

A romantic couple is shown in profile, embracing and about to kiss. The scene is bathed in a deep red light, with soft, ethereal lens flares and bokeh effects in the background, creating a dreamy and intimate atmosphere. The woman's hand is gently placed on the man's chest.

Faden Sinclair

*Forbidden
Rapture*

Tales of the Forbidden book 2

**Forbidden Rapture
Tales of the Forbidden,
Book 2**

By

Jaden Sinclair

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Forbidden Rapture Tales of the Forbidden, Book 2 By Jaden Sinclair

Dane Knight never believed that there is one girl out there just for him, or that she might walk right past him, until Samara Tabor did just that. She is everything he could ever want. She brings out feelings inside him that he never knew he had, or could feel for someone.

Having her summoned to the Compound is the easy part. Showing her how right they are for one another, a bit more difficult. But when secrets from the past come to haunt them, Dane's love is tested and he has to gather all this strength to fight for the one he loves the most—even if his rapture is forbidden.

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Chapter One

Dane Knight sat at the end of the long dining room table, across from his grandmother, with yet another dinner guest and her mother seated in the middle. He tapped his fingers on the table, waiting for his grandmother to initiate the unpleasant conversation.

For the past year now she'd been trying to get him to marry. And not just anyone either. Oh no! Berdina Knight wanted her grandson to marry a proper lady, not the trash that one of his best friends married from the poor side of town.

Before Devon Noved got married, Dane's grandmother was about to ship Dane's sorry ass up to the Compound to find a bride, but after Devon's marriage, she changed her mind. She didn't want to take the chance that he might come home with a girl unworthy of the Knight name.

So she'd devised this plan. Great!

"You haven't touched your soup." Dane turned his head to look at the young girl sitting to his left. She had to be no more than eighteen, and her innocent brown eyes spoke to him of how little she knew of what was going on. "You don't like it?"

He was about to answer her question when his grandmother spoke instead: "You're being rude, Dane."

"Am I?" He waited for her to look up from her soup. Berdina had the same blue eyes as him, but hers were so much colder.

She was a hard woman, and at age seventy-two, very accustomed to getting her way.

She took him in when his parents disappeared during a trip to the everglades. After being gone with no word for over nine months, his grandmother had them declared dead and had herself named sole guardian. Dane had only been fifteen then.

But her stern discipline and controlling ways had him instantly rebelling. He'd hooked up with Blaine Cedric first. The two of them would sneak out at night and go drinking. By seventeen, he was hanging out, not only with Blaine, but also Devon Noved and Darius Alistair and the four of them raised hell.

They partied, drank, and womanized like nothing anyone in Treece had ever seen. They enjoyed many nights with many different girls, not giving a shit if they were from the rich side of town or poor.

The fun lasted three years before the group was broken up.

Blaine and Darius were shipped off to boarding schools in different locations and Dane transferred to another school outside of town. Devon was the only one that stayed put and on the weekends, when Dane would come home, they'd take the town again. Only then, they did it all as discreetly as they could.

But like Devon told him about a year ago, there comes a time when they all must stop and grow up, and it appeared now was his time. But he'd be damned if his grandmother was going to dictate to him who he should marry. He wanted what Devon had. He wanted to be happy with a girl that was just right for him.

"Funny, I thought you were the one being rude," Dane remarked, getting the reaction he was hoping from his grandmother.

She dropped her spoon and motioned for the servants to come and take the soup away. Next course was coming, and as much as Berdina Knight put on the act that she wasn't affected by what he said, he could tell differently. She hated defiance, and if it was done with witnesses, she hated that even more.

"How long are you going to play this little game?" He sat forward in his chair, both elbows on the table, chin resting on hands. "How many young girls do I have to inspect before you give it up?"

"You need a wife," his grandmother stated, glaring at him. "And until the right one comes along, I guess we'll just keep

having guests for dinner.”

Dane narrowed his eyes on her before turning his attention to the young girl. He saw, out of the corner of his eye, how her mother watched him closely. “It’s Katie, right?” She nodded. Tell me something, Katie, do you want to marry someone like me? I mean, I’m sure your mother really doesn’t want you to and all. I have a somewhat torrid reputation.”

“Dane—” there was a warning tone in Berdina’s voice.

“Are you still a virgin?” Katie’s face turned beat red and her mother gasped.

“Dane!” Berdina snapped.

Dane tossed down his napkin, pushed away from the table, and stood up. He glared at his grandmother before turning and walking away. As far as he was concerned, dinner was over.

He made it to the hallway with the intent of heading for his room to pack a few things for the weekend. The last thing he wanted right now was to stay here as his grandmother ranted over his behavior during dinner.

“Dane Richard Knight,” Berdina’s sharp voice caused him to pause. On the heels of his feet, he turned to face her. “How dare you embarrass and disrespect that young lady. You come right back and apologize to her.”

“Grandmother, I’m tired of this game. If you want me to marry then let me do it my way,” he sighed.

“And let you bring home trash like Devon did?” she huffed back. “You are better than that and I refuse to let you degrade our name.”

“Degrade our name!” he heaved in disbelief. “Do you even listen to yourself? I’m twenty-nine years old, not fifteen. You don’t get to run my life and tell me who to date anymore.” She opened her mouth to speak, but he held up his hand. “Enough. I think it’s time that we part ways. We just don’t see eye to eye or get along; not that we ever did.” Once more he turned and headed for the stairs.

“And where do you think you’re going? You’re definitely not going to go see those hooligans you call friends.”

Dane was halfway up the stairs before stopping again. “Those hooligans, as you call them, have been the only ones who were there when I needed them. Now excuse me, I’m going to pack.”

He didn’t wait for a response. Two at a time he took the stairs

and walked as fast as he could to his room.

For the past few months he'd been moving things from his room to *his* home. All he had left was maybe a couple bags of clothing. It took several months of moving his belongings behind his grandmother's back, and a couple years to build himself his own home, but now it was time for him to take the reins of his own life.

His house was about thirty miles from Devon's. In fact, all four of them built homes close to each other. Dane kept his home a secret, as did Darius. Dane did it because he didn't want his grandmother trying to hinder his plans. No one had a clue as to why Darius wanted it kept quiet.

He just finished putting his last bit of clothing in the suitcases when his cell buzzed. He had a message.

Not going to believe this. Blaine is in town and wants to see us. Meet you at his place. Devon.

Now that was somewhat of a shocker. Blaine, back in town? Boy, there was going to be some money-hungry mothers out there looking to hook him up with their daughters.

Dane waited until he heard his grandmother slam her bedroom door. With a smile, he left his room with the two large suitcases in hand. As quietly as he could, he went down the stairs and out the front door.

His car was just where he had parked it this morning. Dane's ride was a black ford mustang convertible with black leather seating. The top was down, so Dane put his bags in the back seat, jumped over the door to the driver's seat, turned the key, and peeled out of the drive. For the first time in years, he felt free and it was a feeling he wasn't going to let go of for a very long time.

The drive to Cedric Manor took almost an hour due to its location deep in the woods. Cedric Manor was one of the first homes to go up in Treece, but after Blaine's father passed, Blaine had it completely gutted. Dane didn't know what the place looked like now, but recalled it being dark and broody feeling the last time he was there.

The drive came into view, and right off Dane saw the changes. The ground was immaculate. The trees had been trimmed, flowers were in full bloom, and a coat of fresh, crisp, cream yellow paint had been added on the house.

Two cars were parked in the drive, one belonging to Devon, and the other Blaine's. Dane parked right behind Devon's, turned off the engine, and got out.

The front doors were opened by a man dressed in a tailed tux. "Good evening, Sir." He looked to be in his fifties, but didn't have many wrinkles on his face. His tux was spotless, and he even wore white gloves. "I'm Randal. Mr. Cedric is waiting in the dining room, if you'll please follow me."

Construction was still going on inside. Walls were being knocked down, floors redone, and other walls painted.

The house had many different levels with stair cases in the middle. The lower level was a large library and ball room with a wrap around stair case going down. That was definitely new, and it was now tucked behind the grand staircase. In the back, straight forward from the front door, up a short flight of stairs, and past double doors was a large dining room.

"You son of a bitch," were the words that came from Dane's mouth upon seeing Blaine sitting at the head of the table with his feet resting on top. "I don't know if I want to sock you one or hug you."

Blaine stood up with a smug grin on his face, walked right up to Dane, and made like he was going to shake hands with him. When Dane extended his hand out, Blaine took it and jerked him into a tight hug.

For years Blaine had been banned by his father for his wild ways. At one time, they were all known as the "playboys of Treece". This was the one and only reason Blaine was sent away. To his father, Blaine was a disgrace to the family with his whoring ways and diminutive respect for women. With the heart of the group gone, as Dane, Devon, and Darius's family thought, it was easier for Devon's family to bring him into line, Dane's grandmother to seize control of his life, and Darius to be shipped off also.

Dane still messed around, only he learned how to be secretive about it. He made extra sure his grandmother knew nothing of what went on in his personal life, or who might end up in his bed. Having done an exquisite job of keeping his social life a secret, he was now bored.

"It's good to see you, too." Blaine strolled back over to the table, looking more like a beast in a grand house than the lord of it

with his long dark locks fanning out behind him as he walked. "Now, where the hell is Darius?" He picked up two large tankers filled with, what Dane suspected, was his father's best brandy, the drink that Blaine's old man had said he would beat Blaine for, if he ever touched it. He handed one to Dane, "I don't have all fucking year."

"You would if you plant your ass and stay longer than a night or two." Dane took a sip of his drink, grinning at the dark look he got from Blaine. "Really? Would it kill you to stay longer?"

"And be the next model for the poster boy husband?" Blaine took a long drink, hissing as it went down. "No thanks. I like my single life."

Dane smiled, showing his bright white teeth. After Devon was married and his wife informed them that Blaine was in town, Dane went searching. He tracked down his old friend and gave him an earful for not talking to them. He also gave him a nice right hook. When Blaine mentioned how he had been in town many times for business only, Dane sucker punched him again. Now, whenever Blaine came to town, whatever the reason, he let them know and they all got together.

Blaine was the oldest, followed by Devon. At twenty-nine, Dane was very used to being a bachelor. He stood at six foot even. His set of baby blue eyes could melt any girl's heart at one glance. Adding to his charm, he had soft blonde hair that was cut short on the back of his neck with long locks on top that, when tousled, resembled a wheat field blowing in the wind.

"Well, when she comes along, I sure hope I'm there to see it." Dane grinned. "I'd love to shake the girl's hand that brings you down to those golden knees of yours."

Blaine pulled out a thick cigar and lit it. He blew the smoke at Dane before flipping him off.

"Darius isn't coming." Devon came into the room, tugging his jacket off and looking as if he was ready to kill him. "And to top things off, no one can seem to find a trace of Cameron. So Kera's on my ass to find him ASAP. She thinks he's going to come back. Darius refused to tell me why he won't come back. Argh! I swear this shit is going to drive me nuts! She's even slightly afraid to leave the house without me."

"Now there is a man truly pussy whipped," Dane chuckled to Blaine.

"That ain't no shit," Blaine grunted with a small grin of his own. "I never pictured you as the kind of man who would bow down to a woman."

"Fuck you both," Devon snapped. He walked over to Blaine, taking his drink from his hands.

"I never thought Kera the kind of woman to be scared of anything," Dane stated.

"She isn't, but she is having nightmares over that shit," Devon said. He sighed, rubbing his face, "So what's going on?"

"Well, I've officially moved out." Dane smiled. "Tonight was the last straw with her."

"Did she catch you beating your meat again?" Blaine snickered, taking a drag from his thin cigar. "Or did good old grandma say yes when you mistook her bed for one of the many other girls you've snuck into late at night?"

"You are a sick bastard, you know that?" Dane shot back and Blaine chuckled.

"I bet she told him she was going to cut the money off if he didn't change his ways," Devon tossed in with a grin.

"Play with your pecker again and no allowance for a week!" Blaine tried to speak in a high pitch granny voice that had Devon chuckling.

"You are so fucking hilarious." Dane threw an apple at Blaine, which he caught with one hand and took a bite out of.

"I do try my best," Blaine smarted back before he sat down and put his feet on the table, which was another "no-no" in his house growing up. Dane was noticing a lot of the old rules which Blaine had to grow up with no longer applied.

"She's been having these girls come over for dinner," Dane remarked with a sneer on his lips. "Wants me to marry a good girl of our class, not go to the Compound and take a chance like Devon did."

"Ah, so Dannie boy is under pressure to get a wife." Devon smiled, sat down, and crossed his arms over his chest. "Ain't life a bitch?"

"You know, I always said that woman has a set of nuts we don't know about." Blaine said, looking at Dane with his own evil smile, chewing on his cigar. "She sure does know how to fuck someone over. Are you sure your grandfather and her marriage was legal, cause I can't picture him willingly fucking her?"

Devon burst out laughing.

"Are you finished yet?" Dane crossed his arms over his chest, glaring at Blaine who was smiling back at him.

Blaine shook his head with a grin. "Not really."

"Let Kera have a talk with her." Devon chuckled. "She can reason with her. Lord knows she needs some kind of distraction. And who knows," he shrugged. "She might kick your grandmother's ass."

Blaine pointed a finger at Devon with the corner of his lips up, "I'll put a C-note on Kera."

"You know, some bullshit never changes, even when we don't see each other for months or years." Dane rubbed his face, slumping back in the chair.

"Shit, Dane, stop acting like a pussy." Blaine stood back up. He walked over to Devon and took his drink back, swallowing what was left. "Find a girl, do your thing, then ship her ass off somewhere. It'll get granny off your ass, and you can still live life somewhat single, happily ever fucking after."

Devon punched Blaine in the arm. "Doesn't work that way, dip shit."

"Maybe you were right, Devon." Dane twirled the liquid in his glass around, staring off. "Maybe it's time I did grow up."

"You do know that, with your grandmother putting this kind of pressure on you, it could backfire, and I'm not talking about if she picks the girl or not." Devon told Dane, snapping him out of his daze. "Ask yourself this question. What will you do if you find someone and your grandmother ends up not approving of her after all?" He shrugged. "She doesn't have much of a say in *who* matches up with you if you go to the Compound. And you can go without her approval, if you want."

"Shit, Devon." Blaine groaned, sitting back down with his cigar between his teeth. "That old hag isn't going to approve of anyone, especially if the girl has the balls to stand up to her. And, if he gets lucky and finds a girl with a back bone like Kera, then that old bitch is going to go ballistic." Blaine put his cold dark eyes on Dane. "You do what you want. If you want to marry, then find one that is right for you and take her. Don't let any of these fuckers tell you what to do." He took a drag, blowing the smoke out, and chewing on his cigar. "Especially that grandmother of yours. If she doesn't like your wife, fuck her. And I don't mean it literally this

time.” He grinned.

“Advice coming from him,” Devon thumbed towards Blaine.

“Hey, I never said I was opposed to marrying.” Blaine took another deep drag on his cigar, letting the smoke out slowly once more. “I only said I didn’t like being forced into shit.” He stretched out again, both legs up on the table with ankles crossed. “I don’t like how this fucking town and the rich snobs trying to tell everyone who is proper and who isn’t.” He looked at Dane, getting his full attention. “Devon found the one that was right for him. End of story. The town didn’t like it, he told them to fuck off. Go to the Compound if you want, or go on the sidelines. Just don’t marry the wrong one. You do, I’ll kick your ass.”

“Look at it this way,” Devon added. “If you get someone that has the fire Kera has, then your grandmother doesn’t stand a chance.” He smiled big.

“Nope,” Blaine agreed. “You marry and you’re free from her for life. Think of it as parole, or some shit like that.” Blaine smiled big. “Now isn’t that enough right there to marry, if nothing more than to stick it to that hag of yours?” That brought a smile to Dane’s lips. “Why the fuck your mother let her be your guardian after the stories your father used to tell us is beyond me.” He looked down at his watch then back up at them. “Well, boys, I hate to break this happy meeting up, but I need to go.” Blaine told them both. “I just wanted you both to know that I’ll be stopping by from time to time.”

“What? Are you afraid of getting hit again?” Dane asked.

Blaine rubbed his jaw, “Yeah. When did you get that wicked punch anyway?”

“Here today, gone tomorrow.” Devon remarked. “When the hell are you going to stay put?”

The corner of Blaine’s lip went up, but he didn’t smile. “I’m selling shit and finding more crap of my father’s.” His eyes lowered, but his body tensed up. “Bastard had more bullshit investments than I think my mother ever knew about.” He took a deep breath. “Loved to fuck people over.” He stood up and stretched his body, groaned as he relaxed, and sat back down again. “When I get it all done, then I’ll come back to stay.” He looked up with a grin on his face, “Maybe.”

“Shit,” Dane mumbled when his cell phone rang. He dug it out of his pocket, frowning as he read the number. “Speak of the

devil.”

“I swear she knows when Blaine is back.” Devon chuckled. “It’s like she can smell the evil.”

Blaine smiled. “When I do decide to stay for good, her *Depends* will be up in the crack of her ass—so far up that no matter how much she picks at her ass, they won’t come out.” He chuckled.

“Well I have a good feeling that she just found out I’m out of the house for good.” Dane stood up and went over to shake Blaine’s hand. “Call me when you get back.”

Blaine shook his hand and nodded. “Will do. And I’ll have someone look into this Cameron crap, Devon. You guys definitely don’t need that prick on your asses.”

“Good,” Devon nodded. “I don’t like the idea of him loose and with the rumors of girls disappearing again—well let’s just say I’m pretty sure he has his hand in it.”

“Then I’ll have some people look into it. When I get back, we’ll have dinner or something, but not here,” Blaine stated. “This house is not ready for shit yet.”

Devon also stood up and shook Blaine’s hand, “You got it.”

“Well, Dane, have fun.” Blaine smiled. “And happy hunting.”

Chapter Two

Five months later

“Yes Devon, I understand that.” Dane rubbed his face and groaned into his cell phone. He sat on his motorcycle in the middle class district of town hoping to hear some news of what was going on. So far all he’d heard were rumors. “But right now, you need to understand that no one is talking. They are all just assuming that the girls ran away.”

What Devon said next, he didn’t hear. Crossing the road right in front of him was a girl he never saw before and she took his breath away.

She was about five-five in height; tight, worn blue jeans hugged her like a second skin. The t-shirt she wore also looked like it had seen better days as did the shoes on her feet. She had wheat color hair that reached to the middle of her back and the way she walked spoke that she was the kind of girl no one messed around with.

He watched her walk all the way into a small grocery store. Only when the door closed, did he come back to his senses and realize that he had lowered the cell phone, had his mouth opened slightly, and was holding his sunglasses down on the bridge of his nose.

Okay, so I bet I look like a complete ass right now. “I’ll call you back, Devon.” He hung up, swung his leg over the bike, and went in the same direction as her.

Traffic, it seemed, decided to go against him right then. The crossing light changed and a shit load of cars decided to proceed across, which made him crossing during the light completely impossible.

Patience wasn’t a strong quality for Dane; he didn’t have any. When he wanted something, he tended to want instant gratification and didn’t give a damn how he got it. And right now,

he wanted to be in that store with that girl, finding out everything he could about her.

When the light finally changed to green, he pretty much ran across the street. He also knocked some woman over when he tried to run in between two women for the door.

The second he walked in, everyone stopped what they were doing, turned, and stared at him. Dane took a deep breath, pulled his glasses from his face, and glanced around. He knew he looked out of place. Hell, he was out of place.

A nod towards the clerk behind the counter and he was moving to the right, looking down each row of food for the one girl that he just had to see again.

She was breathtaking. The way she chewed on her thumb as she looked over the food had him stopping in the middle of the aisle, just staring at her. When she bent over to pick something up, her hair slipped over her shoulder and Dane wanted so much to go over and catch it and press his face into the long silk and take in her scent.

"Can I help you with something?"

Dane jumped and turned. The man from the counter was behind him, looking at him as if he was about to steal something. Quickly, Dane looked back at where the girl was, only to see she was gone now.

"No, thank you," Dane answered the clerk, moving away.

He found her at the counter, talking to someone he knew, Tracy Port, a girl he once dated a very long time ago. Now, she was married and working here it seemed.

Slowly, Dane made his way up to the counter, his eyes never leaving her. Okay, maybe they looked her over, but he sure as hell wasn't going to let her out of his sight yet. Nothing like this had ever happened to him before. He had never felt like this before.

Sure, he had lusted after the girls and got that, 'I have to have' feeling, but this time it was different. It all felt different. This time, he didn't just want one night with her, he wanted many nights.

"I'm sorry, I can't extend the credit anymore," Tracy told the girl. "Max was very clear about your account."

"Tracy, if I don't go home with something my father is going to kill me!" Dane heard the desperation in her sweet voice. "Can't you do something?"

"I wish I could," Tracy sighed.

"Here, let me." Dane didn't think, he only acted. He dug into his pocket, pulled out some cash and handed it to Tracy. "Let her have whatever she needs. I'll cover it."

"Thanks, but no thanks." Her mouth, her sweet full lips thinned out in a smile that spoke of embarrassment.

"I insist," Dane nodded to Tracy, who quickly bagged up the food. He took it and handed it to her.

"Thanks, but I—" Her face reddened, but she surprised him by taking the bag. When she looked up at him, Dane knew, without a doubt, that he was just knocked on his ass by a woman he knew nothing about.

The bell on the door rang again, and this time, a young girl came rushing in. She ran right up to the counter, breathing hard, looking panicked.

"He's coming," she panted to his mystery girl. "He knows you're out of the house."

"Shit," the girl gasped.

Without saying a word, she took the bag and ran out of the store with the younger girl right next to her. Dane was about to follow, but stopped when Tracy spoke behind him.

"You might as well forget about that one, Dane."

Dane tore his eyes from the door and looked back at Tracy. "What are you talking about?"

"I know that look." Tracy shook her head and leaned forward on the counter towards him. "And that is not the kind of girl you're going to get for one of your famous one night stands."

Dane took a deep breath and grinned. "Tracy, I don't do that shit anymore."

She snorted, "Since when?"

"Who is she?"

"Oh no!" Tracy shook her head and pushed herself back up straight. "I'm not helping you with your next conquest. Forget it!"

"Tracy—"

Again she shook her head. "No. N.O."

"Come on. Don't make me beg, because you know I will," he chuckled.

"And why would I help you?"

"Tell you what, you help me out by giving me all the information on her, and I'll help your husband out with the stock

market before you two go so deep in debt, that there will never be a way for you to get out of it.”

“How did you know about that?”

“Honey, that’s my playground. I know all the players, and just for good measure, the stock he’s looking into now is about to crash.”

He saw her chew on the inside of her lip and it took a hell of a lot of will power for him not to smile.

“Fine, but you better stop him tonight.”

He picked up a pen, took one of the napkins, and wrote down one of the best stocks that was about to climb. Once finished, he folded it up and waited for her to talk.

“You know, you’re a real shit.”

“I know, now spill.”

“There isn’t much to tell about her really. Her name is Samara Tabor. Her father pretty much keeps her pinned up in the house, especially with all the girls that have gone missing and all. Her sister, Makayla, does most of the shopping. And like many of the families around here, they’re broke as hell.”

Samara, huh? Nice. “So he doesn’t like her to go out at all?”

“Nope.” She shook her head. “Rumor has it he’s planning on either arranging a marriage or selling her. Don’t know which.” Dane thought about it. “Oh, I know that look. You’re very interested. Why?”

“Thanks, girl.” He slid the napkin toward her. “Have him invest in that tonight at midnight.” He pushed away from the counter and got two steps away before she called him back.

“What have you got planned? No one gets near her, Dane. Her father is a nasty bastard and there is no way in hell someone like you is going to get any closer to her than what you have just now.”

Dane couldn’t resist smiling over his shoulder at her, “Watch me.”

“Oh, this, I definitely have to see,” Tracy smiled back.

* * * *

“I told you not to leave the house!” The backhand that landed on the side of her cheek sent Samara Tabor crashing to the floor. “And where the fuck did this food come from? I didn’t give you any money for it.”

She tasted blood inside her mouth, and tears formed behind

her eyes, but she didn't make a sound. Casting a quick glance towards the bedroom, she saw Makayla watching, crying softly.

"Get up, you worthless bitch!" Ryland Tabor grabbed Samara by the hair, jerking her back to her feet. With his free hand, he took hold of her jaw roughly, turning her face. "You better not bruise. He doesn't want to see marks anywhere on your sorry, ass!" With a shove, she went stumbling backwards. "Where are the pictures?"

Samara rubbed the side of her face with the back of her hand. "I didn't take them."

The rage she saw in her father's eyes had her taking another step back. "What?!" he yelled.

"I'm not going to take those pictures. You can beat me all you want, but I'm not going to do those. It's disgusting!"

"You'll do as you're told." He stormed up to her, grabbing hold of her throat, cutting off some of her air supply, "Or so help me God..." He didn't finish his statement, only dragged her to the closet.

He tossed her inside violently, and then he slammed the door and locked it. Samara got up on her knees, peeked through the keyhole, and tried to listen to see what her father was going to do next.

The crying that came from Makayla had her screaming and banging on the door to be set free. She could hear the strap landing on her sister, all because she refused to take more of those damn photos, now she was locked in the fucking closet powerless to stop any of it. It was the first time he ever beat Makayla and he did it because *she'd* refused to take nude photos of herself, touching her body for him to sell.

It was bad enough that she had dressed up as a whore for someone who came once a month to see her. He kept himself in the shadows of the room, the only light shined on her in the skimpy, see-through outfits that her father made her wear for the perverted silhouette that paid only to watch. The whole incident had her cringing, just thinking about it.

At first, it all started out somewhat simple. She was to dress and take pictures in different poses in the nighties and teddies that this unseen sick fuck had sent. After a couple months, it progressed to her dressing up and standing in the same room to be viewed, like a cow at auction, by the bastard. Last month, he

blindfolded her and touched her body. Now, he wanted nude shots of her playing with herself. Samara was sickened by the fact that her father felt this was a justifiable means of making money and paying debts. She also felt degraded and frustrated at the unknown shadow of a man that felt it necessary to view her and supposedly get off on it, knowing she was performing against her will.

The screaming stopped, footsteps passed the locked door, and the front door slammed shut. Samara couldn't breathe out a sigh of relief yet, because she didn't know what kind of condition her sister was in.

Time seemed to stop, at least for her in the closet. Maybe an hour or two went by before she heard him come back. Again, the front door slammed shut, and with it the lock on her door turned. Light came in, blinding her. Ryland once more grabbed her by her hair, pulling her out. He shoved her into the kitchen where she landed on the floor.

"I want supper. Get to cooking, you piece of shit," he ordered.

Samara only nodded, got to her feet, and began cooking the food she had picked up earlier. She made a beef stew, rich with vegetables, potatoes, and meat. She warmed up leftover bread and set it all out on the table for him. Whatever was left, she and her sister shared, which was usually not much unless she could make extra without him knowing about it.

He ate like a pig, slopping and eating just about everything he could stuff in his face. He made it very apparent he didn't want them to eat much.

The second he was finished, she went to work at clearing the table and cleaning up. Thankfully, this time, there was enough stew left for both of them to eat and go to bed with their hungers somewhat fulfilled.

Like always, after Ryland finished eating, he grabbed the whiskey bottle. He went back to his room, which he kept locked because that was where the television was kept, along with anything else he didn't want to share with his daughters. Only upon hearing that door close and the lock slipped, did she put the left-over stew in two bowls, grab the first aid kit, and rush to Makayla.

Her baby sister was face down on the bed, the back of her shirt ripped in strips from the beating. She didn't move or make a

sound. Samara put the bowls down on the floor and touched the back of Malaya's head.

"I'm sorry, I didn't think he would hurt you for this," she whispered.

Makayla turned her head to face Samara. "Don't be sorry. You shouldn't have to take pictures like that."

Samara smiled, leaned in, and kissed Makayla on the cheek. "Let me get you cleaned up, and then we both need to eat something."

Makayla didn't make a sound as Samara cleaned and put ointment on every open wound. Her body was covered in purple bruises, which she knew must hurt like hell. She wished she could take her pain away. They ate, and then Samara cleaned up, making extra sure there wasn't a mess anywhere in the house.

Sleep didn't happen for her that evening. This time, she was worried about what was going to happen to her and Makayla and what this mystery guy wanted from her. There were girls going missing and her father was pretty much keeping her under house arrest, not because he cared for her safety, but because she was his source of income. Her life was fucked! There was no way out; at least none that she could see now. If she left, then all that rage and anger would fall on Makayla, and she wasn't strong enough to handle the abuse.

Around five in the morning she went to work in the kitchen. She had three loafs of bread made and a large plate of food waiting for her father by the time he came out of the bedroom.

As always, he looked grumpy, like he would snap any second. Makayla also came out with her books for school. While Ryland ate, Samara slipped a thick sandwich to Makayla and some toast for breakfast, and then hurried her out the front door. She went back to their room, made up the bed they shared, and picked up all the clothes, taking them to the laundry. Ryland wanted his house immaculate at all times.

When she came back from starting the laundry, it was time to clean the kitchen back up. Not one word was said between them. And like always, she kept herself busy by doing the same thing over and over again. She dusted, vacuumed, cleaned windows, stopped to fix *him* lunch, and then started something for dinner. When Makayla came home, it was time to help with homework, serve dinner, and pray that he didn't start up again with the

pictures or the beatings.

After dinner, he left the house and Samara gave a big sigh of relief. By nine, everything was as clean as she could get it so she headed to bed with the hopes that tomorrow would be a better day.

* * * *

“You can’t expect her to pose like that, Ryland. I really didn’t.”

As usual, the man who paid Ryland Tabor a lot of money to see his oldest daughter, sat in a dark corner, drinking. And like usual, the man gave Ryland the creeps.

“But you said—”

“I know what I said,” he cut Ryland off. “And I had my reasons for it. A good girl doesn’t pose like that, and I really needed to know if she was a good girl or not.”

Relief flooded Ryland.

“I have very special plans for Samara. And as long as you keep her safe and well protected, then you’ll benefit from those plans and so will your other daughter. Do you understand?”

“I understand.”

“Good. Now go home and protect your daughter, Samara, real well. I would hate for her virginal status to be questioned or lost. It means a great deal to me to have it intact for our special meeting.”

Again, Ryland got the chills. This man scared the hell out of him, but he was also paying a lot of money to get whatever it was he wanted out of Samara. So as long as he was paying, Ryland would give him anything he wanted, even his own flesh and blood.

Chapter Three

“Samara Tabor, huh? I’m not familiar with that name.” Devon shook his head, slumping back in the chair at the table.

Kera cleaned off the table after dinner and was in the kitchen grabbing two beers and a soda from the fridge. She handed the beers off to Dane and Devon before sitting down to join them.

“I’ve heard of the name,” she said. When Dane looked at her, she only shrugged her shoulders. “I mean the name Tabor. My father used to drink with the guy all the time. Think he had a business or something. Lost a lot of money and never got over it. His wife left him for it.”

“Why you so interested?” Devon asked.

Dane bit the inside of his mouth, thinking hard about how much to tell. Hell, half of that answer he didn’t even know himself. Why was he so interested? Good question.

He shrugged his shoulders. “Don’t know, I just am.”

“Uh-huh,” Devon tipped his beer up to his lips, his eyes fixed on Dane. It made him very uncomfortable.

“You know, I didn’t know the man had two daughters,” Kera added. “Only knew of one. Makayla I think the name was.”

“Yeah, I heard he keeps Samara pretty much locked up,” Dane said.

“You want her.” It was a statement that Dane didn’t want Devon to make. “I can see it in those baby blues of yours.”

“What if I do?” Dane met him in the eye.

“Okay, please tell me you’re not going to have her dragged up to the damn Compound?” Kera said loathingly.

“Oh he is,” Devon answered. “It’s in those eyes of his.”

Kera leaned over the table and slapped Dane on the arm. “How could you even think about doing something so stupid?”

“I have to say, man, I never thought I’d see the day when you’d want to go up there for a woman.” Devon took a drink from

his beer, shaking his head. "You do know what happens, right? I mean the outcome of it all."

"Yes. I know what happens," Dane remarked through his teeth. "I've been thinking about it all day." Again, Kera slapped him, and this time Dane stood up, slamming his beer bottle on the table. "Look, I don't like the circumstance any more than you do, Kera, but it's the only way."

"Bullshit!" she snapped.

"Her father keeps her locked up. What else am I supposed to do?"

"He has a point, Kera," Devon added. "If the father is adamant about keeping her under his thumb, the only way Dane can get to her is by having the Compound apprehend her."

"That's a crock of shit and you both know it!" she yelled. "What the hell happens if the two of you don't match up? You two dipshits ever think of that?" They just looked at each other, which seemed to bring Kera's temper to a boil. "Thought so. Well, let me tell you. She'll stay in that hell-hole for good, either becoming a whore or a slave. So I guess you just fucked her life up either way."

"Kera," Devon groaned her name when she stormed out of the room.

"Didn't mean to get you into trouble," Dane said.

"Kera is very touchy when it comes to the Compound. Think she's still pissed over her father selling her to it."

"You can't blame her there."

"Nope," Devon shook his head. "So what's the big plan then?"

"Not sure," Dane sighed, sitting back down. "A fall celebration is coming up, and not too many attend that. I was thinking I could have her summoned for that."

"You really think she's the one?"

Dane thought hard about it. From the first moment he saw her, all he could think about was her. He wanted to touch her, kiss her, feel her body wrapped around his own. It was strange in a way, but he was quickly starting to understand how Devon felt the first time he saw Kera.

"Yeah, she's the one."

"Then you better move fast," Devon groaned, standing up. "Fall party is going on right now."

* * * *

“Please don’t send me away!” Makayla cried and pleaded with Ryland as her things were being packed up.

Samara stood off to the side, watching. There wasn’t a damn thing she could say or do and it was killing her. Ryland shipping Makayla off to a boarding school was mind blowing. First off, she didn’t know where the hell he got the money for it, since they seemed to struggle each night for food. And second, there was always a reason for his every action. Right now, she didn’t understand either of them.

The people from the boarding school came and began packing her up. Not a word was said, except for the school affiliates introducing themselves and revealing their reason for being there. It shocked both Samara and Makayla.

Samara knew better than to question her father. If she did, it would be another slap, or lock up in the closet, and she wanted to stay on his “good” side. She didn’t need him to suspect a thing, or the cage he had her in now would only get smaller.

Makayla ran over to Samara, hugging her tightly. “Please don’t let him send me away. I’ll never get to see you again.”

Samara closed her eyes, hugging her sister back, “Yes, you will. I’ll write to you as soon as you’re settled.” She got close to her ear, whispering low enough for only Makayla to hear, “This is the best thing that could happen. Now, he can’t hurt or touch you.”

“But I don’t want to leave you.”

Samara took hold of her face, moving her head to look up at her. “You’ll never lose me. I’ll always be there for you.”

“It’s time to go,” one of the women from the school said.

Samara hugged Makayla once more, tightly, kissed the top of her head, and let her go. She held back the tears while watching her sister leave with the women. She hated to see her go, but knew deep down it was best. Whatever plans Ryland had for her, Makayla didn’t need to be here to see it.

“Fix my dinner,” Ryland demanded the second the door closed.

Hanging her head, Samara turned and went to the kitchen. There wasn’t much left and she was going to have to let him know, which meant, another fight was about to happen. For some unknown reason, Ryland Tabor thought the little food he brought home should be enough to feed the three of them without any problems.

She served the food, and waited for the right time to let him know that they were once more out of groceries. Her heart was still broken over Makayla being shipped out and tonight, she didn't give a damn if she ate or not. She also didn't care if he beat and locked her up. The only thing she did know was that now that her sister was gone she was definitely going to put a stop to the mystery dates. That shit was over.

She was cleaning up when someone knocked on the door. Being so late, her gut dropped with the thought that she was being summoned for another showing. Samara stopped what she was doing to watch her father walk to the front door. He jerked it open, apparently not expecting anyone after all.

Two large men in black suits stood together at the door. They were large enough to take up the whole frame and the sight of them made Samara's heart once more drop. She knew who these men were, without a doubt.

"What the hell do you want?" Ryland demanded.

"Ryland Tabor?" one asked.

"Yeah?"

"Father of Samara and Makayla Tabor?"

"That's right," Ryland snarled. "What the hell you want?"

"We are here to escort Samara Tabor to the Compound."

They both walked into the house, or more like pushed their way in. The one that spoke to her father handed him a paper, while the other one came up to her, taking hold of her arm.

"Now wait just one fucking minute!" Ryland huffed, opening the paper and reading it quickly. "You can't come into my home and take my daughter."

"Under section forty-five, with the accordance of the laws of Treece, a request for your daughter has been made. If you refuse to comply, then you will be fined and other punishments may be inflicted."

He stood there, open mouthed, as Samara was taken from the house. She couldn't believe what she was seeing. Someone made a request for her at the Compound. That someone had to have money and power. That was the only way something like this could happen. But one question hung in the air, as she walked to the car parked on the side of the road. Who?

A driver waited for them in the black car. He got out, opened the back door and Samara got in with one of the men on either

side of her. She was speechless. Not a word or question came to mind as they took off, heading for the heart of town.

The four story building came into view. It was breathtaking, and for her, held a small amount of hope. The only reason she felt that way was because anything would be better than the life she was living right now. But still, the thought of what might happen once she entered the iron gates scared the hell out of her. She knew, without a doubt, that all girls who were sent here either left as wives or stayed as whores.

The car turned and headed for the back of the house. It being nighttime, Samara didn't get to see much of the grounds or the house itself, for that matter.

A woman met them at a back door. She had salt and pepper hair pulled back in a tight bun and wore a black skirt and white blouse. Her eyes were cold and her body stiff. "I'm the mistress of the Compound. Please follow me."

Samara was led inside, down a hallway, into a room where many different dresses were hanging. She stopped to stare at the gowns, mostly because she had never seen so many, so close she could actually touch the fabric.

"This way," the mistress said.

Samara tore her eyes from the dresses and followed the woman into another room. This room appeared to be a shower accompanied by one huge-ass bathroom.

"Can you tell me what's going on?" Samara asked.

"I figured that was obvious. Please strip and take a shower. Someone will be in to shave you and prepare your hair."

"Whoa! Shave me? What the hell for?"

She turned, taking a deep breath. "Time is not on your side at the moment. You're a request. You have only five minutes to shower, so I advise you to take it before the servants come in to dress you."

"What the hell is going on here?"

The mistress didn't answer, she just walked out. Samara had a very funny feeling that she better at least take a hot shower while she had the chance, because she had no fucking idea what the hell was going on.

Five minutes exactly, and servants were coming into the shower room. Samara barely had the towel wrapped around her body and they were taking her over to a massage table. Her towel

was taken, and they began shaving her all over her body. It was strange and very hard to stay still as they worked between her legs. Once finished, the towel was again wrapped around her and she was taken back into the room with all the dresses.

The mistress was standing there with a short dress in one hand, and a shot glass in the other. She handed the glass to Samara with the simple order to drink it. She did.

“Please remove the towel and slip these on.” She handed her a lace thong.

The thong made her blood start to boil, mostly because it was the kind of shit that freak had her wearing when she went for the “viewings”.

Turning her back on the mistress, Samara slipped the thong up her legs and in place. Crossing her arms over her bare breasts, she turned back around as the white gown was slid over her head. It was short and flowing, reaching her knees. The back was open all the way down to the small of her back, mere inches from showing off the thong. The top was also open and free. The style made it easy for anyone to take it off. All that would be needed to remove the gown would be to slip the folded shoulder straps off her shoulders, and then the damn thing would crumple to the floor.

Her hair was brushed back and left loose; light eye makeup was applied, and a gloss put on her lips. She was told she wouldn’t need shoes.

Two different guards waited for them outside the room. The mistress led the way out, down the hall and set of stairs.

A small party was going on with more men than there seemed to be girls for. Talk somewhat stopped when she walked in, but the quiet didn’t last.

Waiters walked around with trays of snacks and glasses of wine. Samara was hungry, but she was more worried about what was going to happen. She moved around, between people and dodged a few guys who, for some strange reason, tried to kiss her.

“It’s part of the game.” Samara jumped and turned around when someone spoke close to her ear.

“What?”

“The kiss.” He took a drink from the glass he was holding, grabbed another from a waiter who walked by, and handed it to

her. "It's part of the game here."

Samara took the glass, frowned, and stared at the man before her. He was tall, large build, standing at least six foot, if not more. His baby blue eyes, she noticed, held a combination of humor and sex appeal. The dark silk shirt that covered his chest was tight enough to show off wash-board abs, but opened giving her the whole view of his chest.

His legs filled out each inch of his matching black pants, making them look like they were a second skin. His bare feet even looked strong. But what had Samara's mind going black was the thick outline of his cock. It was slightly hard, showing her a glimpse of what he was hiding.

Tearing her eyes away from his crotch and back up to his face, she frowned. There was something about him that she knew she had seen before. It was like they had met before, but she couldn't place him.

"Don't I know you?" she asked.

He finished off his drink, placing the empty glass on another tray held by a waiter as he sailed on by. "We've sort of met once." Samara crossed her arms over her chest, leaning to one side, waiting. "But I didn't get your name." She kept her mouth shut, waiting. He smiled, "I saw you at the store yesterday."

Slowly it all came back. He was the one that paid for the food. Her mouth opened and she pointed a finger at him. "You!"

"Dane Knight. And you're Samara Tabor."

He took a step forward and she took one back. "Did you set this up?"

One eyebrow went up on his perfect face. And yes, perfect came to mind when she looked at him. "Set what up?"

"This!" She made a sweep of her hand around the room.

"The Compound has many different parties and celebrations." He kept coming, walking her out to a balcony that was maybe a bit too private for her taste and comfort. "How could I possibly be responsible for this?"

Okay, that smile was all too sexy and playful. "I don't like being played with." *Shit! He has me alone.*

"I was thinking more like a mouse trapped by a cat." His damn voice lowered, as did his face.

"Whoa!" She ducked under his arm, only to be stopped by him taking hold of her wrist. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

A sharp jerk and she went flying into his arms. Man, he was strong. His arms went around her tight, but not harshly or brutally so. In fact, the way he was holding her had her feeling safe, and Samara never felt safe.

"You afraid of a kiss?" he asked his voice low again, sending chills down her spine.

Again he lowered down, and this time, Samara was able to fend him off by pressing her hands on his chest, pushing him back. "Slow down there, pretty boy. I don't kiss on first meetings or second."

He smiled, and his brows came together, "Pretty boy?"

"I really think you're moving a bit too—" He cut her off. One kiss and she was spinning out of control, or falling. Samara didn't know which.

His head slanted, as did hers, and she was powerless to hold back. She opened to him and he went in for the taking. The kiss deepened, her hands fisted at his chest into his open shirt.

Samara's breath left in a rush and she rose up on her toes. All senses were hit with a sweet taste as his tongue slipped deep inside her mouth, filling her senses with more of that tantalizing taste.

The sweetness was mind-boggling. Her legs felt like they were going to suddenly give, and if it weren't for the strong arms wrapped tightly around her, then she would have surely fallen to the floor.

It was her first *real* kiss and it was very pleasurable and toxic. Slowly, she un-fisted her hands to graze her palms up the ripples in his chest. Her nails dug in slightly on his shoulders as, what she thought was raw desire hitting her. Dampness formed between her legs and the need to press her body even closer to him hit.

When it ended, Samara had to suppress a moan of regret. She couldn't stop herself from stumbling closer to the lips that were leaving her own. Opening her eyes, she looked up to see him licking his lips, which had the effect of making her do the same.

"What was that?" she breathed out.

"Our test," he answered.

"Test for what?"

He held her close with one arm and, with a free hand, brushed her cheek with the back of it. The touch gave her the chills again.

“To see if we’re a match, and we are.” He kissed her again, stealing her breath once more.

It took a lot of willpower to be able to pull back and away from him, but she did. “Wait a minute. What?”

Dane took hold of her hand, turned and walked back into the room, dragging her with him. He went over to the door where guards waited. “Please escort her to the room.”

“What? Wait a minute!” she raised her voice at him. “What’s going on here?”

Dane looked her right in the eye. “We’re a match, Samara Tabor. That means you’re now going to become my wife.”

Chapter Four

Samara was pissed and confused. She thought she felt more confusion than anger, but soon came to the realization that it was equal. She was both!

She paced back and forth in the unlocked room, hugging herself and glancing at the door, waiting for it to open. She thought about what she knew about the Compound, and so far, that was not much. Since she was of the lower class, the Compound didn't concern her. Only the rich girls went up there, with hopes of attaining a husband. Sure, once in a while, a father might sign over his guardianship to the Compound, but that was something she didn't think happened anymore. Or did it?

The bedroom was very nice. It was one of the nicest rooms she had ever seen. The bed was king size, low to the ground with plush pillows and cream silk sheets, and arranged with a comforter folded to the middle of the bed. Two white robes draped at the end of the bed, and two natural stained oak end-tables were positioned on either side.

There was also a low table in the middle of the room with over-stuffed pillows placed around for seating. Arranged next to the table, a smaller table was adorned with strawberries and wine chilling in a bucket of ice.

The bathroom was just as impressive as the bedroom. A large shower with at least six heads built into the wall was immediately located on her right. It had no walls or shower curtain of any kind. Off to the left, was a large whirlpool bath tub for two. Double sinks stood in the middle and in the back corner, the toilet with a private door to close.

A click and Samara was back out in the bedroom, facing the door that was opening. Dane walked in, glancing around the room with an approving expression on his face.

"Very nice," he stated.

“What’s going on here?” she asked, crossing her arms over her chest. It was an action initiated mostly to help give her a bit of protection. The damn dress she was in showed off way too much of her body.

“Didn’t I already answer that?” He closed the door behind him and turned a dial, producing a clicking sound, which indicated they were locked in.

But she had to test it. Samara rushed past him to the door, trying the knob. “Why are we locked in here?”

“You don’t know?” He frowned at her for a second before going over to the bucket where the wine was chilling. “Ah, I heard about this.” he picked up one of the strawberries that had a glaze of chocolate on it. “Now this, I can’t wait to try.”

“Hello!” She waved her arms up in the air to get his attention. “Is there something wrong with you? What the hell is going on here?”

He put the strawberry down, picked up the bottle from the ice bucket, popped the cork and poured two glasses. Once filled, he placed the bottle back in the ice, picked up the glasses and walked over to her, handing her one. Samara took it.

“Okay, what do you know about the Compound?” he asked, taking a drink.

Samara took a deep breath and raised her head. “I know that it’s a playground for you rich people. Guys, like you, come in for your pleasure and leave.”

Dane licked his lips and frowned at her for a second. “Well that’s part of it, I guess, but not everything.” He turned and walked over to the low table, sitting down and lounging back on the pillows. “Come sit down.” She didn’t move. “Please?”

With great reluctance, and her gut screaming not to get too close to him, Samara went over to the table, but sat down across from him.

“It’s true that the upper class comes to the Compound for their pleasures, but the ladies also come with the hope of finding their perfect match.”

“And is it true that fathers sell their daughters also?”

“Yes.”

Samara rolled her eyes and looked away.

“One of my best friends was matched up here with his wife, who was heartlessly sold to the Compound by her father. It was

also by chance that he saw her when she was trying to run away. He knew, at that moment, she was the one for him.” That statement had her looking back at him. “Just like I knew, the second I saw you walking across the street, that you were the one for me.”

Samara shook her head. “No.” She stood up quickly, went back to the door and banged on it. “Let me out of here!” she yelled. “There’s been a mistake!”

“There’s no mistake.” She stiffened when she felt his breath on her shoulder, his body heat next to her. “The kiss proved that.” He turned her around, boxing her up against the door. The way his blue eyes roamed up and down her body sent chills down her spine. “That sweetness only happens once, and that is when the two that drink their special mixture are a match.” He touched her left arm with the back of his hand and Samara cringed away from him slightly. One eyebrow shot up. “Don’t like to be touched?”

“I don’t like to be put on display.” She ducked under his arm and moved away. Samara sort of figured that he’d let her go. She rubbed her arms, putting as much distance as she could between them.

But it seemed that distance wasn’t something he wanted because he followed her. Feeling like prey to the hunter, Samara kept backing up until the back of her knees touched the foot of the bed. She stopped and looked behind her. Now, she was definitely feeling trapped.

“I like this dress.” His voice lowered, his hand reached out, trailing up and down over one of the folds at her breasts.

“Please don’t.” She could barely speak or breathe. He was too close, invading her senses with nothing but him.

Up to her shoulder his hand went, and ever so slowly he pulled one of those folded straps down. She instantly covered herself and tried to twist away again when he pushed the other strap down. The whole dress crumpled to the floor at her feet, and Samara stood in front of him in nothing more than a thin lace thong.

“You’re a very beautiful woman, Samara Tabor.” Dane’s head lowered, and before she could think of something to say or move, he kissed her again.

His arms went around her body and pulled her closer. Once more, she was hit with the sweetness of the kiss, but it quickly left

and her body came alive.

He moved his mouth with such skill that Samara's sole focus was strictly on the kiss and that was it. She didn't even notice him taking his shirt off until she felt the bare chest touch her arms that she still had crossed over her torso.

The kiss ended slightly, but his mouth continued to roam upon her body. Dane's lips traveled down to her left shoulder as his hands slid to her hips and behind her. He suckled on her skin, touched the bare roundness of her rear and squeezed. The action had Samara gasping and jumping up on her toes.

Up his hands went, one at the middle of her back, the other fisting into her hair. He pulled, forcing her head back. Hot lips kissed her throat, sending chills down her spine.

It was the first time anyone had kissed her or touched her. Samara couldn't think. She could only feel what he was doing. And as much as she might hate to admit it, she enjoyed his touch immensely.

"You need to slow down," she finally managed to get out.

"I don't think so." He did stop and looked her in the eye. "I'm going plenty slow enough as is." His hands left her body and went to his waist.

Samara didn't even bother with hiding her shock. She looked wide-eyed at him. "What—what the hell are you doing?" she forced herself to ask.

"Getting more comfortable," he answered her.

She made to take another step back, but ended up falling down on the bed. She'd forgotten that she was standing right up against it.

"Are you insane!?" she squeaked out, backing herself up onto the bed with the hopes of being able to get back up on the other side. "You can't take your pants off."

"Why not?" he asked. They were already open and the zipper was down. Samara could see hair.

"Because—you—you..." She couldn't think up the right words to tell him why.

His pants fell to the floor, and Dane stood naked in front of her, his erection standing at attention and proud. Her mouth dropped. Not once in her life did she see a man naked before, and here one stood.

"Oh, my God!" Samara turned over with the intent of crawling

away from him, but realized with embarrassment, that she was showing him her naked ass. “Shit!” she said under her breath, flipping back over, and this time, taking the sheet with her to cover her breasts.

Dane began to crawl onto the bed. He hovered right over her, and started to lower himself on top of her, but Samara held her hands up to stop him.

“You can’t...we can’t do...” she stuttered, feeling her face heat up.

“Can’t what?” Dane charmed. He braced both hands on the sides of her shoulders then lowered his body down on top of hers, pinning her hands between them. “Touch, kiss?” He lowered his voice. “Taste?”

Okay, he felt too right on top of her, positioned between her legs. So much so, that Samara almost forgot why she protested. “I don’t know you.”

“This is the perfect way to get to know each other.” He kissed her nose and leaned on his elbows looking down at her.

“I can’t do this,” she whispered.

“You know, I’ve got an idea.” He pushed himself off of her, and Samara breathed out a sigh of relief.

She watched him walk, completely naked, over to the small table with the strawberries. He picked one up, took two large bites, then put the small stem down and picked up the remaining one. When he started back, Samara quickly sat up and pulled the sheet over her chest.

“Eat this,” he said and handed her the fruit.

She looked down at it, frowning. “Why?”

“It’ll make us both feel real good. I promise,” Dane moved up to the bed, sitting down next to her. He kissed her shoulder, moving up to her neck, towards her ear. “Go on. Take a bite.”

Samara took the bite. Sweet juices filled her mouth, running down her throat. Another bite and Dane moved behind her, lounging across her back. He slid her hair over her shoulder, kissing her neck on the exposed side. When she finished the strawberry, he took the stem from her hand and pulled her back to lie against him.

“Now relax, and let it do its thing,” he whispered in her ear.

“What do you mean?”

“You’ll see.”

Samara didn't understand what he was talking about until it hit her.

Warm, tingling sensations hit. It started out feeling like fingers grazing over her body. She felt chills, heat, and this warming awareness between her legs. Her clit woke up and began throbbing, causing Samara to feel very uneasy and anxious.

She sat straight up, letting the sheet slide down to her lap. Samara pressed a hand to her forehead and began to breathe faster. "What's happening?"

"Aphrodisiac strawberries," Dane answered, moving behind her. She could feel his body heat and had to close her eyes to take several deep breaths. "I'm told they heighten the sexual experience."

"What?" she squeaked out.

Okay, she couldn't handle this. The sheet felt too raw against her skin, so she flung it from her lap. For the first time in her life, Samara didn't give a damn that she was half naked in front of someone else.

"Your skin becomes sensitive," One finger went down the middle of her back, sending shards of pleasure to pool right between her legs. "The pleasure heightens." His hand touched her belly, and she could actually feel her womb contract. "And the need for me to be inside you becomes too much to fight."

A whimper left her lips before she was able to suppress it. Samara opened her eyes as the first wave of raw need washed over her. She gasped, holding her breath as it seemed to land right between her legs, causing her clit to throb almost painfully. She tried to scoot from the bed, but Dane held her close. He rubbed her belly, and then re-positioned himself again on the bed. He sat right behind her, placing her between his legs.

She could feel his erection pressing against her back. Hard, silky, and scorching hot, just like the rest of his body, it seemed. Both of his arms went around her and moved her arms back so they hung over his legs. His mouth on her shoulder, nibbling, caused her back to arch and her breasts to be pushed upward, as if begging to be fondled.

Samara panted to breathe. Perspiration covered her forehead, and the need to move her hips was powerful.

"Your pussy is on fire," he said in her ear. "The clit throbbing for one touch, and when that touch comes you'll explode into

pieces, but only for a few seconds. Then the buildup starts all over again.” Both hands closed over her breasts, nipples slipping between his fingers for a pinch. She moaned at the touch, pressing her breasts firmer into his hands. He kneaded them and the throbbing in her clit seemed to get stronger. “And by that third orgasm, I bet you’ll be more than ready for me to come inside you.” One hand left her breast to slide down between her legs. He moaned as he slid his hand right into the thong, touching her pussy for the first time.

“Oh shit!” Samara gasped, jumping from the touch.

“Fuck, I throb just to be inside you,” he moaned in her ear, giving it a lick before a quick suck. “I can’t wait to feel how tight you are wrapped around my cock.”

She could feel her wetness on his fingers as he touched her. Dane teased her clit, barely touching it. Mostly, he grazed around it, teasing her until Samara was helpless to stop her legs from opening up for him.

Two fingers slid into her and she lost it. The pleasure that greeted her was unlike anything she could’ve imagined possible. She arched against him and came apart at the same time. Her first orgasm was like nothing she could’ve expected. It was pleasure, it was pain, it was desperation, all mixed up in one tiny, tight, never-ending package.

He moved his fingers in and out of her, touching her clit every so often. He kept her wound up so tight that Samara couldn’t even tell when the first orgasm stopped and another hit. Hell, Samara, I have to taste you.” Dane’s voice sounded ravenous.

She couldn’t protest or ask any more questions. She felt weak, and when his fingers left her body she also felt lost.

Dane stood up on the bed, walked over her, and jumped off. Samara just flopped back down, gasping to get air into her lungs. She didn’t even pay attention to what he was doing. But she did feel what he was up to.

He picked her up, placing her in the center of the bed. Samara was so limp from the many orgasms she’d had, she didn’t give a damn what he did right now. She didn’t even ask why, or beg him not to when he took hold of the thong and slid it down her legs.

Naked before his eyes, she didn’t give a shit. The next wave of need that he told her about was starting to build, and she didn’t have a clue as to what to do about it.

She felt the bed shift, her legs were parted, and her knees pushed up. She was having such a hard time breathing that she closed her eyes to work on relaxing. The relaxation was gone as soon as she felt his hot breath touch the bare mound of her pussy. Somehow, Samara got the energy to rise up on her arms and look down between her legs.

“What the hell are you doing?” she demanded.

“I’m having an appetizer before my meal,” he answered with a smile.

One kiss to her pussy, and she was seeing stars behind her eyes. One lick and Samara lost all strength in her arms to hold herself up and watch.

The folds of her pussy were spread open and his tongue licked her from the back ring of her ass to her swollen clit. He flicked his tongue over her clit and Samara could only gasp for precious air. When he sucked the nub into his mouth, she screamed at the top of her lungs, shattering once more.

He licked, he sucked, and he drove her mad with this need for much, much more. Both of her hands fisted into the cool silk sheets, and both of her legs wrapped around his head. She tried to press him closer, hungry for more depth. But for whatever reason, he held back. In fact, Samara was sure that he was teasing her, keeping her on edge deliberately, and that pissed her off. So much so, that she let go of the sheet and fisted her hands into his hair, pulling hard.

He sucked hard one more time on her before releasing her and backing away. She met him in the eye, watched as he licked his lips and took hold of his cock. He moved his hand up and down the length a few times before crawling back up on the bed between her legs.

The fire between her thighs began again, and this time she was free to squirm on the bed. He took hold of her legs, spread them wider, and looked down.

“Watch me enter you, Samara,” he breathed out. “Watch and feel me.”

She did look down and gasped loudly. The head of his cock pressed against the entrance of her pussy. He took hold of it, rubbed it between the slit, and pressed it against her throbbing clit. That touch had her shaking in both need and pleasure.

“Fuck, if you’re not hot as sin itself,” he moaned, stopping

once more at her entrance.

He pushed, she parted. Dropping back down on the bed, Samara fisted her hands and pressed them over her eyes. It was difficult to breath, difficult to stay still. He entered her body and she stretched to accommodate him. And boy, did she feel each and every thick, hot inch of his cock. It stole her breath and had her yearning for more.

"This isn't right," she gulped.

"The hell it isn't," he groaned back. "Fuck, I can't control it."

He surged into her, making Samara think and feel like he just ripped her in two. She cried out, immediately pushing against his chest, digging her nails into his skin. Dane moaned loudly arched his back and seemed to enter even deeper into her.

She only got a moment to catch her breath before he was moving inside her.

Pulling out slowly, thrusting quickly, and with such power that once more, he left her speechless. He held himself up slightly by his elbows, his cock surged in and out of her, and all Samara did was hang on for dear life. His chest rubbed against her, teasing and tormenting her achy nipples. With each inward thrust, she got an extra surge of pleasure shooting up from her clit.

He kissed her as he picked up speed. Closer and closer, the pleasure which was building inside her was beginning to force a release. His tongue matched the trusts of his cock, and soon she was whimpering with the need for relief.

And then it all came crashing down.

Samara broke the kiss to scream at the top of her lungs. Her pleasure erupted so violently that, even her toes felt like they were convulsing with her climax, and still Dane continued. He kept surging, thrusting, and fucking her with powerful, fast strokes that only triggered the whole build up again.

She dug her nails in harder, which had him prying her hands away from his chest to pin them up over her head. She felt him swell up inside her, heard the moans come from his lips, but she couldn't process any of it. All she could do was try to keep what little bit of sanity she had left intact.

But she couldn't.

On her third, or was it the fourth orgasm, Samara really lost it. She broke down crying with such a release that she was unable to stop.

“Oh, fuck me!” Dane rose up again on his hands and arched back as much as he could.

She felt him swell, felt the jerks of his body, and knew that he was experiencing his release. Covering her face with her hands, Samara kept on crying. She didn’t understand why she was crying, only that she was feeling so much pleasure she couldn’t stop.

“Shhhh,” Dane lowered back down on top of her. He wrapped his arms under her, hugging her close. “It’s okay.”

“Why am I crying?” she sniffed.

“Because you just went through one hell of a series of orgasms.” He pulled out from her body and she groaned loudly at the tenderness and sensitivity. He rolled over to his back, taking her with him. “Just relax. Everything is going to be alright.”

It was soothing having him hold her and rub her back. She still felt hot, in need, but her exhausted body was dragging her into a deep sleep, which she needed and hadn’t had in a very long time. In fact, she couldn’t think of the last time she felt safe enough to sleep, but she sure as hell did now. And this time, Samara was going to take full advantage of it and sleep until she couldn’t sleep any longer.

Chapter Five

Dane sat on the side of the bed with his robe on, watching Samara sleep deeply on her belly. He sort of expected that she hadn't had a good night sleep in a while and the faint bruise he was now looking at told him of a rough home life. How rough, he had no clue, but would soon find out.

A faint knock on the door and he was up, heading for it. It opened and servants brought in food that he ordered and a special present that just wasn't going to wait until morning. Everything was set up on the low table. All that was needed was his new bride.

Waiting until the door was once more locked, Dane went back to the bed. He pulled the sheet down to her feet. His mouth instantly watered at her flesh and he couldn't help himself from bending over and kissing her ass.

She stirred some, but not enough. So he kept kissing her, up her back, until she slowly started to wake up.

And like cold water to a face, she went flying out of the bed. "God I'm sorry. I'll start cooking right now."

"Samara."

"What?" She stood away from the bed, naked.

Dane turned, picked up the robe and stood up. He extended his hand out to her, with the robe hanging from a few fingers. "Want this?"

Her face turned red. She snatched it from him, turned her back, and slipped it on. "What time is it?"

"Not even morning. Hungry?" He turned from her and went over to the table. With a sigh, he sat down and began to pick up lids. "Ah, roasted chicken. Very nice." He started to fill up the plates, but stopped to look over his shoulder at her. "Are you going to join me?"

He went back to the food and she sat down across from him.

Dane handed her a plate, took his own, and lounged back against the pillows, eating.

“So you thought you needed to get up and start cooking.” He took a bite of the meat, chewing it quickly. “Is that something you do often?”

Samara looked down at the food, not touching it. “It’s my job to cook and clean and take care of my sister.” She took a deep breath before looking up at him. “My father expected everything to be spotless, his meal hot and on time, and Makayla out of his way. As long as I completed my jobs Makayla was safe.”

“Makayla is your sister?”

She nodded.

“How old?”

“Seventeen. My father sent her away to a boarding school, but I don’t know where.” She hugged herself and he could see tears forming in her eyes. “I really don’t know why. It cost money and that’s something we don’t seem to have a lot of.”

“Well, I don’t know much about the boarding schools around here,” he sighed. “Two of my best friends were shipped off. So far, Darius is the only one that hasn’t come home yet. Personally, I think he’s a bit afraid.”

“Why would he be afraid to come home?” She frowned.

“The town sort of turned its back on the four of us.” He put the plate back on the table, reached for the pitcher, and poured them both a glass of tea. He took a big drink, sighing as it went down. “Damn, that’s good. Maybe I should see if I can steal one of the cooks here.”

Samara picked up her glass and took a drink. “I can fix that.”

“What else can you fix?”

She started to smile, but it never really formed. “Enough about me, what do you do?”

“I play in the stock market and I love talking about you.” He gave her a big smile. “In fact, I don’t think too many around here know that much about you. Why is that?” She shrugged her shoulders, looking back down at the food. “If you’re hungry, eat. We have a long night ahead of us.”

“It’s strange,” she mumbled.

“Excuse me?”

“It’s all so strange.” She looked up again.

“What is?”

"All of this." She glanced at the food quickly. "I mean, first off, I've never got to eat before him, and second, never so much." That had her chuckling and rubbing her face. "God, this has to be some kind of dream."

"Then let's add more to the dream." He crawled over to her on his hands and knees. Samara watched him the whole time, looking a bit scared of what he was going to do next. Dane brought out a small box he had in the robe pocket. He handed it to her. "Open it."

"What's this?"

"It's a tradition for the grooms here to gift the new brides with something special. I got here early and put claim to this for you."

She frowned at him, "But how did you know that we would be any kind of match?"

"I had high hopes. Open it."

He saw her hands shake as she took the lid off of the box. Resting in black velvet, a ruby and diamond heart band. Dane brought it out, letting her get a good look at it. The setting was solid gold with rubies in the shape of hearts going all the way around. Small tear drop diamonds were placed intricately between each ruby.

He took hold of her left hand and slipped the band on her ring finger, finishing it off with a kiss, first on her ring finger and then on her lips.

"Dane, I can't take this," she breathed out. "It's too much."

"No it's not. It's perfect for you. Now eat. My hunger for you is growing again." He winked at her before moving back over to his seat.

He watched her from the corner of his eye. Samara was very hesitant about eating anything. That had him wondering even more what life with her father was like.

He ate slowly, mostly so she would eat. Every few bites, she stopped and looked down at the ring on her finger. The silence was beginning to bother him though. Dane wanted to know all there was about her and Samara seemed very reluctant to tell him a thing.

"You're worried about something." It was a statement, not a question. Dane watched her closely now. He saw the worry on her face, in her eyes. "What is it?"

"My father." She reached for her glass of tea. "I'm sure he's

beyond pissed by now. I would bet he's ready to kill something or someone." She took a drink and held the cup up next to her face. "He was very pissed when you paid for that food."

"What did he do?" Dane somewhat had an idea of what her father did. He didn't know the man, but he had no doubt that her father was the kind to beat out whatever it was he wanted. "Did he beat you?"

Her eyes lowered, his anger rose. "Not me. Makayla." Her voice shook when she spoke. "I really don't want to talk about this."

"He can't hurt you anymore."

Her eyes went up quickly. "It's not me I'm worried about." She put her glass down rather hard. Some tea splashed onto the table and she stood up. "My God, do you have any idea what you've done here? What we've done?"

Oh, this anger is unexpected. "Samara, we didn't do anything wrong," Dane frowned. "We're married. You're my wife."

"I can't be your wife, Dane. My father has something planned, something that is endangering Makayla's safety." She ran both hands through her hair in frustration. "I need to go take a shower. I need to think!"

He watched her go, and then looked back at the table. The food he put on her plate, she barely touched. Instead, he saw that she was putting some of it in the napkin to her side, almost as if she was storing it for later or to take with her.

He stood up, pulled the knot from his robe, and let the thing fall to the floor. Naked, he walked to the bathroom. Once at the door, he heard the shower start. Counting to ten, he waited before opening the door and going inside.

She had her back to him, which was just what he wanted. Dane slowly walked towards her. With each step, his cock became harder and harder. When she spotted him, he pounced upon her.

Dane rushed her, pressed her up against the wet tile, face first. He picked up her left leg and in one fluid motion entered her hot pussy from behind.

Samara gasped loudly as Dane thrust repeatedly into her. He fucked her hard and moved his other hand around to her clit. Keeping the motion going, he opened her up, and flicked her hard clit with his finger. She moaned and pressed back against him.

"You're my wife, Samara," Dane huffed in her ear, slamming into her as hard as he could. "Say it." She shook her head no. "Say it, or I'm going to spank your clit."

"What?" she squeaked.

Dane jerked her from the wall and forced her down to her hands and knees and stopped moving within her. Now, with two free hands, he held her sweet pussy lips open with one hand and with the other he gave her hard clit a tap.

"Dane!" she yelled.

He gave her another tap, "Say it or the tapping only gets harder."

"Are you out of your mind?"

A harder tap and her head went down and her pussy tightened around his cock. "Don't come yet, baby. I'm not done with you."

One more slap and Dane was once more thrusting hard into her. Every few seconds, he would slap her clit and follow it up with a slight pinch. Each time he did so, she would tighten up around him, almost squeezing his climax from his damn dick!

"Tell me you're mine," he moaned, closing his eyes tight, trying to push the orgasm back. "Say it, or I'll make sure neither one of us comes."

"Come on!"

He slapped her clit five fast times and rotated his hips, grinding his rock-hard cock into her. Samara cried out and pushed back against him, but he held her still with ease.

"It's just three simple words," he huffed in her ear. "You can do it."

"I hate you!" she screamed.

Dane laughed low in her ear, "That's not it."

He moved again, kept one hand on her clit, and moved the other between the folds of her rear. He found the tiny ring to her ass and teased it. Anal sex was one of his favorites, but not many of his past lovers wanted to play like that.

Dane fucked her slow, moved her own juices back and rolled her clit between two fingers at the same time. It was tortuous for him as well, but he knew the wait was going to be worth it in the end.

He kept teasing her ass with one finger and kept moving very slowly into her. She would push back, and squeeze down on him,

which tested his control immensely. But Dane held his climax at bay. He wasn't going to give in too easy at least he was going to try like hell not to.

Oh, I'm going to come soon! Dane bit his lower lip. A chill raced down his spine and pooled between his legs. He could feel the swelling starting, the beginning of his climax, and he couldn't seem to control it.

So instead of fighting it, he went with the flow. He slipped one finger as far into her ass as he could, pinched her clit, and pumped hard and fast. Samara screamed. Her pussy tightened over his cock and she pushed back against him. He swelled inside her, yelling his own release. Pulse after pulse of his seed shot out of him, deep into her. He couldn't get a grip on the sensations that hit. He couldn't control a fucking thing. Hell, he couldn't even stop himself from climaxing.

They both fell to the wet floor, him on top of her. Dane couldn't seem to catch his breath or move. Every part of his body felt alive and tingled.

"You *will* admit it," he panted.

"We'll see," she breathed out. Her statement had Dane laughing and rolling off of her at the same time.

* * * *

Ryland lay face down on a cold floor. His face was pressed into the wood by a foot to the back of his head. He hurt everywhere, especially his ribs. He half-expected one of them to be broken, just like he was pretty damn sure his nose was.

He hated having to come here tonight to inform "the watcher" that Samara had been taken. It was the last thing he wanted to do, but he knew he had to. If he found out any other way, well Lord only knew what punishment Ryland would've suffered.

"You disappoint me, Ryland." The man in the shadow, which was what Ryland called him in his head, strolled in front of Ryland's face as another person held his head up by his hair. "I thought we had a deal and a very clear understanding."

"We do," Ryland muttered. Talking or answering any kind of questions was damn near impossible when you had your face shoved into the floor.

"Well, then I must be mistaken. Your daughter is not at home you said, but at the Compound becoming someone's whore?" The calm in his voice gave Ryland the damn chills. He was scared.

Real fucking scared. “Oh, and I discover by my other acquaintance, that your other daughter has been shipped off as well, making her untouchable also. He made a tsking sound. “Too bad for you, my friend.”

The foot at the back of his neck moved, but Ryland didn’t get up. “I only sent Makayla away so that she would be safe. I didn’t want anyone to come messing with her.”

“I’m sure.” The sound of his shoes moving away had Ryland glancing up. “But, unfortunately, I don’t believe you,” he sighed, and sat back down into the darkest part of the room. “So how are you going to convince me otherwise?”

A big hand grabbed the back of his neck, or more like the shirt at the back of the neck. Roughly, he was shoved over to a chair and forced to sit down, with the one who held and beat him standing right behind him.

“Makayla hasn’t been touched,” Ryland spoke fast. “That’s why I sent her away. I knew that you might be interested in her later on.”

“Really?” he sounded bored. “Funny, but I was interested in Samara. She was a special pick.” The way he said “special” had Ryland shivering. He just hoped like hell he didn’t piss his pants. “What do you know?”

“She was requested to the Compound, taken from the house, and presented at the fall party,” the one behind Ryland answered. “Dane Knight married her. They’ll be there until morning.”

“Now, we definitely have a problem, Ryland.” A snap of a finger and the one standing behind Ryland bent over, and hit his hand with a hammer. Ryland screamed out in pain as his hand was broken. “I paid you for a virgin.” Now he sounded dangerous. “Paid you a lot of money and expected you to keep my property safe and intact. Now, I’m out money and have no virgin. This disappoints me Ryland. It disappoints me greatly.”

Ryland held his broken hand, tears falling freely down his face. He bit his lower lip to suppress any sound. “I’ll—I’ll do whatever you want,” Ryland had a hell of a time speaking. The pain was unbearable.

“Oh, I have no doubt you will.” Once more he stood up, but it wasn’t Ryland his attention was fixed on. “You’ve had dealings with this Dane Knight, I take it.”

“I know him,” the one standing behind him answered. “He’s

associated with some powerful people in Treece. Two being Blaine Cedric and Darius Alistair.”

“Impressive. I want to know everything there is to know about Dane Knight. Samara is now worthless, but there might be some hope for her sister. Find out where the sister is. She may be of some use, but I’ll have to check.”

“What about him?”The man pointed at Ryland.

Ryland held his breath, fearing the worst. He didn’t want to die and he was now thinking that he made a deal with the devil; a deal that he couldn’t get out of. He had made a deal that just might bury him alive.

“Get his hand fixed. He might need to use it.” Once more, Ryland was jerked to his feet. He was pushed towards the door, only to stop. “Cameron. I’m depending on you. Don’t let me down.”

“No sir, you don’t have to worry about that. I’ll get you what you want and I’ll have tons of fun doing it.”

Chapter Six

Dane woke to the sun shining in his face, a warm body pressed up against him, and hot food that made his stomach growl. He opened his eyes and glanced down at the foot of the bed. On the table was breakfast.

He reached towards the night stand for his wristwatch that he left before the party, to see what time it was. It was already eight in the morning. He groaned, took a deep breath, and slipped from the bed without disturbing Samara. Dane went into the bathroom for a quick shower. Once finished, he dressed in a pair of jeans and one of his silk shirts before he went back to the bed to get her up.

"Samara." She rolled onto her stomach and Dane couldn't resist kissing her back and pulling the sheet away. He ran the back of his hands down her spine to the curve of her ass before raising his hand and swatting her.

"What the hell!" She rose up on one hand, hair in her face.

"Time to get up. Food is here and it's hot." He walked away, heading over to the table and sitting down with a sigh.

Samara swung her legs over the side of the bed, wrapped the sheet around her body, and brushed hair from her face. "What time is it?"

"It's a little after eight."

"God, I feel like I've got a hangover." She bent over and rubbed her forehead. "I've never slept this late before."

"This is late?" He frowned. "You've got to be kidding me. What time do you usually get up?"

Samara stood up and looked around the bed. She picked up the blanket, and tossed the pillows around. It appeared like she was looking for the robe or something. "I usually get up between four and five in the morning. Where's the robe?"

"No clue."

She shrugged, turned, and surprised him by heading over to him, holding the sheet close to her chest, but she didn't sit down next to him. She sat across from him, as usual.

"So you get up before the crack of dawn. Why?" Dane started picking up lids to the food spread out on the table.

Eggs, pancakes, sausage, toast, croissant rolls, orange juice, coffee, and fruit were spread out on the table. Dane half-figured it was more food than Samara usually got to eat. He watched her closely. Her eyes got bigger just by looking at the food, and saw her lick her lips several times.

"You can eat whatever you want," he told her. "I'm not going to take any of it away."

"Do I look that bad?"

"You look like a girl that hasn't eaten in a very long time."

She sighed, her shoulders slumping. "I told you last night. My father usually got to eat everything first. Makayla and I only got what was left, and most of the time it wasn't much. So I gave it to her."

"I'm sorry."

She shrugged. "Nothing for you to sorry about. My father is a bastard, plain and simple. I mean, he was always a dick, but when my mother left us, he really changed."

"Where'd your mother go?"

Samara picked up a grape and put it into her mouth. Dane picked up the pitcher of juice and poured her a large glass. "Don't know. I just woke up one day, and she was gone. Never could understand how she could just leave us with him."

"Well, maybe I can see if we can find her." He saw the hope in her eyes. "But first, I want you to eat and eat until you're full."

Dane saw a twitch of her lips, almost like she was going to smile but held it back.

She ate slowly and hesitantly at first. About an hour after the meal was delivered, the door unlocked and opened again. In came the servants with towels over their arms and one large box.

"Well it looks like that's my cue to take off," Dane stood up and stretched. "The final pampering of our time at the Compound begins." He took her hand, helped her up to her feet, and brought her knuckles up to his lips for a quick kiss. "It's time for your bath." He backed up, keeping a hold on her hand until the last second. "She's all yours. Take good care of her."

* * * *

Samara didn't move, only stared at Dane as he backed out of the room. Once the door closed, the young women came up to her, two taking hold of her arms and leading her into the bathroom.

A hot, scented bubble bath was drawn for her. The whole room filled with the scent of tropical flowers. She soaked for a bit, enjoying how the hot water eased her sore muscles and relaxed her. It embarrassed her when they started to wash her from head to foot. Once the water cooled, the women helped her out and dried her body. Again, Samara felt strange having anyone take care of her in the manner these women were doing. In only a towel, they led her into the bedroom. The bed had been stripped and freshly made with new clothes laid out on top. It was a tradition of the Compound to be dressed in one special outfit. The clothes told anyone who saw her that she was a new wife. Sort of like a wedding gown, but without the white lace and long gown.

A pale pink, silk blouse with long sleeves, which would be tight around her wrists, was spread out on the covers. One woman removed her towel and a thong placed at her feet for her to step into. Then the woman picked up her top and held it over her head. The neckline was so loose it hung off her shoulders, but it had an elastic band that fit tightly around her waist. She wore no bra under it and the silk teased her nipples, making them hard. The matching skirt had a high slit on the side and a woman drew it up from her feet to her hips. It was a short skirt which stopped at her knees. There were ruffles adorning the hemline and up the skirt's slit, which matched the effect of the ruffles around the neckline and wrists of the blouse. After the servants helped Samara sit down, soft, pale pink cotton leggings graced her legs, and knee-high boots with soft pale fur to match.

While she was sitting down, her hair was brushed and dried, then pulled back with diamond encrusted combs on the sides. Standing in front of the mirror, which had been brought in, Samara knew without a doubt that her life really had changed. She was no longer the poor girl her father abused. No longer would she worry about her next meal or when a beating might come. But could she handle being Dane's wife? What did that entail?

"My God, you are beautiful." Dane snuck up behind her, meeting Samara's eyes in the mirror. "I could just about eat you

up.”

“I don’t look like myself,” she stated. “This is some kind of dream and, very soon, I’m going to wake up from it.”

“Well, then, let me just add to it.” She watched him reach over her head and place a necklace around her neck. Made of rubies and diamonds it matched the band around her finger. “Now it’s all official. You’re my wife.”

Samara shook her head, touching the necklace, “Dane this is too much,” she breathed out.

“No, it’s not nearly enough.” He turned her, kissing her deeply. “You deserve much more, Samara, and I’m going to make sure you have it. You’ll no longer be abused or expected to serve. Hell, I’ve even got a cook, so you don’t have to do that either.” She lowered her eyes and he raised her head with a finger under her chin. “What’s wrong?”

“I’m worried about Makayla, Dane. I don’t know what my father is going to do now that I’m no longer his cash box.”

“You let me worry about that.” He gave her another kiss on the lips; a short kiss that left Samara wanting more. In fact, she wanted much more, and that slightly bothered her since she didn’t really know him. “God, you’re beautiful,” he breathed against her lips. “I’ve got a strong feeling that I’m going to fall head over heels in love with you real fast.”

Samara couldn’t help herself and smiled. She looked him right in his blue eyes, “You don’t know me well enough to say that. Hell, I bet once you get a taste of the baggage I have, you’ll want to get rid of me faster than stink on shit.”

Dane laughed, “Oh, for sure I’m going to fall for you. But first, how about we get the hell out of here?”

Samara nodded. “I’m all for that.”

Hand in hand they left the room. This time, Samara left out the front door.

A limo was waiting for them with a driver holding the back door open. Dane stood to the side, letting her get in before him. She slid onto the cool leather seat and stared around in amazement.

There was a phone, small bar, and flowers. There was even a dark window that separated them from the driver. On the floor there were bags from *Veto’s*, one of the biggest and most expensive stores in Treece.

“Ah, good,” Dane stated, sliding in across from her. “Everything’s here.”

“Is this your car?” she asked, the door closing behind him.

“Naw.” He opened one of the bags, peeking inside. “I just rented it for you.”

“Why?”

“Why not?” he shrugged, opening the bag wide and leaning it towards her. “You like these? If not, I can have them returned.”

Samara looked inside the bag. There were bras, panties, stockings and garter belts in many colors. When she reached inside to touch one, she found it as soft as the silk shirt that Dane wore.

“I also got you a couple outfits. I thought once Kera met you, she’d take you shopping for what you need.”

“You assume that she’ll like me.” She sat back. “What if she doesn’t?”

“Oh, I have a strong feeling that she will.”

The limo pulled away, heading east towards the woods. Samara watched everything go by. It was the first time she got an up close look at the rich side of Treece.

Shops that she had only heard about they passed by as she stared out her window. The people dressed in such nice clothes, she instantly felt out of place, but for some strange reason, whenever Dane touched her leg or squeezed her hand, the fear and displacement she felt vanished.

Maybe forty-five minutes went by, and the limo was turning onto a paved, winding driveway, and what came into view at the end, stole her breath away.

A large, two story log cabin with a basement showed itself through a thickness of trees. Samara sat forward in the seat, lowered the window, and gaped at it. The driveway lead to the Lodge’s grand entrance and portico and stopped right next to a wide, stained glass double door. The limo stopped, the driver got out, and the back door opened. Samara got out slowly, staring up at the house which was now her home.

Dane took her hand walked her up to the door and opened it for her, standing back. With some hesitation, Samara entered the house and was blown away. A grand front room left her speechless. A stone fireplace that seemed to go up into vaulted ceilings was off to the left. Bolted right above the fireplace, a flat

screen television, and positioned around it, were one large black leather sofa, a matching love seat, and two rocker recliners. Between the furniture, wooden end tables, and under it all, one huge black and white fur rug. On the right, a wooden staircase which reached a loft that had a hallway going left and right. To the back, a dining room table with six chairs. The table rested in what she saw as the middle of the house. To the right and left of the table, other hallways lead to wonderfully adorned rooms, which Dane pointed out as spare bedrooms.

The kitchen was located at the back of the house. It appeared to be a semi-commercial gourmet kitchen with upscale appliances and granite counter tops. There was also a wooden spiral staircase going up to the second floor. Hidden behind a closed door were stairs going down to the basement.

Hand in hand, Dane took Samara out the back door of the kitchen to a large wraparound porch, which was also a deck. Down the deck stairs, hidden from the road and drive, was a pool that he specially designed. The ground pool was built in all stone, making it look like it was a natural spring. What had Samara's jaw dropping was the stone waterfall that beat down into the pool.

"I keep it heated and going all year round," Dane said.

"I'm speechless," she said, walking around the pool. "I've never seen a pool with a waterfall before."

"Doubt you will," he chuckled. "I wanted something rustic and unusual, so I came up with this idea. Devon also has a cabin home, but I don't think it's anything like this. It took me a few years of building it behind my grandmother's back to accomplish what you are seeing."

"Why'd you have to do that?"

"Because my grandmother is a control freak and that is another conversation all together. Come on," he extended his hand to her. "You've got to see the rest of the place."

They walked back in, and Dane took her over to the spiral stairs. They walked upstairs and toward the far end of the house. He opened the door and took her into one huge bedroom. Inside, a four poster, king sized bed nestled in the center of the room between two floor-to-ceiling windows. A chest was placed at the foot, armoire to the left, chest o' drawers to the right, and a set of double glass stained doors that opened to a balcony.

Dane opened up a door next to the armoire that was a walk-in

closet and another door on the other side that was the bathroom. The closet and bathroom were connected from inside the closet.

"The other bedroom down the hall is bare. In fact, all but this one is. I just moved in a few months ago."

"Well I think it looks great," she said, looking over the bathroom. It had a shower, Jacuzzi tub, and toilet in its own private room. "I've never seen anything like it before."

"It's your home now." He came up behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist and resting his chin on her shoulder. "So how about a swim?"

Samara smiled and felt her face heat up. "I don't have a suit."

Dane turned her. He walked behind her, half-making her walk in front. "Who said you needed one?" She laughed and his phone went off. "Damn. How the hell do they know when I'm home?" he sighed, letting her go and taking his cell out of the pocket. "Yea."

Samara left him alone to talk. She left the bathroom, then the bedroom, and back down stairs. The bags of clothes that Dane bought for her were next to the front door. She picked them up and turned and headed back for the stairs just as he was coming down, still on the phone.

"Hold on." He pressed the phone to his chest. "I've got to take this. Why don't you unpack those things and change if you want. We'll do a nighttime swim after dinner. Okay?"

"That's fine."

He took hold of her chin, bringing her face up towards him. When he kissed her, Samara sighed and closed her eyes. For that split second, she forgot who she was and where she was.

"God, I want to eat you up," he said.

"Not right now, you're not." She smiled, brushing away from him.

Dane laughed, and Samara went upstairs, smiling the whole time. The only time her high slipped was when she thought about what Makayla might be doing and where she was at. Samara's gut was screaming that she needed to find and protect her sister with everything she had. Something just wasn't right. No matter how much her life might have improved, her sister was still suffering and as long as she was breathing, her sister wasn't going to suffer.

Chapter Seven

Samara changed into the new skirt and tank top Dane bought for her. She didn't bother with shoes and was now in the kitchen looking through the cabinets trying to decide what to fix for dinner. She also discovered that, in the basement, Dane had an office with two computers running. He was into the stock market, and made a very good living with selling and trading from the looks of the house, grounds, and the kind of money he spent on her so far.

A knock on the front door had her stopping on her toes, with the top cabinet doors open. Samara's heart began to pound in her chest. Fear took hold, preventing her from moving at all. Another knock and she was closing the doors, turning, and walking towards the front room very slowly.

First thought; her father found her and was going to drag her back home to be degraded again.

"Hey, is someone at the door?" Dane came up behind her, causing Samara to jump. He smiled and went right to the front door. "What the hell are you doing here?"

Samara held her breath and bit her lower lip, waiting.

"Only giving you back the same shit you gave me," she heard a male voice say. "Chinese?"

A man, with a pretty woman behind him walked into the house. They both were carrying bags in their hands, the man a six pack of beer and the woman, sodas.

The guy was as big as Dane. He also had dark, thick hair which reached his wide shoulders. The stranger's dark brown, kind eyes, bright smile, and playful attitude eased Samara. The girl behind him appeared like she had a spark to her. She also smiled and went right to the table with her bags. She also looked Samara up and down.

"Samara, this is Devon and Kera Noved. Devon is one of my best friends, and a major pain in the ass," Dane said.

Devon laughed, shoving one bag and the beer into Dane's hand. He extended his hand to Samara, which she took. "Nice to meet you."

"Hi." Kera came over with her hand out to Samara also. "I have to say, you're a lot better than what I was expecting."

"Huh?" Samara frowned.

"It means she likes you." Devon draped his arm over Kera's shoulder. "Behave," he pointed a finger at Kera. "Let's eat!"

Samara was a bit confused and it must've shown on her face. Dane came up to her and gave her a quick kiss before turning her towards the table. With his hands on her shoulders, Samara was powerless to do anything but sit down in the chair and let him get the plates.

The food was spread out, and everything passed around the table. It still felt strange for Samara to be able to sit down and eat something hot before her father got to it, or eat until she was full, not until the food ran out.

"Blaine called me last night," Devon said, passing a box to Kera on his left. "I told him you got married and I think he dropped his cigar in his lap."

Dane snickered and shook his head.

"He also said that Darius called him. Said that this high class brothel, which used to be shut down, has reopened. Talk about girls showing up for private viewing and expensive brutal nights."

Dane had his fork halfway up to his mouth and stopped. "And?"

"It was shut down about three years ago, but someone is opening it up again with special invites only to the girls," Devon went on. "Price is half a mill to see a face, quarter to see a name."

"And to see the flesh?" Dane asked.

"One and a half million." Devon took a bite of his food. Samara couldn't touch a thing. "He also said that Darius called him before he called me," Devon went on. "Darius has an invitation for a view for cost only."

"Are you shitting me?" Dane asked, dropping his fork back on his plate.

"What's this mean?" Samara asked. There was something about the way Devon was talking about girls being shown that bothered her. "Dane, what's going on?"

Dane slumped back in his chair with a sigh, looking at her.

Samara's gut turned at his expression. "Girls have been going missing. Maybe one or two out of them come back, but the family is keeping it quiet if they do. We've been looking into it, only because we think we know who might be behind the kidnappings."

"My dear cousin," Devon stated with disgust in his voice.

"What?" Samara gasped.

"Maybe now isn't the best time to be talking about this shit," Kera said.

Now she felt like she was going to throw up. Samara pushed away from the table, stood up and rushed out of the dining room towards the bathroom. She slammed the door, barely made it to the toilet before what little dinner she had came right back up.

"Samara," Dane knocked on the door. "You okay?"

She flushed, stood up, and went over to the sink. Turning the water on, she bent, washed out her mouth, then her hands before turning her back on the mirror and leaning back against the counter to take a few deep breaths.

The door opened slowly and Dane entered. "What's wrong?" She shook her head, keeping her eyes down on the floor. He came closer, took hold of her face, and brought her head up to meet him in the eye. "Talk to me."

What could she tell him? Hey, my father is a sick bastard who was selling me for a peep show. I don't think so. "I'm fine. Guess some of the food just didn't agree with me," she shrugged. "I'm not used to eating every day, remember?"

"You sure?" She nodded. "Okay."

"Hey," Kera popped her head in with a smile. "How about we go shopping in the morning? I bet you need just about everything."

"Sure," Samara said.

"Great. Then I'll drag Devon out of here, and be back to pick you up say, ten. We can have lunch and everything." Kera tapped the doorframe before leaving the two of them alone.

Devon complained some about leaving, but with the front door closing, Samara let out a ragged sigh.

"Now you want to tell me what's really going on?" Dane crossed his arms over his chest, looking at her.

"Nothing." She brushed past him, back to the table where she started to get to work at cleaning the mess up.

"Samara, I'll admit that I don't know you that well, but I also have to say I think I know you enough to tell when you're lying to

me.” He took hold of her wrist when she bent over the table to pick up one of the plates, stopping her. “Talk to me. Please.”

She took another deep breath and slowly lowered herself down to the chair, but she still couldn’t look at him. Just meeting his eyes had the dirty feelings washing over her. What should she tell him? How much?

“I think my father is part of what you were talking about.” She forced the words out. “Or at least he knows about it.”

“Why would you think that?”

I can’t tell you that. “How else would he get the money that he’s been getting lately?” It took a lot of willpower to move her eyes up to meet him eye to eye. “He doesn’t work Dane. How the hell could a man who doesn’t work bring home cash like he’s been doing?”

Dane shook his head. “I think you’re making too much out of this.”

“Or send Makayla away to a boarding school,” she rushed out, standing back up. “I don’t know where, but come on. Any boarding school around here costs a lot of money. Think about it.”

“Okay, I’ll give you that he might be doing something he shouldn’t for money, but to get involved in kidnapping girls and selling them. That’s stretching things.”

Her temper began to rise, but Samara held it at bay. She got back to work at cleaning the table. “You’re right.”

She took the dishes to the sink and started rinsing them off. But behind her, she could feel Dane’s eyes boring upon her back.

“There’s more, Samara,” he stated. “What are you still not telling me?”

“Nothing.” She kept her back to him, loaded the dishwasher and started to put the leftover food away.

“Samara.”

She tossed the towel to the counter and turned away, “I’m going to bed. I’m tired and Kera is going to be here to pick me up for shopping.”

* * * *

Dane watched her go. He kept his mouth shut, but deep down he knew without a doubt that she was holding something back. His gut was screaming that it had to do with her father, but for some strange reason she was only giving him half of the information.

He finished cleaning up what she started then went around the house shutting off all the lights and locking everything up. He was also tired, but with each step up the stairs he took, his cock stirred and came alive. By the time he reached the master bedroom, he had steel behind his jeans and the overwhelming need to be as close to her as he could get.

She was on her belly, the sheet down at her thighs. One of the short lace nighties he bought her was covering her body, but showing him clearly that she had nothing on underneath it.

He undressed, letting his clothes fall to the ground. As gently as he could, he picked up that sheet and pulled it down her legs before crawling onto the bed.

He parted her legs, stopped between them, and slid his hands up her thighs. Under the gown, up over her ass and around under her. He touched her smooth flesh, parted the folds of her pussy and touched her clit. Samara stirred but didn't wake up, so Dane kept on touching her.

He rubbed, moved his finger around the nub, feeling her get wet in her sleep for him. She stirred again and this time, she woke up.

"Dane?" Her voice was tired. "What are you doing?"

As gently as he could he brought her back towards him, up to her knees and slowly entered her heat. He moaned as his cock parted the slick fold of her vagina, stretching her and burning him.

"God, you feel heavenly," he gasped, grinding into her. "Like I've died and gone straight to heaven each time we come together."

He moved, steady and strong. Withdrew, and slid forward. Each thrust she gasped and tightened around him. Her hands fisted into the sheet, head hung down, and hair covered her face from him.

Harder, faster he moved until the bed began to rock. The gasps that came from Samara turned into moans and pants. All too quickly, it was over.

She cried out as she tightened around his shaft. She milked him, pulled for his climax, leaving him powerless to hold back for one more orgasm from her. He swelled, exploded, and dropped down onto the bed with her body held securely in his arms.

"You can trust me, Samara," he said after some time of silence passed between them. "I hope you know that."

Kera showed up right at ten. Samara left with her to go shopping and Dane made sure they both understood that Samara could get what she needed and wanted. Alone in the house, he walked around with a cup of coffee in one hand and the newspaper in the other.

Dane always liked having the house to himself, but now that he had someone to share it with, it all just seemed too quiet.

But that was all about to end when a black Rolls Royce pulled up.

He was just about to take a drink but stopped with the cup midway to his lips and watched the damn car turn and park right in front of the door. The stiff ass driver got out, put his cap upon his head, and pulled the black jacket down before opening the door. He reached in with his white gloved hand and helped Berdina Knight from the backseat.

Dane swore under his breath, put the cup and paper down on a nearby table, and met his grandmother at the door. He opened it before she could bang on it or barge in.

"Well, hello, Grandmother." He smiled big. "What a surprise."

"We need to talk," Berdina grunted, pushing her way into his home.

* * * *

"So how you like all of this so far?" Kera asked Samara as they sat down at a table Devon had booked for them at the Italian restaurant, Olafini's.

Samara sat down across from her, taking the menu from the waiter. "Still trying to make sense of it all, I guess."

"Took me months," Kera stated. "Hell, sometimes I wake up and think it all was a dream and I'm back either at home or at the damn Compound waiting for the nasty ass oatmeal."

Samara couldn't help it and laughed. "Yeah, I heard it was pretty nasty. Never experienced it though."

"You're lucky. That shit really sucked."

The waiter returned with water and bread sticks. Samara looked over the menu, not really seeing the words. She never got to go out for dinner, lunch, or anything. It was expected of her to cook every meal, even if her father didn't show up. If something new was desired, then the recipe and food were given over.

"I don't know what to order," she finally said, putting the menu down with a sigh. "I've never really been out for lunch before."

"Well, then, let me help you out." Kera gave her a friendly smile. "It's all pasta or nothing. Lobster spaghetti is great. They put these large chunks of lobster in with the pasta and put this kick ass sauce on top. It's also good with steak, but I love lobster. It was the first meal Devon and I had when we left the Compound."

"Then lobster it is," Samara nodded.

Kera ordered. She even requested a bottle of red wine to go with the meal. But as much as Samara was enjoying her day out, her mind refused to let her completely relax.

"So what'd he do?" Kera asked, snapping Samara out of her thoughts.

"Excuse me?"

"You're father." When Samara didn't answer, Kera just rolled her eyes and sat forward. "We don't end up at the Compound because our fathers wish us the best. Mine sold me and bailed. Haven't heard a word from him now for about a year. Wow! Time really does fly when you're having fun."

"So you and Devon have been together for a year now?"

"Yep, and let me tell you, it wasn't all roses at first." She smiled and their food came. "I fought him all the way."

"Why?"

"I didn't want to have anything to do with the Compound or the rules." Samara watched her take her fork and twirl the spaghetti around with a chunk of the lobster at the end. "I wanted to go to school and make something of myself, but when my father did what he did, I really thought it ruined my life."

"But it didn't?"

"Don't let him know I said this, but Devon is a life saver. I don't know where the hell I'd be if he didn't come along. Girls that end up sold to the Compound usually don't come out with a happily-ever-after life." Kera took a bite and Samara thought about what she said.

"I wasn't sold," Samara stated. "My father didn't want me to have anything to do with the Compound. In fact, I don't think he wanted me to have anything to do with anything." She picked up her fork and worked the spaghetti the same manner in which Kera had done. Her first taste of lobster and she was lost. "Oh, my God! This is great."

"Told you so." Kera smiled.

They ate, and once more Kera surprised her by ordering dessert. A large double layered chocolate mousse cake for Samara and strawberry cheesecake for herself.

"If I keep eating like this, I'm not going to be able to fit into those clothes we just bought," Samara giggled.

"Don't worry. We can start going to the gym," Kera waved her hand at her and laughed.

"Well, well," said a dry voice. "I never thought I'd see the day when this fine restaurant would let something like you in."

Kera straightened her back lowered her fork and the expression on her face told Samara all she needed to know.

"I must say, I'm a bit impressed that you can eat without stringing it all over the place," came another side comment.

Kera put on a big smile and turned in her seat, looking up at the blonde woman before her. "Samara, let me introduce you to Beth—I'm a fucking cunt—White."

The woman's jaw dropped. "I shouldn't be at all shocked at your manners. Trash like you knows no better."

"And I'd thought by now that scorned bullshit of yours would pass." Kera stood up and crossed her arms over her chest. "It's been a year, Beth. Get over it and yourself. He never was interested in you."

The blonde in the designer paint suit turned her eyes on Samara. Samara held her breath, waiting for whatever it was to come. "And what's this? Your charity case?"

"What? You mean you haven't heard?" Kera gasped, pressing her hand to her throat, putting on a very good 'I'm stunned' act. "Dane got married."

Again the woman looked stunned, but this time, it had an air of 'I'm put out' to go along with it. "Well, I must say—"

"Do you have to," Kera mumbled.

"You really have brought them all down low. "It's a good thing Blaine and Darius aren't around to witness their friends' downfall. I'm sure the embarrassment alone would have them cutting ties."

"Beth, why don't you go back to the hole you just crawled out of," Kera sighed. "Your shit bores me."

"At least I can see that nice clothes don't take the trash out of people," Beth snapped.

"You're right, so let me be as clear as I can. If you come around me again with that shit, I'm going to knock it right out of

your mouth.”

“Are you threatening me?”

Kera smiled, but it was one of the smiles that had you wanting to take a step back or cringe in fright. Beth did neither.

“I’m not threatening you, just stating a fact.” She turned to Samara. “Come on. I’d hate for you to lose your lunch by being in this bitch’s company.”

Samara got the hint, and quickly stood up, following Kera out of the restaurant.

“What was that all about?” Samara asked.

“Beth White. She used to be one of Devon’s old lovers.” The casual manner in which Kera said that had Samara stopping in the middle of the street. Again, Kera rolled her eyes at her. “It was a long time ago, and I’ve gotten over it. Apparently, Beth refuses to.”

Again, Samara followed her, jogging some to catch up. “So she doesn’t like you being married to him.”

“No one does really.” They got into the car, but Kera didn’t start the engine. They sat in silence for a few moments before she turned to Samara in the seat. “We come from a different class of people, Samara, the other side of the tracks, so to speak. You know, as well as I that the people in this town want things to stay just the way they are. The guys marry their own class of people, and so on and so forth.”

“Yeah, I figured that out a long time ago,” Samara sighed.

“Well, there are also many of those guys that don’t want to comply and we happen to be married to two of them.”

Samara frowned. “But what about this Blaine and Darius? Don’t they want to stick with their own class?”

“Blaine, no. Darius, no clue. Only met the guy a few times. He doesn’t stick around long enough to get to know.”

“My father used to re-iterate it over and over to me and my sister that we had to stay with our own kind,” Samara stated with another sigh. “But that was when we were young,” she added quickly. She didn’t need to dish out her past. What her father did and made her do was never to be spoken of. Dane wasn’t even going to know.

“Well, I better get you back before he starts sending out search parties.” Kera smiled and slapped her lightly on the leg. “Lord knows Devon would.”

Chapter Eight

Samara knew before she walked into the front door that something was wrong. Her gut screamed it.

She thanked Kera for taking her out, waved good-bye with a smile, and turned with this strange sense of dread overwhelming her.

The house was deathly quiet. Only one lamp was left on and next to the lamp, an envelope that was open with something sticking out. She went over to it, her curiosity getting the better of her. Putting the bags down on the chair next to the end table, Samara picked up the envelope and brought out what was inside.

The air in her lungs went out in a rush and the room began to spin.

Pictures! Pictures of her slipped from her fingers to the floor.

"My grandmother brought those over." Samara jumped, hand going up over her mouth. She turned around and stared at Dane in shock. "They were mailed to her with a demand that you be sent back to your father." He sat in the dark at the dining room table, a drink before him. "I want to know what's going on, Samara. I want to know everything and I want to know right now."

Tears fell from her eyes. Silent, mortifying tears that left her speechless. She couldn't speak and there was no way in hell she could tell him. She didn't know Dane that well, and yet in her heart, she felt like she had known him her whole life.

Hugging herself, she slowly advanced toward the table. The closer she got the more of his face she could make out. And with each step, a small sense of relief came. Dane didn't have contempt in his eyes or disgust. What she saw was genuine concern.

Samara pulled out a chair, sat down across from him, and sniffled. She wiped her face, brushed her hands through her hair, and thought of what to say.

"I don't know where to begin," she spoke low, and avoided his eyes.

"How about the beginning?" When he took her hand, she looked up at him. "I'm not going to judge you. I just need to know what the hell is going on."

She nodded, wiped her nose, and took a deep breath. "I told you last night that I thought my father was involved in what you were talking about. Remember?"

"Yeah, I remember."

She shook her head, looking upward. "My mother just disappeared. Makayla was only five and my father lost everything he had to move us. We weren't rich, but we sure as hell were better off than what we were when you first saw me." Another deep breath and she met him in the eye once more. "He changed, Dane. Something about when my mother disappeared, he changed. And it wasn't for the best."

"Usually never is."

"No, you don't understand." She pushed away from the table and stood up, pacing. "He took everything that was of value and locked it in his room. Any cash he got his hands on he hid. Bare essences were given to me and Makayla. It was like living with a damn stranger."

"How long?"

"Six years," she groaned. "Then, when Makayla turned sixteen, he changed again. One day, he didn't give a shit about us, and then, the next he wanted to know everything. And I do mean everything, Dane. Our time of the month, who we saw, even how long it took us to get home from school. Everything."

"He beat you?"

She looked at him quickly, only to lower her eyes to the floor. "Sometimes."

"And the pictures?"

Samara rubbed her arms, hugging herself, closing her eyes. "Ten months ago. After I graduated from high school, he stopped letting me out. I had to cook, clean, and take care of everything. He came home one night and told me that someone was interested in me. I was to dress up and take pictures of myself. If I didn't, then he was going to have Makayla do it and it wasn't going to be pretty." Once more she met Dane in the eye. "I had no choice," she whispered.

He stood up slowly, his cheek twitching. "What else?" Samara shook her head, and Dane hit the table with his fist. "What else?" he demanded.

She jumped from the sudden outburst and took a step back. "It lasted for six months. Then, I had to dress up and go to this place where the guy who paid for it all looked at me."

"Looked at you?" Now she heard the anger in his voice, along with the disbelief. "You telling me that your father whored you out?"

"No." She shook her head and held up a finger. "I was never touched."

"Oh, I know, you were untouched, in one way."

"Dane, please," she started to cry now. "I did it to protect my sister."

Dane rubbed his face and took several deep breaths. "I'm not pissed at you." He held his hand up. "But I'm going to kill your father."

She put both hands up to her mouth, took several deep breaths before lowering them and speaking again. "I think he was going to sell me." It was hard to talk. "And I'm damn sure he's got something planned for Makayla."

"Come here." He held his arms out for her and Samara rushed to him. He held her tight and she welcomed it. "Nothing's going to happen to Makayla. And I understand why you didn't want to say anything. If I was in your shoes, I'd want to forget about it also."

"Something isn't right," her voice muffled against his chest. "The rage in his face when they came to get me for the Compound. I've seen Ryland pissed before, but that was something I've never seen before." She pulled back enough to look up at him. "It was almost like he was scared and angry at the same time."

Dane touched the side of her face. "I think it's time I had a meeting with your father." Samara shook her head. Fear had rendered her speechless. "Yeah, way past time."

"Dane, please," she licked her lips, fisting her hands into his shirt. "You don't know what he's like."

"And he doesn't know what I'm like, especially when I'm pissed."

* * * *

"Why is it that every time I come home, I get hit with shit like

this,” Blaine Cedric groaned, lit his thin cigar, and slumped in one of Devon’s leather chairs.

“Samara, meet Blaine Cedric,” Dane said.

Blaine Cedric is a dark man. That was the first impression Samara got of the man who took up a whole leather chair. He had dark eyes, dark hair, and a body that spoke of power. But even though he gave the impression that he didn’t like to be bothered with shit, his eyes told another story. She saw loneliness in the cocoa depths.

“A pleasure,” Blaine stated those eyes of his giving her the chills. He looked her up and down before turning his attention to Dane. “Aundre Esopo. He’s Greek. He’s nasty. And he’s one fucked up perv.”

“How the hell do you get this shit?” Devon asked with a shake of his head.

Blaine crossed one leg over the other, shaking his hanging ankle. “Money talks, bullshit walks. And I have a lot of money to get people talking.”

“You need a hobby,” Dane remarked.

“Here you go.” Kera handed Blaine a cup of coffee and a friendly smile to Samara.

Blaine took a sip and cringed. “I don’t want to sound ungrateful, but honey, this sucks.”

Samara snickered and took the cup from him, “Let me. I feel like a damn third wheel anyway.” She went into the kitchen and began to get to work at brewing up a fresh pot.

“You okay?” Kera asked.

“Yeah, I guess. No!” She stopped and turned towards Kera. “I don’t know what the hell is going on anymore. Not that I ever did.”

“I can’t say that I understand what you’re going through, but I can say I understand the helpless feeling.”

“I just wish I knew what it was my father had planned for me and Makayla.”

Kera smiled. “Oh, you will. I have discovered quickly that when it comes to finding shit out, those dipshits in there are damn good at discovering secrets. Come on.”

Samara picked up the cup and took it back to Blaine. He took it, sipped, and a sparkle lit up in his eyes. “Wow. She’s good.” He took another drink, then a drag on his cigar. “Okay boys and girls, here’s the deal. Aundre Esopo likes them young, fresh, and he

doesn't really give a shit if it's male or female. He pays high dollar for what he wants, and he paid a one Ryland Tabor over ninety thousand dollars cash for special treats." Again his eyes landed on Samara, and Samara moved over to Dane.

Devon whistled, Dane swore.

"Oh, and it gets better," Blaine added. "Darius is also looking into shit. He found out that Esopo has taken Cameron under his wing."

"Yep, it just keeps getting better and better," Devon grumbled.

"Darius also told me that a rumor was going around. Esopo was going to give something special away, but that something slipped through his fingers." Once more he looked at Samara. "Guess we all can guess what happened to that something."

"What'd you mean give something away?" Dane asked.

Blaine took a deep breath, moved the cigar around in his mouth, and linked fingers together over his chest. "What it means is a very high end auction has been set up. Cash has been flowing in and out of the bank like water in a waterfall. But there is a snag in the deal that Esopo has set up. From what Darius has heard and what I've learned, Esopo is only a middle man. He answers to someone else and that someone wants five virgins for his little party. Right now, he only has four."

"And I was supposed to be the fifth," Samara said softly. She pulled out of Dane's arms, turned, and left the group. She couldn't stomach it anymore and needed some air.

"Samara," Dane's voice was soothing, but not enough to get rid of the dirty feeling she had. He followed her out back, which she knew he would.

"I bet he's going to put Makayla in my place." She hugged herself, looking out at the night sky.

"No, he won't."

She snickered low with a small grin, a single tear falling down her face. "You don't know him, Dane. If Ryland has a chance to make money, he's going to take it."

He came up behind her, his arms going around her waist, chin on her shoulder. "Trust me, Samara. Nothing's going to happen to Makayla."

* * * *

"Well, it's about fucking time you showed your ass." Dane walked into Blaine's mansion and smiled big. Darius Alistair

l lounged with his feet up on an antique sofa in the study.

Darius smiled. At the tender age of twenty-three, he appeared a boy of only eighteen. He had a cocky smile on his full lips, day old growth on his chin, and messy looking dark brown hair. Just the way Dane had always remembered him. He wasn't dressed like he had money either. Darius wore faded blue jeans with holes starting or appearing like they were starting in the knees and one on the thigh. He had a white t-shirt and leather jacket with shit-kicker boots.

"A child protégé?" Dane snorted, "Still looks like a punk to me."

Darius slowly stood up, strolled over to Dane, and looked him up and down. Without a word, he grabbed Dane in one hell of a tight hug.

"Good to see you too," Darius said.

"Where's Blaine?" Dane asked, taking a step to the side around Darius, going right for the liquor.

"Right here." Blaine came in with a pissed off look on his face, a cigar in his mouth, and smoke floating all around him. "Fuckers," he mumbled.

"Something wrong, sunshine?" Dane asked with a snicker.

Blaine went right over to the fireplace, which was blazing. He tossed his cigar into the flames and kicked another log in.

The study was something right out of a gentleman's book. Adorned with brown leather furniture, dark oak book shelves, and leather bound books, the room would be an executive's dream. Lamps which gave off soft light and a fireplace in the center with two chairs facing it shed the only light in the room. There was even an old redwood desk placed at the far right of the room positioned in front of the windows and hanging over the fireplace, a large painting of William Cedric.

Dane watched as Blaine glared up at the paintings, turned quickly for one of the crystal pitchers that had bourbon in it, and threw it as hard as he could with a yell at the painting.

"Randal!" Blaine yelled. Within seconds the butler came rushing into the study. "I want that damn painting out of here. I don't give a fuck where you put it, just get it out!"

"Yes, sir," the butler said in a rush, turning and scurrying from the room.

"Care to share?" Dane asked.

Blaine just gave him a glare and Darius leaned on him with an arm over his shoulder. "Oh, he's been a grumpy son of a bitch since I showed up. Think it has something to do with a clause in the will."

"Fuck off, Darius," Blaine pointed a finger at him.

Randal came back in with three more servants and a large ladder. It took four people to bring the large painting down.

"Did you get cluster fucked again?" Dane asked.

"You have no idea," Blaine answered.

"Saint Ignatius's Cathedral boarding school and convent," Darius said, getting Dane's full attention.

"What's that?" Dane asked.

"Where a one Makayla Tabor is residing." Darius flopped back down on the sofa with a sigh. "And the damn place is tightly secured. If a parent doesn't want the daughter inside to have visitors, then she won't. They do whatever the parents want. No questions asked." He crossed one leg over the other. "And Makayla has pretty much been quarantined."

Across the room, now leaning on the desk, Blaine lit up another thin cigar. Dane watched him take a big drag and blow the smoke out before moving it around between his teeth.

"You've got a plan," Dane stated.

"I've got a plan." Blaine said, his cool, emotionless eyes locking with Dane's.

* * * *

When Dane got back home, his mind was thinking about what Blaine had told him. But all thoughts went right out the door when he looked around and all he saw was a dark room. Right off, he got a panicked feeling, like Samara might've left him. But the relief came when he saw the back light on near the pool.

He walked out and saw her sitting poolside in a cream color robe that reached her knees. Her feet were in the water, making ripples.

"You okay?" he asked, kicking off his shoes, bending to pull his socks off. Dane sat down next to her, his feet going right into the water.

"Yeah," she sighed. He noticed that she didn't look at him.

"Well, I have some good news for you." That had her turning her head toward him. "Saint Ignatius's Cathedral boarding school and convent. It's where Makayla is."

Samara's eyes lit up, but that light diminished and her attention once more went back to the water. "That place is worse than a prison. No way in hell we're going to get her out."

"Have faith in me," he nudged her with his elbow gently. "We have contacts and shit. I'll get her out."

"Do you have any idea what my father has in store for her?"

"Not yet, but I'm working on it." She nodded, and the silence which grew between them thickened. "So is this one of your new outfits?"

"Kera picked it out."

Dane reached over and touched the robe. He ran his fingers down the front, parted it and almost lost his breath. She was wearing a black lace teddy under it and he could see her nipples. He reached into the robe, touched her breasts with the back of his hand, and almost grinned when she gasped.

"I definitely like this." His voice sounded foreign to her. His cock thickened behind his jeans. "Does it have a snap down here?" He cupped her between the legs and she arched, the breath leaving her lungs in a rush.

"I'll never tell."

Samara surprised him by sliding into the pool. He watched her go all the way to the bottom, take the robe off, and push back up to the surface.

Dane said nothing. He stood up, and with his eyes locked to hers, he began to take his clothes off. Naked, he went over to the steps and slowly walked into the warm water.

She didn't back away from him when he swam towards her and that filled him with such joy. It was strange now. When he looked at Samara, Dane felt something change in him. Something he couldn't put his finger on just yet.

He wrapped one arm around her waist, brought her close, and Samara wrapped her legs around his waist. He kissed her deep and she kissed him back. Together they sank under the water and he worked fast to find out if she had a snap between her legs. His cock twitched when he found out and throbbed the second he yanked it open.

Only the need for air brought them up to the surface, but even air couldn't still the pounding need he had to be as deep inside Samara as he could get. He pushed them to the side of the pool, kissing her the whole time. She in turn, wrapped herself around

him.

"God, I lose control when I'm near you," he breathed against her mouth, bumping against the side of the pool.

"That's funny," she licked his lips and he moaned. "All I can see is a man in complete control."

And that did it! What little control he had slipped right out the door. Dane opened her up and surged into her with a rush that knocked the air out of his lungs.

Water splashed around them, but it did nothing to sway him from thrusting into her. Samara held onto his waist in a grip that amazed him. She met him thrust for thrust, met him hunger for hunger and their movements synchronized, as two bodies came together in a wave of pleasure.

Way before he was ready for it to end, he swelled inside her and lost the battle. Mere seconds before his climax hit, he felt Samara contract around him. The sensation seemed to just trigger and squeeze the orgasm from the depths of his soul. Dane gripped the side of the pool so tightly his hands hurt, but he was powerless to let go. It felt like he needed to hold onto something as his cock shot spurt after spurt deep into her womb.

And just as fast as it started, it was over. He slid from her body, biting the inside of his mouth at the sensitivity he felt.

"I swear I'm going to die from pleasure like this," Dane remarked.

"God, I hope so," Samara smiled. "Not a bad way to go, if you ask me."

Dane laughed, pushed away from her to the center of the pool, dipped under, and swam back up in front of her. "I'm falling for you, Samara." Her face seemed to drop some, almost like she was afraid again. "And I'm falling hard." Before she could speak, he kissed her quickly. "Come on. Let's get out of here and get some sleep. You're going to need it."

"Why?"

"I forgot to tell you that my grandmother has requested us for dinner." He wrinkled his nose. "She wants to meet you."

"And you don't like that?"

"Oh, whenever my grandmother requests something, it's most certainly never good. Trust me."

Chapter Nine

Samara sat quietly in the formal dining room of Berdina Knight. Across from her in a silk white shirt, and black slacks, was Dane and he didn't look at all happy about being summoned for dinner.

Samara had dressed in a black skirt, cream silk top, heels and her wedding necklace around her throat. She'd fixed her hair in what she thought was the same fashion as at the Compound. She culled it, and then pulled it all back to hang down the center of her head and back. She felt a bit overdone, but Dane assured her that it was the way to dress for dinner with his grandmother.

In a bowl before her was split pea soup. It was very green, and very unappetizing to Samara. She didn't touch it.

"Soup not to your liking?" Berdina Knight asked, taking a sip from her bowl without looking up at Samara.

Samara jumped at the cold sound of the woman's voice. She sounded detached in a way. Almost like it was a bother for her to have Samara and Dane over for dinner. Samara glanced at Dane who shrugged his shoulders and gave her a nod. Before they came over he made it very clear to not back down before his grandmother. If she showed any kind of weakness, then the old woman would strike.

"No, I'm sorry," she answered back with a smile towards Berdina. "Green soup never seemed to appeal to me."

Berdina put her spoon down and motioned at a servant with her hand for the soup to be taken away. Carefully she wiped her mouth with the napkin and faced Dane. "So have you taken care of the problem then?"

Dane sat forward in his seat, one elbow on the table with his hand or, more like fingers over his mouth. He stared at Berdina for what felt like a lifetime. At least until the serving of the second course.

Braised Lamb Shanks with roasted asparagus and a small portion of mashed sweet potatoes. Another none favorite for Samara. Dane must've seen it because he pushed his own plate away with a disgusted sigh.

"Come on, Grandmother. Did you purposely have the cook fix everything Samara hated?" he asked.

"Dane, it's all right," Samara said.

He held his hand up to her and shook his head. "No, it's not. What the hell do you have up your sleeve now old woman?"

Again Berdina wiped her mouth with the napkin, placed it slowly back on her lap and faced Dane. The way the two of them looked at each other made Samara feel like she wasn't even in the room with them.

"There is a problem in our family, and it has to be dealt with. If you refuse to do it, then I guess it will be up to me." Berdina motioned with her hand and a servant instantly came to her side and passed her a large brown envelope. She placed it on the table and slid it over to Dane. "All you have to do I sign."

Dane ripped the envelope open, slid out some papers and his face turned bright red. Samara wasn't sure she'd ever seen anyone get that angry, except for her father.

"You have some fucking nerve." He pushed away from the table, his chair falling to the floor. Samara jumped, but stayed put. "That's my wife!" he yelled.

Berdina's eyes narrowed and she also stood up slowly. "She doesn't belong in this family. Not with the baggage she has over her head. I won't have it, Dane!" she yelled back.

"You won't have it," he huffed. He ripped the papers and tossed them up in the air. "I can't believe that you would invite us over for this shit. Hell, I almost had hope that you were coming around, but I should've known better. All you think about is yourself and the damned family name. Well, fuck the name!" he yelled again. "Samara, we're leaving."

"You walk out that door with her, and you're no longer my grandson," Berdina threatened. "I'll cut you off for good."

Dane took Samara's hand, pulled her slightly behind him and faced off with her once more. "I never could recall when you ever acted like a grandmother. You want to cut me off, forget that I'm your blood, you go right ahead. I don't need your money or your damned influence."

Dane tugged Samara from the dining room and right out the front door. She couldn't believe what just happened and wasn't too sure what to say about it all. She got into Dane's car quickly, buckled up and waited for him to say the first word as they pulled away. She didn't have long to wait.

"That no good, meddling old bitch!" He hit the roof of the car with his fist, and she jumped.

"I'm sorry about this," Samara said to him. "Maybe you should've made a better decision after all."

That seemed to fuel him even more. He gave her a look, turned the car off to a dirt road and skidded to a halt. He yanked off his seat belt, then hers, and pushed his seat all the way back before yanking her over to his lap.

The kiss he gave her was brutal, full of anger, and the manner in which he ripped the hose from between her legs and the panties let her know there were going to be a few bruises come morning. But the fingers that touched her, teased her clit and pussy were gentle and had her instantly getting wet, ready for his penetration.

The sound of his belt coming loose, the zipper going down seemed like it echoed in the car. The force of his entry took away her breath.

Dane picked her up, his hands around her waist, and lowered her down on him, forcing her to take every hard inch of his cock. Her muscles stretched tight around the shaft and his fingers dug into her hips, moving her up and down.

With a growl, he reached up and ripped her blouse open, along with the bra. Lips left her and closed around one nipple while a hand teased, cupped and pulled at the other. The whole time he kept moving her with his other arm. Moved her hard and fast, panting with the action.

"Shit, Dane!" Samara couldn't stop herself from coming fast. She fisted her hands into his hair, pulling the strands, moaning loudly and moving of her own free will.

"Fuck me!" Dane also moaned. He raised his head up, locked eyes with her and came. She felt the contractions of his cock, the heat of his seed.

And just as fast as it started, it was over. He hugged her tight, his head on her chest, breathing hard. Samara also held him close, catching her own breath, waiting to see what he would do

next. He was still deeply embedded inside her, and still very hard.

"You belong with me, right here," he finally said. "Doubt it again, and I'm going to spank your ass until you admit it." Samara smiled and tightened up on him. Dane groaned. "Keep doing that and I'm going to have my way with you again."

She giggled and removed herself from his lap, fixing her clothes as best as she could. He did a number on them that was for sure.

After they fixed their clothing, Dane fixed the seat, put his seat belt back on and started the car up again. They drove home, and it was strange for her to call the place home. In such a short time with him, and with her new position in life, to have a home that was truly hers felt good.

The next morning Samara fixed a big breakfast for Dane; scrambled eggs, large steak, homemade biscuits, juice and coffee. It was also a good thing she made so much, because Blaine decided to stop over with more news.

"Dane, she can cook," Blaine stated before putting a large piece of meat into his mouth.

Samara smiled and took a drink of her juice.

"Stop flirting and get on with it," Dane grumbled.

Blaine wiped his mouth picked up the cup of coffee and took a drink before speaking again. "She's fine right now. Like Darius said, Ryland has her pretty much secluded. But there has been some talk that Cameron is trying to get her out."

Samara sniffled. "Why would he want to get her out?"

"To replace you," Blaine said, his dark eyes locking with hers.

* * * *

Ryland Tabor once more lay on the cold floor of his home, bleeding from another sound beating Aundre Esopo ordered. Hell, he just got over the last one, barely. His ribs still killed him, but now it was ten times worse. Now he for sure had a broken one.

"You disappoint me, Ryland," Aundre said. "I thought we had a deal."

"We do," Ryland rasped out. Damn if talking was something hard as hell to do right now. Maybe his lungs were damaged.

"Cameron, please help him to his feet."

One of Aundre's thugs grabbed Ryland by the back of his shirt, jerked him to his feet and shoved him into his chair. Aundre walked around him before going to a chair that was placed for him

right in front of Ryland.

“My party calls for five virgins. I only have four. Men are expecting five, Ryland. Four of my special colleagues were looking forward to the pick, including me. I’m short, Ryland, so what are you going to do about it?”

“I—I can’t find you another,” Ryland rushed out. He was desperate now. Had to get this man off his ass and do it before he was killed.

Aundre made a tsking sound, shaking his head no. “My trust in you is gone. Already you owe me so much, and I have so little back. No, now Cameron and I have another plan.” Aundre nodded and Cameron tossed a photo on Ryland’s lap. It was a smiling picture of Makayla. “She’ll do, Ryland.”

Ryland’s gut dropped. His youngest daughter, the one that he was hoping would find a match in the Compound and take care of him. Aundre wanted her. What would he do if the man discovered that Ryland already gave her over to the Compound when she turned eighteen?

“Make the call, and we’ll be in touch.” Aundre stood up and fixed his tie. “And if you fuck me over on this deal, I’ll slice your throat.”

Ryland just sat there, staring at the photo. What could he do now? Leave? Yes, that’s what he would do. Get the fuck out of Treece and tonight. Aundre couldn’t kill him if he couldn’t find him.

Carefully he stood up and made his way to his room. Cash. He was going to need all of his cash, a few clothes and that’s it. But first, a quick trip to the hospital, because he couldn’t breathe and breathing was very important to someone who wanted to live.

* * * *

“There’s a small snag, one I didn’t want Samara to know about just yet.” Blaine sat with Dane down in the basement office. He crossed one leg over the other before pulling out a thin cigar, lighting it up.

“And what’s that?” Dane asked. He didn’t like the way his friend insisted on them talking alone. Alone meant trouble.

Blaine blew out a puff of smoke, rolled the cigar between his lips before settling it to the left in his mouth. “Ryland signed over rights to Makayla when she turns eighteen. As soon as she’s done with school she’s to be shipped to the Compound.”

Yep, Blaine was right. Samara didn’t need to hear this right

now. "Fuck," he groaned, slumping back in his chair.

"Darius is trying to see about getting her out of the convent thought," Blaine went on. "Says that place is like a damn prison, but he might be able to forge some papers for you to get her out. Being married to her sister has a bit of pull."

"Why do I get this feeling there's a 'but' coming on?"

Blaine smiled. "He can't find one loop hole to get her out of the Compound. Maybe if you were able to get legal guardianship over her then she could live with you. Now the bad part of that is, your grandmother has the influence for it and has her nose into this crap as is. You might want to ask her for help."

"Shit," Dane snorted, "That old woman isn't going to help me with shit. Do you know she wanted to have me sign papers to dissolve my marriage?"

"Sounds like her," Blaine nodded.

"She isn't going to help in this."

"Keep in mind one thing, Dane. If this sick motherfucker gets a hold of that little girl, then she's never going to be the same." Blaine sat forward, the cigar going to the other side of his mouth. "That bunch of guys fucks girls' minds up, just like they fuck up their bodies. They're sick, twisted bastards who get off on the pain of others."

"Then what's your plan?"

"You need to do whatever you have to in order to get that little girl out and safely with you. Even if that means sucking up to your grandmother."

"What about sneaking her out?"

Blaine shrugged, blew smoke and sat back in the chair again. "Might work. But if Darius can get the papers then all you have to do I walk right in and take her out."

"Samara isn't going to like hearing this." Dane rubbed his face, slumping down in his leather chair.

"Well I wouldn't tell her anything until we all figure something out." Blaine chewed on his cigar and Dane watched him.

Smoking was something Blaine started doing around fourteen or so. It was one of those things he did to piss his father off. After all these years, though, you never saw Blaine without one. It was his way of thinking or relaxing. Maybe both. But after all this time, Dane knew that when Blaine chewed on the damn thing he was thinking real hard.

“What’s up with you?” Dane asked. “Ever since the other day when you came storming into your study and had the painting removed you’ve been tense.”

Blaine shook his head, the long locks flying out around him, “Don’t worry about it, man. My problems are small compared to this. You need to get guardianship over Makayla. That’s what we need to work on.”

“Come on, Blaine,” Dane sighed. “We’ve been friends for years. I know something’s going on. Something’s eating at you.”

“I’m okay.” He stood up, stretching. “And I’m going to get out of here. Darius is keeping tabs on things. I’m heading out. One more major business thing to take care of and finish with my father’s bullshit.”

“Then you staying put?”

Blaine shrugged. “We’ll see.”

Dane caught sight from the corner of his eye a shadow that quickly disappeared. Inwardly he wanted to groan. Samara heard everything, he was pretty sure.

He followed Blaine up the stairs and out the front door. Shaking hands, Dane waited until his friend was gone before going back into the house. Samara stood in the kitchen, washing dishes by hand slowly. He almost shook his head at the scene because of the simple fact that he had a dishwasher.

“You heard, didn’t you?” he asked her. She nodded, keeping her attention on what she was doing. “Samara, I was going to tell you.”

“I don’t want to talk about it right now.” She rinsed a dish, put it in the strainer and began to wipe the counters down.

“Samara—”

She held up her hand, cutting him off. “I’m going to bed. We’ll talk in the morning.”

Was this their first fight? Instead of letting her go, he followed her up the stairs and into the bedroom. She kept her back to him, opened the dresser and pulled out a nightgown.

“You really don’t think I was going to keep this from you?”

“I’m not upset about that.” She sat down on the side of the bed, pulled a leg up and took her shoe off.

“Then what?”

After the second shoe was off she stood up, crossing her arms over her chest. Tears formed but didn’t fall. “My father just

fucked us both, Dane. Do you understand that? He was going to sell me like a piece of meat, and now that the meat isn't fresh, he's going to sell my sister. That's what I'm pissed about."

"And you have every right to be pissed."

"But in a way you don't get it," she went on. "That's the way of things on my side of the neighborhood. Our fathers can sell us—get rid of us girls like trash. We are either worth something or nothing. The nothing gets sold to the Compound. How fair is that shit?"

"Nothing in this town is fair, Samara. It never has been. Our founders who started this believed in the old ways and, for whatever strange reason when it comes to the Compound, the old ways stay. Personally, I don't think they ever thought that when they started this shit it would come out fair."

"Fair!" she huffed. "There's nothing fair about the Compound or the rules."

Dane held his finger up. "Yes there is. At the Compound, when you drink that stuff it doesn't give a shit if you're rich or poor."

Her frustration showed. Samara ran both hands into her hair, sitting back down on the bed. "He sold her, Dane. My father sold Makayla and tried to whore me out. Who does that to their children?"

"Someone who doesn't give a damn about anyone but himself." He went over to the bed, sitting down next to her. He took her hand, brought it up to his lips and kissed it. "I promise you that I'll get her out of there and keep her safe."

"But the Compound," she said, pausing when he put his finger on her lips before she could say more.

"One thing at a time." He smiled at her. "Besides, she can't be expected to go to the Compound if she isn't in town. Right?"

"What'd you mean?"

"I mean that once we get her out of that damn convent I can send her off to school where no one knows about. If she isn't in Treece, then she's not expected at the Compound when she turns eighteen."

"But you have to get her out?" He nodded. "Can you?"

"If Darius comes through, yeah, I can get her out."

She leaned to the side, resting her head on his shoulder. Dane wrapped his arms around her, holding her tight. "There

really isn't a happy ever after, is there?"

"Oh, I don't know." He squeezed her. "I'm thinking I found mine. Hell, I'm starting to think I'm falling for you now."

She raised her head and Dane kissed her gently, lingering on her lips for the longest time.

"Don't look so shocked," he told her with a smile. "It was going to happen eventually." He stood up and headed for the bathroom. "I'm going to take a fast shower."

Dane whistled all the way into the bathroom. When he closed the door he stopped, smiled and even chuckled. Damn, it was priceless the look on her face when he told her he was falling for her. Now he wondered what she would look like once he told her he was falling love with her. Now that look would be priceless without a doubt.

Chapter Ten

Makayla Tabor stood staring out her bedroom window, which had bars on it, wishing like hell she was any place but here. She was only sixteen and should be home with her sister, not in this prison.

Drab, boring gray clothes on her body, pointless classes and no contact with the outside world. That was her life. Boring! Even the food here lacked excitement. She wondered what was going on with Samara. Was she okay? Was their father torturing her, making her still do the pictures and see the man in those clothes? She didn't know, and that worried her.

At sixteen, Makayla wasn't too sure what she wanted to do with her life. One thing she did know was that she didn't want to be here. This place was sucking the life out of her. But she also had a gut feeling that if she was home then it wouldn't be any better.

The bell rang, indicating lunch before the last class of the day. With a depressed sigh, she turned from the window and left her small room. She got in line with the others, another gray dressed girl among so many others forced to live here.

Down to the dining room and into the food line she went. She picked up the tray, as did the others, walked down the line as the kitchen workers placed food on the tray. The meal consisted of meatloaf that was too dry, lumpy mashed potatoes and mixed steamed vegetables that were soggy from being overcooked. She picked up a carton of milk and napkin-wrapped silverware then sat down like a robot.

Damn she missed Samara's cooking.

"I swear I'm losing weight." Makayla pushed the food away and sighed. She looked around. The other girls had the same hopeless expression on their faces.

She couldn't eat. Not this food for one more night. And she

sure as hell couldn't stay here for a moment longer.

Makayla stood up and walked away from the table, leaving her food where it was. She left the dining room and acted like she was going back up to her room. Peeking over her shoulder, seeing that no one was really paying attention to her, she dashed to the back of the convent.

Right when she showed up she heard a few of the girls talking about this place they would hide at in the boiler rooms. They would drink and smoke. One even said there was a way outside from there and Makayla was going to find it. She was getting the fuck out of here!

Since everyone was eating she didn't see or hear one person. She went down to the basement, found the door that led to the boiler room and headed down deep under the convent. It was hot, but quiet down here. She also saw the buds of cigarettes from the girls that snuck down here to smoke.

Deeper into the darkness she went, keeping her fingers on the walls, her steps slow and quiet. She did stop when she heard the bell go off over head. She could even hear feet over head running, and her gut dropped. Fear hit causing Makayla to start running in the darkness. Something told her that they knew she was gone and were out looking for her.

Faint light showed itself at the far end. Makayla felt a small sense of relief at seeing it, and had to swallow down her panic. She was almost free, but they were looking for her. This wasn't the first time someone tried to run away. But that girl was found, and she didn't try to leave in the manner that Makayla was trying either. That girl went out the front door and had been caught in town. And no one ever said what happened to her after that.

Makayla stopped at the old rusty door which she knew without a doubt led to the outside. She listened, both in the front and behind her. She didn't want to have to rush out and be caught, but she also didn't want to be discovered from behind.

Cracking the heavy door open, she peeked outside. Her position was toward the rear of the convent, right next to the woods. Now according to memory, they passed those woods coming here, so the main road was to the left. That gave her a plan. She could walk the road, and anyone that might be a threat...well she could lose them in the woods and make her way back home to Samara.

Makayla slipped outside, kept herself pressed to the wall and scooted out. Nuns were out looking for her as were the groundskeepers.

Time felt like it was standing still. It also felt like it was taking her forever to make her way to the woods. If she could get there, then she could make her way to town and call Samara.

She made it about halfway only to stop when she heard a guy yell her name and her sister's.

Makayla stopped and stared at the man who was holding papers in his hand and yelling at the head of the convent. He was large, easily six foot, had golden brown hair and body language that screamed power. But it also appeared that the power he wielded wasn't getting him anywhere at the moment.

"I have the paper work!" he yelled. "I want Makayla Tabor brought to me right now."

The nun shook her head and backed away, closing the iron gate in his face.

Makayla licked her lips and thought for a second about what she should do. Should she flag him down or let him know? He could be someone her father knows, but then he wouldn't be here without Ryland to get her. Ryland would make sure to collect her himself if he was bringing her home.

I know him from some place.

He turned away from the gate in anger, and Makayla quickly racked her brain to place where she'd seen this man before. When he got into this car and started the engine it hit her.

The grocery store!

Makayla ran for him. She waved her hands in the air and even yelled at him. For one second she thought he was going to leave but then he shocked her by stopping, parking, and getting out of the car. As she ran for him, the ones looking for her ran after her.

The man got back in the car, and the hope of her getting away left. She screamed, for him to stop, and then he surprised her. He floored the car, turned it and came right toward her.

Skidding to a stop, the passenger side door opened and he leaned over. "Get in!"

He didn't have to tell her twice.

Before she had the chance to fasten her seatbelt, he was spinning the tires, taking off as fast as the sports car would take them. She worked at catching her breath and looked behind her.

With the convent getting further and further behind her she could relax now.

“Okay who the hell are you?” she snapped, staying sideways in the seat. “And what the fuck is going on?”

“Hey, watch your language,” he snapped back. “You’re only sixteen.”

“What? You think you’re my father? I don’t think so.” She crossed her arms over her chest. “I’m waiting?”

He looked at her quickly with a frown. His attention went back and forth between her and the road. “You related to Kera Noved by chance?” She shook her head. “Sure as hell act like you do.” She started to look around, opening the glove compartment. “What are you looking for?”

“A phone.”

“For?”

“I need to call my sister.”

“Samara’s fine.” Makayla stopped searching and looked at him. “Worried about you, but fine.”

“Okay what the hell is going on?” She raised her voice this time.

He took a deep breath, “My name is Dane Knight. I’m your sister’s husband and—”

“Wait a damned second.” She held her hand up, stopping him. “Her husband. When’d that shit happen?”

“I told you to watch your language.”

“I don’t give a damn what you told me.”

The car skidded to a stop in the middle of the road. He parked and turned in his seat, a finger pointed in her face. “Okay, first off, work on that mouth of yours. Second, we were married the night you were sent away. I requested her to be sent to the Compound.”

Makayla snickered, “I bet that so pissed Ryland off.”

Dane turned his head and growled.

She quickly held up her hand. “I’m sorry. I’ll work on the cussing if that will please you, but only if I can see Samara.” She pointed her finger back at him.

“Where’d you think I was taking you?” He gave her a wink, put the car back in gear and spun off.

Makayla waited a few before speaking again. “So how did Ryland take it?” He looked at her quickly. “He doesn’t like to give up control for sh—nothing.” An eye brow went up when she

almost swore again.

"I don't know how he took the news. I wasn't there when he was told."

She laughed. She couldn't help herself. "Oh, man, I wish I was there when they came and took her away. That old bastard deserved it." He cleared his throat. "Hey he did! You have no idea what he put us through. What he put Samara through."

"Yes, I do." The detachment spoke volumes.

"She told you?" He nodded. "Wow. Have to say didn't think she'd tell anyone about that. Hell, I only found out by accident and boy that wasn't a fun night." Makayla looked out the window, the memory of that night still bothering her. The shame on her face was enough to have her shivering again at the memory. "So what's the game plan?"

"At the moment the only plan I had was to get you out. Didn't plan on busting you out."

"Well, I'm glad you showed up." She sat back in the leather seat and sighed. "Can I ask for one thing though?"

"Sure."

"Can we stop somewhere and get me a big fat hamburger? That shit they served me in that hell hole could starve the children in Ethiopia."

"What did I just say about the swearing?"

"Give me a break here!"

"Do you talk like this around Samara? I swear I think I'd remember if she said something about a mouth on you."

"No, I don't talk like this around Samara," she huffed. "I rarely talk around Samara. And she kept me in my room away from Ryland. Can I please have something to eat? I'm starving."

"Fine."

He turned, headed right for town and pulled into an old fashion drive in diner. Dane ordered and waited. She tapped her fingers on the side of the door, looking around.

"You don't have anything I could change into, do you?" she finally asked. The silence was driving her nuts.

"No."

"Shit," she mumbled.

"What'd you say?"

"Nothing." Again she crossed her arms over her chest. "Are you going to be this anal all the time? I mean, it's sort of a drag."

The food came, Dane paid for it and Makayla went to work on it. The first bite of the juicy burger and she was moaning in pleasure.

* * * *

Dane watched the young girl eat her lunch like it was the last meal she was ever going to have. Hell, she gave Kera a run for the money when it came to lobster.

She finished the burger in what he was pretty sure was record time, and went to work at the fries. The soda was last. He shook his head when she belched, took the trash and tossed it out the window.

He pulled out of the diner and got back on the road, heading for home. Lucky that the convent was only an hour away. He didn't want to leave Samara alone for too long. Dane was pretty sure the convent was going to call Ryland and let him know that his daughter was missing and that someone showed up claiming to have papers to take her out.

Makayla fell asleep in her seat. From the looks of things he would bet she wasn't sleeping like she needed to or eating. From the stories Kera had told him about the Compound he could only imagine what food was like at that convent.

So this what a little sister feels like. Wow! She was a handful. And a knock out. *And* only sixteen! He could understand now why Aundre Esopo wanted to get his hands on the girl. She was petite, built so small that those men would have no trouble with breaking her. Long eyelashes, heart shape face, pouty lips and long black hair.

Yep, Makayla Tabor was a knockout and the first motherfucker who came to get her was going to have to answer to him. No doubt about it. This girl was *not* going to the Compound. He'd ship her to another school out of this town if he had to. When the time came for her to marry she could do it on her own, not have the choice taken out of her hands.

I sound like a damn father!

Dane just couldn't get over the change in him. Not only was he falling for his wife—correction, he was in love with her. No mistaking the feelings he had for Samara. He loved her. Plain and simple. And it all made sense to him also—how Devon fell so hard and so fast for Kera.

When one found that perfect girl there just was no mistaking

the instant attraction. Dane thought about it and decided he'd fallen for Samara that first time he saw her crossing the street before him. He knew he had to have her. Knew she was what was missing in his life.

It was dark by the time he reached the drive to his home. He nudged Makayla, waking her. "We're here."

She slowly straightened up in her seat and rubbed the sleep from her face. Lights were on in every room of the house, illuminating the place, breaking the darkness.

He pulled right into the garage, parked and shut everything off. Makayla got out first stretched and smiled at him.

"Man I can't wait to see her. Feels like a lifetime ago," she said.

"You know, you're not as I pictured you to be."

"I've changed," she shrugged. "Think the day Ryland sent me away, the little girl Samara knew left also. I couldn't keep crying myself to sleep each night. The self pity got me nowhere in that place."

"So, the little girl grew up quickly." He shook his head. "That's a pity all itself."

"Huh?"

"Don't grow up too fast, Makayla. The world isn't ready for it quite yet. Come on."

He led her inside and was a bit surprised at how quiet everything was. Makayla followed him through the laundry room, past his office and up the stairs which would take him right into the kitchen.

"Hello, Dane." A gun cocked, pressed right up to the side of his head the second he walked through the door. "We've been waiting for you."

Dane stood completely still. He stiffened, looked forward and didn't move a muscle when someone yanked Makayla away from him.

"Get your hands off of me!" Makayla yelled.

"Makayla!" Samara rushed into the room, shrugging off the hand that had her arm. Dane watched the sisters embrace.

"Dane Knight," Cameron Noved strolled into the kitchen like he owned the place with a cold, malicious smile on his face. In the couple of years he'd been gone not much had changed on the man. "Long time no see." He looked around the room. "Impressive

home. Much better than Devon's I have to say."

"What the hell do you want, Cameron?" Dane tried to keep his voice even and his anger under control. Thankfully the gun pointed at his head helped with the anger part.

"I think you know what I want." Cameron yanked Makayla from Samara's arms. The girls cried out. He wrapped his arm around Makayla's throat, holding her close. "This little thing is expected. Big party waiting for you," he said in her ear, rubbing his face into her hair.

Makayla started to cry softly. It was strange watching her act like a frightened girl when a few hours ago she was so tough. Of course her age had a lot to do with it. She was only sixteen—the age between childhood and adulthood.

Cameron pressed his face into the back of her hair and sniffed, "She smells fresh, Dane."

Dane glanced at Samara. She was holding her mouth with both hands, tears smeared her face. Got he wanted to go to her, wrap his arms around her and let her know that everything was going to be alright.

But he couldn't, and at the moment things didn't look alright to him.

"Devon will kill you for this," Dane said.

Cameron laughed. "He has to find me first. Say good-bye sweet thing. You have a very important appointment for which you can't be late."

"Cameron..." Dane warned him and took only one step closer. The man with the gun pressed harder against his head.

"I would love to stay and chat, Dane, I really would." Cameron smiled. "But I have things to do and a boss who doesn't like to wait. But don't worry. I'll make sure you have something brought back to you." He hugged Makayla tightly, his hand flat on her belly, moving up towards her breasts. "But it won't be this sweet peace of ass," he finished with a laugh.

Dane made to move towards him and was greeted with a hard hit to the side of his head. Pain ricocheted in his head, dropping him to the floor. A few kicks to his gut knocked the air right out of his lungs, and Samara screamed.

"Don't kill him," Cameron stated. "Bullet hole is not suicide." Dane lay in a ball, holding his gut, trying to breathe. "Bring the other. He wants her too."

He saw feet moving around, smelt something like gas and tried to get back up on his feet. That plan came crashing to a stop with a hard kick in the face. He fell back hard on the floor, darkness dragging him down. The last thing he heard was two simple words.

“Burn it.”

Chapter Eleven

“Darius, I’m heading over to his place right now,” Devon said into his phone as he drove as fast as he could towards Dane’s place. “No, he hasn’t answered the phone. I understand that, but what the hell do you want me to do about it. If I can get in touch with him, then I can’t let him know—”

“Oh my God!” Kera gasped right next to him.

Devon almost dropped the phone. He saw the fire and just about shit his pants. It was a blaze. Simple as that.

“Darius, call Blaine and get the hell over here!” Devon shouted in the phone. “Dane’s house is on fire.” He hung up, floored the car and prayed like hell Dane was still alive.

Kera was out of the car before he had it completely stopped. She ran towards the fire, giving him another fright. “Kera! Damnit, wait.”

He went after her.

“Dane!” she yelled.

There was nothing left of the house. The whole thing on fire, reds, oranges, blue flames engulfed every space, every room. He caught hold of her before she could get too close for his comfort.

“Hold up,” he told her. “I don’t need you to get hurt also.”

“He can’t be in here,” she huffed, thanks to the running. “Devon, Dane can’t be in there.”

Devon held onto her arms, holding her back, looking around. He was also thinking the same thing. Dane couldn’t be in there. He had to be out, because if he was inside—well he didn’t want to think along that line.

And then he glimpsed what he was looking for. “He isn’t.”

Dashing to her side, Devon ran to the right and slid to the ground right next to Dane’s body. “Dane!” As gently as he could he rolled Dane over.

He was out cold, side of his face bloody and bruised. But he

was alive.

"Oh, my God," Kera gasped, kneeling down next to Dane also. "What happened?"

"Stay with him, I'm going to get the car."

"Car? Devon he needs a hospital!"

"Stay with him," he ordered, stood up and ran to the car. Inside he called Darius back. "We have a major problem. Where's Blaine?" he asked the second Darius answered the phone.

"Hasn't gotten back yet. What's wrong?"

Devon took a deep breath started the car and put it in gear. He turned the steering wheel and drove right up into Dane's yard towards him. "Someone just burned Dane's house."

"What?!"

"Looks like Cameron's kind of work if you ask me." He pulled up as close as he could and stopped. Kera was still on the ground, Dane's head cradled in her lap. "He's hurt and I don't want to take him to a hospital."

"Are you out of your mind?" Darius was shouting now. "If he's hurt and his place is on fire you need to call the damn police and get him to the hospital."

"Do you really think Dane is going to want to hang out in a hospital?"

"Where's Samara?"

The question had Devon stopping for a second and looking out. He got back out of the car and just stood next to it. "Good question. You don't think she's in the house do you?"

"If your fucked up cousin is involved in this shit, then no. He takes girls, not kills them, remember?" Devon nodded, rubbed the back of his neck and tried to get himself under control. "Okay, bring Dane here to my place. I'll call someone I know personally to look at him and I'll call Blaine. Devon, we need to move fast here. That shing-dig starts tonight."

"Okay, I'll be there in about twenty," Devon hung up and went over to Dane. "We're taking him to Darius's place."

"What?" Kera gasped. "Are the two of your out of your damn minds? He needs a doctor."

"And Darius is taking care of it." With a groan, he picked up Dane's limp form and walked over to the car. "Open the back door."

Kera rushed to the door opened it and quickly went around

the other side where she put Dane's head once more in her lap. "You guys are crazy."

"You just now figured that out?"

Devon slammed the door closed, got back into the driver's seat and peeled out. He took the back roads towards Darius's home, and was thankful he did. It wasn't long before he heard the sound of sirens off in the distance coming closer.

Darius Alistair's home was just about as large as Blaine's. The grounds were green, trees in full bloom and lined up along the long driveway. He didn't have a stable, but did have a guest house, pool house and one big ass pool with a slide that reached up to one of the windows on the second floor.

Darius was waiting for them at the drive. He waved his hands in the air until Devon stopped right in front of him. As usual, Darius was dressed in ratty looking jeans, tight white t-shirt and shit kicker boots.

"The doc I have coming is going to meet you in the guest house," Darius said, poking his head into the window. He looked at Kera then Dane. "I got another call after you. The party's back on and I have a personal invite just for having the name of Alistair." He looked back at Devon. "Was told something young might interest me."

"Shit," Devon sighed.

"What's that mean?" Kera asked.

"It means that Samara's sister is up for sale," Darius answered. "Come on." He hit the door and stood back up. "Get Dane into the house and park the car in back of it. We don't need eyes watching us."

Devon nodded and turned the car towards the guest house. It was a slight struggle to get Dane out of the back seat, but he managed it. He had him in the bed when Darius walked in with a man he didn't know or had seen around town.

"Devon, my personal man and family Doctor. Ron Burton," Darius said.

Ron Burton was an old man, but he also had a look in his eyes like he knew what the hell he was doing. His thin silver hair was slicked back, the brown sweater hung from his bony shoulders, and the black bag in his hand reminded Devon of something he saw from the Mr. Rogers show.

"I'll tell you right now, boy, this one needs a hospital." Burton

wiggled his finger at Dane. "There's the smell of smoke on his clothes. He might need more oxygen than what I have with me."

"With what we've got going on right now, a hospital isn't going to hold him down," Darius said, putting his arm around the old man's shoulders. "So please, do your magic and let's keep this between us. Okay?"

The old man shrugged his shoulders. "You pay the bills."

Burton moved to the side of the bed, Kera stayed on the other side, and Devon nodded to Darius to follow him out into the small living room.

Guest house was more like a small apartment. It had a living room, full of furniture, kitchen fully stocked, one bedroom and one bathroom.

They both sat down in the chairs and faced each other. "What'd Blaine say?"

"He's going to look for Cameron. I'm going to the party alone," Darius stated, meeting Devon in the eye. "And I'll buy her and bring her back."

"Just like that," Dane crossed his arms over his chest, watching Darius closely. There was something off with his friend, something he couldn't put his finger on.

"Got a picture of her?" Darius asked.

"No."

"Well, that's going to make things a bit hard, but I'll make do." Darius slapped him on the shoulder and smiled. "Don't worry so damn much. I'll get her and have her home before Dane wakes up. And if he does before I get back, just let him know that I'm taking care of the sister. Blaine's going to see if he can find out where the hell Samara is."

"What if this doesn't go as planned, Darius? You could put out a lot of money here for nothing."

"Then Dane can call it a wedding present. I've got to go."

Devon watched him walk away. Once out of sight, he turned and went back into the guest house where Dane was resting.

"He's going to wake up with one nasty headache," Burton said. "Might even have a slight concussion. Aside from that, he'll live."

"Thanks, Doc," Devon sighed.

Burton nodded. "Once whatever it is that's going down is finished, I want to see this boy in my office. You let Darius know

that please.”

“Will do.”

Kera came out of the bedroom just as the doctor left. “I don’t like this, Devon.”

“I know you don’t.”

“It’s dangerous,” she hissed. “You need to get the cops involved in this.”

“Kera, they haven’t been able to crack the smuggling that’s been going on around here in over a year. Do you really think they’re going to be able to help us find Samara or her sister?”

“Cameron is dangerous.”

“I know that. Believe me, I know he’s dangerous and I know it’s important to catch him. But it’s also important for us to all stick together. Dane’s going to need everyone’s help here.”

“Well, I still don’t like it!” she snapped, turned and went back into the bedroom.

“And you won’t let me forget it either,” Devon sighed, following her.

* * * *

“Mr. Alistair.” Darius walked up to the man waiting for him at the top of the steps that lead inside an old Victorian house. He shook the hand. “You look just like your father.”

“So I’ve been told,” Darius remarked. “I have to say I’m a bit surprised about your invitation. Last I had heard our name had been taken off the list.”

The man that greeted him only smiled over his shoulder at Darius. He didn’t stop walking but led Darius deeper into the house to a closed door. It opened and they went down a set of stairs.

The whole lower floor of the house turned into a large showroom. The kind of showroom one would find in a sleazy, cheep, porn show. Darius was taken to a closed, sound proof room where wine chilled in some ice; a large oversize chair faced a thick glass window with red drapes blocking whatever view happened to be on the other side. The room even had a bid button for Darius to pace his bid on whatever girl he wanted.

“We have a nice selection tonight,” the man said as he handed a pamphlet to Darius, who took his seat. “Five fresh ones all ranging in ages.”

“Which are?” Darius tried to act uninterested as he flipped

through the pages of the girls. All appeared a bit drugged when the photos were taken.

“Oldest is just twenty and our youngest on the last page only sixteen.”

Darius flipped to the last page and lost his breath. The girl he saw was indeed still a child, but one that would turn out to be something of a vision once all grown up.

Thick black hair, dark eyes with long lashes. He couldn’t make out the body since the photo was of her face only, but that face of hers would haunt him. Darius knew that without a doubt. Her full lips, heart shape face, creamy skin—yep, for sure she was going to haunt him.

“Pretty girl,” he stated. “How much?”

“Price on her should reach the millions. We have other clients here that like them that fresh.”

“And how much to skip all the bullshit?” Darius stood back up, facing the man who led him down here. “What’s the price to have her right now?”

“Mr. Alistair I’m not in the position to do that.” The laugh that came forth sounded nervous.

“Three million.” Darius saw him sweat now. One bead slipped down the side of his face and his eyes seemed to light up.

“Mr. Alistair. That really wouldn’t be fair to the other bidders.”

“Why don’t you go check it with your boss? I’m sure he’ll consider my offer.”

The man nodded, turned and walked out. Darius looked at the photo again. Without a doubt he knew that this was his Makayla. *His? Where the hell did that thought come from?* Standing in this room, staring at her photo, Darius knew without a doubt that she would be his in time.

It felt like over an hour before the gentleman who brought him down here came back. Darius was pacing the floor, waiting for some kind of answer so he could form the next plan of action on getting Makayla out of here.

“Five million.”

Darius smiled slowly. He couldn’t help himself, or believe that it would be that easy to get Makayla off the auction block. “I’m going to assume a check is acceptable.”

“But of course. Follow me please.”

* * * *

Dane woke up slowly. His head throbbed in pain and limbs felt like they weighed a ton. He winced when he tried to open his eyes, the brightness in the room causing his head to pound even harder. Even his mouth had a funny taste in it.

"Samara," he rasped the name out, his throat feeling like it might close on him any moment.

"Here, drink some water," said a soft female voice, and a cup touched his lips.

Dane sipped, almost moaning at the pleasure from the cold water touching his dry sandpaper throat. "Samara."

"She's not here, Dane."

That soft statement gave him the strength to open his eyes. Kera sat next to him, the cup of water in her hand and concern filled her eyes. Glancing around the room he knew right off that he wasn't in his bed or home.

"He burned it, didn't he?" he asked. She nodded. "Motherfucker."

"Darius went to get Makayla," Kera said. "And Blaine is on his way here. Devon's in the other room on the phone with him I think."

"Where am I?"

"Darius's guest house. Want some more water?"

He nodded and she helped him drink, then to sit up in the bed, "Thanks." His head felt like a band was going off inside.

"Hey, you're awake!" Devon stuck his head in, a cell phone up to his ear. "Yeah, Blaine, he's awake. Okay I'll see you when you get here." He put the phone in his pocket, crossed his arms over his chest and stared at Dane. "How you feel?"

"Like shit."

"Look it too."

Dane smiled for a second. "Cameron took them both."

"Not surprised."

The sound of a car pulling up had Dane tensing.

"I bet that's Blaine," Kera said, handing the cup to Devon. "I'll go get him."

Once the door closed behind Kera, Dane looked Devon right in the eye. "I'm going to kill him, Devon. I know he's your cousin, but I'm going to kill him for this."

"Not if I beat you to it."

The door opened and Blaine walked in. The dark scowl across

his face had Dane's stomach dropping.

"You up for an ass kicking?" Blaine asked Dane.

Not since they were kids and Blaine's father knocked him down once did Dane ever see his friend look so dangerous. But then, Blaine was only a young teen and unable to stand up to his old man back then. Demons haunted him, Dane knew that now. It didn't just start with Blaine being shipped off. No, something else happened to his friend to make him look like a monster right now.

"You know where Cameron is," Dane stated.

Blaine shook his head. "No, but I know where Samara is."

It took a lot for Dane to get out of that bed and stand on his own two feet. Once steady, he took a deep breath, facing both of his best friends. "Then by all means, let's go kick some ass."

Slowly, a malicious smile spread across Blaine's face. "Then let's go have some fun."

Chapter Twelve

Samara paced the room, rubbed her arms, fearing what might come. The room was something she half imagined a brothel room might look like. No table or chairs, dim reddish lighting and a full size bed. Even that bed had a red blanket and black sheets. And even though she knew that she might be in some serious trouble, Samara couldn't stop thinking about Makayla and what might be happening to her.

One of the first things Samara did when she was shoved into the room was to check the door. Not a surprise, locked. The small window also had bars on it, sort of reminding her of the things she heard about the Compound. But this wasn't the Compound. She heard someone unlock the door saw the knob turn, and Samara held her breath, waiting to see who might walk in. Two men entered, one dressed up in a suit, cane in hand. The other more casually dressed, and both had cold, dark eyes. Yet there was something familiar about the one with the cane. Something that Samara couldn't put her finger on.

"What did I tell you?" the one with the cane said. "Still enticing."

"But not what I paid for." The other strolled into the room, staring at Samara. The way he moved had her instantly on edge. "She's missing something, Esopo."

"And I told you that you may do whatever you wish with her, as compensation."

The guy lunged at Samara, grabbing her arm tightly, jerking her close. His other hand fisted into her hair, yanking her head back. She hissed in pain. He kept hold of her by her hair, grabbed the front of her shirt and ripped it open. This time she cried out and began to fight him.

"I see you enjoying yourself already, so I'll leave you to have your fun." The one with the cane walked out, closing and locking

the door behind him.

Once her shirt was ripped all the way off, leaving her in her bra and jeans, he shoved her away. Samara hit the wall hard, crossed her arms over her breasts and watched him. He licked his lips, eyes going up and down over her body. But it was his hands that had her fear climbing. His hands went right to the belt around his waist, unhooked it and pulled it quickly from the loops.

He folded it in half, slapped his hand and smiled at her. "Now the punishment comes for you letting another fuck you."

* * * *

"Now, how the hell you know anyone is here?" Dane asked Blaine for about the tenth time.

They pulled up in front of a building right on the border of town. When they were younger, in their teens, the three of them use to visit this house. It had one time been the most popular brothel in Treece. But once it was discovered that kidnapped young girls ended up here, some used as prostitutes, others just sold off, and the house got closed down. So to Dane it really wasn't that much of a surprise to know that someone might use the house for their own sick pleasure.

The three of them got out of the car slowly. Dane had this nagging feeling that something bad might already be happening. First off he couldn't imagine any reason for Samara to be brought here. Yet, then again, it was the perfect place to hide someone. Everyone in town suspected this house had been shut down, not in use.

"You hear that?" Blaine asked.

"Sounds like yelling or crying," Devon remarked.

"Samara!" Dane rushed past them, right into the house.

The house was dark, dusty and cobwebs everywhere. The place had been turned upside down long ago. In the center of the room, which had been the gathering place for men to pick which women they wanted, Dane stopped and listened. Sure enough he could hear crying mixed with screaming coming from upstairs. He turned left, found the old staircase and took them two at a time.

Most of the bedrooms had no doors, and some hung on broken hinges. But down the long hall there was one door that was closed, and beyond that he could hear Samara crying out and the faint sound of slapping. The kind of slapping that came with a belt.

He took off at a run, slamming into the door with his shoulder. He busted through, saw a man raise his hand up with a belt in it and Samara hunched in a corner trying to protect herself. Dane went right towards him and body slammed him down to the ground.

Dane wrestled the man, fighting to get the upper hand. But thanks to his little bout with Cameron earlier he was still weak and ended up the one on his back. The man above him raised his fist but the blow didn't come.

"Don't you know three is better than one?" Devon had a hold of the fist yanked the man off and hit him hard in the gut. He bent over and Devon finished him with a knee kick right in the face, knocking the guy out cold.

Dane nodded to Devon, rolled himself over to his hands and knees and crawled to Samara.

"Samara," he said her name softly.

Samara slowly raised her head. She had a cut over her left eye, right along her eyebrow and her whole back was quickly turning black and blue.

"Oh God, Dane!" She rushed into his arms, wrapping her arms around his neck. "I thought they killed you."

"Going to take a lot more than a hit to my head to get rid of me," he said, closing his eyes, holding her as tightly as he dared.

"Hey, what happened to Blaine?" Devon asked.

* * * *

Blaine stayed downstairs; he walked around, looking in each and every room. Hairs on the back of his neck stood up, making him feel the presence of another. In his right hand he held a gun, cocked and ready.

A scuffle sounded behind him, Blaine swung around, aimed and stood in shock as the one who made the sound came out of the shadows.

"Hello, Blaine. Been a long time."

"Owen?" Blaine frowned, not believing his eyes.

Owen Paterio had been a school buddy when Blaine got shipped off. He also had a twisted side to him, one that Blaine had quickly discovered. Owen liked to beat the girls he went out with. Got off on their pain. Owen also didn't mind 'renting' out his girlfriends. After this, Blaine began to back away from him. What got Owen kicked out of school and disappearing was the night he

picked up one of the freshmen girls, drugged her, and held a private auction. To Owen, girls were used and abused and you were either with him or against.

Looking at the man now, Blaine hardly knew him. Owen dressed in the finest silk suit money could buy. His blown hair slicked back from cold, brown eyes. Narrow face, nice tan—no the man that Blaine thought he knew years ago wasn't the same one standing before him.

"You going to shoot me?" Owen asked with a smile. "That wouldn't be very gentlemen like, now would it? After all, how long has it been since we last saw each other?"

"Are you the money behind this shit?" Blaine demanded. He didn't lower the gun or his guard. With his memory coming full force at him, Blaine recalled how well Owen could talk his way out of trouble.

"You still coming to their rescue?" Owen asked. "You can't save them all."

"I don't need to save them if I stop you."

Owen laughed, "Oh Blaine I'd forgotten how funny you can be at times. I really have."

"You're not going to get away with this."

The smile slowly left Owen's pretty face. Pretty boy was what they called him back in school. He also had the charm, the smiles, and the cash to get out of trouble. But he didn't have anything that Blaine wanted in order to get out of this mess.

"I already have."

Another noise had Blaine glancing over his shoulder. That small action was all Owen needed in order to make a run for it. And Blaine was right on his ass.

Blaine ran after him. Through the house, jumping over rubble like broken tables and chairs, and out a back door. He got outside just as Owen got into a car. Blaine shot his gun, hitting the sides of the limo twice before it pulled away fast. Blaine stood alone outside, breathing hard, watching it leave.

"You okay?" Devon huffed, clearly out of breath because of running. "Heard shots."

"I'm fine," Blaine answered. "Just ran into the past."

"Huh?"

"Never mind." He turned, looking Devon in the face. "Did Dane find Samara?"

“Yeah, that fucker beat her.” Devon swallowed. “Heard anything from Darius?”

Blaine shook his head. “Nothing yet. Why don’t you take that bag of shit to the police? I think it’s time we burned this place to the ground.”

“Blaine, you alright?”

“Just peachy,” Blaine turned back around to the direction the limo had headed. “Fucking peachy.”

* * * *

Darius followed his personal escort up the stairs, back to the main floor then up another set to the second. After writing the check, waiting for them to make sure he had the money in his account to cover it, he now headed for the girl and prayed like hell it was without a doubt Makayla Tabor.

On the second floor they went down a darkly lit hallway to the door at the end. The man, who led him this far brought out a key, slipped it in the lock and opened the door. It slightly pissed Darius off to know that not only were the girls taken, but also locked into a room to wait their fate. It also had him wondering what kind of condition he might find her in.

“Enjoy,” the man said, opening the door for Darius.

Darius turned his head slightly with a nod before walking inside. The door closed, lock turned and he quickly looked around for a way to get her out, then his eyes landed on the girl upon the bed.

Her long black hair fanned out, falling off the bed, as well as one arm and one leg. Apparently she had been tossed onto the bed. Taking a few steps closer he saw that she also was scarcely dressed. A very thin, white baby doll lingerie covered her young body and no panties. From the way she stayed on the bed, even when Darius touched her face, told him that she also had been drugged.

“Makayla?” he said her name softly, kneeling down on the side of the bed, tapping her face. “Makayla, wake up.” She moaned. “Great,” he groaned, sighing.

Standing back up, Darius went over to the only window in the room. He pushed the thick burgundy curtains aside. Surprisingly there weren’t any bars on the window, yet at the same time why would they need them since the girls seemed to all be drugged once brought to the rooms. No threat of them trying to jump.

Pulling out his phone, he dialed Blaine. "Hey man, I need a distraction," he said the second Blaine answered the phone. "I've got her." He turned and looked at the young girl passed out on the bed. "She's out. I think they've drugged her, maybe roofied her or some shit. I'm going to have to carry her out and I don't think they're going to just let me walk out the front door with her."

"Think a raid will do it?"

Darius was speechless for a few seconds. "How the hell are you going to get a raid?"

"I didn't say with cops."

"Okay, I'm just lost then."

"You dope, I'm going to raid the place! Just be ready to leave."

"And how the hell am I going to know?"

"Oh, you'll know." The phone went dead, and Darius just stood there frowning.

"That man just keeps getting stranger and stranger." Shaking his head, Darius went back over to Makayla. He knelt down once more near the bed, grabbed the sheet and covered her up. As much as he might be attracted to her, she still was a kid. "What are we going to do with you, little one?"

* * * *

"You need stitches," Kera told Samara for about the tenth time.

Samara flinched when the ice touched her back. The beating she endured was worse than anything she ever experienced at the hands of her father. The son of a bitch who beat her really got off on it. When she tried to fight back he backhanded her so hard that she almost blacked out. That hit busted open her eyebrow.

"I'm not going anywhere until Makayla is back," Samara said, shaking her head.

"I can't get this bleeding to stop," Kera sighed. "Dane, please!"

"Samara you need to have that cut stitched up," Dane said.

"I'm not leaving!" Tears filled her eyes again. She didn't know if it was from the pain in her back or the pain in her chest over what might be happening to her sister.

"I've got some news." Blaine came back into the guest house. After they got Samara out all went back to Darius's place and decided to wait there until they had some news. "Darius has Makayla, but in order for him to get her out he needs a big distraction."

"Is she alright?" Samara knew she sounded desperate, but didn't care.

"As far as he could tell yes. They have her drugged though." Her heart sank. "But don't worry. He'll keep her safe, and we'll bring her home." His finger went right at Dane. "You take her to the hospital and have yourself checked out as well. Devon will go with me and Kera with you."

"I can go with you," Dane said.

"Not with that knot on your head." Blaine shook his head. "You both need to be checked out. Once we get Makayla out, I'll see to it that she also goes to the hospital to get looked at."

"Blaine, you don't need to fight my battle here," Dane stated.

"This battle isn't all yours, Dane, it belongs to us all," Blaine said. "Now get her looked at. Come on Devon."

"Thank you," Samara said, stopping Blaine when he turned and began to walk away. He didn't look at her, only nodded.

"Come on," Kera said, "Let's get that head of yours stitched up. Don't need my best friend bleeding to death."

Samara met Kera in the eyes and the tears fell, "I've never had a best friend before."

Kera smiled. "Neither have I. Kind of nice, isn't it?"

With the help from Dane and Kera, Samara got back up on her feet. Kera placed a thin sheet over her shoulders and she winced at the contact. But she needed it since her shirt had been ripped from her body.

The drive to the hospital was brutal. Each bump, each turn felt like once more she had that thick belt hitting her backside again. By the time they reached the hospital she felt as if she might pass out. And when they were taken back, and a doctor saw what kind of shape she was in, instantly she got a shot for the pain and another to stitch her up. Ten stitches.

"How you doing?" Kera joined her in the room she would be occupying for overnight observation. Lying on her side, Samara tried to fight the sleep that kept working to take her.

"I'm tired," she sighed.

Kera took her hand and the contact gave her comfort she didn't know she needed. "Well, it looks like Dane's hard head has done its job," she smiled. "He's fine. Talking to the police right now, making the bullshit statements and all." Samara smiled also.

"I'm worried about Makayla." Samara felt so drained of

energy. Even talking seemed to use up what precious amount she had. "She's only sixteen."

"I know. Saying to not worry won't do either one of us a damn bit of good, but try to rest. She's in good hands, and in a few hours she'll be right here with you."

Tears fell. Tears she didn't even know were forming in her eyes. "I can't believe my own father would do this to us. What kind of person does this to their children?"

"A selfish one," Kera stated. "My father sold me to the Compound, Samara. Took the cash and left town for good. To this day I don't even understand the why of it, and don't think I'll ever understand it. But what I do know and understand is that I have friends now. I have Devon, you, Dane and Blaine and even Darius. To me, you all are family and that in my eyes is way thicker than blood. So even though it hurts like hell over what your father has done, and what is happening with Makayla, you also need to take a deep breath and get the rest you need and let your new family help you take care of this. I promise you, your sister is coming back."

Samara nodded and let out a ragged breath. More tears fell and she closed her eyes, crying silently. Kera wiped them away, squeezed her hand, but said no more and Samara kept on crying. She cried until her body gave up, the pain killers won, and sleep overtook her.

Chapter Thirteen

“Come on, Blaine, don’t have all night,” Darius mumbled to himself while he paced the room, waiting for Blaine to show and do his thing. Every few steps he would glance over at Makayla.

She was out to the world. He could go over there, take what he wanted, and she wouldn’t be the wiser. It sickened him. How the hell could men get off with a young girl that was passed out?

Once more he went to her, knelt on the floor next to the bed and touched her hair. Soft, black silk slipped through his fingers. Darius didn’t think he would ever find a woman to complete him like Devon and Dane had. He and Blaine didn’t believe there was one out there that could claim their hearts, and both blamed their mothers for it. Darius’s mother turned her back on him every time his father lashed out. She didn’t give a shit what happened to Darius. Never showed him a kind hand, or loved him like a mother should have. She simply had nothing to do with him.

Darius was brought up with the notion that women were here for his pleasure. At a very young age his father had him instructed on the pleasures a woman could give a man. And at that young age Darius knew just then how fucked up his family really was. When the day came that his father sent him away, Darius left with a smile on his face. He’d rather be sent to some boarding school on another planet than live in that cold house.

But looking at Makayla, something inside him began to melt. For the first time in his life he felt like he wanted a woman by his side, not one for the night. Kneeling down next to this young beauty, Darius felt for the first time a sense of protectiveness.

“Don’t hurt me,” the three words came out in a faint, whimpering whisper.

Darius moved his hand from her hair, brushed knuckles down her cheek and got closer, “Never.”

Apparently the drug was starting to wear off. Darius stood up

went back to the window and looked out again. Off in the distance, almost too far to see, he could make out a car parked. A car that looked a whole lot like Blaine's. Not losing sight of it, Darius brought out his phone and dialed Blaine again.

"That you parked off in the distance?" he asked the second Blaine answered.

"Yeah. You ready?"

"Hurry the hell up!" The lock on the door turned, Darius jumped and turned to face it. "Make it fast, man. Someone's coming." He hung up and waited. The door opened and in came a man Darius never saw before. "Can I help you?"

He closed the door and faced Darius. The man didn't look like he had money, and yet Darius didn't either. The guy wore jeans, shirt with jacket. Cold gray eyes, messy brown hair and stood the same height as Darius. But there was something about him that Darius just didn't like.

"I paid for the next round," he told Darius. "I've come for my sweet young puss."

"Don't think so," Darius quickly put himself between the guy and Makayla. "I paid a large amount of money for her alone. I don't share."

The man smiled. He also fisted both hands at his side and Darius knew there was going to be a fight. He lunged and Darius was ready. Two strong bodies pushed against each other, but it was the other one a bit stronger. He shoved Darius to the side, and Darius went flying. The man went towards Makayla and Darius lunged right back for him. He knocked him down, hovered over him and hit the guy in the face with his fist.

They both rolled on the floor, hitting each other, landing some really hard and good punches. Darius tasted blood on his lip, felt a cut over his eye, but didn't stop fighting. He heard the sound of a nose being broken, the man yelling out in pain and another hit to his ribs. Somehow Darius ended up back on his back, the man over him and his fist rising up for another hit.

But instead of the hit landing in Darius's face, a chair landed on the guy's back and head, knocking him out cold. Darius got a glance of Makayla standing over them both, a chair leg in her hand. With a shove, he got the guy off of him and caught her just as she crumbled to the floor.

"Nice one," he said.

She smiled. "Samara. Where's my sister?"

Makayla still sounded weak and drugged. "Don't worry. You're going to see her real soon." He grabbed one of the blankets from the bed, wrapped it around her body then swung her into his arms as he stood up.

Since the door was unlocked, Darius left. He went back down the dark hallways and to the stairs, glancing around him every so often to see if anyone might be following him or noticing him leaving with a girl. With the silence of the house he could clearly hear moaning from men now behind the closed doors.

He made it all the way down the stairs and just about to the front door when he was stopped.

"Where do you think you're going? And with one of our girls?"

Darius was just about to answer that when he heard Blaine. "He's leaving."

Darius turned to see Blaine with a gun at the guy's head. "Perfect timing."

Blaine hit the guy in the head, knocking him out cold. "Let's get the hell out of here. The cops will be arriving in about five minutes or less."

"Thought you said you weren't calling them."

"Changed my mind," Blaine shrugged.

Darius followed Blaine out of the house. He jogged with Makayla in his arms to where Blaine parked, put her in the back seat and got in the front. But instead of leaving, Blaine waited.

"What's going on?" Darius asked. "Blaine?"

"I want to make sure none of them get away," Blaine answered.

Less than five minutes and cops arrived, raiding the house. When men were brought out in cuffs, Blaine started the car and pulled away.

Letting her go once they reached the hospital was one of the hardest things Darius had ever done. It felt strange also. Hell, he didn't even know her and still he felt as if she belonged to him.

The doctors checked her out, confirmed that she had been drugged with a roofie and planned on keeping her over night. Samara also was staying overnight. Some fucker beat her for his kicks.

"I owe you." Dane handed a cup of coffee to Darius. Darius looked at it before taking it, but avoided eye contact.

"No, you don't." Darius pulled away. He couldn't let Dane see what was written all over his face.

"I know that look, Darius," Dane stated. "I saw it on Devon's face the first time he saw Kera. She's too young for you, and she's my wife's sister. I can't let you have her."

Darius sat down and sighed. He was damn tired, more so than what he thought. "I'm not stupid, Dane. I know she's too young right now."

"Right now?" Dane huffed. "She's too young period."

Taking a deep breath, Darius stood back up and faced Dane. "I'm not going to argue this with you here. Dane, I don't know what the hell is going on with me and I don't want to fight with you. I have five years to figure it all out. Maybe you'll get lucky and this all will be one big ass mistake. So to keep our friendship where it's at, I'm going to say goodnight, good luck, and I'll be in touch."

He turned, and walked away, leaving Dane standing right where he was.

"Doesn't work that way." Devon was waiting outside, leaning against Darius's car.

"What doesn't?"

"Darius, I knew without a doubt that Kera was the one for me, just like you discovered tonight Makayla is for you. You'll wait the time that's needed for her, and then you'll come right back here for her. But as for just walking away from her, Dane, this town for that matter, doesn't work the way you want it to." Devon took a deep breath. "You've been running from this place for years. You and Blaine. Stop running and face it."

"There hasn't been a thing in this town for me to come home to," Darius stated. "Until now. Keep me posted on her, will-ya?"

Devon nodded, "Yeah, man. I'll let you know what's going on."

"Thanks, and keep an eye on Blaine. Something big is going on with him."

* * * *

Blaine stood in front of the fireplace, a fire blazing, and giving off golden light in the study. The rest of the room stood in darkness. Between his lips, a thin cigar, and resting on the mantle was a glass of whiskey. And in his hand a photo that he hadn't looked at since he graduated from school.

He stared at the photo, wondering when things went so wrong. It was the only photo that Owen Paterio took. They stood

together, laughing outside the school. Blaine remembered it all like it was yesterday, even recalled who took it. A young girl—a pretty young thing that Owen enjoyed having around. It didn't hit Blaine then why Owen liked having her around so much, until the last week of their friendship.

Owen being Owen, ended up having a relationship with the girl's mother. Besides boasting about it, Owen's main plan was to get to the girl herself. She was so young, so pretty and as Owen liked to point out 'ripe for the picking'. Once Blaine discovered what his friend was up to, he cut all ties. That pissed his father off mostly because Owen was from a good family and would do Blaine good to be a close friend with him instead of the ones he had back home. He never knew what happened to the girl or her mother. Only heard rumors that she left in the middle of the night with her daughter and the stories of her being paid to leave by Owen's father flew through the school.

"Can I get you anything, Sir?" Randal asked from the doorway.

"No, thank you, Randal," Blaine answered him

"Your luggage is ready and the car out front waiting for you."

Blaine fisted the photo in his hand as he rolled the cigar in his mouth. He tossed the photo right into the fire, watching it burn. As far as he was concerned his past was just that—the past, and Owen nothing more than a punk who needed to be stopped.

Turning away from the fire, Blaine walked out of the study and met his butler at the front door. "Randal, I have a job for you."

"Sir?"

"I need you to look into something for me. A mother and daughter with the last name of Kabrey. I want to know what happened to them, where they're at, everything. And I also need you to get me everything you can find on Owen Paterio."

"Yes Sir."

"Thank you."

"Have a good trip, Sir."

Blaine nodded, walked out into the night, got into the back seat of the car. He drove off but his mind was not on the business meeting that was coming up. No, his mind thought about his school days and the girl that Owen wanted. She was the only one he ever wanted and the one he never got. But for the life of him, he couldn't recall her name, or a face for that matter.

* * * *

Dane stood in what use to be his front yard looking at what was left of his home. It had burnt to the ground. Everything he owned, worked for, gone. Some of the timbers still stood, nothing more.

"We can rebuild," Samara came up behind him, wrapped her arms around his waist and rested her chin on his back. He nodded. "I wish I knew what to say, Dane."

"Hey, it looks like your car made it!" Makayla called out.

Dane turned his head. Makayla stood at what use to be the garage and sure enough there stood his car. It had some fire damage but not much.

"Come on, staying at Blaine's place won't be so bad," Samara said.

"It's not that," he sighed. "This was the first thing ever to be mine. I worked my ass off behind my grandmother's back to build this place and now it's gone."

Makayla walked up to them, brushing her hands over a pair of second hand jeans. None of them had clothes when they left the hospital, so the staff found them something to wear. By the time Kera came with new things they were already dressed and ready to get the hell out. Then Blaine called to tell them all he was out of town once more and if Dane wanted to stay at the house until he could figure out what he was going to do about this place he was more than welcomed.

The crunching of gravel and Dane, in Samara's arms, turned to see a limo enter his drive. He frowned. It was strange to see the limo, since the last time he spoke to its owner they left on very bad terms.

It stopped; the driver got out and opened the back door. With Samara on his left and Makayla on his right, Dane watched his grandmother get out of her limo and walk up to him, head held up.

Berdina Knight dressed like she always did in her best when she went out. A dark gray designer suit, black pumps, hair pulled back into a bun and her blue eyes crisp and sharp as if she was still in her early twenties or thirties. She walked up to Dane, standing face to face with him.

"I just heard about everything," she said. Those sharp eyes of hers softened. "I'm sorry. You shouldn't have had to fight this battle alone. I'm a stupid old woman, set in her ways, use to

running things the way they need to be ran. I'm asking you to come home." She looked then at Samara. "All of you."

Dane thought the Earth had to have stopped. Never in his life did he think he'd hear his grandmother say the things she just said now.

"I don't understand," he said.

She turned back to him. "Any man that would risk his life for a woman must love her dearly. I see that now, Dane. And as much as I might've been raised to keep classes in their proper order I can see now with wiser eyes that change needs to come. Your grandfather showed me that once. He might've had money, but as far as my father was concerned we were from different worlds. And to keep this story short, he accepted it, and I'm going to accept this. And I ask you to come home. Please."

Dane opened his mouth to tell his grandmother 'no', that what was said couldn't be undone, but Samara stepped forward and spoke up first.

"You know, Berdina, I think we all could use a fresh start." She smiled first at her then at Dane, and then took his grandmother's hand. "And we will be very grateful to you for taking us into your home."

Berdina's face seemed to lighten up and tears came into her eyes. Tears Dane never thought he'd ever see. Hell, he didn't think she knew how to cry.

Dane also knew when he was out numbered. His wife seemed to be able to bend his grandmother in a way he never thought possible. "Okay, Grandmother," he nodded. "We'll come back to live with you, but only under one condition." He held up his finger.

"Anything."

"That you understand that the only woman I answer to now, is Samara." He smiled.

Berdina chuckled, "Oh, I think I can live with that."

"Now meet my sister," Samara said, tugging his grandmother over to where Makayla stood. "Makayla, this is Berdina."

"Oh, isn't she lovely." Berdina's voice even sounded bright.

Dane shook his head, watching as the three women began talking. It started first with shopping for clothing that they lost, then school for Makayla then on to the house and a few changes his grandmother wanted to make but was unable to handle anymore. The change in her alone shocked him all the way down to his

boots.

When they all finally made it home, after a very large shopping trip, his grandmother handed over the reins to the kitchen to Samara. She then took Makayla upstairs to a room and spent what was left in there talking about redecorating it. All Dane could seem to do was stand around, watching the change with an open mouth. He never thought he'd see it.

After supper, they all went into the family room. Makayla and his grandmother chatted away about school, which college would be the best, all the girl things. Watching them getting along so well, Dane didn't have the heart to tell her that her father sold her to the Compound and that he couldn't find a way out of it. The only thing he could think of was to keep her out of town as much as possible, and with the lingering thought that Darius might want her also, well, it made keeping her away that much easier.

"You're too quiet." Samara snuck up behind him, wrapping her arms around his waist. "What's got you so deep in thought?"

"I can't save her," he sighed. "If she stays here they will take her to the Compound and she will be married off."

"Maybe she'll get lucky and find someone as great as what I did." She slid around to his front, a big smile on her face. "I'm very lucky to have someone like you in my life, Dane."

"No, I'm the lucky one." He hung his arms over her shoulders, making sure to not press on her back. "You've changed everything in my life—made it so much better. You have no idea." He kissed her lightly.

"Why do I get this strange feeling though that you know more about what's going to happen to Makayla than what you're letting on?"

Dane sighed. "Because I think I do." He didn't get to finish. Makayla turned the television on and there on the news was the arrest of the people involved in the kidnapping of not only Samara and Makayla but others as well.

"Police officials have located Cameron Noved along with Aundre Esopo, who is suspected of not only kidnapping but underage prostitution and selling of young girls. Cameron Noved had escaped from prison months ago. Last year he had been convicted of kidnapping and selling young girls over the border to men and to brothel houses. Esopo is charged with a list of things, including kidnapping and trafficking of underage girls. Other

charges have been filed as well.”

“Karma is a bitch,” Makayla started.

“Young lady!” Berdina gasped.

“What’d I tell you about that mouth of yours?” Dane snapped also.

“Well she does have a point,” Samara agreed. “Karma sure is a bitch.”

Out of the blue, Berdina began to laugh. Dane never saw anything like it and could only stand there in awe over the scene.

“Oh, I got this strange feeling that my sister is going to be very good for your grandmother,” Samara chuckled.

“This is just way too strange.” Dane shook his head.

“Well, why don’t we use the distraction to our advantage?” She lowered her voice, pushing at his chest, making him back out of the room. “I have this hunger that I just *have* to take care of.”

Dane saw the twinkle in her eye. “You can have anything you want.”

“Good, let’s go upstairs where you can love me properly. I’m dying to try out this position Kera told me about. Sixty-nine I believe it’s called?” She backed away from him, turned and ran towards the stairs.

Dane growled and went after her, tugging at his shirt as he ran. He chased her right into their room, closed and locked the door behind him.

“I love you, Dane,” she huffed, taking her clothes off.

“And I’m about to show you just how much I love you, Samara Knight.”

She smiled, stripped down to nothing before him. “Can hardly wait.”