't match the vibe I was going for. I then spotted this pretty torch like one, it looked like a medieval gothic torch, a light bulb centered in the middle. Perfect. This would be perfect for my room's setup. I look around for a worker, upon finding one, "Hey, excuse me, Miss, Is there a box of those medieval torches?" I ask, pointing towards the gothic light. "Yeah, most likely, I'll check the back for you, ma'am" The woman then walked towards the back, while I was trailing behind her. Looking around still. A shadow zips past my vision, I turn around to look for it, not seeing anything. The shadow seemed familiar, my pendant glowing a dark red, tinting my skin a dark reddish pink.

I hold my breath, oxygen trapping in my lungs, as I catch that lavender scent in my lungs following with a piercing headache. I stumble slightly, falling right into Ryker's arms, looking up at him, his beautiful eyes glinting that red matching my pendant. He caresses my hips, tracing a pattern on my skin that trailed deep into my bones, my hands trail up his body to his chest, resting my palms on his chest. He leans in close, grinning down at me, his nose a hairsbreadth away from mine. His fang-like canines making his smile even more handsome, I swallow thickly. One of his hands trails up my body, kissing right below my jaw on my neck as his hand caresses the pendant I still wear. My eyes roll back slightly, just then I hear the heels of the worker clicking my way, Ryker turns into shadow and mist. I gasp all the air inside my lungs and hold it

in, as she approaches with a box, the box of the torch lights. She was not even aware that Ryker was in here a second ago. I swallow, letting myself breathe.

She hands me the box with a warm smile, and I take it willingly with a smile of my own, my eyes still looking around for Ryker. I walk to the checkout counter, my pendant pulsing with a forbidden energy beneath my skin, making my heart skip a beat. He's following me, it feels like my soul is pulsing out of my body. I put the box on the checkout counter, digging in my bag for Jasiri's wallet, containing her credit card. Pulling the card out and sliding it into the pay device and entering Jasiri's card pin, waiting for the beep of confirmation. Once the beep goes off, I give it a second before pulling the card out, putting it back into Jasiri's wallet, making sure to put it in the exact place.

I watch as the cashier bags my stuff, my eyes darting around, looking for a whisper of Ryker, my pendant pulsing with its eerie glow. When my eyes snapped back to the cashier, my stuff was already bagged, she handed me the bag, her eyes looking at me with silent concern and confusion. I smiled sheepishly, which she returned with her own awkward smile. I speed walked out of the store, letting out a breath I did not even know I was holding. The rain was lighter this time, not pouring but not stopping. I glanced around one more time for Ryker, not seeing him nor feeling my pendant pulse, I just continued on my way home.

My footsteps softly walk upon the concrete while rain drops hit against it, dribbling. It was getting late, Jasiri was probably going to panic if I didn't hurry and get home, I sigh and pull my hood up, shielding my hair from any more rain damage. I step onto the porch stairs, the porch light already on, lighting the rainy dark sky ever so slightly, I twist the doorknob, the door locked. With a soft sigh, I pull out my key and insert it into the keyhole, turning the key to unlock the door, I step in. The door creaking open, revealing the dimly lit cabin I'm supposed to call home. I take a step into the house, pulling the key out of its socket, struggling ever so slightly. I close the door behind myself. My hood is dripping with rain, I then realize I must've left my umbrella at the store, I glance around once more, not a single whisper of sound from anyone within the cabin.

I take a deep breath and exhale, sliding my boots off gently at the door, setting them neatly on the shoe rack Jasiri kept. I leave my wet bags on the rug by the door, not wanting to track water inside, I also shed my hoodie just leaving it on the floor. I make my way to the kitchen, lights are all off minus the dimmed lighting Jasiri's wax melters give off. The wax smelt like a nice campfire, it was comforting in the cold rainy night. I flick on the kitchen light, letting it light up the room, the cabinets were colored a nice dark tanned brown, the counters a nice dark wood of sorts, I run my hand along the smooth counter.

I make my way to the fridge, opening it to see what I can make. I hear footsteps behind me and I whip around, just Elijah. "Jesus Christ man!" I hiss adding on "You scared me." he rubs the back of his neck "My bad, didn't mean to." He averts his gaze from mine. "How's Jasiri?" I ask, turning back towards the fridge. "She's.. Tired. Drained to say the least, she lost a lot of blood." He mumbled, looking over my shoulder into the fridge.

I grabbed something wrapped in tin foil, it felt like a sandwich. "Can I eat this?" I ask Elijah, who responds with a nod. His eyes landing on my pendant, his pupils turn into slits, like cats. I notice his gaze on my pendant. "Where did you get that?" He asks sternly, leaning against the wall. Shit. "A jewelry store." I responded casually, unwrapping the tin foil to reveal a sandwich, I guessed right. I took a bite, the flavor of pepperoni hitting my tongue, tasted like a pizza subway sandwich. Swallowing my bite I questioned him. "Why?" I tilt my head, almost innocently, his eyes still stuck on my pendant, I bring one of my hands up, fidgeting with the pendant. Watching his gaze "Something the matter, Elijah?" I spoke softly, he looked me back in my eyes, his pupils turning back to normal but still holding doubt.

"No, I just thought it was something else. But carry on." He smiles at me softly before turning on his heel and walking away, probably back to Jasiri's side. I smirk from behind his back. "I'll carry on, alright." I hummed, walking back to the living room eating the sandwich, I glanced at my bags containing the light decorations. I sit on the couch, resting my back against the cushions, throwing my arm over on top of one of them, kicking my feet up and resting them on the coffee table. Everything felt strange, strangely normal. Like I've been here before time and time again. I glance at the wall, no pictures hung up. There was one but the face was all warped, I rolled my eyes.

I walk over to one of Jasiri's bookshelves, sandwich still in hand as I take another bite. Reading the spines of her books. Dragging a finger along the spines. My eyes land on a black magic book, I raise an eyebrow, pulling the book out as I read the front. I open it, careful to not get any sandwich crumbs or whatever is in the sandwich onto the paper, I try reading the words, but to no avail, it just looks like scribbles on a page, with some drawings. I put the book back, looking around more. I pick up my bags, walking to my room, I set them down.

I sigh looking at the empty room, excited to decorate it. Jasiri probably has some furniture in a storage place somewhere. Then I remember, how the hell am I supposed to set these up? I wander off out of my room looking for a toolbox that contains a drill or at least something to put those darn lights up. I look under the kitchen sink, an odd place for a toolbox but it's there. I sigh, picking it up and taking it to my room. I start unboxing the lights, getting ready to place them on my wall at atleast an even length. That would be weird having lights at all different heights, my eyes scanning the walls, I crouch down, opening the toolbox, grabbing a drill, some screws, and a tape measurer. I start measuring lengths on the wall, imagining the lights hanging from each length. I finally picked a length, not too far from the ceiling but also not near the floor.

I start marking on my walls where the screws go, where the lights hang, all with a whiteboard marker so it doesn't stay. Then, I began my work. I start drilling the screws into the wall, holding the lights in place, praying I do not wake Jasiri, I would cry if I made her get out of bed with how much pain she is in. Once I drilled all the screws in, I stepped back, admiring my work. I'm probably just going to ask Jasiri tomorrow if she has furniture in her storage that she doesn't mind me stealing for my bedroom. I climb into my bed, pulling the dusty sheet over me, I let out a cough from accidentally inhaling the dust. It felt cold, nothing like the warm thick pelt in Ryker's palace. Why am I missing him so much?

Chapter three: Inner battles

I stirred in my bed, opening my eyes, my vision still blurry as my eyes adjust to the morning light, I sit up, balancing on my hand as the other rubs my eye, I let out a yawn, stretching, drool on the side of my mouth, dipping into my hair, I wiped my mouth before stepping onto the cold wooden floor. I made my way to the kitchen, the smell of breakfast leading me. I saw Jasiri drinking her coffee at the counter, sitting on a barstool as she watched Elijah cook, it felt domestic, like a happy family. Jasiri fidgeting with the pendant around her neck, the one Elijah gave her. She rubbed the blue stone with her thumb, Elijah's tail started wagging out of nowhere as he glanced behind him at Jasiri, who just softly looked at him.

Elijah smiled, redirecting his eyes back to the pan, a new pep in his step and posture. I made my way to sit beside Jasiri, she glanced at me and smiled, before her eyes went back to Elijah, taking another sip from her coffee. "Good Morning, Cora! I requested some pain killers for Jasiri's gash. Do you mind picking them up for me?" Elijah chirped, his eyes glancing at me before going back to the pan on the stove that's currently scrambling eggs. "Yeah, I can do that." I smiled at him before adding "Only after I eat though" He laughs and nods "Yeah yeah, after you eat." He started plating everyone's plate with scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage and hashbrown, setting our plates down in front of us before going to get his. Jasiri starts eating her bacon first as usual. I looked at her gash, it was deep but not that deep. Something Jasiri could handle without pain killers, I looked up at her eyes as she stabbed a piece of egg, her eyes were tired, the drained kind of tired, she had eyebags, her hair was messy, she looked at me in the corner of her eye, raising an eyebrow.

Her eyes looked empty, blurry. Like there was truly no human soul in there. What happened during the fight? What did it take? I looked back at my food, taking a bite, letting the flavor burst on my tongue. The food was great but I couldn't stop thinking about the look in her eyes, the empty cold look. I finished my food rather quickly, shocking Jasiri since she usually finished first. "I'm on my way to get her pain killers, which pharmacy?" I looked at Elijah and he swallowed his bite before responding "Pain and Care Pharmacy" I nodded in response, grabbing my jacket and throwing it on, I could pick up my umbrella while I'm at it. I slid my shoes on, opening the door to head to the pharmacy. Jasiri watched me as I went out the door.

I walked my way to the pharmacy. The morning was pretty cold and chilly, I used my hands to cover my mouth, breathing in and out to keep warm air in my lungs, I did not want my lungs freezing up after all. Asthma sucked. I looked at the frost build up on places, cars, stores, everything. It truly was chilly, I entered the pharmacy, the door ringing the bell to signal my arrival, a gush of warm air hitting my cold rosy-cheeked face, and my cold hands that were red from the freezing morning. I stepped up to the counter "I'm here to pick up the pain meds for Jasiri Jules?" I asked and the clerk nodded, handing me a bag. "Thank you" I bowed at my waist, before straightening myself and walking out.

I make my way back to the house, booted feet walking upon the pavement sidewalk.

(Jasiri's P.O.V)

I perked up when I heard Cora enter the cabin, finally, the pain meds are here. I didn't need them, I could handle the pain on my own, "but just in case" I kept telling myself, forcing a smile as Cora walked into the kitchen, putting the pharmacy bag in front of me. "Thanks" I said, grabbing the bag and opening it, going for the bottle of pills immediately. I opened the orange and white bottle, pouring a pill onto my hand as I took it using my coffee. I start closing the bottle, setting it down beside me as I sip my coffee once more. Back down the bad path I go without even realizing it.

I stood up and said, "I'll go rest in bed now." Elijah perked up at my words, his tail wagging like a dog's, sometimes I think he's not even a demon. "Yes. Elijah. You may follow." I assured him, he stood up immediately, Cora watched the exchange between us with curiosity, I glanced down at the pendant around her neck, the one Elijah talked to me about. It was definitely Ryker's doing. I looked back up her eyes which flickered from green to red and back to green, just as I figured, She's under his spell. I walked toward the stairs before Cora stopped me "Do you have a storage room where you keep extra furniture?" I looked at her, furniture? Oh, right she was setting up her room. "I should, yeah." I responded before turning back toward the stairs heading up to my room where Elijah was following. I opened the door to my room, holding it open for Elijah who immediately ran to my bed and jumped in, I sighed and closed the door behind him. Following him to my bed, I laid down beside him, curling up to hug my knees slightly. I felt him roll over to face my back, then I felt his arms hesitantly wrap around my waist, once my body softened and melted against him.

That's when he started moving, one of his hands moving from my waist up to hold my throat in a gentle caress, just for him to move and kiss the side of my neck before I could let out a moan, the hand moved from my neck to my mouth, he kissed the same spot on my neck, he knew my weak spots, he knew *me* the real *me*.

He licked my neck, causing my body to shutter, my hand reached behind me, pushing on his pelvis, which he only grinded needily against my hand, I knew I didn't want him to stop. I let out a muffled whimper against his hand, he bit into my shoulder, my eyes rolled back, pain, god how *I love pain*..

He licked at the bite mark, my body shaking against his. He moved his hand on my mouth to shove two fingers in my mouth, as his other hand moved from my waist to below the waistband of my jeans, circling my clit with his thumb as he dived two fingers into me, I moaned around his fingers, my hips grinding against his wrist. He curled his fingers just right inside me, my legs quivering as he massaged my g-spot, my toes curling.

He pulled his fingers out of me, I whined at the lost warmth. His hand unbuttons my jeans, unzipping the fly and dragging my jeans off my waist, down my legs, and fully off. Leaving me in my shirt and panties. I whined once more, grinding against the air. The fingers in my mouth get removed, I looked down at him as he shifted me to lay on my back, I watched as he

kissed down my stomach, his goal was between my legs, even I knew that the second his head reached the apex of my thighs, I breathed slightly heavier, my hand reaching down to hold onto his dreads as I whimpered, watching him move my panties to the side. His mouth was already on me, sucking on my clit as two fingers dived back into me. My back arched as I gasped, his other hand holding my hip to keep me steady. I let out a soft groan, my hips grinding against his face, *needing* more.

He curled his fingers again and I squirmed, he held my hip even tighter. As he suckled on my clit even more, I bucked my hips more, clenching down on his fingers, his tail wagging as he looked up at me from between my legs. He gently massaged my hip as I shuddered. "E-Elijah.." I moaned out quietly, his name fell from my lips like a prayer. "We can't—" I get cut off from my own body's response, my whole body jolts, my eyes rolling back, my gash stinging as I climax, squirting on his face, I let out a loud yelp, it was pleasure mixed with pain, my brain mush and hazy.

"That's it. Just like that, sweetheart." He purred, rubbing soothing circles on my hip, I looked back down at him as he pressed a kiss to my pelvis. I was panting, my chest rising and falling rapidly, he sat up, wrapping his arms underneath me, pressing me against him, he nuzzled into my neck. Breathing me in, I held him, "I didn't want to leave." Old memories flickering through my brain of when we used to be together. Before he—"I didn't betray you. Ryker just made it seem like that." He cutted my thoughts off, already reading them. "W-what?" I asked, stuttering, still coming down from my high. "You heard me." He stated. "S-So-" He cut me off once more.

"Yes, it means we separated for no reason, you hated me for no reason. *You left me* for no apparent reason." He said, sadness and longing lacing his voice. Tears pricked my eyes, as I held him tighter. He kissed my shoulder lovingly, before going back to nuzzling into my neck. "Well, we found our way back to each other. Like always." I smiled softly "Always" he repeated. "I'll always come back to you, Elijah." I said softly, "And I'll always come back to you." he replied. He let out a low demonic purr, coming from his throat. "Demons." I sighed, running my hand through his dreaded hair, scratching at his scalp gently. "Hi my sweetboy" I cooed, babying him, he let out a little groan and nuzzled more, playing into my babying.

"*Please*. Don't leave me again. I can't go through that again." He whimpered into my skin. "I promise. I won't ever, *ever* leave you." I whispered, kissing the top of his head. I laid my head back on the pillows of my bed, looking up at the ceiling. Replaying every moment in my head of the so-called-betrayal. I couldn't even look at Elijah, couldn't even look into his eyes to see the truth. He loved me so much, to the point he stayed away. I heard his breathing start to even out against my chest, I continued playing with his hair. I closed my eyes, focusing on his breathing, his heartbeat, my hands started to glow a light pink, a pink that traveled up my hand, making pink vines up to my elbow, the glow from my hands emitted a soft glow on his warm skin, the ends of my hair starting to glow too. "Jasiri! Jasiri wake up" a familiar voice shouted, jolting me awake, objects start crashing to the ground, glass breaking, bed frame hitting the

ground with a creak. Elijah held the back of my head and behind my knees, holding me to his chest.

“Wha—what?” I stammered, my eyes adjusting to the bedroom. “Power surge.” He sighed, I looked at my hand, where the pink was now white. I sighed, sitting up from his arms. “Grab my hair dye.” I whimpered, looking at my now fully white hair. He looked at me gently, “White suits you though.” He muttered, I glanced at him “You can’t be serious—” He cut me off with a soft caress of his hand on my cheek. I leaned into his touch almost immediately. “I am serious.” He kissed my forehead as my hand held the one on my cheek. “I still love you” He muttered, “I still love you too” his thumb rubbed side to side on my cheek, and I smiled softly.

“You look.. *Tired.*” I looked up at him as he said that, my eyes widening and my pupils dilating, I pulled away. “I’m fine.” I grumbled out, the lie so normal in my world, so much easier to say than explaining how I feel. I stood up and said, “I don’t think I’m tired anymore.” I glanced away, he let out a nervously awkward chuckle “Uh.. Yeah, I bet after that orgasm you can’t”

I walked away, swallowing thickly, grabbing my jeans and putting them back on. I could feel his eyes on me, even when I wasn’t looking at him, and I know he feels it. I know he feels me pulling away once more. But, I couldn’t get hurt again, no matter how much I loved him. I said I’d never leave him, but I never said I wouldn’t pull away every time he got a little too close. I walked out the door, back to the kitchen, I grabbed the pain killers, looked at the bottle, and with a sigh, I grabbed the vodka, I opened the bottle, shaking it slightly to pour pills in my hand. One, two, three. I closed the bottle, opening the bottle of vodka instead. I tossed the pills into my mouth, chasing it with chugs of vodka.

I slammed the bottle down, panting. I start giggling, not like a maniac, but giggling like a girl who knows she’s getting bad again but might let herself just crash and get worse. Tears prick my eyes. “*Fuck..*” I muttered under my breath. I shove myself off from the counter, I close the bottle, putting it back on its alcohol shelf. I make my way to the couch, still feeling that throb of satisfaction between my thighs. I rested my body on the couch, my now white hair splayed across the couch cushion, as I looked up at the ceiling. My eyes water. Not again. I was always falling into a spiral. I wanted to get clean, but for some reason I can’t. It’s like I find too much comfort in my own sadness, but getting sick of it at the same time.

Addiction is hard, not many people talk about it but many struggle with it, Cora and I grew up with smoker parents, one that tried quitting just to be dragged right back into it by the other. They first started smoking outside, then it got dragged into the house. Yellow stained the white walls, my lungs burning just as much as they are when they dragged it into the house. No matter how much we begged and pleaded for them to take it outside, sick of the unflushed cigarette butts in the toilet when we go to use the bathroom, sick of the smell of nicotine smoke clouding our house, covering our clothes.

Another thing not talked about in addiction, is the withdrawal of one getting better. Of one succeeding. The headaches, the urges, missing the action or the burn, missing the feel of it.

And when times got tough? There goes the relapse. Again. And Again. And once more, again. One thing after another, and another.

My thoughts got cut off by the sound of footsteps, I glanced towards the direction of the sound, calculating whose footsteps those were. Elijah. Back to talking to me again, he sat on the part of the couch I wasn't taking up. I sat up, shifting my body to sit on the couch like a normal person. "So, you gonna talk about it?" Elijah questioned me, leaning back on the couch, not breaking eye contact what so ever, almost like he wanted to see me squirm, he knew I can't handle eye contact, knew I'd break. He *wanted* me to *break*. I swallowed thickly, trying to avert my gaze but he gently grabbed my chin, guiding it so I had no choice but to look him in the eyes, his brown eyes soft with concern, worry, and adoration. *The look of love.*

I whimpered under his touch, he gently pulled me closer, holding me as I hugged him tightly, he pulled me into his lap, hugging me back from around my waist, one of his hands trailing up to tangle in my hair, holding me close. I pulled back slightly, looking him in the eyes, his eyes on my lips full of want and softness before his gaze snapped back to my eyes, I knew what he wanted, he knew I knew. But, he wasn't rushing me, wasn't leaning in close, just holding me, putting my needs and wants first, like he always did. He waited, wanted, lost in me. Just like I was lost in him.

I swallowed thickly once more, my white hair falling over my shoulders as I lifted myself up onto my knees, my knees on either side of his hips, I lifted his chin to look up at me, my face over his, my hair cocooning his face like a curtain, I swore I could see god in those warm brown eyes, I leaned in ever so slightly, my eyes jumping to his adams apple bobbing in his throat. He wanted me, he wanted me *bad*. I pressed my lips against his, he let out a groan, my tongue traced the inner of his lips, wanting in.

And he happily obliged.

My tongue tangles with his, he was tasting me on his tongue and clearly couldn't get enough. His hands moved to my hips, grinding me downwards, against him. I broke the kiss "Still can't get enough, huh?" I snickered, he looked up at me, panting with want, eyes dark with unadulterated need. *Want*. "I'd literally go through hell and back to get you again." He growled, his hands squeezing my hips. "But, you're trying to distract me from what's wrong. Bad move, Jasiri. Bad move." He added with a grin. "Girl, you need to *sweat*." Again. Exact pick up line he used when we first met. I can still remember that exact day. The day his eyes first landed on me.

"Hope you're hydrated, you might need it." He said, pinning me to the wall, then the iconic line. "Girl, you need to sweat." His voice was husky, deep, I had his attention, just like I do now. The flashback ended.

"Sweat?" I grinned "I remember that line, Elijah." my thumb pressed on his bottom lip, his eyes looking into mine, even as he felt my nail pressed against his lip. "New nails?" he asked, grinning back at me. "Glad you noticed" I winked, giggling slightly. His eyes soften, his gaze drifting to his pendant around my neck. I was still wearing it. He was an outlaw of his own home,

his eyes went back to my eyes, looking at me like he was thinking maybe, maybe I was an outlaw too of some sorts. I kissed him again and he groaned, his eyes practically rolled back. I giggled into his mouth, as the kiss moved to my neck, he was trailing kisses from below my jaw to the edge of my shoulder. "You belong to me." he murmured against my skin, grinding me down against his hips again. I nipped at his lip, he let off a low moan, I *loved* how vocal he was, how unashamed he was to make noises for me. My sweet noisy boy.

"I know, I always knew." I replied, my voice going stern and dark, my hand drifting to his throat as I held it tightly, feeling his heart throb underneath my fingertips. His eyes were dark and hazy, I could tell his mind was mush, a blur. A blur I created, I made, that I controlled. I owned it. I could tell he missed me. His body showed it, his eyes, his lungs, even the prominent throb pressing against between my legs. Even through breathless need and want, his concern still bled through. "You gonna tell me what's wrong now?" He whispered, and I responded with a sigh.

"Fine" I added to my sigh, huffing my words with an attitude that made his eyes darken, I grinned, I loved being a brat, and he loved taming me. He was very open about how much he wanted me. Always has been. "I don't know what's wrong with me." I mumbled, his eyes immediately softening, he always kept up with the quick mood shifts, he was a master of that. No matter how many times I tried changing the subject, he always caught me. "I just think my depression is coming back, and soon I feel like it's going to take a toll on me, I didn't want to leave Cora alone with our parents back then." I sighed.

"And now she might be under Ryker's control. A slave to the dark shadows." I added, looking into his eyes as my hand trails back up so my finger can rub against his bottom lip again. His eyes on me, seeing through me, looking at the soul underneath the strong woman he knew and loved. "We'll save her, Jasiri. We always have. Even if she isn't aware of it." he responded, lovingly. "Te amo, mi amor." I spoke, and his eyes softened more, a gentle smile adorning his lips. "I love you too, baby girl."

I nuzzled into his neck, sitting back down into his lap and he let off a tiny groan, I remembered how much he's aching and I immediately squeaked, lifting myself back up "I'M SO SORRY—" I spoke, giggling laced into my panicked voice. He chuckled along with me, as he pulled me to his chest, keeping me off his lap, as he held me by my back, our giggling lacing together, our souls tied together. I looked back into his eyes, his smile reaching his eyes, just like mine was, his eyes glimmering with love and adoration.

"God, the way you pull me in, you're underneath my skin, truly baby girl." He laughed warmly, I blushed shyly, pushing on his face, he wants me, he wants me badly. He worships me, he always knows what i'm thinking, he's so obsessed with me, and I wouldn't want it either way. I'm drowning in him, his smile, his laugh, his eyes. I want to become one with him. To breathe him in. To be as close as physically possible. "I'll keep my hair white, for now.." I smiled, his finger twirling in my hair. "Why thank you, Ma'am." He spoke, using his "fancy" voice. Making me giggle harder, in which he happily joins me, being right where he wants to be, now and forever.

I kissed him again, giggling into his mouth, and he gently pinned me down onto the couch, breaking the kiss, his hand tucked my hair behind my ear, then he leaned down and kissed my jaw. My hand gripped his shirt, giggling.

“So, what do we do with Cora and Ryker’s little pendant?” he questioned, tilting his head ever so slightly. I fell silent, thinking “I don’t know. We can’t keep it. We both know what it can do.” I muttered, glancing off to the side, avoiding eye contact. “If that pendant takes a hold of her. We have to fight her, Jasiri.” he cupped my cheek, making me look at him.

“*I know.*” I spoke, glancing towards the bottle of pills again, my gaze focusing on it, blurring everything else around it. I knew that if I had to fight her, I had to lose Elijah in the process. I looked back into his eyes, smiling softly. *Maybe I’ll enjoy him when I have him again for now.*

I knew he was going to leave eventually. I knew. I would have to give him up eventually. Feel my heart break again, but permanently. He lit the match in my soul, and he’s gonna be the one to snuff it out too. I felt his hands tracing my curves, his touch taking me higher, and I know it’s going to drive me into earth eventually. But...

I moaned, ever so slightly, his hand hooking my leg over his hip, I tilted my head to the side, letting him kiss my neck, his face buried in it, as my eyes snap to the pills again, one of my eyes closed, as he sucked on the skin of my neck. I was drowning, in the feel of him, and the urge to just take every single one of those pills, finish me off. I felt his fingers dive into me again, I felt numb again. I could feel his fingers, yeah, but it was like touching my numbed mouth after the dentist. I wanted to die. I wanted to live for him, but I hate how my darkness wants to swallow him whole with me. Like a big hungry wolf or as I call it ‘The watchful dog.’ the dog in all my poems. The dog is eating me from the inside. Like it was tearing through my stomach and chewing through my guts with a sickening wet crunch. I shuddered beneath Elijah, the thought making me sick.

He licks the hickey he made, my gaze snapping back to him. I sighed, closing my eyes, *get through it, get through it*, I chanted inside of my head.

I felt the water over my eyelids, bubbles leaving my nose, I sat up, the water falling off my face. My eyelashes wet as I opened my eyes, my eyes sort of puffy because of the water. My hair flat and wet, cascading over my shoulders and breasts, I hugged my knees, resting my cheek on my left knee, zoning out at the wall. The hickies scattered on my torso, shoulders, and neck. I let out a sigh, moving my hands to the tub’s floor, pushing myself up, I dripped water onto the bathroom mat, and I moved towards the mirror. It’s like I’m a ghost in the mirror. I don’t even see or recognize myself. I certainly do not feel like myself. My eyes tired, drained, I tried putting on a smile, it didn’t feel like mine. It didn’t look like mine.

My face looked like it was blurring and contorting, melting, I reached both my hands up, dragging my nails down my cheeks, pinkish-red lines blooming on the skin of my face, I wanted

to peel my skin off. I rolled my eyes at my mirror, nothing feeling real, like a video game. Like some fucked up horror movie, but it's how I view myself in my eyes. I'm cracking, fraying at the edges, my nails short from biting at them, the skin even around my nails chewed up.

My gaze lands on the sharpener I use for my penciled eyeliner, I swallow thickly, my tongue feeling swollen in my mouth, the urge swallowing my whole body and soul. My hands shaking as I grabbed the plastic green sharpener, looking at the blade, I reached under my bathroom sink, grabbing a screwdriver as I unscrewed the blade from its plastic enclosure. I get the screw out, plopping the blade into my hand. I start breathing heavily. I took the blade, pressing it against my bare thigh, zoning in onto where the blade pressed into my skin. Without thinking or hesitation.

I dragged the blade against my skin, keeping slight pressure, a quick drag, like a whip cracking against someone's back, that quick. I panted, looking down at the blood welling up from my skin, I grinned, giggling. Then I brought the blade back, swipe, swipe, swipe, over and over again. Blood dripped down my thighs. The pain makes a heat pool between my legs. The way it hurt, god, I needed it. My legs and hands trembling, I looked at the blade. Shit. What have I done? Blood leaked past my knees, I glanced down, feeling the warmth against the goosebumps of my wet skin. I giggled, sitting on the ground and laying down against the bare cold ground, my giggles turned into laughing, the back of my wrist and hand rested on my forehead, my other hand's palm just rested against the cold ground. One of my knees was up and bent. Blood trickling down onto the cold tiled floor, coloring it a beautiful red.

I let out a long heavy sigh, my gaze fixated on the steamy ceiling of the bathroom, my blood coating the tiles. I pushed myself off the tiled floor, figuring it's best to clean up. I picked up a washcloth, soaking it in warm water, ringing it out slightly to start scrubbing at the tile, blood leaking down my thighs once more, I let out a long heavy sigh, standing back up to grab the medkit from under the sink, zipping it open, pulling out rubbing alcohol wipes, and bandages, I wiped at the cuts with the wipes, the pain zinging up my spine, making my eyes roll back. *Fuck.*

I hurried to bandage them, not wanting to get more blood on the tile. I bit my lip as I dropped back onto my knees, scrubbing at the tile desperately. Putting my whole back into it, even getting the blood between the cracks. My wet hair draped over my shoulders.

Once everything was finished, I got dressed, ignoring the pleasurable sting on my thighs. I crawled into my bed with a sigh, my wet hair already soaking my pillowsheet. This shit sucked, but hell, the pain was dizzying. The scent of Elijah still clinging to my sheets, I sighed. Running my hands through my hair and gripping it, tugging slightly, tears pricking my eyes. What the *fuck* is wrong with me. I ask that question alot. But when others asked me it, my usual reply was "What isn't?", Now I'm genuinely wondering what isn't.

I laid back, turning my head to look at the wall mirror in my bedroom, my face saddened, I groaned, rolling my eyes, "*Elijah and I still aren't dating right?*" I asked myself, as I reached over to my dresser. Grabbing my phone, opening the contact 'Wisteria', I sighed, texting.

9:22 P.M

Hey, Wisteria. Need you tonight, you free?

I stared at my phone, blankly. Nothing wrong with a fuck-buddy right? Wisteria and I never had feelings for each other, just a quick fuck, got the edge off both of us. Mainly me. She was okay with that. Knew my kinks, knew everything. I stared at the screen of my phone, as it cast a white light over my face, as I laid on my side, cheek against my pillow. My phone dings, and I zoned back in, reading her text.

9:30 P.M

Always. My house?

I smiled slightly, sending a thumbs up, before standing. I threw on some sweatpants, and a hoodie to keep the rain off me. It's been raining for quite a bit now. My boots made soft thuds against the concrete, the rain pouring down, little droplets committing suicide against the concrete, god, wish that was me.

I made sure to pick up alcohol, Vodka, for me, and red wine for Wisteria. She loved wine, I didn't. But hey, she's the one laying me. I eventually approached her house, it was bigger than my cabin. *Perks of banging a millionaire, am I right?* I rang the doorbell, she opened it, looking gorgeous as ever, her soft curly ginger hair down her back, her freckles scattered across her warm skin like beautiful constellations. Her pretty electric blue eyes sparkle at me with mischief. I smiled sheepishly and she dragged me in by the wrist, making sure I didn't drop the bag.

I pulled her in by her waist, she tilted her head innocently at me. I knew damn well she was NOT innocent. The things this girl can do? Would make a man shy and the devil blush. She kissed my cheek gently, softly. I giggled, her lips warm as summer, even if she looked like spring, Hawaii itself. Looked even more gorgeous in the pink lingerie she was wearing. Her eyes are as pretty as the blue sky. I could get lost in them. She wrapped her arms around the back of my neck, leaning in, her lips a whisper from mine. My thumbs idly tracing circles on her beautiful hips. She giggled, leaning in and biting my lip, tugging it with her teeth. My head spun.

She pulled me into her house, her hips swaying subtly, seductively. Her demon horns, and tail sprouting out from her head and tail-bone. Unlike others, hers was pink, a soft pretty pink that suited her more than I cared to admit. *Yeah, I had a type. For demons, specifically.* "Careful Wist, your succubus side is showing" I grinned, and she looks at me from over her shoulder, her tail swaying, not a wag like Elijah's, but a seductive teasing sway. *Why the hell was I so horny recently?* God damn whore-omones.

Once I snapped out of my thoughts, I was shoved onto her soft mattress, bouncing slightly, she straddled my hips almost immediately, *looked like she needed me more..* Her thumb pushing down on my lower lip, which she leaned in and bit, again, tugging it as she giggled mischeivously. My hands moved to rest on her lower back, her thumb moved into my mouth,

pulling my cheek to the side, I took the hint and stuck my tongue out, she giggled again. "Good giiirl" She purred, sticking her tongue out to press against mine, dragging her tongue up mine, our saliva mixing, that familiar heat pooling between my legs.

Women, Women were my weakness, through and through. Men were..well men. I liked both of them, I just leaned more into women. She moved again, biting my shoulder, hard enough that I felt blood trickle down my skin. My eyes rolling back, she giggled again. Her giggle is sickeningly addicting. She gets her pleasure off mine. She pushed me onto my back, as she crawled on top of me, swaying her hips seductively like she always did to pull me in. She nuzzled my nose with hers, giggling as she bit her bottom lip, her fangs digging into her lip, she sure was giggly tonight. She swirled her hips over mine. My heart was racing.

She tugged open her nightstand beside me, I gulped and followed her hand, as she pulled out a thick vibrator, turning it on, I shuddered at the buzz it emitted. She trails her hand up my stomach, my clothes disappearing and teleporting onto the floor, neatly folded. *Huh, new trick? Neat.* She traced the vibrator on my inner thighs, swirling the buzzing device on my sensitive skin, teasing, testing. She traced the vibrator up the middle of my stomach, making the muscles in my stomach tense, Ticklish. She moved the vibrator, putting it between my breasts. Before moving it to circle one of my nipples as she sucked on the other one. I can feel the slickness between my thighs growing thicker and heavier, her tongue swirled around my nipple and I shuddered. She dragged the vibrator back down and slammed it home, my brain practically malfunctioned.

The sting of the stretch had my eyes rolling back ever so slightly. She started thrusting it in and out of me. The vibrator buzzed right against my g-spot with every thrust. Stars exploded behind my eyes. I whined and she let go of my nipple, a string of saliva connecting her mouth to my breast before breaking off. She teleported a knife into the hand that wasn't thrusting the vibrator into me. My breath hitched with both fear and arousal, it looked sharp as hell. She traced the tip along the side of my stomach, not enough pressure to draw blood but enough to leave a stinging mark after this was over.

I let out another pathetic whimper, and she immediately knew, applying more pressure to prick my skin and draw blood. I let out a guttural groan, bucking my hips against the vibrator, making her prick my skin slightly deeper. She watched me with adoration in her eyes. Her eyes drift down to the bandages adorning my thighs and she puts the knife down, dragging her tongue up and down the new injury. Making my head spin, I didn't care that she was currently unbandaging my thighs, the vibrator still pumping in and out of me, making my legs shake. I felt the cool air on my thighs once the bandaging was taken off.

She kissed every individual cut from earlier, the pain zinging up my spine, making me quite literally drool. I was drowning in sensation. My pussy clenched around the vibrator, my back bowing, As I let out a guttural moan, she thrust the vibrator into me at the same pace as my moans, making my legs quiver. "C'mon, Baby. You can let go" She purred into my ear. And I completely lost it. Letting out a whimper as I held onto her. She buried her face into my neck as

my orgasm wracked through my whole body. Shuddering. She kissed my cheek lovingly as she slowly dragged the vibrator out of me. My body twitches, she then kisses me on lips, gently, soothingly. Stroking my hair as I watched her eyes glow. Her body takes in my pleasure. I didn't mind, I was feeding her. At least it wasn't my soul.

She laid on my chest, she giggled, and I let out a soft sigh, a breath I didn't even know I was holding. She let out a demonic purr, like a cat, but deeper ever so slightly, and a bit more high pitched at the same time. I forgot demons purred, and everytime they do, I get reminded of it. I ran my hand through her hair, her tail swaying. I trailed my nails up and down her back gently. I closed my eyes, drifting off with a gorgeous demon laying on my chest. My mind is starting to produce a dream.

Sharp piercing blue eyes, colored like an ocean, identical to mine. The thick eyebrows that had a natural arch that most people were jealous of, eyebrows set so sternly. Long lashes the women craved to have. Short black hair, a slightly outgrown buzz. He was identical to me, half of me. Part of me. *My father.*

It was a memory from before, his black hair turning white as he let out a powerful blast, a blue blur towards a tree. Destroying it. Then turning to face me. Nodding. I swallowed, looking at my soft small hands. I was so small, I was only nine. I turned to the tree beside the one he blasted, I took a deep breath, holding my hand out. Pink glowing from my hands, it burned, it burned so bad, tears pricked my eyes, I could see the look of judgement as I glanced sideways at my fathers eyes. I tried harder. The pain felt like it was branding my skin with lava, seering my bones. I let out a sharp cry, the blast I was trying to prepare, to force. It hurt more than I could handle. "Dad! I can't do it, Daddy! It hurts!" I sobbed, he gripped my wrist, holding it up near his face, making me have to stand on my tip toes. "It's nothing but a mere *chicken scratch*. Again." He growled, releasing my wrist, I rubbed the sore spot, sniffing, before holding my hand out towards the tree, pink charging up from my palm, my skin scorching again.

It hurt. It hurt worse. Like my hand had multiple daggers digging into my hand and twisting at all sick twisted angles, I glanced towards my father, a desperate plea in my eyes. He rolled his eyes, then tilted his chin towards the tree. I sniffled, sucking in a breath as I forced the charge out of me. Blasting the tree. I let out a yelp and held my tiny hand. He smiled, clearly pleased with himself. He clapped me on the shoulder. "Good, good." He praised, my eyes glimmering at the approval, even as I squeezed my bloodied hand that smelt like sizzling flesh. I glanced at it, seeing the raw, scorched skin, burned pieces of white flesh twisting away from the sizzle in my hand. I shuddered. Swallowing thickly at the pieces of peeling flesh.

It happened almost daily, until my palms went numb. I shot a blast, clearly in my fifteen year old body. My palms took no damage, calloused from the amount of times they shredded. Numbed. His name echoing in my mind.. *Jonas. Jonas. Jonas Jules. You're just like him. Just like your father. — I'm not that monster. No. No way. I'm normal. I'm—*

*You're a girl just like her **father**. That's all you'll ever be.*

I can't! I won't! I will NOT! — I shot awake, breathing heavily, my hair glowing white, my palms pink, they stung.. *They haven't*— I glanced at my hands, bloodied blisters adorning my palms. Wisteria sat up, resting her cheek on my shoulder, the strap of her lingerie falling off her shoulder, she looked at my palms and gently caressed the back of my hand. “It’s getting bad again, isn’t it, dear?” She murmured softly, lovingly. I gritted my teeth, tears stinging my eyes. She looked at me, and I turned my head to look at her, my eyes terrified, I pressed my stinging palms into my eyes, letting out a choked sob.

“What if I do become him, Wisteria? What if I become that monster?” I looked back at her, like I was looking for answers. “You are *only* related to him, Siri. That doesn’t make you him.” she responded, looking into my eyes, she reached up, tucking a strand of wet hair out of my face and behind my ear. I sniffled, nuzzling into her neck as I held her. “Jasiri, go home and clean up, love.” She kissed my cheek, I nodded and sniffled. “Yeah. Yeah, alright.” I pulled myself out of her arms, wiping my eyes as I walked out of the room, she made sure to teleport my clothes back onto me. I headed out her front door, the rain settled, now the only storm left was me. I walked back to my house, the cold nipping and biting at my skin.

Wisteria didn’t do well with emotion but she tried, that’s all that mattered, plus, she knew I hated crying or showing vulnerability in front of people. That’s probably why I didn’t take offense when she gently told me to go home. *What if my father did become a part of me? One I can't seperate? What if I let myself become him?* I let out a shuddering sigh, the light of my cabin glowing on my skin faintly, I stepped in. Looking for any sign of Cora or Elijah, hell, even Ryker. I stepped into the kitchen, looking for my hot chocolate powder. I opened one of my upper cabinets, finding the powder, I grabbed it. Setting it on the counter.

I opened the fridge, grabbed the jug of milk, I filled a mug with the milk, opened the microwave and set the mug on the glass plate within the microwave. I then set the microwave to one minute and 40 seconds. Closing it and pressing start. My cabin was dark except for the few wax melters I had, it lit up dim lights, the scent was a soft rainy wood scent. Calming. I took deep breaths, trying to calm myself. The microwave beeps softly, I turned on music. My hips swaying gently as ‘Lunch’ by Billie Eilish plays, I hummed along to the beat. Trying to calm myself as I reached into the microwave, ingoring the burn of my palms, a burning mug against raw blistered skin does not feel nice. *I like pain, but jeez.*

I sighed, setting the hot milk down, I went to the bathroom, going to grab the medkit. My thighs are notthighs are not stinging now that I think about it, nor the slice Wisteria gave me. I looked into the mirror, not atnot at my face, but at my body. I lifted my shirt, the sliced healed and scarred. Even the blow Ryker gave me healed, I checked my thighs, also scarred. *I got all these recently. How long has the one from Ryker been healed?* I bit my inner cheek, I haven’t felt the pain from that huge gash that son-of-a-bitch gave me. I grabbed the medkit, wrapping my hands with bandages. *Did Wisteria heal me? Could she heal things?* I pulled the bandage tightly, before clipping it to hold. Letting out another sigh, *I sigh alot.*

I walked back to my room, slumping on my bed and checking the time. 3:30 A.M. I rolled over, the sheets rustled beneath me. My cheek against the pillow. I took a deep breath, trying to

breathe, to relax, my world blanked to darkness once more. I opened my eyes, I was floating.. floating in this weird celestial place, my white hair glowing and flowing among the zero gravity. I was automatically holding my breath. I needed to breathe— I couldn't— I gasped for air, shocking, oxygen filled my lungs. *Okay so, I CAN breathe.* I looked around, among the purples, blues, pinks and blacks, among the stars. There were portal-like doors, white gaping portals leading to other places, I peered into one, There was a little girl, blonde hair and brown eyes, with olive skin, playing with a unicorn, the grass pink, the trees lollipops, the weedy dandelions were suckers, stones were gumdrops.

I felt a cavity forming and a stomach ache from just looking at it. I pulled my head out of the white portal, floating to another one, it was a teenage boy, dark brown hair and green eyes, his face had slight pimples everywhere, he was in an arcade with people I could only presume were his family. He had a huge smile on his face, dimples caving into his cheek that made me smile. I pulled my head out of the portal. Floating to another one, peering in. Elijah.

Elijah was frozen in place, arms and hands pressed to his sides, feet pressed together, tense. I swallowed thickly, looking at what he was staring at with tears stinging his eyes, I saw myself, in this whole pitch black place, me on the edge of a black squared cliff, a soft yellow-ish light on me, like a spotlight. I heard every painful thing I said to him, before falling forward. Over and over again. This was mental torture. I heard every angry scream then a thud, silence following, before it repeated, a different sentence but the same pitiful ending. It was gut wrenching. He was watching me die over and over again, screaming how much I hated him, how much I couldn't take it. How much I blamed him and all he could do was stand there, tears streaming down his face as he didn't even make a peep.

I pulled out of his dream, jolting awake. *Should I wake him?* I swallowed, I throw the blankets off me, rushing to where Elijah was staying, I panted as I reached him, he had a peaceful face in his rest, I would've thought it was someone else's dream if it weren't for the tears streaming down his peaceful face, I sat on the edge of the couch, I touched his leg ever-so-slightly, and he jumped away with a gasp, eyes wide and hurt, he was quick to pull me to him, crushing me to his chest. I held my breath, watching as he nuzzled his face into the crook of my neck. I sighed softly, holding him, biting my inner cheek.

I rocked him in my arms slowly, waiting until his labored breathing calmed. He breathed me in with shuddering breaths, clinging to me like a life line, I glanced to the side, pressing my lips to the side of his head. He whimpered, his body shaking. It was cute how vulnerable he was being. *Elijah. You're okay. You're okay sweet boy.* I thought, feeling him read my mind, I felt it unlike others, I was hyper aware of every sensation, so when my brain felt watched, I knew it was being watched. His breath finally settled, and so did I.

I cupped his cheeks with my hands, making him look into my eyes, my eyes glew pink once more, I felt him melting into my embrace, his eyes glowing my same pink before he passed back out. Falling back asleep on the couch. I stood up straight, my expression turning stern. Cold. Do *not* get too attached. He will leave, they all do. Him too. I stalked my way to the

kitchen, grabbing the Vodka once more, pulling the cork out, before lifting it to my lips and tilting my head back, chugging. My throat was on fire. I won drinking games at the bar for a reason though. I tipped my head downwards, pulling the bottle away from my lips, I giggled at the burning sensation in my throat. Feeling the warmth of the alcohol pooling in my stomach.

Always back to the bottle, constantly. I stumbled my way to the wall mirror in the living room, looking at myself once more, nothing but me being able to hold the demons in my eyes, which were tired and weary. My face melted in the mirror like flesh-like-slime. I reached up and touched my face, it was normal to my touch but I literally saw it warping and twisting in the mirror. I laughed, rolling my eyes. Nothing new. I hate how I looked, I literally couldn't stand seeing myself anywhere. Some days I thought I looked pretty, but all it took was for me to find one insignificant flaw, and I enlarged it, so it was the only thing I saw. I don't know why I did it, but I did. It was a habit I've had since I was a little girl.

But the issue with me is; I've literally never tried to change things, when I was little, I was skinny fat. The worst kind to be, I hated it. I hated how big my belly was. But I never tried working out to change this factor. Instead, I enlarged the insecurity. Wearing baggy shirts, or pulling my pants up so the waist band was over my hip dips, making me look skinnier. Curvier. I've always had body issues.

I stripped from my shirt, unclasping my bra, looking at my own full breasts in the mirror. The skinny hourglass in the mirror. The one I worked so hard for. I turned my back to the mirror, then looked at my own back, my back tattoo adorning my skin. The black lines, it was up and down my spine, the design didn't merely sit on my skin; it seemed to adapt to my anatomy. At the nape of my neck, intricate, flame-like roots took hold, gathering density before erupting outward across my shoulder blades. They stretched into sharp, sweeping branches that mimicked the skeletal framework of phantom wings, cutting aggressively toward my shoulders.

From that central mass of my tattoo, the ink trickled downward. A segmented, vertical column ran the precise length of my spine, mimicking a stylized, bio-mechanical vertebral column. It was a dark, elegant architecture that linked the upper fury of the piece to its anchor below. At my lumbar region, the pattern bloomed into a symmetrical, upward-curving crest that framed my waistline, its needle-fine tips whispering against my skin like delicate, frozen smoke.

The artistry laid in its weightlessness. While the linework was razor-sharp and absolute, a soft, smoky black-and-grey gradient bled inward from the edges. It gave the entire composition a three-dimensional depth, an airbrushed illusion that made the cybernetic sigil look less like a tattoo and more like a living, dark entity melting directly into my flesh.

It was a tattoo I didn't regret getting. At all.

The tattoo held no meaning, no meaning to me or others that I was aware of. It was a tattoo I completely made up. People adored it as much as I did, that's probably why I fucked so many people. Let them see my body that I perfected. Let them see my body that I designed. Anything for approval, validation. What was wrong with me?

I sighed, looking away from my body, as I slid into my shirt once more, a second skin, my hands pulsing with frantic energy. I took a deep breath, trying to calm my thoughts, to calm my power, the energy crackling within me. I suddenly got an idea, I grinned to myself. Might as well put this energy to use. I rushed to my front door, slipping on Elijah's hoodie, it was a bit big on me, but I rolled the sleeves up to my elbows. The cold of the night biting my skin, goosebumps adorning my skin. But I held out my hand, my palm facing a tree in the dark, the branches growing jaggedly upwards, as if trying to reach for the sky. Trying to grab the stars to hold them hostage. The moonlight casting beautiful strays of silvery white along the dark shadowy bark, before a pink burst erupted from my palm, crashing into the tree, clashing against the bark, warping and tearing a clean hole right through the center of it. I heard a whistle, making me whip my head around.

A girl with white hair down to above her knee, and her right eye covered by her hair, just her left red eye focused on me as she sat on a thick tree branch like she weighed nothing. "Damn, Jasiri, haven't changed much, huh?" She purred, fidgeting with an old time-y watch connected to a chain. The gold contrasting against her pale skin. "I don't have time for your games, Elfeky." I hissed her name, she raised a brow at me, grinning. "Oh look at you being cute." She grinned wider, her eyes narrowing almost seductively, almost. I rolled my eyes as she hopped down, her shoes landing in the grass with barely a soft thump. She was wearing a black choker, a deep red crop-top that hung so far off her shoulder I could see the outline of her breast that's out of the fabric. She was in casual dark blue denim bell-bottom jeans, the bottoms were perfectly laid on top of her converse shoes. She slid a hand into the back pocket of her jeans, she was taller than me. I definitely noticed that.

She stepped closer, tilting my chin up with her index finger. Her fangs are more noticeable up close. I drifted my eyes back to her eyes, her rounded pupils turning into slits like those of a cat's. Her eyes were so pretty. "What are you doing out so late, babydoll?" She cooed, tilting her head. I pulled my chin away "None of your concern, Elfeky. Don't you have shit to do?" I muttered. Pulling the sleeves of Elijah's hoodie down my arms, covering the markings that twisted towards my elbows, my hands were definitely a different color though. They were still pink. "No, not really." She hummed before adding on "You're using your powers at night, how is it *not* my concern?" she quirks a brow at me once more. I casted a side glance at her. "Look, Elfeky. We aren't friends, we never were. Go back to Ryker." I hissed, Elfeky's eyes glared at me. "How would I go back to Ryker? He's dead." She grumbled, I turned my back to her. "No, he's not. He's haunting my sister, so, don't you dare fucking lie to me."

Elfeky frowned, looking like a maniac who was bored. She crossed her arms. Putting all her weight in one foot that made her hip stick out. She lets out a bored huff before disappearing into the night air once more in a blur of dark grey smoke. "Fuckin' vampire hybrids" I hissed under my breath. I looked back at my pink hands, no damage. Wasn't that strong of a blast yet I blew a hole through a tree. I stomped against the soft grass before turning around and heading back inside. I never understood my powers, and I don't think my father did either. Kicking the door shut behind me out of frustration. I headed towards my room, not bothering to change, all I did was kick my boots off at the door. I threw myself onto my bed, letting out a huff of air. Closing my eyes, praying not to see others' dreams.

The morning light blared through my curtains, lighting my room up with soft golden orange hues. My eyes fluttered open slowly, glancing around my room with tired hazy eyes. I sat up, my body overheating and sweating. I groaned, feeling gross. I climbed out of bed, stumbling tiredly to my bathroom, entering the bathroom once more. I turned on the water, turning it into freezing cold. Making sure not to glance at the mirror. My mind drifting back to sex, I groaned, clutching my head. Why did I like it so much? Maybe because I like being used, it means I have a purpose. I hated being sexual, truly. But that's all I knew. I don't know how to be loved without sexual tension being involved. Yet all I ever wanted was to be loved gently. To get flowers.

But all I get is cock inside me, or even fingers, toys.

I let out an irritated sigh, tears pricking my eyes. God, I have issues. I glanced towards the shower, the cold water sprinkling down like winter rain. I stripped out of my sweaty clothes, stepping into the cold, I took a sharp inhale of breath, goosebumps prickling my skin, my nipples pebbling under the cold. My body shivering, I lifted my hair, revealing the back of my neck to the freezing water. Letting the water cascade down my back and over my shoulders, my body eventually getting used to the cold, I let out a sigh of relief as I tilted my head back. The top of my head is soaking with water. The tension bleeding from my body, melting to join the water down the drain. I could feel a knot underneath my shoulder blade. It hurt. Like hell. I couldn't even reach it.

With a sigh, I washed my body, scrubbing with my loofa, I made sure to wash my hair too. Doing my whole shower routine. After that, I stepped out, wrapping a towel around me, heading towards my bedroom, I glanced sideways, Seeing Cora practicing her bow I gave her, Elijah showing her the ropes. I smiled gently to myself before heading inside my bedroom, the cold air emitted from my ac enveloped me immediately.

I stayed in my towel and laid on my bed, I didn't like getting out of my towel immediately. I liked drying in the towel first then getting dressed. I closed my eyes, taking deep breaths. What am I really doing with my life? I feel like I'm wasting it away, like the world is moving too fast and I fell and can't keep up with it. It makes my stomach drop just thinking about it. I rubbed one of my hands down my face, pinching the bridge of my nose, mumbling under my breath "So fucking stupid." I grumbled, just then, Elijah finished up with Cora, walking into my room, I could feel his gaze on me, I looked up at him. "What." I growled.

"Are you okay?" He muttered gently at me, to which I sighed in response before giving a real response. "Yeah, I think." I grumbled once more, looking away from him. "Just tired," I added, my gaze falling onto my pillow. "Everything is.. Overwhelming. Stressful even, and having to mentally prepare to fight my own sister just doesn't feel right. I want to be able to just.. Live with her. When I ran away with you, I lost so many memories I could've had with my sister, but I also do not regret the memories I made with, well, you." My voice spilled out of me before I could stop it, spilling out my hurt, my sorrow, my burdens, the things that kept my shoulders tense and my soul heavy, the things that weighed my heart down and made my eyes water, then before I could stop it, my truth spilled next. "I relapsed." I muttered, and Elijah froze just then. "Elijah, I don't love you. I don't think I can anymore." I whispered, my head lowering as I stared

at my clasped hands in my lap. "I don't want to break your heart, I don't want to take anything from you." I stood, hugging Elijah. "I'm sorry. Please get out." I walked past him to open my door behind him, so he could leave and he did. Part of me regretted telling him, regretted kicking him out. But, it needed to be said, needed to be done, he had to know, and I had to say it.