

The tracker boy had been avoiding Hannah all day. Every time he, against his better judgement, stole a glance in her direction, the faint smell of his hair burning filled his nostrils and small beads of sweat pooled in the follicles where his baby curly-q's used to be.

She'd ruined his hair. He fingered the singed ends of his locs. They weren't only tangled into each other, they were melted wads that—even if by some pinching miracle, he could untangle—would never be healthy again.

“Man!” He groaned at the product of five years of tender, love, and care gone to waste.

“Tracker!”

“Huh?” The loc fell from his hand as his head turned on a swivel, searching for whoever had called him.

Finding Hannah, sitting on her calves and crouching towards him, he instinctively dropped his head and continued walking.

“Tracker, please,” her voice broke, triggering his weak spot.

“This girl's gonna be the death of me,” he muttered under his breath, shaking his head and throwing his arms up before stomping over to her. “What d'you want?” The convoy kept moving, forcing him to walk alongside her cage. He glued his gaze to the ground.

Hannah's voice softened when she repeated his name. He'd known her long enough to notice, though it was still coarse as peppercorn. He knew exactly what she wanted. With a deep sigh and another shake of his head, he relented. Initially, he'd intended it to be a brief look, but he couldn't look away once her eyes were on his. Those spinning honey-colored rings put him in a trance.

“Tell me what you saw. Please, help me.”

He snorted, “You don't need my help with anything.”

A bitter scowl spread across his face as he recalled the guard she'd killed. The memory made his stomach churn. He couldn't trust her.

“How stupid do you think I am, Hannah? You can play all you want, lady, with this amnesia game you got goin' on, but I'm not fallin' for it anymore.”

“Play amnesia?” she snarled, “Are you bloody serious?”

He lifted a brow at her in confusion.

“Y'know what, no,” he added, “I saw you! I saw what you did to that guard! There is no mystery to solve 'cause there is no other monster hiding in these woods hunting you down! You are the monster, Hannah—the only monster!” He was finding it increasingly difficult to keep his voice low. “You're the only thing in the whole entire forest that's hunting us. Just like you were the only thing trapped in that cave. It's just you! Only you!”

Tracker's outstretched palms articulated every single syllable on one side of the bars, his gaze still on the path ahead. But on the other side, Hannah's grasp around the metal bars tightened, the strength of her grip loosening them.

“And if you think I’m stupid enough to help you,” Tracker shoved his hand through the bars, shaking his finger at her, “kill off me and mine, you-y”