

Something Between Red And Violet

Prologue

20:05 pm, 31st December 2013, Kashmir, India

He stands in front of the stately mansion surveying it. Jack Frost air of Kashmir palpitating at his hair and features, chilling him to the core. He's been examining it like a hawk for over a week now. Today's finally the day to make a move. The reason behind all the torture he had to endure since childhood has to be retaliated. Their evil deeds would cause their demise, after all. He knows what he has to do very well and how sleekly. Although he decided to make her suffer for at least a while giving her a dose of her own medicine. He smiles devilishly at that.

"The devil's supreme decoy is to coax you in to believing that he doesn't exist and here I am The Devil himself, standing at your threshold to lure you away from your deplorable epoch to the path of repentance and emancipation."

imitating a gravelly tone he mocks, making his way to the back of the house and sneaks in through the rear end door, then silently ascends the stairs to the second floor and finds the room he intended to do his business in first. He couldn't afford any distraction and the kid will definitely be one if he doesn't shut her up beforehand. He finds her sleeping soundly on the bed, and sits slowly at the end. It wasn't really her fault, but the more he looks at her, the more furious he becomes. The kid mumbles something unintelligible while stirring. After a while her eyes flutter open and she sees him staring at her intensely.

"I'm sorry baby sister." He says and before she could make any sound he wrings her neck promptly.

Coming downstairs he moves like a panther in search of his prey. He hears two people having a heated conversation in the living room. He peeks and sees her seated on the couch, frustration clouding her delicate face, then he notices the suited man sitting beside her. He smirks, adrenaline coursing through his veins. Without being noticed by them he turns off the main switch of the house letting darkness envelope them.

"What happened?" Mr. Singh asks, annoyed.

"Go check." Martha frowns.

He stands at the doorway waiting for the dupe to come near. Mr. Singh gets up and makes his way blindly to the doorway without a hint of what's coming next. When he nears the door someone grabs his neck from behind and jabs something sharp in his stomach. He shrieks in agony, but the assailant slits his throat before he makes anymore damage to his ear.

“Guru, what’s wrong? Guru” Martha’s voice shakes, her little body trembling in fright.

He smiles a triumphant smile. He can almost taste the terror attenuating her. He heads toward the couch where she is standing and takes out his lighter from his pocket.

“This would be fun.”

He can make out her silhouette. She’s searching for something to light up the room. He moves effortlessly and lights up his lighter.

“Rifling through for this?” He drawls near her ear. She whirls around to a very familiar pair of byzantium eyes.

“Well hello mother!” He greets her mockingly and begins to slash her throat barbarously lengthening her misery. Blood oozes from the cut and gurgling sounds come from her throat while she hits the floor with a thud.

He goes to turn on the lights with a very satisfied grin on his face. Then he comes back to the living room to admire his performance. He finds her trying to say something to him, leaning against the couch he takes her frail almost lifeless hand in his gloved one and whispers, “Sleep” and closes her eyes. He sits there watching life slipping out of her body.

“As much as I would love to stay with you for a few more moments, I have to get done with one more business.” He whispers caressing her face, “Good bye mother.”

And he absconds in the night, filled with the smell and promises of a life altering upcoming new-year for his next quest.

Chapter One

17:03 pm, 18th May 2015, Bucharest, Romania

Mattia Renzi, Chief of the Intelligence Agency, staged before the glassed fenestra of their ten storey office building, awaits the arrival of the “Bloodhound” of their agency. Worriment patently etched in his expression. The assignment they are going to work in is more viperous than ever, although he has faith in his little bombshell. She’s impossibly good at her work and skills. She’s definitely going to come out unharmed and shining, deep down Mattia knows that. But still he worries out of the nurturing sentiment he has for the girl.

“Vuoi farmi portare il caffè ora, Signore?” His personal assistant’s voice brings him back his equilibrium. He declines shaking his head while opening the door of his balcony which is attached with his cabin. Coming out, he expands his eyes to the direction of the early evening sky and draws in a lungful of air. An approaching form of a Royal Enfield Thunderbird 350 grabs his attention, causing his lips to tug upwards.

Rushing inside he sits on his chair and picks up the already read newspaper in his hand as a means to look wonted. Minutes pass by while he sits on his chair immobile, holding the paper and knuckled down on the supposed comer. Several minutes later he lowers the paper from his line of vision and almost falls down from his seat when he sees her sitting on the couch across the room with mirth on her countenance.

“Didn’t know that you read papers upside down! I should try that too sometimes since you seemed so immersed.” She sarcastically states.

“How long have you been here?” He asks her rolling his eyes.

“Exactly four minutes thirty five seconds.” She answers stopping the timer of her watch. He moves his head sideways in mock amazement, being as of now used to her oddball ways.

“Anyways, you’re going to Bristol.” Mattia declares and looks pointedly at her to gauge her reaction. The mass of fruitcake she is, she whistles at the announcement as if she’s own a jackpot and is about to go on a long term expensive vacation.

“Wow! Homicide or terrorism?” He winces at the throw of her question. Her absurdity towards this kind of serious circumstances knows no boundary.

“Pretty much of the both. I transferred you all the files required for you to operate the case and you will be working with three more people assigned on this case. All the necessary documents have been sent to you to get through the customs. You leave tomorrow morning. Good luck Agent Calme!” He reveals in one breath.

“You do understand that I don’t function well in groups, right?” she asks grimly.

“Well, you have no other choice.” He shrugs nonchalantly.

She remains seated for a while looking narrowly at him for God knows why, then rises from the couch and saunters to his direction. Coming to a halt beside his desk, she outstretches her hand for him to hold. He places his hand in hers and clasps it tightly.

“I’ll come back safe and sound. You don’t worry.” Leaning forward she kisses his cheek and says, “Addio Zio!”

“Abbi cura di te, ragazzino.” He whispers to her retreating back.

Chapter Two

10:03 am, 22nd May 2015, Bristol, United Kingdom

“Hey pretty boy, come here!” Paxton calls out to me from his usual table. He and I have become good friends after I helped him from being mugged outside of our diner. *It could have turned into a romantic love story just like the movies if he were a woman, eh?* Still, it formed a firm friendship between us. He and his little group have been coming in this diner almost regularly ever since. I

sometimes even help them in their studies and according to them I'm a genius and I should get into the school with them. But they all know that's literally visionary for me. *Go figure!* That doesn't keep them from coming up with various suggestions though. They even think I would be great at marketing industry. *Yeah!* That sure sounds like a pretty good idea but that's rather illusory as far as I'm concerned. Nevertheless, I feel blessed to find such friends, I don't even fit in their group yet they made me one of them. They were the only people who were always generous towards me without any selfish motives since I came here. They even helped me mingling with the crowd and become somewhat outgoing.

"Hey big boy, I'll take the usual!" Bethany purrs and I roll my eyes. Bethany Taylor technically is the owner of the diner I work in. This diner is one of her father's many businesses. She's been hitting on me from the day I started working here. She doesn't have anything to do here. Still, she comes here every day to mess with my head. She's immensely pretty with her big brown eyes and long tanned legs. But she's boss's little daughter and I don't want any trouble. *Oh sure I'm a guy; but not the one whose gray cells are always connected to his groin when it comes to girls.*

"Hey Paxy!" I acknowledge him placing their orders on the table.

"Don't Paxy me Dom. You know how I hate the name!" He says fuming.

"Exactly!" I say priggishly. Paxton's mother has always called him Paxy and he always hated it. According to him Paxy sounds very gay; but his mother never listened. He eventually got used to her calling him that. But other than his mother whoever dares calling him the name, he goes all vile and vicious on them.

"Whatever! Anyways, this is Jason, a friend of my sister's." He says motioning to the smug looking blonde guy sitting beside him.

"Hey mate!" he nods in my direction. I acquiesce smiling politely never leaving his dark gaze.

"Actually one of Jason's friends needs a place to stay and since he's staying with my sister and you mentioned that you needed a roommate, I thought it would be best if she stays with you." Paxton spouts. I look at the guy named Jason and try sizing him up.

"Where is she from?" I ask him directly.

"We both are from Yorkshire, came here to do our internships." He answers in his peculiar accent. I think for a while about all the complications of living with a totally unknown person, especially with a girl. But getting to share the costs of the apartment with someone is quite tempting for me at the time. So shrugging all the "what if"-s off, I nod my head; yes. Jason's expression turns into relief.

"Okay! She'll move in tomorrow morning then. Only if that's fine by you?" he asks.

"Cool!" I say turning around to leave their table.

"Do you fancy going out with us tonight, mate?" Jason asks suddenly.

“Nope! I gotta go work after my shift ends here.”

“Come on dude! It’s Friday!” Paxton says exasperated. I do understand his exasperation, but skipping work wouldn’t do any good to my already broken financial condition.

“I know I know! But I seriously can’t make it tonight. There are some works pending at Joey’s. But we could go out after you guys are done with your semesters and I could also save some money by then. What say?”

Mr. Anderson enters the diner and motions for me to join the cash counter; making our conversation hanging. With him it’s always like this; he without exception comes and goes as he pleases and he’s continually annoyed with something or someone, particularly me. I don’t really understand what I ever did to offend him.

“You get paid to serve the customers; not to chit-chat.” He says glaring at me. I fight a scowl.

You’re the manager so why don’t you ever do your own duty instead of lounging around with your stinking butt! I think in my mind but don’t say anything. Nodding I settle at the counter.

The guys come to pay and I ask Paxton the same thing I asked before Mr. Anderson came strolling in. He sighs, “Fine! But you better not forget or I’ll drag you out of your house if need be.” I nod and control my urge to roll eyes.

They leave the diner and I get back to work.

Chapter Three

There is a jingling when I open the door of the café. I get inside the air conditioned room and breathe a sigh of relief. No one looks up; they all are busy either doing their work or chatting. I make my way to the counter and ask for a latte and blueberry muffins. It’s 7.30 pm and I’m on my way from Joey’s to home.

Joey is the owner of the mechanical shop I work into and a scumbag. The only reason I have been working there so far is, I love my work and his shop is one of the best in town and he pays well. But he takes advantage of me because he knows my weaknesses, which are money and machines and makes me work for hours than necessary. The guy from the counter breaks my train of thoughts and hands me my orders. I pay him and skim through the crowd for a vacant seat. I find one at the far corner of the café and see a girl sitting there, typing furiously at her keyboard, oblivious to everything surrounding her.

Without noticing my moves, I slowly take steps to her direction. She doesn’t notice me though. She’s fixated on her laptop screen. Reaching her table I clear my throat. She still doesn’t look up.

“Excuse me!” I croak awkwardly and clear my throat again. She looks up for a second and I feel my breath catching in my throat.

She looks at me through her amber depths with a glint of blankness in them and I feel my knees buckle. Her long auburn curls fall to her waist, her golden pools are surrounded by long dark lashes, her small pointy nose is crunched up in an irritated fashion and her plump lips are held by her pearly white teeth. She surely is a sight to behold. Her bewitching beauty can put even the angels to shame. *Not that I ever personally met any angel or something.* I see her lips part and she says something, but nothing reaches my ear. I then see her waving a twenty dollar bill before my face in a slow mo, every activity around me seems to happen in a snail's pace. *Wait! Am I having a heart attack? Why my heart is pounding so fast? Why everything is so weird around me?* I blink and everything becomes normal. I look at her face and panic is imminent there.

"Are you alright? Can you hear me?" she asks in urgency. *Oh God! Even her voice sounds heavenly.*

"Are you alright?" she asks again.

"Huh?"

"What's wrong with you? Are you not feeling well?" she asks frowning.

"Yeah yeah.. I'm fine! Thanks." I vocalize lastly.

"Okay! Here take your tip."

"Why would I take tip?" I ask looking down at her hand and she's holding those bills to my direction; then it hits. *She thinks I'm a waiter and asking for my tip!* I hear someone growling. *Oh it's me of course!*

"Do I look like a waiter to you?" I ask glaring at her, suddenly angry.

"Then what do you want?" she asks absently. I look at the latte and muffins in my hand and then at her. I open my mouth to say something, but refrain myself.

"Never mind!" I say shaking my head. She shrugs and gets back to whatever she was doing as if the whole ogling and waiter-tipping scene didn't just take place.

I look from the corner of my eyes around the café and no one seems to have noticed anything and even if they did, they don't care. Taking a last glimpse and a snap-shot mentally of her exquisiteness, I practically run out of there.

I'm so not ever coming back to this place again.

Chapter Four

I wake up at the sound of my door bell.

"Oh son of a gun!" I curse under my breath sitting up in my bed.

It's probably my new roommate. She's supposed to move in today. *But why is she so early? What time is it?*

I check my alarm clock placed on my bed side table. *Oh shoot! It's 11 in the morning. I overslept! And there goes running my errands down the drain.*

I jump out of my bed and rush towards the front door. I open it and my jaw drops. *It's her!*

"Hey mate!" I look behind her and find Jason holding two boxes in his hand and beaming brightly. I start to say something but nothing comes out my mouth. *AGAIN!* I look at her and reiteratively find myself drowning in those amber depths.

"Hello?" she says waving her hand.

"Oh! Please come in." I finally choke out. Then noticing my half naked self I race to my room.

Oh Christ! Kill me. I'll probably die every day if she's gonna stay with me. I get dressed in record time and head for the living room. Reaching there I find her sitting on the couch and Jason in the kitchen with a carton of milk in his hand. Slowly I take steps toward her. "Hi" I say, but once more just air comes out instead of words.

"Hey! You're the one I met at the café last night, right?" she asks sounding amused. *Shit! She probably thinks I'm a lunatic.* I nod at that, unable to form any word.

"I apologize for my last day's behavior. I actually was engrossed in something and thought you were the waiter—"

"No no. It's totally fine." I find myself answering, *finally.*

"I'm Serenity, by the way." She holds out her hand for me to shake. *Serenity. Ah! An irenic name for a tranquil beauty.*

"I'm Dominic." I say shaking her hand and feel my body quiver at her touch. "Let me show your room." I offer her. She accepts and I show her to her bedroom and give her a little tour of the loft.

In the midst of the tour my stomach grumbles making me realize that I haven't eaten anything.

"Would you like to eat something?" I ask her in constraint.

"No. You go ahead. I already had breakfast." She informs. Agreeing I make my way to the kitchen. Jason is in the kitchen sitting at the counter and admiring his handiwork which is a pile of bread. *How did he manage to put this giant cardiac arrest on a plate so fast?* He peeks at me from behind the hulking sandwich and wiggles his brows, making the whole scenario seem ridiculous before my eyes.

"Are you seriously gonna eat it?" I ask him incredulously pointing at his sandwich.

"Oh yes! This is nothing." he says chuckling and biting it. I cast a glance at Serenity and find her rolling her eyes. I drink some juice and check the time at the wall clock which is striking twelve. *I'm going to be so late!* I hurriedly fetch the spare key and hand it to her.

"Here is your key. You make yourself at home." I say heading to the door.

"Where are you going?" she asks after me. "I don't mean to pry but since I'm new here I could come along and get to know the place a little."

"I'm going to buy some groceries and stuffs." I state.

"Great! I need to buy some too. Let's go." she says pulling Jason out of the counter just when he was about to take a last bite of his hoagie.

Before I could say anything, they both bolt out the door afore me as if the house is on fire. I confusedly slip out after them.

Chapter Five

Parking my car in front of the grocery store I remain seated for a while and admire my old black, single cab, short bed; Chevy that I put back together myself at Joey's and bought it myself from him. This baby runs smoothly. I instinctively smile and get out of the car. Jason and Serenity both excuse themselves to go to the computer store across the street.

I get inside the supermarket and start rummaging through the shelves for the things I need. Picking up everything I make my way to the counter. The guy behind the counter seems to be going through a phase when you go all Emo with aberrant hairstyles and tons of piercings. I give him my stuffs; he looks up and his eyes light up and a smirk tug up at the corner of his lips. I look at him confused and finally realize that he's looking behind me. I turn around and see what he sees. It's Serenity standing in front of a shelf turning her back towards us and the guy's checking out her butt. I turn to the guy shooting him daggers through my eyes and clear my throat to get him out of his reverie. He gives me a nervous smile and starts calculating the items.

"here." she says placing her stuffs on the counter. I smile at her. *God! She's breathtaking.*

Get a grip Dom! She's only a girl; a very very beautiful girl.

"Got everything you need?"

"Yeah. For now, yes." She replies grinning.

She's probably the most attractive woman I have come athwart in twenty one years of my life. She has a certain aura which works as a magnet. She's intimidating yet alluring. Her skin is pale beyond belief yet it glows almost an unearthly glow.

She snaps her fingers in front of my face making me realize that I'm recurrently staring at her.

"Did you hear what I said?" she asks.

"Um..No. Could you repeat it?" I ask abashedly.

"I asked whether you would like to go to the coffee shop across the street" she bids raising one delicate brow.

"Uh..yeah we could do that." I utter awkwardly

"Fantastic. Let's go!" she says gleefully.

Did she just ask me out? Duh! It's only a cup of coffee; not a date. But did she really?

"Hello..! You coming or not?" she asks walking past me looking bored. *Gee! I again zoned out. What? Am I a thirteen year old or something?*

"Yeah yeah.. right behind you."

I say collecting our stuffs from the counter and walking out the store leaving the counter guy open mouthed.

Chapter Six

"So where are you from?" Serenity asks sipping her latte; eyes shining with mischief. I start feeling uneasy. I'm never comfortable talking about my home country. It's been years that I'm away from the place which was supposed to be the treasure chest of my living. Home, the word is so welcoming and heartwarming, yet it leaves a dull ache in my heart.

"Bristol it is." I answer finally. She gawks at my face for a while making me squirm under her penetrating gaze.

"Oh!" she says finally and I leave the breath I didn't know I was holding. "What do you do for a living?" she asks changing the subject.

"I work in a café and a mechanical shop. I want to do something in mechanical field though. I want to have a real job you know. But I don't know if I'm ever going to get one, since I don't have a degree. I have this thing for machines from childhood. I even reassembled my own car." I ramble smiling fitfully. She stares at me for a while and shakes her head grinning.

"What?" I ask her confused.

"You love machines, don't you? I mean really love them!" A flicker of sadness crosses her face.

"Is it that obvious?" I ask fidgeting with the handle of my coffee mug.

“It’s your eyes. They literally shine when you talk about machines.” She reveals smiling sweetly and then her smile falters when her phone beeps with an incoming message. Her body stiffens and her face becomes unreadable. She stands up, places money on the table and leaves the café without saying goodbye or giving a backward glance.

I sit at our table dumbstruck and wonder what exactly did just happen!

I park the car in the driveway of my apartment building and get myself out. I get inside and head directly to my room. Serenity’s not home yet; I wonder where she might be. I throw myself on bed. It’s only 7 in the evening and I’m bone tired. I can’t afford to lose track and here I am lounging around and sipping lattes with achingly good looking strange roomies. *God bless me!* I start reeling the day’s events in my mind. Firstly she was intimidating, secondly she was sweet and then all of a sudden she was rude and mean; *I mean what exactly is it with her?* She was the first one to ask me out in the first place, then why couldn’t she at least bid a goodbye? She actually seemed to be having fun; then? *Christ! She is Mercurial after all.*

Keeping all these infuriating and confusing thoughts aside, I let sleep consume my consciousness.

Chapter Seven

Delicious aroma of food invade my nostrils. *Mmmm! Is that pancake?*

I stir by my stomach quibbling and an eerie feeling as if someone is watching me. I open my eyes a peek and the very next moment both my eyes grow larger when they land on the spine-tingling frame of Serenity sitting at the bean-bag beside my bed with a delightful facial appearance.

“Buongiorno sleepyhead!” she greets gaily.

“Morning! Err—how long have you been sitting here?” I ask her ineptly trying to cover my unclothed body.

“Eight minutes twelve seconds to be precise.” She says looking at her watch. *Whoa! She’s been counting the time?*

“Why didn’t you wake me then?” I ask her getting out of the bed.

“Why, I liked watching you sleep.” She shrugs, as if it is the most common thing to do.

“Umm—” I try to form words but find myself tongue tied at that.

“Come, I made breakfast.” She states getting up from her seat and leaves the room.

I stand there grinning insanely big for a few moments then dash inside the bathroom.

“So, what do you plan on doing today?” Serenity asks me after spraying maple syrup on my plate of pancakes.

“Nothing. Will stay in probably.”

“How about we take a tour of the city?” she offers with sparkling eyes making me choke in awe. *She wants to spend a whole day with me? Really?* I stare at her radiant face trying to discern if she is being honest and all I see is sincerity there.

“I’d love that.” I say returning the same sincerity.

“Great! It’s 8 o’clock now and we leave in thirty minutes then.”

It’s been five hours we are on our outing and it is in every way the most exciting and entertaining day out I have been on so far. I have been staying in this city from quite a long duration now, but with all my extra baggage I never had the heart to explore the city in so much of a care-free manner. When they say, “God created man and finding him not sufficiently alone, gave him a companion to make him feel his solitude more keenly.”- which is conclusively chauvinistic keeping aside the metaphorical meaning of course, I would say keeping the hunky-dory feeling I’m going through now in my mind by having Serenity next to me that, it was one of the best thing God has ever done, *I mean literally*. Glancing at her joyful face I feel my heart melting. That smile on her face has the power to illuminate a whole city like this; it is that much gracious indeed.

“It’s beautiful.” I hear her commenting.

“Undeniably.” I pronounce looking at her face.

“I know ri—” she locks her gaze with me.

“Umm—Walker?” she clears her throat making me blink and points toward the Cabot Tower.

“I’m talking about that.” She smirks making me flush in embarrassment.

“Err—Yes it is.” I say scratching the back of my neck.

She laughs shaking her head. Then looking behind my shoulder her body tautens and her hand flies to the back of her jeans.

“Move!” she shouts shoving me aside.

And the next thing I know, she’s holding a gun and firing at a backtracking mugger’s leg.

Chapter Eight

I just stall gaping like a fish out of the pond in the direction of her effortless velocity of taking a shot at the man. The man staggers on his track but surprisingly keeps running with his bleeding leg. But Serenity runs like the flash after him and tackles him to the ground. The man manages to hit her across the face, but she does not budge an inch. One hard punch from her and the man becomes unconscious.

Sirens of the police car and an ambulance break my stupor. I without delay run to her with a pounding heart wondering if she's fine. But before I could reach her, I see the guy scrambling to his feet and taking out a knife he readies himself to stab her from behind. My heart stops!

I yell her name trying to alert her. Hearing that she twirls around and the man plunges the knife in her stomach, but she still succeeds to grab his arm and twist it, making the man wail in pain. Police cars reach the place within minutes and they all rush to the direction where now Serenity sits holding her abdomen with a huge crowd surrounding them. Thrusting the crowd aside I try reaching her, but the cops stop me from going any farther.

"She's with me goddamit!" I roar at the younger looking cop. Imaginably, there was something savagery clearly written on my profile, because without a word he lets me through.

"But Miss we need to take you to the hospital. Look at all the blood you're leaking." I see a female officer insisting Serenity sitting beside her.

"Take care of the lady there with the kid who was mugged. I'm perfectly alright. Besides it's just a scratch." She tells while standing up.

"But Miss what about the state—"

"I'll be down to the station in the evening." She informs. The cop argues, but she dismisses her with a wave of her hand. Then all of a sudden her head whips to my direction and her eyes soften. I see her walking to me with that usual smirk on her face. She stops in front me and comes impossibly closer to my face and as if feeling the emotional turmoil racing inside of me, she caresses my cheek with her hand in a soothing motion and whispers, "I'm okay. Let's go home."

"You sure you don't want my help?" I ask her for the upteenth time after reaching the apartment.

"Ugh! Quit nagging me Walker." She snaps and heads for her bedroom with the supplies in hand.

I sit at the couch with my shoulders slumped and let out a sigh. The day has gone from awe-inspiring to awful in a matter of few seconds. I was planning to make our night romantic by making her a special dinner after getting back from our trip and here I am drowning in self-pity for not being able to protect her today. I could have helped her getting that bastard, instead I stood there like a thunderstruck puppy. Anyhow, there were certain things which had me cemented to the spot during that occurrence, which was her possession of a gun and her expert fighting competence. Those are clearly the skills of a warrior. Moreover, what kind of internship lets one tuck a 9mm under their shirt? *What exactly is she?*

CLASH!

I jump from my seat when I hear a glass shattering. I immediately follow the sound and reach her room and there and then ice up looking at Serenity's bare back facing the entrance. My throat becomes parched and hands turn clammy.

The lamp on the bedside table has cast a part luminescent glow to the whole room making her lush surface glimmer ethereally. Her long fiery curls are knotted in a messy bun with untamed tendrils flowing down her back where stands a lonely angel with her head held up high soaking in the rays of the sun and her wings are spread along Serenity's shoulder blades. I feel my fingers itch to trace circles on the breathtaking body art.

"Would you mind helping here?" she asks without turning to look at me bringing me down from my ecstatic state.

Shakily I take steps to where she is sitting and stand facing her. My breath hitches when I take in the sight of the artistry before me. I try to perceive every lines of her delicate face, the arch of her neck, the sinuosity of her breasts, the curve of her torso and the swerve of her long shapely legs which go on for miles. My eyes linger on the slash she got while saving someone else's life. I swill down the bile rising in my windpipe thinking of how much torment she must be going through. Outwardly I place my fingers on the cut which is now gauzed.

"I'm not hurting." She assures me looking up. I don't know from where I get the courage to stoop before her and taking her hands I kiss both her palms.

"You don't know that I almost died the moment I saw the guy holding that knife." I murmur to myself. I feel her one hand tangling my hair and she lifts my face with another hand to meet her eyes and from that moment everything happens in a daze.

I gently lay her on her back and leisurely start kissing every inch of her bewitching entity, remembering her every sensualistic gasps and moans.

And the moment I enter her I get an underlying feeling that even though my desolate soul has been replenished by the passion emitting from our beings, my life is amended for the rest of forever.

Chapter Nine

How can she do this to me? I thought she loved me; then why?

The room's dimly lit. They are on the bed together. I can clearly hear the sound of her singing the blues; hiding under their bed. I'm shaking, tears streaming down my face. This isn't happening! They stop. Now they are talking. They are talking about the sex they just had. They are saying it was fun; they are

complimenting each other. I ball my fist and put it in my mouth to block any sound of my misery to come out.

“Why don’t you just leave him? Then we won’t have to sneak around like this babe.” he asks her. She snorts. “Come on Raj! You know how much he loves me. He caught me making out with others several times before and still didn’t leave me. He probably would do the same if he walked in on us now, you know. Besides, you know as well as I do that we’re only having fun--” blinded by rage I come out and stand at the foot of their bed.

I wake up gasping for air. I look around panicking. Then feel relief wash over me. It was just a nightmare; there’s nothing to worry about. But it was so vivid; I felt everything happening before my eyes.

Fuck! I’m sweating like a pig. But I never had these dreams for few months now. I buried it safely in the back of my head. Then what could trigger it?

Serenity!

But she was sleeping beside me; *where is she now then?* I get off the bed and search for the bathroom. She isn’t there. Panic stricken; I rush towards my room, she’s not there as well.

She’s gone; just like that!

I come to her room. Plopping down on the bed I put my head in my hands and let out an angry growl. *This is the second time she walked out on me without saying anything.*

I think of checking the time. It’s 6 o’clock in the morning. I see a piece of paper tucked under the alarm clock. I take it out and it’s a note; from her.

Walker,

Sorry I had to go without informing you, but I’ll have to attend to some serious business before I come back. Till then, keep your ears perked up and eyes open.

Serenity

I stare at the note for a while with several questions swarming through my mind. *Why did she write a note like a detective flagging her client? And what business she had to attend this early in the morning with her injured-self? Ugh! Now I sound like an insecure clingy boyfriend! Whoa! Now from where did come the boyfriend part?* Shaking my head I try to control my thoughts to stop trespassing that particular jeopardous territory; it is definitely not the time to think of putting myself and her to the

boyfriend-girlfriend zone, even if we slept together. I smile internally when I again scan the note at hand and carefully put it in my pocket. At least she said something before leaving this time.

I roll to her side of the bed and inhale the fragrance she left there. She smells like honey and sunshine; an exhilarating sweet smell.

I close my eyes wrapped around her scent and drift off to a peaceful slumber.

Chapter Ten

“Dude, I mean she’s a caged lioness in bed. The scratches are still fresh from that night on my back.” Derek says with a dreamy expression on his face.

“You sure got lucky man! I was aiming at the bar tender but since Grayson was with me and the way he was falling all over me after getting tipsy; the bartender thought that we were partners.” Paxton says scowling at Grayson. They all burst out laughing.

We all are at Paxton’s place having a guy time. We initially were discussing about the possibilities of their placements in preferred companies but eventually it came down to the club they went to three days ago, the night I had Serenity cuddling me like an ivy tree. I grin goofily thinking about her. But I stop smiling when I realize that I haven’t heard from or seen her since then and I miss her. I feel a sudden ache in my heart and let out a sigh.

“Well hello there Romeo!” Paxton remarks making me shoot my head to his direction.

“I don’t see any Romeo here.” I ask feeling screwy.

“I can clearly envision the romantic scenario playing in that pathetic head of yours.” he asks wiggling his brows at me.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” I shrug. *I know what exactly he’s talking about but I don’t want to talk about it.* So I pretend to be clueless.

“Stop being a pussy Dom!” Paxton whines.

“Is she hot?” Grayson asks looking like a child who’s about to unwrap his Christmas present.

“Did you get lucky?” Paxton throws another question.

I scowl at them. But they all seem oblivious to that. They are scrutinizing my face.

“You’re smitten bro!” Grayson says unexpectedly.

I look at the three of them; they are grinning like the goons and shake my head in disgust.

My phone starts vibrating and taking it out I click the answer button without looking at the caller ID.

“Hello.”

“Walker.” It’s her. *How did she get my number?*

“Serenity? How did--” I ask baffled. *I don’t remember giving her my number.*

“I have my sources.” She says sounding amused.

“Oh! Did you come back?” I ask her feeling the endorphin spreading through my whole body.

“Yes I’m back . Listen about that night--” I interrupt her mid sentence, “I too wanna talk about it.”

“Umm—Okay! But that’s not what I was getting at. I wanted to invite you over dinner at my new place tonight; say at 7?” *Whoa! She’s inviting me over dinner at her place? Wait! Her place? Does that mean she’s not gonna stay with me anymore?*

“Umm.. your place?” I ask her joylessly.

“Yeah! My company has given me my own apartment actually and tonight I kinda called a few colleagues and friends to celebrate housewarming. So, would you come?” She asks again. I feel all the previous good feeling draining from my body, omitting all that I finally agree to come. She reverberates cheerily at that and rings off.

I look at my friends and they are staring curiously at me.

“It’s Serenity. She wants to have dinner with me tonight.” I reveal wistfully.

“Then why your expression is as if someone ate your dog?” Paxton asks grimly. I decide against telling them the truth and fabricate a bright smile raising my empty beer bottle.

“Well, she did invite me to have dinner with her. Aren’t you guys gonna drink to that?” I try changing the subject. They get all slaphappy and raise their empty beer bottles to make a toast.

“To all the smitten jackasses!” Paxton says. I glower at him but for once let it go.

“To all the smitten jackasses!” We all say in unison.

Chapter Eleven

It’s 6.55 pm and I’m standing at her doorway. I have been anxious the whole afternoon, not knowing how to take all these in. But now I feel quite content since life has to go on.

I press the bell of her apartment and moments later the door opens. *But it's not her!* It's a very tall guy; about few inches taller than me, with baby blue eyes and blonde hair. He looks straight into my eyes and smirks.

"Walker, right? Come in; she's in the kitchen." He says almost blocking my entrance leaning at the doorway with his huge built. I nod and squeeze myself in past him; but I can still feel his eyes drilling through the back of my head. A shiver runs down my spine.

I head towards the kitchen and there I find her chopping vegetables. Her hair is messy and she's without makeup and wearing a cute apron. *She looks beautiful.*

Sensing my presence she looks up at me and smiles an all toothed smile.

"Hi!" I greet her.

"Was it troublesome to find the place?" She asks going back to her chopping.

"Not really. I didn't know you were allocated to a place so near to mine though." I say suddenly feeling uneasy.

"Oh! Where are my manners! Walker this is Jeremy my childhood friend. He landed here yesterday from York and Emy, this is Dominic; the friend I was talking about." I look behind and Jeremy is standing there. *Oh! The culprit of my dysphoria.*

"We have met already at the doorway. Haven't we Walker?" he asks smirking again. He comes and sits on the countertop before giving Serenity a small peck on the cheek. I clench my fists feeling a pang of jealousy.

"Here, this is for you." I give her the chocolates and the bottle of wine I brought for her. Her eyes light up and she kisses both my cheeks taking them from me. I start to blush but looking at Jeremy's smirking face again I control myself. The doorbell rings, making us all aware of the other guests' arrival.

The dinner goes well without me embarrassing myself or Jeremy pulling any stunt on me. But he keeps staring at me for God knows what reason. We finish our dinner and Serenity sits up to fetch the desserts after giving an evil eye to Jeremy. We sit there in silence and I notice Jeremy still staring at me from my peripheral vision.

"Why do you keep staring at me?" I ask him frustrated now. He chuckles as if I cracked a joke.

"Because you are pretty to look at" he says surprising me. My eyes widen. *Does he think that I am--*

"Excuse me! But I'm not what you think I am." I state in horror. He seems taken aback, then bursts out in a fit of laughter.

“Don’t flatter yourself. I’m not gay either. I was just kidding! It just seems that I have seen you somewhere before. You’re not from Nevada; are you?” he asks looking smug. I stiffen. *How does he know? I don’t remember mentioning anything about ever being in Vegas tonight, that’s one of the dark hours of my life.* I reach for the glass of wine and taking a long swig finish it. My nerves calm a bit.

“What makes you think that?” I ask looking him straight in the eyes; my voice comes out stronger than intended.

“Think what?” He raises his eyebrows.

“I smell pumped up testosterone in this room. What you guys were doing?” Serenity comes carrying the desserts in her hands. She looks back and forth between me and Jeremy.

“What did you say to Dominic?” she asks scowling at him.

“Nothing offensive I presume!” he states with that dirty smirk plastered on his face. Then he looks at Serenity and they share a knowing glance between them. I gape at both of them; anger and confusion rippling inside me.

“I’m sorry for whatever he said to upset you Walker.” Serenity says placing her hand over mine; breaking the silence. All the mixed feeling evaporates from inside of me because of her alleviating touch.

“It’s nothing. I just overreacted.” I state squeezing her hand reassuringly.

“So, what did you think about the dinner?” She asks changing the subject.

“I --” I start to say but her phone rings and she excuses herself. Jeremy sits up and holds out his hand for me to shake.

“It was nice to meet you Dominic Walker.” He says looking me squarely in the eye and shaking my hand. *He has a firm grip.*

“Not so nice I would say.” I say smugly. He narrows his eyes at me, shakes his head and leaves the room.

Serenity enters the room just after he leaves. After a while the other guests start leaving too and she sees them to the door.

“Did Emy behave this time while I was away?” She asks gesturing for me to head for the living room.

I shrug smiling. We sit on the couch next to each other. I take a quick look around her living room. Everything in the room is themed with white and blue. The L shaped couch, the paintings on the wall, the sculptures, the big screen television, the chandelier hanging from the ceiling; everything screams wealth. But all of these perfectly suit her personality.

“So, you’re from York?” I ask her initiating a conversation.

“Yeah.” She says. I stare at her wondering if she’s going to go any farther; but she doesn’t say anything more.

“You’re an interior designer, right?” I ask her curiously. She nods.

“How do you know anyway?” She asks looking impassively at me.

“Internet is a very useful tool Ms. White; since you have been too ignorant to say anything about you, I had to search you up.” I reveal smiling at her. She smiles too but it doesn’t really reach her eyes. She sits there fidgeting with the corner of her dress. I can tell right away that something must be bothering her.

“What’s wrong?” I ask her placing my hand on her shoulder.

“It’s nothing actually. I was just thinking about the other night. I hope I didn’t come--” I place my lips on hers making her stop. Her eyes widen; but she eventually relaxes and kisses me back. I kiss her tenderly at first, then it starts to turn into a heated makeout session. Unfortunately, her phone starts to ring again and her muscle tenses. I groan and let go of her. I peek at the caller ID and it shows Emy; which means Jeremy.

Just in time! That bastard!

She talks; mostly listens then hangs up. She checks the time and excuses herself for a minute. I sit staring at her phone. After a while it starts to ring again. Emy!

Wow! I scowl at the phone hoping it would burn under my gaze. It stops ringing after a while.

Serenity comes with the chocolates I brought for her. I open my mouth to protest; but considering that as an opportunity she pops few of them in my mouth and starts giggling. I glare at her but looking at the happy expression on her face I feel myself smiling too.

“Thanks for coming tonight Walker.” She smiles.

“Thanks for inviting me.” I state winking at her.

We head for the door. She opens it and I slip outside.

“You cook mighty fine Ms. White. I guess I’ll see you around then!” I state grinning. Then suddenly the reminder of her carrying the gun crosses my mind. “Why do you carry a gun by the way?”

“I got it for my safety when I was twenty-one.” She says as it were a mobile phone she is talking about. I think of asking her how she could shoot so ably; but decide against it.

“Good night Walker.”

I wish her too then turn and head for the elevator with a mind full of undiscovered facts.

Chapter Twelve

Jeremy Whitlow scowls at the glass of whisky in front of him. This is the sixth one since he got into the pub. He reels the encounter with Dominic Walker again and again in his mind and his blood boils. Jeremy was no fool; he saw how he looked at Serenity. He instantly took a dislike at him the moment he laid his eyes on him and why would not he; he is a criminal after all. Since then he's been messing around with him the whole time. Jeremy was posted in Nevada when Dominic was there about a year ago. But he could not take him down for his misdeeds then. This time he would not fail, he decides. No matter what it takes, he will bring him in and in order to do that he needs to do some digging privately.

He didn't like Serenity being friendly with him either. He and Serenity have known each other from middle school; but he could never tell her that how much more he wanted from their relationship. She has always been so closed off since the death of her parents; yet she turned out to be this amazing woman. Not that she needs any protection but he always feels the responsibility to protect her, especially from that Walker bloke now. Maybe it's time that he revealed his feelings for her.

He takes out his phone and calls her. They only talked a few minutes back but that was work. This is important. The phone keeps ringing but no one answers. *Maybe that Walker hasn't left yet or maybe they are...*

He gulps down his drink. The bourbon slides burning down his throat but leaves a sour taste in his mouth. His phone vibrates in his hand after few minutes. He smiles thinking it's her. He looks at the screen but it shows an unknown number. He answers begrudgingly.

"Whitlow." He says.

"If you want information about Gunter's whereabouts then meet me at the back of the pub." A deep male voice says.

"And who the hell would you be?" He asks. But the caller already rang off. *What the fuck was that?* He looks around the pub. *How the hell he got hold of my number? Probably a prank call;* he thinks. But who would know that he was seeking information about Gunter? Strange! Then again, crapulence hardly lets you think straight. But giving it a shot would not hurt. He has to be cautious though.

Paying the bartender he makes his way out of the pub. The alcohol in his system makes his steps wobbly and his vision a bit hazy. Coming out of the pub he turns left and heads toward the back of the pub. Reaching there he looks around for a sign of someone's presence; but finds no one. *Great! It was a prank call.*

"I'm gonna hunt him down and cut out his balls." He says out loud; fuming. Then he turns to leave.

"Well hello Jeremy!" Someone calls out to him from behind. He turns around. But for the little amount of light and his foggy headed state he fails to make out who the person is.

“Who are you?” He asks. The person moves and stands in front of him.

“What the fuck are you doing here?” Jeremy asks confused and angry.

“Why, don’t you need information about Gunter, my friend?” He states smirking and before Jeremy understands what’s happening, the person takes out a knife and in one swift move slits his throat.

Jeremy falls to the ground looking at the most singular shade of orbs.

Chapter Thirteen

“Do we have any lead yet?” Agent Calme asks, her voice booming through the big conference room.

“The air-attack is supposed to take place on 5th June madam. But we do not know the places yet.” Detective sergeant O’Brian says shrinking slowly in his seat.

“We have seen a SUV parked around the corner of Walker’s apartment for two days in a row though.” Agent Mazzeo adds.

“Did you see who it is?” Calme asks raking a hand through her hair.

“No madam, but the car is unregistered.” Mazzeo answers bowing down his head.

“Okay! I want men to keep an eye on that car see if it keeps coming back and I want 24*7 surveillance on Walker. We can’t take any risks now.” She pauses and continues, “You, Agent Mazzeo, try moving your butt a little bit more instead of fulfilling your notorious urges. National security is at stake, we can’t just lounge around as if we are on some vacation. Do you get me? And I want you to pack your bags and shift at Walker’s place tomorrow morning.” She orders firmly.

“But mada—”

“No buts. You are not your master here, I am. So you do what I say. Do I make myself clear?” she asks firmly leaving no room for discussion.

“Yes madam.”

She dismisses everyone then with a flicker of her fingers. Her mind floats to Dominic Walker; their accessory to get back at Gunter. She thinks of his extrinsic violet eyes, she has never seen that color of eyes before. The first day he approached her at the café, she was stumped at seeing him in person. The picture she had of him was nowhere similar to the person that stood before her eyes. He was way too skinny and he looked worn out with the dark bags under his eyes and his disheveled attire that hung on his tall bag of bones, yet he was the most beautiful man she has ever laid her eyes on. His chiseled jaw, titillating mouth, keen-edged nose, high cheekbones and excessive in length lashes were enough for a girl’s libido to go overdrive. The times afterwards she spent with him was nothing like she had expected, she did yearn for him the whole time but it is not in her nature to give in to those desires so easily; unless it is necessary. And finally she did give in.

Although she keeps reminding herself that it was strictly to get closer to him and win his trust, but deep down she knows that is not true.

The ringing of her phone cut her off from her woolgathering. Sighing she picks it up.

“Calme.”

“Madam, I’m afraid we have a bad news.” O’Brian’s somber tone causes her to straighten her spine.

“Which is?”

“Agent Whitlow is dead.”

Chapter Fourteen

I wake up at the sound of my phone ringing. I look at the ID and smile when I see her name.

“Hi” I say.

“Dominic I want to meet you.” She says coming directly down to the business. *Wait! She never calls me by my first name and her voice seems different. Something is definitely wrong.*

“What is it? You okay?” I ask; concerned.

“I’m coming over.” She says without answering my question.

“Umm, Okay” I say; but she already hung up. I check my clock. It’s ten past five in the evening. *I must have dozed off while reading.* I stretch and get out of the bed.

I come out of the bathroom and the door bell rings. *Well that was fast!* I hurry and open the door. Serenity walks in. She gets inside without acknowledging me and sits on the living room couch.

“Hello to you too!” I mumble closing the door and sitting on the couch beside her.

She starts fidgeting with the corner of her shirt.

“What’s wrong Shelia?” realizing what I just said I tense. She looks at me and smirks.

“Shelia? Really? That’s pretty sappy!” she clears her throat, “Emy’s dead.” She reveals finally.

“What? When? I mean I just saw him safe and sound the other day.” I say; shocked. *I mean I didn’t like the guy even a little bit and all, but what happened all of a sudden?*

“He didn’t come home that night. I called him but he was unreachable and last night I got to know that he’s dead. They found his body in a rubbish bin.” She explains looking at me with an unreadable

expression. There is a certain glint in her eyes which I can't quite fathom. It's almost as if she's trying to read me. She doesn't cry, which I reckon quite strange. Her face seems devoid of any emotion. I stare at her for a while, not knowing what to say.

"Did you see him?" I ask finally.

"Yes." She answers nonchalantly.

"You want something to drink?" I ask her.

"Scotch. If you have it!" she replies looking impassively towards me.

"Uh. Okay wait here." I tell her heading for the fridge. I feel her eyes on my every move like a predator. *Why is she boring holes in my skull? What's gotten into her?*

I hand her the glass and sit next to her. She finishes it in one gulp and hands me the glass.

"A little glass is not going to help what I'm going through. Bring the bottle." She says motioning to the bottle on the counter.

I bring the bottle to her and sit on the floor facing her. She keeps pouring and drinking and I watch her in amazement. She's almost on five. *How the hell does she even hold all these liquor?* I shake my head smiling.

"I'm glad that I can entertain you." she smirks. Her eyes are glazed over but she doesn't slur. Not even a little.

"It's time that you move that bottle away or else you are gonna puke all over me." I say trying to lighten her mood.

"Sure." She says smiling a sad smile. Her sadness is palpable.

"Did you come home straight from my place that night?" she asks just when I'm about to head for the kitchen.

"Uh-huh. Why do you ask?" she looks at me and holds my gaze for a while. "Do you trust me Walker?" she asks all of a sudden. *Do I trust her?* I have only just come across her a few days ago and only met countable times since then. *Does that make her a trustworthy confidante?* There's something in the amber depths of her eyes that makes me want to share all my atrocious misconducts. I put the bottle in the fridge thinking how to answer when the door bell rings.

"I got it." I say rushing to the door. Jason and Paxton are standing there smiling widely. I thank God for their arrival and saving me from answering the question.

"Hey lover boy! Aren't you gonna let us in or something?" Paxton simpers shoving me out of the way.

"Or something." I say rolling my eyes. Jason smirks and gets inside.

"Whoa! Who have we got here?" Jason asks looking at Serenity. She rolls her eyes.

“Were you missing me babe? I know I’m irresistible and all; but did you really have to stalk me to my house?” Jason says winking at her.

After Serenity moved out, Jason moved in with his luggage which was today morning, saying that he could not stay with Paxton’s sister anymore since she was transferred and had to put the apartment on sell. I was hanging back at first, but seeing that I had to have someone to share the costs of the loft, I took him in.

“You wish!” Serenity says smirking at him.

Paxton looks at me befuddled and I shrug.

“Paxton.” He says holding out his hand. She takes it lithely and shakes.

“How are you doing?” She says.

“So you’re the girlfriend?” Paxton asks her curiously making me go rigid.

“Kind of, since I’m a girl and his friend.” She answers apathetically. I feel a warm feeling in my breadbasket. It was tactful, but she didn’t deny either. Paxton beams widely and mouths you-did-good-mate. I roll my eyes playfully at that.

“How come you ended up drunk now?” Jason asks raising a pale brow.

Oh! I forgot that he was there too.

“Long story.” I say looking at Serenity’s direction for her permission to impart what happened.

“I’m all ears.” He says smirking.

“Would you guys stop with the pissing contest? I’m trying to relax here. Jason, you stay at the same house as him. Why don’t you just ask him later? It’s not that he’s going somewhere.” She says stoically and oddly he nods letting it go. *Whoa! This girl really is something.*

“Would you guys like to party? Let’s go clubbing then.” Paxton exhorts cheerily.

I open my mouth to say *no* considering Serenity’s situation but she shrugs and says, “Why not!”

I smile warmly.

“Clubbing it is.” I say.

“Can I come with you too?” Jason asks.

“Sure. The more the merrier.” She says heading for the door.

Tonight’s definitely going to be blundering.

Chapter Fifteen

“You sure you’re okay with this?” I ask Serenity taking a seat beside her at the bar. She’s been quiet the entire ride to the club.

“Yeah, besides Emy wouldn’t like me being a cry baby.” She answers indifferently ordering her drink.

“You shouldn’t drink you know. You’re gonna be sick.” I insist her.

She doesn’t say anything but sits blankly looking at the dance floor. Jason and Paxton are dancing like kooks with each other. I try hard to stifle a laugh.

“Come dance with me?” Serenity offers holding out her hand to me. I take it reluctantly and head to the dance floor. Jason and Paxton join us.

“Have you ever been to Vegas?” she shouts over the music. I become keyed-up at that. Vegas is another crude chapter of my miserable life and I really don’t want to go there anytime soon. I just nod.

“Do you have any idea who could have done this to Jeremy? I mean the guy only came here the other day. What the cops are saying?” I ask her in an attempt to change the subject.

“They are on it. They don’t understand the motive behind this though.” She replies.

“Are you sure it isn’t a case of mugging?” I proffer.

“No. Nothing was missing from his belongings. The thug simply planned on killing him.” she says calmly, but she is everything but calm. I kiss her forehead holding her close while swaying to the music.

“Hi handsome!” Someone grabs my waist from behind. Serenity narrows her eyes. I turn around and face a giggling Bethany.

“Oh hi Bethany!” I acknowledge untangling her arms from me. I nervously look at Serenity and her pupils have dilated into something very dark and she’s smirking at Bethany.

“Let’s dance.” Bethany says placing her hands around my neck.

“I can’t. I’m here with someone.” I inform her motioning towards Serenity. Serenity’s smirk widens and she waves toward her. Bethany checks her from head to toe and scrunches her nose.

“Who’s she?” Bethany asks looking up at me.

“I’m standing right here kid!” Serenity says smugly.

“Kid! Excuse me? What are you forty or something?” she snorts. Amusement becomes evident on Serenity’s face.

“You never know!” she says.

“Whatever bitch!” Bethany says pompously, making my eyes wide.

“What did you just call me?” Serenity asks stiffening.

“Bitch you bloody skank!” Bethany repeats adding one more lingo. I stare at her in disbelief. Serenity lunges toward her but Jason grabs her from behind. Anger bubbles inside of me seeing Jason’s arms around her and I see him clasping her tightly against him. I grab Bethany’s arm and drag her out of the dance floor. *It all started because of her. Jason got the opportunity to touch Serenity because of her.* I take her outside and shove her against a wall.

“What the fuck are you doing?” she screeches.

“What the fuck were you doing? Why would you talk to her like that for no damn reason?” I yell at her.

“Because she was giving me that attitude for no damn reason. From where did you get that little slut huh? I bet she’s gonna be rich in one night with your money.” She says venomously. I move towards her expeditiously causing her to stumble back. I clench my fists and close my eyes to control the rage burning inside me.

“If you dare say anymore bullshit about her then I swear to God, you won’t have your voice left to talk about anything anymore.”

I enounce every word on her face and with that I turn on my heels and get back inside the club.

Chapter Sixteen

“Bloody asshole! Ugh!” Bethany hollers getting inside her apartment. How dare he humiliate her like that! That freak! Guess he forgot that he works under her. That jerk has been demeaning her from the very beginning and she was nothing but nice to him. He has to pay this time!

She storms to her bedroom and gets in the shower. After getting done with her business she gets ready for bed. She eventually falls asleep after tossing and turning for a while.

She wakes up feeling awkward. A feeling as if someone’s there inside her apartment. She gets off her bed and slightly opening her bedroom door sneaks a look outside in the living room. She finds the room’s light turned on. *I did turn off the light, didn’t I?* She thinks to herself. She hears someone shuffling around in her kitchen. Her heart starts pounding in her chest. She fully opens the door and tip-toes to the direction of the kitchen. The kitchen light is turned on as well but inexplicably she finds no one there. She slowly makes her way to the counter and picks up a bread knife in her reach.

"Hi Bethany!" a deep male voice says. She jumps and the knife falls from her hand. She hears the person coming to her from somewhere behind. She doesn't move a muscle as if she's glued to the floor.

"You shouldn't have called her a bitch you know. But again, I'm glad you did or else I wouldn't have gotten this opportunity." He whispers biting her ear lobe. Her eyes widen. She shoves him backwards and runs to her room locking the door behind her. She hears him chuckling.

She searches for her phone. After finding it she dials emergency contact number fumbling all the way with the keys.

"Really? You would now close your bedroom door on me! Come on baby, open it already." He says from the outside with an obvious laugh in his voice.

"Oh God! Please please please pick up..please!" she prays.

"Hello" a woman's voice says.

"Hello..hello..there's someone in my apartment..please please help!" she rambles desperately.

"Calm down ma'am! Tell us your address, we will--" the door bursts open. Bethany shrieks dropping her phone.

"I hate picking locks you know." He says making a disgusted face.

He moves toward her. Then takes out the same bread knife she took from the kitchen out of his pocket along with a packet of cigarette. He puts one cigarette in his mouth and lights it up.

And that's when she sees the most unusual violet eyes with a glint of malice in them.

Chapter Seventeen

By the time they reach the crime scene forensics were almost done with their business.

DI Flynn was already there, seeing Calme and Mazzeo he darts toward them.

"You do realize I can't be seen doing all these official works, don't you?" she scowls.

"Ah! Mattia told me you were a fire-cracker, but didn't say you were this much annoying too." Flynn grimaces. "Anyways, this case probably concerns you." He informs.

"Where's the body?" Mazzeo asks.

"In the bedroom. But I must warn you lot that it ain't a pretty sight." Flynn says shaking his head.

They make their way to the bedroom and after seeing the body Calme shudders. *It sure as hell not a pretty sight.* Only few hours ago this girl was running around picking fights and now she's lying on

the floor with her throat sliced open and her tongue chopped off. *Who would do this and above all for what reason?*

“Got anything Barone?” she asks shifting her focus on Barone. Baldini Barone is an excellent forensic technician and there is hardly anything which goes unnoticed by him.

“Aha! Got a bread knife full of prints and few other here and there.” He says holding out the knife in an evidence bag in front of them.

“You mean to say that the bread knife is the murder weapon?” Mazzeo asks drawing his eyebrows together.

“That’s exactly what I mean.” Barone says smugly making it almost clear that he doesn’t really like Mazzeo.

“The killer is quite strong, so to speak and it seems that he’s psychotic as well.” Barone says motioning to the body and continues, “And the work he did on this girl is not a work of any amateur. If you look closely you’ll see how smoothly the cuts have been done. Now I’m done with my work here, move out of my way I have reports to make.” He keeps babbling until he gets out of the apartment. Calme and Mazzeo look at each other, both shrug and head to the living room.

“So, what do you think?” Flynn asks.

“Isn’t there any camera anywhere around the whole building?” Calme inquires.

“Yes! One at the lobby, one in the elevator and one at the staircase.” He informs.

“Great! Now we check the footage and Mazzeo and O’Brian you guys apply the door to door trick.” She says. They nod and leave.

“Two murders in a matter of one day. We don’t have a suspect neither the motive behind all of these.” She mutters.

“Yes we do have a suspect. I heard you guys went to a club today and there you had a dispute of some sort with this girl.” Flynn says haughtily.

“We don’t know that for sure yet. Let’s just not be presumptuous.” Calme says irritably.

They make their way to the control room. But after reaching they see no one there. They find the security guard at the lobby and ask for the footages.

“Now, show us the tapes from 9 pm-3.30 am. And tell me have you seen anyone who’s not from the building around that time?” she asks. The guard seems shaken.

“No Miss nothing like that happened. I have been there the whole time, even when Ms. Taylor came around 9.30 and she seemed pretty upset.” The guard informs.

Calme thinks of the incident that took place at the club. Dominic took Bethany outside and when he came inside there was fire in his eyes. She didn’t expect him to be so angry over something so little.

She was outraged for a while but it was nothing she couldn't handle. In fact it was a very common act of jealousy from Bethany's side. But Dominic took it somehow very seriously and acted aberrant the whole time after that. So in the end everyone had to call it a night. *What if this murder has anything to do with him?* She thinks and shudders at the thought.

"Here Miss." the guard takes her out of her thoughts.

"Thanks." She says and the guard leaves the room.

They go through the footage but find nothing noteworthy.

"Is the killer a ghost or something? I'm beginning to find the footage useless Calme." Flynn says agitated by now.

"Have patience. There has to be something." She says. Just then they see someone ascending the stairs. It's a man wearing a black hoodie and sweats, his head is covered by the hood of the jacket. Reaching the top of the stairs he looks up at the camera. But they barely notice his features. His face is masked; only his eyes are shown. Calme's heart starts to beat faster.

"Call the guard." She says urgently. Flynn calls the guard and he comes in.

"Who's this man? Have you seen him come in?" she asks him.

"This man came in search of Mr. Burton. The lawyer stays at the second floor. But I told him to come later since Mr. Burton's not home and he left. I swear I don't know how he got in and he wasn't wearing the mask at that time." The guard says wide-eyed.

"Shit! Just enhance his face." Calme says. Her heart seems to be on the verge of exploding.

He zooms and adjusts his face and she finds herself staring at the most exotic couple of eyes.

She looks more closely. Yes, the same eyes she admired so dearly. *But why would he do this? It was me whom Bethany fought with, then?* She looks at DI Flynn and there is a glint of happiness in his eyes, as if he finally solved the puzzle. He looks at her and there is that I-told-you-so expression on his face.

"You said when you talked to this man he was without the mask, right?" she asks the guard. The man nods.

"Would you be able to recognize his face?" she inquires.

"I didn't notice much because he kept looking down at his feet and wouldn't meet my gaze but he had these strange eyes. Besides, there wasn't much light." He says. Calme takes out her phone and shows him Dominic's photo. He focuses on the picture and a spark of recognition becomes evident on his face.

"So it was him?" she asks him with a pounding heart.

“Yes Miss. I’m sure now. Those eyes, I can never forget those eyes.” The man says shaking his head. Calme looks at Flynn and he smiles a triumphant smile.

“Thanks-” she checks the guard’s name on the name plate, “Jay, we appreciate your help. But we might need you later. So don’t go anywhere.” With that she leaves the room with Flynn on her trail.

They meet Mazzeo and O’Brian at the lobby.

“What did you blokes get, eh?” Flynn asks them excitedly.

“Nada!” Mazzeo says animatedly. “Her neighbor’s not home and the rest of the building didn’t witness or hear anything strange.” O’Brian finishes.

“Well, we got everything we needed to know.” Flynn says as if he’s a kid who got the best Christmas present.

“What is it?” Mazzeo and O’Brian both ask at the same time.

“We’ll fill you in on the way. Let’s just rock and roll now.” Flynn says beaming.

“But where are we going at 5 o’clock in the morning?” Mazzeo asks stifling a yawn.

“To have breakfast and a little chit-chat with your roommate, you moron! Now move your butt. It’s going to be a very long and a very interesting day.” Flynn says rubbing his palms together and Mazzeo glares at him.

“One more thing Flynn, check if there is any camera behind the pub where they got Jeremy’s body.” She says.

“You got it Agent.” Flynn states.

But Calme still refuses to believe that the angel she thought him to be is a demon after all.

Chapter Eighteen

11:10 am, 2nd June, Las Vegas, Nevada

“Ah! Ray, my boy! I was anticipating your Welcome Home ceremony; but not this soon.” Gunter says opening his arms for me.

“I had no other option.” I murmur looking down.

“What have you got yourself into this time? Have you raped anyone or something?” he says feigning horror. I flash him a death glare.

“What? You have already murdered, dealt drugs, almost have done all the illegal things. Rape is the only worst thing which is left. So, I just presumed.” He says looking amused.

“You know I didn’t do anything willingly.” I hiss at him. He just shrugs and chuckles; as if it was a joke of the century.

“Who cares! Now, since you have already come to your senses and came back, I have some works for you to do. And remember, I won’t let you go this time. I considered the last time, but not anymore.” He states looking me straight in the eyes.

I curse under my breath. I knew very well before leaving Europe that what exactly would happen if I came back this time. But I had no other option. The anonymous call last night changed everything. I didn’t expect my secrets to be revealed. I had to get away from there, even if it meant setting my foot into the Pirate’s hideaway and leaving Serenity behind. I just couldn’t put her life in danger as well.

“You can stay in your own apartment. I gave it to someone though since you left; but you can always share. I’ll see you in the evening.” He says picking out a cell phone from his drawer and continues, “Here take it.” He says handing it to me.

I take it and start to leave the room. But he stops me.

“Welcome to Las Vegas again my boy!” he says cheerfully.

I sigh and leave the room wondering what life will serve in my platter next.

Chapter Nineteen

7:08 am, 31st May, Bristol, United Kingdom

“Shit! Shit! Shit!” Flynn curses under his breath. “Great!” he glares looking at Calme.

They are sitting at Dominic and Mazzeo’s living room waiting for Dominic to come home. It’s almost been an hour and they are still waiting or more like thinking deeply to make things fall into the right places. Earlier when they got here they thought Walker must have gone running. They took the liberty to search anything and everything in his room, but what they came up with were his empty wardrobe and toiletries. It was clear as water that he was gone. That proves their suspicion about him was right.

“Don’t give me that look.” Calme scowls at Flynn.

“Then would you care to explain where is this boyfriend of yours?” He grits his teeth. Calme starts to charge towards him but O’Brian chimes in.

“Where do you think he took off this time?”

“I have no goddamn clue. Maybe to some other country with a new identity, deceiving bastard that he is or better, he might be celebrating the little “Shawshank Redemption” stunt he has pulled on us in Fiji.” Flynn says furiously.

Calme sits back and buries her head in her hands. She was determined to prove everyone wrong before, but now she has no other option but believe it herself. Both the murders in the past two days have been connected to her and Walker all along and yet she couldn't see it. She makes a mental note about the events- Walker met Jeremy, but they both weren't happy with each other and clashed; Bethany called her names which made Walker furious and he clashed with her too; but clashing with someone about so little can't be the reason to murder them. *What is she missing here?* She suddenly feels disgusted with herself. *How her instincts could be so wrong about Walker?* She always prided herself on this.

"What if he didn't go to any new place this time? What if he went back to his old den?" Mazzeo suggests.

"What do you mean old den? Don't talk in riddles Mazzeo. We don't have time for this." she says resignedly.

"I mean what if he went back to Vegas? At this point he would want someone powerful. Since he had connections with these people from Vegas he definitely would go back to them to hide his mess and they would help him no matter what." Mazzeo reasons.

"He has a point sir. He needs money and a new identity to survive and that's a child's play for these people to provide." O'Brian says.

Flynn nods and starts to say something but his phone starts ringing.

"Flynn." He answers distractedly.

He listens, looks at all of them, then hangs up.

"It was Barone. He says the knife he retrieved from Ms. Taylor's apartment has only her fingerprints all over it and he didn't get any other prints of anyone else at the crime scene." He says frowning.

"That doesn't really matter for now. We all know how anyone can cover their traces. But again there has to be something." Calme says. Flynn's phone beeps with a text message and he smirks looking at the screen.

"Well another news. They got the footage of the restaurant and it seems like the same man we are looking for, only here any part of his face ain't visible but the appearance is the same as that apartment footage." He reveals.

"What our next move would be Madam?" O'Brian asks curiously.

"We gather information about the whereabouts of Mr. Smarty Pants and take a little trip to Vegas."

Chapter Twenty

11:30 am, 2nd June, Las Vegas, Nevada

I get inside my old apartment I used to live in. I look around and the place seems like a total dump.

Ah! It's the newbie's lifestyle then. I head for my old bedroom. I open the door of the room and find a naked woman drooped over a naked guy's chest. The creaking sound of the door causes them to jump out of their socks. It takes me a moment to sink in the whole scene and when it hits I mutter an apology and bolt from the room. I go inside the room across the hall and find even this room to be a dump as well.

Are you kidding me? I mean what is this guy, a pig?

"Who are you? How did you get in?" I feel a cold metal press at the back of my head. My reflexes kick in and turning around swiftly I tackle the person to the ground. I look down and see the woman who was slumped over the guy like a potato sack. I feel flustered remembering that I saw her without clothes and scramble to my feet helping her up as well.

"Nice reflexes! Now that you're done with your little kung-fu act, would you care to tell me who the hell are you and what you're doing in my apartment?" she narrows her eyes at me.

"How can you call this dump an apartment?" I ask her in horror.

"Whatever!" she says rolling her eyes. I grimace.

"Well, for your information I was actually the previous owner and Gunter told me that I can stay here again. He did tell me about sharing the place with someone but he should have warned me beforehand." I say shaking my head.

"Excuse me?" she asks folding her hands against her chest.

"Never mind!" I say spurning around and moving to the living room. There are clothes scattered around the whole living room, the cushions are on the floor; it seems like a tornado has hit the place. I shake my head in disgust and sit on the couch.

"It wasn't like I was expecting a company or something." She says sarcastically. I look at her. She's only wearing a shirt, *probably the guy's*. Her blonde hair is in a very short pixie cut, the bright blue eyes and a petite frame makes her look like a kid. *Who am I kidding? She probably isn't a day older than nineteen.* I wave my hand in a dismissive manner to her.

"Cocky much, eh?" she remarks. She stands for a while waiting for my reaction, then storms out of there. After few seconds she drags a half naked guy by his arm and throws him out of the apartment. Without giving him a chance to say anything she shuts the door on his face with a thud and goes to her bedroom slamming the door shut behind her.

I sit there, mouth wide-open, wondering why women have to be so strange. I think of Serenity. What she would think if she found out how I escaped like a coward without explaining anything to her. But I had no other choice. I couldn't bear the hatred on her face if I told her about my past. I couldn't tell her how special she is to me and how special were the moments to me that I spent with her. *But what if I told her? How she would have reacted then? Would she have accepted me for whoever I am?*

What if I tell her now? I jotted down her number when I broke the phone. I could call her and tell her my feelings. That wouldn't hurt. Even if I never see her again, I would be appeased with the fact that she's at least apprised of my feelings for her.

I take out the phone Gunter has given me from my pocket and mustering up all the courage I dial her number.

I hear her phone ringing and my stomach starts doing somersaults. After what seems like forever the phone gets answered and my heart leaps in my mouth.

"Hello?" she accosts.

Chapter Twenty-one

19:45 pm, 2nd June, Bristol, United Kingdom

"What's with the poker face?" Mazzeo asks from the driver's seat. Calme rolls her eyes at him ignoring his inquisition. She never really liked him from the beginning. He is way too arrogant and over friendly for her to stand. Sure, he is good looking with his soccer player like built physique, sharp features and charming personality. Conceited bastard that he is, he always thinks that sooner rather than later she'd get caught in his spell. But she knows better, that is never going to happen. Even he queerly resembles Walker which made her think several times whether they are related somehow. But she kept that thought to her.

"O'Brian would you pass me my bag?" she asks. She takes out her notebook and starts scribbling down her premises regarding the case. She writes down the names of the victims and the convict and analyzes the possible grounds of the crimes. But she fails to discover any. What could set off someone like Walker to perpetrate those crimes in the first place? Because as far as she knows, a little brawl like those never lead anyone to take someone's life. That would totally be absurd unless they had any personal vendetta against the victim or they are demented or they did that on a spur of the moment. Two of the options she declines, considering the fact that Walker only knew Jeremy for only an hour and there's no way he could know him personally and she doesn't think he had anything against Bethany, because lascivious intentions of a woman can never really provoke a man to kill her. Besides, their convictions of him are mostly based on what he may have or have not done in his past and of course his eyes. *What if someone impersonated him in order to frame him? But who would do that?* She dismisses everything from her mind. Their prime mission now is to prevent the blast. The whole mystification of the murders has started to get on her nerves. She closes the notebook and puts it in the bag and catches a glimpse of her phone. It's vibrating. She takes it out looking at the ID, but fails to recognize the number.

"Hello?" she asks.

"Hi!" she becomes dumbfounded after hearing the voice. Mazzeo raises his brow seeing the expression on her face.

“Walker? Where are you? This isn’t your number.” *Of course he wouldn’t use the phone he used in Bristol.* Mazzeo and O’Brian both look at her startled after hearing the name.

“No. I’m not in Bristol anymore.” He responds nervously.

“Oh yeah? I’m not in there either. I’m taking a trip to Vegas with my friends, in fact I’m on my way there now. I wanted you to come with me, but you just disappeared.” She rants out.

“You’re coming to Vegas?” he asks, with mixed emotions distinct in his voice.

“Yes I am. But wait, you said coming? Should I assume that you’re in Vegas too?” she takes her chance. There’s silence for a few moments on the other side. She looks at her companions and they are anxiously looking at her face.

“Walker?” she finally breaks the silence, too antsy to wait any longer.

“I don’t want you to hate me Serenity, but I really can’t tell you where I am. It won’t be safe for both of us. I wish I could explain. I only called to let you know that you’re a most amazing and beautiful person I’ve ever met in my life. I wish I could keep you forever. However, that wouldn’t be possible. I don’t know what these feelings are that I’m having for you, but it sure is enchanting. I guess finally I’m captivated and smitten, smitten on you, Miss Serenity White.” He declares.

Calme sits there flabbergasted, pressing the phone tightly to her ear hearing his soft breathing. After a while the phone clicks indicating that there is no one on the other side.

He disconnected the call.

Chapter Twenty-two

7:45 am, 4th June, Las Vegas, Nevada

Calme and Mazzeo reach their destination in record time after knowing the exact location of the possible malefactor. Checking out from the McCarran International Airport they move to the way to their awaited rides, where their superior Special Agent Clarke stands.

Calme is still stunned by that day’s episode. She couldn’t apprehend that he might actually abound feelings for her. His words seemed so genuine and his voice was so sincere that for a moment she thought of letting her guard down, forgetting all her responsibilities, her assignment and professing her endearment for him as well. But she learned to restrain her emotions from a very young age and that lesson seized her from affirming her feelings for him. She has to make commonsensical compromises for the sake of her oath and job. Although she still refuses to believe that Walker is the inhumanly abject criminal.

She estimates his nature in her mind. The few days she spent with him, he didn't for a moment make her wary about any of his activities and he seemed to be ardent and guileless the whole time. His affectionate and attentive nature made her feel cherished. She wanted to trust him whole-heartedly.

But maybe all of that were a mere façade? Maybe he is a deranged killer?

Brushing off those assessments she decides to meet him personally without any surveillance. If she pulls some strings then she might accomplish something interesting.

The car comes to a halt taking her out of her thoughts.

"You okay kid? You seemed zoned out in la-la land for a while there." Clarke asks, worried.

"I'm fine. Just tired." She half-lies.

"Okay. Let's just check in and rest for a while. We have a long day ahead of us."

She nods and follows him out of the car towards the hotel.

Coming to her room she showers for a long time and changes. She starts hatching a plan about how to convince Walker to meet her. She decides to make it seem coincidental. According to the sources he's back to his former drug-dealing employer Gunter whom they are actually looking for. Gunter has misled them yet again. They all knew that it was Bristol he was planning his attacks on and Walker was the person who was leading that plan on behalf of him. But after Walker's abrupt departure and from more deep investigation they got to know that it is Vegas where the blast will take place. Gunter Ross is an A-listed terrorist and he's probably got nothing against national government, one can only say that it is only his blood-lust which drives him to make these deadly plans to take people's lives and still no one could touch his hair yet. Getting Walker means getting Gunter, as he was the one who brought Walker here. But he happens to have a different relation with Walker since he let him quit six months ago and go to Bristol, which he never does. So, she thought she would wander around in his territory looking for drugs. That way she can at least get an insight of what they would be dealing with and she can find where Walker is as well. She calls her good friend and one of the colleagues on this case, Auciello for the information and tries to be as discreet as possible. He doesn't ask many questions thinking she needs it in her investigation process. She rests for a while and calls Clarke.

"Clarke." He answers sleepily.

"It's Calme. I'm going out for a while. Maybe would do some shopping. I will be back in a few hours. Hope that's fine?" she asks crossing her fingers.

"Tell me you aren't going to do what I'm thinking you're going to do Calme? Should I need to call Mattia?" he asks suspiciously.

"I don't know what you're talking about sir." She asks innocently.

“You know very well what I mean Calme. Just don’t get yourself killed and if you seriously are going to shop, then bring me some crackers.” She smiles brightly at that.

“I will Sir.”

“You’re a pain in the butt kid!” With that he hangs up.

She gets her bag and gets out of her hotel room.

Chapter Twenty-three

I come out of the bathroom and start getting ready for the day. I suddenly feel light-headed and sit for a while on my bed. *Probably I’m way more stressed than I thought I was.*

The conversation with Serenity didn’t help at all. I thought I would be better off after confessing my feelings, but it got worse. After telling her how I feel, I didn’t give her any chance to respond. I dreaded her rejection. But after hanging up I felt empty and today I feel even worse. I just keep wondering that how someone whom I met only a few weeks ago can control my emotions so intensely. My room-mate’s late night debauchery parade didn’t even succeed to distract my mind. I was awake almost the whole night thinking about almost everything that has happened in the past fifteen months. Life would have certainly been composed and happier if I didn’t do the things I did. But there’s nothing I can do to reverse my deeds and that is going to haunt me forever. As they say, “The past is a different country; they do things differently there.” I wish it was all delusive. But the nightmares I have on me are the strange reminders that the past was actually real.

I hear someone singing “You’re beautiful”, I identify the voice and it’s my room-mate.

She didn’t strike me as the nightingale type.

I head to the direction of her room and see her singing and holding a guitar with her eyes closed, oblivious to everything. But she doesn’t play the instrument, she’s just cradling it. I lean at her doorway and listen to her. After a while she opens her eyes and I smile at her. She doesn’t return the smile; instead stops singing.

“What are you doing here?” she demands seeming visibly flustered.

“How could I resist a fine a cappella like that, roomie!” I say grinning.

“Are you taunting me?” she asks narrowing her eyes.

“Why would you think like that?” I ask raising my brow. She just shrugs carelessly.

“You have a very enticing voice and I presume you play too?” I tell her pointing at the guitar. She nods.

“Can I see it?” I ask her.

“Do you play?” she asks handing me the guitar.

“I used to but not anymore.” I say. She doesn’t say anything. I hold the guitar and feel a sense of déjà-vu, it feels like the very first time I held my first own guitar when I was fifteen. I start to check the tuning and find a name inscribed over the corner of the guitar.

“Who is Mindy?” I ask her about the name. She looks at me as if I have grown two heads.

“That would be me.” She scoffs.

Oh! My roomie’s name is Mindy then, pretty colorful.

“Okay.” I say smiling at her. Then I start playing the same song she was singing. It feels good to play after so long. There was a time when I couldn’t stay even for a day without my guitar. I close my eyes and think of the good ol’ days.

The door bell rings and I cease. Mindy holds out her index finger indicating that it’s more likely to be her call. She gets up from her bed and goes to open the door.

I examine her room and it doesn’t look like a dump anymore. She cleans up pretty well consequently. I hear her talking to someone about drugs. I can hear a deep female voice and that seems strangely familiar. I dash to the living room and find Mindy talking to someone animatedly at the doorstep. But I cannot see the person. Hearing my approach Mindy looks at me and smiles.

“Definitely not my call.” She says. *Is this who I think this would be?*

“Come in.” Mindy invites the person in and goes back to her bedroom.

She comes in and I stand there bewildered looking at her. It’s Serenity. She’s wearing a camouflage crop top which shows her belly button and tan shorts. She looks totally different. I stand there gaping at her in horror. *How is this possible?*

“Walker?” she asks perplexed.

I feel my world crumble.

Chapter Twenty-four

Calme stands there staring at his face, a bunch of expressions cross his features: bewilderment, happiness, perplexity and then horror. *He probably thinks that his treasured secrets are out.* But she cannot let him think that way. She starts brainstorming to find possible excuses. She tardily comes up with a different trick to distract him.

“Who’s she?” she asks making a poker face.

“Huh?” he looks at her blankly.

“What are you doing in an apartment with a girl Dominic?” she says scowling at him. He looks terrified and starts shaking his head. Just then the girl who opened the door for her comes out from a room with a guitar slinging from her shoulder. She stares at both of them for a while.

“Weirdos!” she mutters rolling her eyes and slips out of the apartment leaving both of them alone.

They both stand there staring at each other awkwardly. After a while she clears her throat indicating that she needs answers.

“If you would just calm down and take-” she plops down on the couch before he finishes.

He stands there looking amused.

“You can make yourself at home.” She says pretending to be annoyed. He obliges and sits beside her.

“She’s my room-mate. I don’t even know her. I only got to know her name today after staying with her for two days.” He explains. “Wait! Are you jealous?” he asks grinning sheepishly.

“What? No I’m not!” she says brusquely rolling her eyes.

“How did you find me Serenity?” he asks, becoming serious precipitously. She tenses at that.

“I didn’t find you. In fact I’m shocked to see you here. When have you become a drug dealer, huh?” She turns the table astutely.

“You don’t wanna know that.” He sighs, squirming.

“Of course I wanna know. What’s going on Dominic?” she asks softening. His jaw clenches and he closes his eyes, keeping silence.

“You should go. This place isn’t safe for you, these people are dangerous.” He says getting up from the couch. She braces, *this is not going the way she wanted.*

“What are you talking about? Drug-dealers are usually dangerous when they are not paid, they wouldn’t kill someone if they are about to profit from them, would they?” she says as innocently as possible.

“You don’t understand. It’s not only about drugs.” He shakes his head. “By the way, from when did you start doing drugs?” he asks her darkly.

“It’s for my friends.” She flat-out lies.

“Where are they?”

“Woo, Easy Sherlock! Are we playing twenty questions or something? If it’s that, then I have more than twenty.” She says, smiling slyly.

“It’s just that I’m surprised and not in a very good way. I mean, I didn’t want you to see me like this.” He mutters. “I don’t want you to get harmed. Please go!”

“Remember, if I walk out of this door, I’m never coming back.” She rises from the couch heading for the door with her heart beating erratically. She stands at the door thinking what could she do next, but nothing comes to her mind. She sighs disappointedly and starts to turn the door knob. Just then he grabs her waist from behind pulling her hard against his chest.

“I’m sorry! Please forgive me. I can’t tell you anything. I can’t bear the hatred which you’re bound to feel for me if I tell you about my past.” His words come out muffled, thick with emotions. She doesn’t say anything wondering if she was wrong all along about him.

He starts kissing her neck sending electric sparks throughout her body.

“I didn’t mean any of that to happen. But I was so scared. If I didn’t run out of there then I would be dead or in prison by now.” He states with a strangled voice.

“What are you talking about?” she asks in a whisper. Marveling his touch and trying to make out sense from his words at the same time. Spinning her around, he takes her lips with urgency, as if his life depends on it. She responds wrapping her hands and legs around him.

He takes them to his bedroom without breaking their connection and lowers her on the bed. They both lose themselves in wild amour. Their hands move desperately on each other’s body. He trails kisses on each part of her face and keeps kissing coming down to her neck and works on pulling off her top. She writhes under him in anticipation of the inevitable and bites his neck. He releases her for a while to peel off his own t-shirt and again leans on her, stroking her sides. She gasps in excitement when he grazes the path between her breasts with his teeth. He proceeds to open her shorts when reality of the situation hits her hard.

“Stop!” she almost shouts, making him flinch. His eyes seem almost onyx, filled with desire.

“What’s wrong?” he breathes.

“We need to talk.” She blurts out.

“We have all the time we need in the world to talk, after we are done.” He says smiling seductively and licking her neck. Goose bumps form on her entire being. *Treacherous body!* This is not good; she has to regain her composure.

“No! We need to talk now. You need to tell me what you meant by all those things you mentioned earlier.” She asks authoritatively sitting up and pulling on her top back.

He sits there staring ambiguously at her for a while, then begins speaking almost inaudibly, “I killed my cousin and girlfriend before I fled to Europe.”

Chapter Twenty-five

She sits there staring at him in utter disbelief. Everyone was right about him all along and she just kept thinking he wasn't guilty. Now it seems that she couldn't be more wrong about anything in her life.

He looks up at her, looking shattered.

"Go on." She urges him gruffly.

"Rajveer and I were more like siblings than cousins." He clears his throat and searches her face for any reaction, but all he gets is a blank look. He continues squeamishly, "He came to stay with us when he was in elementary school. My mother was an Australian and she married an Indian business man, he was my stepfather. We got along pretty well. Shivanya, my ex-girlfriend, was the daughter of my step-father's colleague. She was a boisterous person and very sharp and beautiful; maybe that was the reason everyone loved her." He pauses looking at her. She listens with rapt attention. "Anyways, I, Raj and Shivanya were sent to Australia to pursue our education. We all were inseparable as they come. Between me and Raj, Raj was the one who was always surrounded by girls; I mean girls used to get attracted to me but preferred to steer clear from me since I was the quiet and geeky type. They used to call me freak. But that doesn't really count in this story, what really counts is that, despite all the name calling and everything, Shivanya was the one girl who approached me saying she wanted to go out with me. I liked her a lot from the beginning but never had the courage to confront. So, when she asked me out I said yes and from then on we started dating. I, of course used to get occasional glares from the guys, but I shrugged it off. We dated like that for three damn years. I used to hear now and then that she was cheating on me with other guys but I never believed any of it. I even caught her making out with other guys, but she would always come up with some excuse and I would overlook it always. I loved her too much to leave her. When we went to India for our winter break, the abominable chain of events took place. One day I found messages from Raj on her phone, they were having these lewd conversations. I was shattered at the time. I didn't expect this from Raj." He sighs looking exhausted.

"I'm sorry for whatever they did to you, but that's no excuse to kill them. Anyways, go on." Calme comments, shaking her head.

"That day we were having this new-year party at Shivanya's place in Mumbai and I told her that I'm not coming and she didn't insist much either. My actual plan was to throw them off guard. So, I sneaked in her apartment during the party, slipped unnoticed to her bedroom and hid under her bed. When the party was over she and Raj came to the room and they started—" he choked then, remembering that night.

"It's okay. You don't have to say that." She says in a soothing voice. He nods and continues, "When they were done and making fool of me, I couldn't stand it. I was so angry and heart-broken, I came out from under the bed and lunged at both of them. I was both physically and emotionally drained, so they both took that as an opening and started beating me. They both didn't have a single sense of moral. Shivanya was speaking profanities and kept saying it was my fault that she was being like this. At one point I couldn't take it any longer. I grabbed both of their necks at once and started strangling them with all my might. But when I understood what I was doing I released both of them

and sneaked out. I didn't notice if they were dead, but later I heard that they both were found dead at the exact place I left them." Burying his face in his hands he starts sobbing silently. Years of pent-up remorse finally unleashes.

But something doesn't really sit right in the whole story. She knew from the reports of CBI on his background that Shivanya Pathak and Rajveer Singh were found with their necks twisted and Walker says that he only strangled them, but not intentionally to death.

"Are you sure you didn't break their necks?" she inquires.

"Of course not. It was just an impulsive move and an act of defense. I don't know any technique of breaking someone's neck. I mean, I know strangling isn't an impressive thing to do either and that was extremely evil of me to do, but I'm not that evil. I didn't mean any of that to happen, trust me. That one night changed my whole bloody life. When I got home later at dawn I found everyone at my home dead. I called the police but didn't have the backbone to stay any longer. I just took off after that. I knew that would make me their prime suspect, but I was too petrified to care." He admits, shaking.

Calme sits bewildered. Nothing makes sense anymore. Every word Dominic says, makes the situation all the more vague. She mentally organizes the events. According to Walker when he came home he found his family dead, which means he couldn't be the one who killed them if he was with Shivanya and Rajveer at that time and reports said their necks were twisted, but Walker says he only strangled them. Walker's sister was also killed with her neck wringed that way, which probably means her killer was the same person as Shivanya and Rajveer's. She looks at Walker, his pain stricken face and he seems genuine. But she cannot really trust him properly until she's done interrogating.

"Why did you elope like that if you weren't guilty? I know you were scared, but how did you flee without any trace?"

"Why do I feel that you're playing cop with me?" he asks.

"Not exactly." She states. He sits staring at her with an unreadable expression on his face.

"I had enough cash at home and—"

"What about passport and other documents?" she asks gravely.

"I was booked to fly back to Australia that day itself and i did leave successfully. Then I waited for two weeks in Melbourne and got myself an entire new identity and that's when I met Gunter Ross, the person who may have directed you here. I then came here with him and started working for him. I really didn't have much option if I had to survive then." He asserts.

Her phone starts ringing. She fishes it out and it's Clarke.

"Where the hell are you?" Clarke grumbles.

"Shopping." She answers.

“What did you buy, eh?” Clarke asks.

“You know, the essentials.” She says.

“Bravo kid! And don’t forget my crackers.” He says and rings off.

She looks at Walker and he’s standing with an inscrutable expression.

“Let’s go somewhere.” She asks. He doesn’t say anything, just keeps staring.

“What?” she asks.

“Who are you?” he asks finally after five minutes of staring.

“For now, the ticket for you to get out this mess.”

Chapter Twenty-six

“So, you knew all along.” he utters more as a statement.

“I’m afraid so.” Calme admits.

“Then you can obviously end your discretion and roll playing and tell me what is it exactly you need from me?” he asks with her mouth pressed in a thin line.

“I want information about Gunter Ross’s plans. Exactly when and where is he planning the blast?” she asks straight away.

“Wait! You want to know about Gunter?” he asks, confused. “How would I know about his plans? I have only just got here and besides I’ve not been in touch with him for months now.”

“Then why did you come here all of a sudden right before 5th June if you had nothing to do with this?” she counters.

“I swear I don’t know about any of these. I left Europe because—”

“Because you killed Jeremy and Bethany.” She finishes for him. His eyes widen to the point of popping out of its sockets.

“Bethany is dead? What are you saying?”

“Right after the argument you had with her. I mean not exactly right after, but after three hours and don’t play canny, we got evidence against you, on both the cases.” She says calmly.

He looks at her as if she has punched him in the gut. Her heart wrenches seeing the look on his face. But she holds her imperturbability. This is no time to think through the heart.

"You believed all of that? And what evidence you are talking about? Hell! Why would I even want to kill them? I didn't like Jeremy and had a little argument with Bethany, but that doesn't mean I would kill them!" he says in nihilism. Calme thinks back to the same reasons she's been trying to feed her mind.

"Who knows! You have killed before." She points out.

"But that was different." He whispers distractedly.

"And I left because I had a call that night from someone and they told me to leave the country or they would reveal my past to the police and would kill you. I had no other choice left!"

"Killing isn't really an admirable act to perform, no matter what your motive is. And who was this person you're talking about? More of all, if you didn't kill Bethany, then what were you doing in her apartment building that night?" she remarks, ignoring the fact she just discovered that she was threatened to kill.

"I went to meet my Landlord Mr. Burton." He says slumping down on the bed, wrecked. A sound of knocking comes from the front door and a gigantic man clad in black walks in. Calme straightens.

"Gunter wants to see you Ray." The man imparts in a booming voice.

"Tell him I'm dealing." He says looking at Calme. She looks at him startled and somewhat happy inside that even after knowing who she was and what was her purpose, he chose to be by her side.

"He wants to see you now." The ogre emphasizes each word without assimilating her presence. The room fills with tension. Calme reaches for the gun always tucked under her shirt. But then she remembers that she forgot to bring it. *Shit! Now I have to bring this sumo down without any weapon. I'm so dead!* She thinks to herself.

"I'm not done with my business here." she advances. The man turns toward her and checks her out visibly.

"Make deals with me lassy!" the man says laughing a guttural laugh. "And boss requested your presence too. He's actually waiting for the two of you in the car." The man moves to grab her arm. But that's a very grave mistake he makes. Before he could touch her she gives him a mega side kick, all her training pitching in. The man cries out in surprising pain, taking that as a lucky chance she gives him a chopper blow and holds him into a headlock and twists his neck.

The man's lifeless body crashes on the hardwood.

Chapter Twenty-seven

I sit there hog-tied trying to register the affair just took place before my eyes. The whole thing seemed to be happening in a slow motion, from her side kicking Terry to breaking his neck. I find

myself vacillating between her and Terry, not knowing how else to react. Terry seems dead with his mouth wide open and Serenity is standing over him, barely out of breathe with her almost six feet toned frame and checking his veins. I stare at her in astonishment. She didn't even give the man a single chance to attack. She was that quick and took his almost three hundred pounds and seven feet chassis down single handedly without even getting a scratch. She truly has the power to unman me or probably everyone.

Then the revelation seeps in my mind. She's been toying with me this entire time just to seek out information about Gunter. But her eyes always said otherwise, they seemed honest. *Maybe she has something for me in her heart and she's only doing her job?* I understand the criticalness of the whole situation; the upcoming blitz, Jeremy and Bethany's death, my past and probably I'll get my ass thrown into prison, but none of these are bothering me at the moment, all I can think of is her and how wonderful she is and how I can get her to confess her feelings for me.

Two hard punches on my face bring me down from my air castle.

"What the hell! Why would you hit me?" I scowl at her in anguish.

"You weren't listening to me." She says unconcernedly. "Gunter seems to have found out about me. So now I'm gonna tell you what you have to do."

"So much for not killing anyone no matter what your motive is." I mock her pointing at Terry's dead body.

"Shut it and listen."

"Where's the bitch? And what happened to you? You look like shit!" Gunter scuttlebutts, rolling down the window of his car. I take a deep breath, *time to test my acting skills.*

"I don't know. She killed Terry and knocked me out and when I woke up she was gone." I explain, sounding melodramatic.

Gunter stares at me contemplating what I just said, which is quite unnerving. I really hope I pulled the act off without any exaggeration.

"Mike, head to The Mirage's direction." He orders the driver.

"Do you really think I can deal like this now?" I scorn.

"We're not gonna deal. We're going to see this little agent and her team." He says smirking.

"Agent? Team? What do you mean?" I ask faking confusion, but inside I know very well what's going to happen. *She's an agent then!*

"Playing dumb doesn't suit you, kid. You're so much like your mother." He snickers making me jerk my head to his direction.

“How do you know my mother?” I ask him, trying to grasp where he’s going with this.

“Well, since I’m your father it is only fair that I know your mother.”

Chapter Twenty-eight

Calme heads toward Clarke’s room, limping. *I probably broke the darn ankle*; she mutters under her breath. Jumping from the third floor wasn’t really a good idea, but she had no choice. Gunter’s car was parked at the entrance of the edifice. She couldn’t possibly slide out of the building being inconspicuous. She has to tell Clarke what happened and to what illation she has come to. She knocks on his door.

“Who is it?” he shouts.

“I’ve got your crackers.” She answers. The door opens unveiling an unkempt in appearance Clarke beaming ear to ear. He lurches outside searching for the illustrious guest she was about to bring along.

“Where is he?” he queries.

“That’s what we’re about to discuss now.” She informs getting inside the room.

“Why are you limping?” he asks getting inside and locking the door.

“Long story short; I tricked Auciello into giving me Gunter’s location, I went there as a dopehead and one of his minions directed me coincidentally to Walker’s place, he was horrified to see me but I eventually convinced him that it was totally fluky and finally bamboozled him into confessing everything.” She takes a pause then continues, “And about the bad wheel, it turns out that Gunter happened to form a doubt against me and sent his one big fawner to escort me and Walker so he could hang us upside down and torture the truth out of us, but clearly he underestimated me and since I couldn’t use the front door, I had to jump from Walker’s balcony.”

“I don’t wanna know what you did with that unfortunate bloke. Tell me what you found out.” Clarke says getting out an energy drink from the mini fridge.

“Firstly I should tell you that these energy drinks are diabetic demons, you wouldn’t wanna mess with ‘em and secondly I want you to contact CBI and ask them to reopen the cases of the Singh family and Shivanya Pathak murder cases.” She says searching in her bag for her notebook. Her intuition wasn’t wrong. Walker was innocent and has been the whole time. She already had the information that why Walker was present at Bethany’s apartment at the exact time the murder took place, he was clearly tricked and from his caller’s list she even came to know that someone verily called him from the pay phone near his building that night, certainly to tout him into leaving the country so that the whole suspicion would fall on his shoulder and from their conversation she has become more positive than ever. There is no way he has been falsifying the entire time. He’s not

involved in those murders neither he's associated with Gunter in his onslaught mission. Now all she has to do is gather evidence and to do that she needs Clarke's help.

Clarke spits the drink he was guzzling down and looks at her as if she said earth is rectangular. He opens his mouth but she stops him. "Hold it there. It's important." With that she scurries out of the room all the while looking for her notebook but not able to find it.

While she passes Jason's room trying to remember where she put her notebook, she finds his door open. She peeks inside and gets a brief look of her notebook lying on his bed. She becomes puzzled; *where did he get my notebook?* She enters the room and finds a girl mopping the floor and hears the water running in the bathroom.

"Sir is in the washroom." The girl says. Calme nods picking up her notebook and runs an eye over the room. Her eyes fall over a box of contacts placed over the bedside table. She makes her way toward that and uplifts the case. It's a brown contact lens, the color of Mazzeo's eyes. *Never noticed he used contacts;* she wonders.

She opens the notebook to see if everything was in place. While flipping through the pages she suddenly finds a page missing, as if someone has torn it. She recalls, it was the page where she wrote her assumptions regarding the murders. *What would he do with only those assumptions? And how dare him going through my personal stuffs!* She seethes. Despite of her hissy fit her subliminal self smells the shadiness of the whole status quo. She decides to take a chance by leaving the notebook at the exact same spot. Delving into her shoulder bag she digs out the mini hidden camera she always carries and places it inside the flower vase set on the bedside table and dashes out of the room.

Maybe I'm only being paranoid; she reasons with herself. But what could be the reason behind this sneaky attempt?

She reaches her room, turns on her laptop and connects the Wi-Fi.

Chapter Twenty-nine

Standing under the shower Jason chuckles about how he was able to delude the national security and frame his little brother. It was more thrilling than killing those seven people. Although, nothing has been easy for him, it took him more than twenty one years of bottled up fury to go down that route. Ever since he got to know from his cur of a father that how his own mother threw him off like a garbage sack to rot and took his ringer with her, all he felt for them was rancor. He had every intention of killing Damon just like he killed their mother, but that wasn't sufficient affliction on him. He too had to bear hardship just like Jason did for twenty one years. He held Gunter in contempt even if he never was hard on him in anyway. He gave him almost everything he wanted. Still, he knew all the sordid reasons behind his father's generosity. He was an international antagonist after all. Throughout Jason's life he had to stay as an orphan even if he had both of his parents and family and that one thing annihilated his spirits.

Getting out of the shower he towel dries himself and settles in front of the lavatory mirror. A slow smile curves up his lips when he looks closely at his features. It's unavoidable that he and Damon how much resemble each other, yet no one ever seems to suspect their kinship. He locks his gaze with his reflection's and delves into the same violat e eyes as Damon's which he had been hiding behind those brown contacts. He starts to chortle, but pauses when he remembers about Agent Calme's progress of investigation concerning the murders. She certainly is a potential threat to him. Most of her assumptions are enough to prove Damon's innocence and if she happens to discover his real eyes and the relation between him and Damon, then it wouldn't take her long to solve the snag. Tearing the page out of rage is a very dire mistake he has made. He has to be careful during his next feat. So far he has been ahead of the game, everything is planned perfectly and all are in his favor. They are supposed to encounter Gunter if they don't succeed in getting him in custody and since he knows his father's plan and place of the air-attack, no encounter would be necessary. He could get him to surrender. He may hate his father but always he at least took care of his "necessities", sparing his life just to send him behind the bars wouldn't be so merciful either. When it comes to his little brother, he would nothing but enjoy pulling the trigger. He planned on making him suffer, which he did by killing his happy little family; the bitch of a girlfriend of his and framing him for their murders. How he loved seeing him suffer all these years! Killing Bethany and Jeremy was the added weight to his sufferings. This time he lets out an evil laugh thinking how despicable he has become. However, he stopped caring a long time back about anything when he used to be bullied, beaten to a pulp and be found almost lifeless in different alleys each night without anyone to give a damn about that.

His stomach grumbles letting him know he needs to eat. He comes out of the bathroom, gets dressed and orders room service. Then he picks up his contacts, *this is one thing which is letting me get away*; he thinks. He cunningly let his father know about their arrival, a trap to speed up the pace of his victory.

Now all he has to do is, wait.

Chapter Thirty

She sits there zeroed in on the screen for any sign of Jason's emergence from the bathroom. *It's been fifteen minutes, what is he shaving himself stark or something?* She lets out an exacerbated breath. After five long minutes he comes out of the bathroom wearing a towel in his lower half. He comes directly to the place where she fixed the camera and picks up the room phone. She hopes for him to come a little closer so that she can analyze steadily, but the way she stationed the camera she could see nothing but his bottom half and that makes it hard for her to determine anything.

Shit! Now what do I do? She curses in despondency. Meanwhile, he discards the towel giving her an eye full of his naked body and gets dressed quickly. He comes near the table again to pick his contacts. Calme holds her breath in anticipation for some clue, but his room phone rings making him retreat. He talks over it and after a while says something and throws the phone across the room in angry whim.

Whoa! What's with the rowdy air? She thinks in a dither. She sees him darting out of the room banging the door behind. She decides to go to the root of this occurrence and losing no time she too almost flies out of her room in order to tail him.

Coming down to the hotel lobby she catches sight of him talking to the receptionist. Being twenty feet behind in distance she doesn't make out what they are talking about, but by the look on Jason's face she realizes that something is not right. Whatever that is, she hammers out a deal to follow him when he walks out of the hotel.

Barreling out; she looks about, but finds no sign of him. Suddenly her gaze falls upon a limousine parked in front of a café across the street and she sees Jason talking to a man leaning at the door of the vehicle. She squints her eyes trying to recognize the man, but fails to do so. After a while they both get inside the café. Playing it cool Calme heads to that direction and gingerly tries to note the number plate of the Limo. Inspecting her circumambient she takes a reserved look to the number. *Ah! Local vehicle. But who could possibly know Jason here?*

She hears an abrupt bang in the back of the car. She jumps backward at that. Several more bangs and a muffled voice from the confinement arouse her curiosity. Taking cautious steps toward her object of snoopiness she places her ear to the trunk. BANG!

She becomes certain that someone's bound and gagged in there. Taking a trembling breath she picks the lock and opens the lid a crack. Peering inside she sees a man lying face-down just in the condition she thought he would be.

"Hello? Are you alright?" she whispers opening the lid a little wider.

The man lifts his face revealing his dark headed pale familiarity. It's Walker.

Chapter Thirty-one

I see her eyes widen in disorientation and shock.

"What the hell happened?" she lets out a buzzing shriek. I roll my eyes.

"Oops! Wait." She says removing the duct tape from my mouth. *Ouch! That hurt.*

"Now tell me what happened?" she asks. I give her a really-you-wanna-do-this-now-instead-of-taking-me-outta-here look.

"Oh! Let me just check around." Taking the hint she closes the lid and vanishes.

After a while the lid opens and she motions for me to not make a sound.

"Listen now, I'm going to leave the lid open and while I distract the driver, you're going to come out and run directly to the end of this street and wait for me." She whispers. I nod and wait for her to act. Moments later I hear her talking to the driver. *That's my cue.*

I fastidiously beat it out of the trunk, inspect my surroundings and take off to the direction to the end of the street as if the hounds of the hell are after me. I reach to a corner and looking back I see Serenity moving fast towards my direction.

I glaciare while I see her running to me. Her glossy mane winging wildly, her long legs dynamically hitting the pavement in perfect rhyme, her paradisiac lips formed in an O out of drudgery, her eyes universal-- Oops! Not universal, it's wide as if she's trying to alert me of something. BOOM!

And I'm hit.

"Sono certo che fosse lui tutto il tempo, lo zio...ottenere una sospensione di Clarke..si si..E con me..." I wake up listening to someone conversing in fluent Italian and with a feeling that I have been hit by a giant hammer on my head. I try opening my eyes, but I'm too hazed to do so.

"The sleeping beauty is waking up. I'll talk to you later."

Tearing open my eyes finally, I try to sit up.

"Welcome back!" I hear Serenity poking fun at me.

"Where am I? What time is it?" I ask her ignoring the pain I'm feeling.

"Does that really matter?" she asks scowling at me.

"I .. I—"

"Are an annoying fellow?" she suggests mockingly.

"That wasn't really I was opting for, but thanks for the compliment! Now if you're done with the blasphemy, would you care to fill in the gaps?" I needle her rubbing my temple.

She gets up from the stool she was sitting on and goes to an adjoining room what I presume to be a washroom. I hear the water running as a consequence she comes out carrying a wet towel in her hand.

"You were hit by a motor-cycle and been knocked out cold for a day." She mutters pressing the towel on my forehead.

"Where are we now?" I inquire never leaving my eyes from her face.

"A friend's apartment and you're staying here until everything is sorted." She states single-mindedly.

"What about you? You're not staying?" I ask her, discomposed.

"I can't. I have a mission to complete."

"I'm coming with you." I tell her with finality in my voice.

“No, you’re not. If you really wanna help, help me with the information you were supposed to find out.”

That hits me like an iceberg. I was purportedly about to fall to the lot about Gunter’s conspiracy when I parenthetically came to know that he is my father. Not only that, he even revealed that one of his henchmen is working with Serenity, who is in fact my twin brother and he was the one who collared me into all these mess. I was numb when the exposition cuffed me. I wanted to demand the reasons behind his grudge for me, but couldn’t. Moreover, what kind of a sick father I have, who despite of knowing everything kept me in the dark and planned on making my life a living hell?

“It turns out that I’m a descendant of a splashy mafia.” I whisper, hesitantly. Serenity stops dabbing the towel and frowns.

“Come again?”

Taking a deep breath, I tell her everything that has happened with Gunter and about my brother who’s currently working with them being a yes-person of his.

She sits there stunned for a while, as if her suspicion has been confirmed. She dials someone on her phone and scrambles out of the room.

Chapter Thirty-two

I remain seated for a while taking in my surroundings. The room is too small and almost empty containing only the bed which merely holds my ample body and a bitty bench, giving me a feeling as if I have been taken hostage and thrown into a dungeon. *Or it is truly a dungeon?*

Leaving behind these irrational concepts I extricate myself from the bed and go in search of Serenity. Coming out of the bedroom I find myself standing in another nearly empty room which probably is what you call a living room. I momentarily ice over when I spot her standing beside a window distantly staring out in the early morning sky. Heading to her way I stand behind her silently.

“You know, I never failed at any assignment yet. But during this one, I have been so distracted that I hardly was able to make out who the real bad guy is.” She mutters coldly. I stand there stiffly and she continues, “I know in my line of work people will lose their lives, I have to kill or else I would get killed, so far I lost count of how many lives I have taken, except it was all for the sake of the nation. I have always been proud of my innate knowledge, but never knew that because of one silly mistake, this time two innocent people have to suffer so grievously. All because of my puny mind was distracted, distracted because of you!” she looks at me sternly.

“Me? What did I do now?” I ask taken astern. Without a word she dives for me, throwing me off balance. We both hit the floor with our hands all over each other, as in she, throwing unending

punches at me and me dodging those off. She manages to land five or six on my face and I try to calm her down.

“Why do you have to play with my mind?” She says in between her hits, “Why do you have to always make me think about you?” she stops with her relentless attacks at that and buries her face in the crook of my neck. We both lay there trying to stable our ragged breathing, when I feel the metallic gout hitting my taste-buds. *Ah, broken nose!*

Subsequently I feel her body dead-set and I follow suit after realizing our situation and proximity. *Oh yes, the famous woman on top position!* I hear my breath hitch when she lifts her head and looks at me with something indecipherable in her eyes.

“Did you mean whatever you said on that phone-call?” she asks huskily. I nod without a single thought, feeling all too overwhelmed by the desire burning inside me.

Leaning down she kisses my neck igniting forbidden phenomenon deep within me.

“How do I make you feel Walker?” she rasps. I part my mouth to utter words when she sinks her teeth in my neck making me wince in pain or more like in pleasure.

And the next thing I know is that she’s up and out of the apartment, leaving me all wanton and in need of a cold bath.

Chapter Thirty-three

By the time she comes back I’m already done with my much needed business and sitting on that dingy bench. She comes in dressed up all “Mission impossible” and I feel my mouth going dry.

“Like what you see?” she asks smirking.

“Err—”

“Quit drooling and take it.” She says dispassionately handing me over a takeout box of food making my stomach rumble. Without wasting any time I eat the food as if I’ve been starving for years.

“I can see that you have taken care of your nose.” She asks not looking up from the little piece of machine in her hand, which I guess is a cell phone. *It sure doesn’t seem like one though!*

“I had to, since you left me to bleed to death.” I sigh, causing her to roll her eyes.

Few moments later her phone beeps with a message and she shoots up and appears to take haste. *Déjà-vu! Oh you’re so not leaving me behind this time Miss Agent.*

I shoot up as well and block her path, causing her to bump on me.

“What the—”

“You’re not going alone.” I tell her obstinately.

“I’m not alone. I have my team with me. Now move it!” she spits. I shake my head adamantly.

“Being stubborn, are we?”

“Take me with you.” I tell her firmly.

“You’re not gonna be of any use there. So just get out of my way.” She asks very calmly.

“Make me!” I say and instantly regret it. But to my surprise, she only huffs and gestures for me to go ahead.

And off we go.

All the way to our destination she doesn’t say anything, but I can sense how constricted she is. I want to know what is going on in her mind, but the stoic mask she’s wearing is too thick to move across. She’s driving for almost nine long hours, without stopping anywhere in between except the gas stations, as for me, i feel totally dehydrated and empty. I tried to talk to her several times, but she simply is being monosyllabic.

The car screeches to a stop and we move out. I see her taking out her so-called cell phone and call someone. We hike our way to a construction site, which seems to be abandoned. Reading the sign makes me realize it is the famous Silver city. *Interesting place of choice to conceal your ass father!*

Thirty feet ahead of us I see two people almost lying down on the ground.

“Crouch down, now!” Serenity commands. She too takes the same position and makes her way to them with me on her tow.

“What have we got?” she asks the blonde elderly man once we reach them.

“It seems the air-attack is cancelled and they are planning on escaping.” He says without looking in our direction.

“Is Mazzeo there?” she asks.

“No! We got no trace of him for a few hours now. The bloke is dangerously crafty, we need to give him—” he pauses once he notices me staring at him in a moronic way.

“What is he doing here?” he whisper-yells at Serenity.

“Get over it! We have a ring to take down.” she barks and slowly starts to run to the direction of the building. I hear the blonde groaning and following after her.

I feel ya mate. She’s one frustrating woman!

Chapter Thirty-four

21:41 pm, Silver City, NM

“When do we get in?” I whine near her ear. It’s been ten agonizing minutes that we are standing near the ground-floor window of the already disintegrated building, witnessing few guards, playing cards. Serenity has already taken her stance with a revolver in her hand, the blonde who I have come to know as Agent Clarke is holding a revolver too and the other guy Auciello is carrying a rifle, more help is on the way and these three people with me are probably loaded with more weapons. *And I’m a fidgety mess as usual!*

“Enjoy the hunting. After all you insisted!” Serenity counterclaims caustically.

Right after that we see a SUV pull in at the wrecked driveway. I see all three of my companions taking positions.

“There comes Gunter.” Clarke whispers.

Gunter comes out of the car and gets inside the building.

“I’m going in. Wait for my signal when it’s clear in there.” Serenity says. I open my mouth to protest, but she stops me right before that, “Stay.”

I stand there watching her subtly enter the building without a backward swivel. I look at Clarke and Auciello and they are preoccupied with their jobs, as if it is just a cakewalk for her. *Or probably it is!*

But I still fail to control my fluctuating nerves. *What if something happens to her?* As if on notion I hear a gunshot.

My mind becomes blank and I feel my feet moving like a bat out of hell ignoring the desperate yelling of Clarke. Reaching inside I search for her presence, but find her nowhere. I keep climbing the stairs all the while looking for her and following the sound of thundering gunshots. Arriving at the fourth floor I become chilled to the bone.

There are at least a dozen of men lying dead on the ground and Serenity is sitting on a chair cleaning the revolver at hand with the tip of her leather jacket. In front of her, Gunter is tied and gagged and is trying to kill her through his eyes. *Did she just bring down an army of men all on her own?*

“I told you to stay.” She says very calmly bringing me out of my trance. *How does she know it’s me? She didn’t even look back!*

“I thought they—”

“Killed me? I’m hard to kill Mr. Damon Cooper.” I cringe at the mention of my real name after so long.

And the dialogue! She's such a drama queen sometimes.

"Trust me you are not, babe!" I turn abruptly towards the owner of the voice and feel all my breath knocked out of me when I come face to face with Jason.

The familiar smirk is on his face and his eyes, those are exactly like mine. *Wait! Jason is my evil twin? Come on!*

"Why hello little brother!" he says, amusement laced in his voice.

"Walker move!" Serenity shouts and before I could follow her order, Jason shoots her. I see her limp body falling to the floor. I feel everything stop around me including my heart. Taking that as a fair chance Jason grabs my neck and hits his head with mine. I feel disoriented for a while.

Oh no big brother, you didn't just do that!

Regaining my equanimity I boot him in the gut and reverse our position and start beating the shit out him. He becomes shocked for a while, but immediately redeems his senses and starts counter attacking me. Our bones crack, blood spills, but oblivious to everything, we keep on fighting.

All the catastrophe from the past fifteen months flare before my eyes. The dead face of my little sister, my family, how I had to run around country to country just to survive; it was never a living for me, it was just not dying; all because of some sadistic revenge.

Suddenly I feel a blaring pain in my chest. Looking down I see Jason drilling a knife through my heart and smiling victoriously.

"Why?" I sibilate.

"If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us shall we not revenge?" he chuckles, "Words of William Shakespeare. One heck of a—" he keeps babbling, but I don't hear him anymore. I think of Serenity lying on the floor bleeding. *Someone please come to her aid-* I want to shout, but nothing comes out of my mouth. I smile thinking of our first encounter. How I was speechless then. I hear people shouting, pounding of heavy boots coming upwards. *Someone's coming, maybe for help. Wait Miss Agent, you're gonna be just fine. Hold on a few more—*

And I drift off into nothingness.

Epilogue

14:10 pm, 14th February 2016, Bucharest, Romania

I sit at the reception area uncouthly waiting for the Chief of this Intelligence Agency. The journey this far has not been easy at all, but the ultimate reason behind this tour kept me going. I have come here for answers and a strong belief that I would not return empty handed.

“Mr. Renzi is ready to see you now Mr. Cooper.” The receptionist’s thick accented voice brings me back on track. She motions for me to follow her and we come to a stop in front of a large wooden door. She knocks and opens the door for me to enter.

Setting a foot inside I spot a man sitting behind a desk, holding a news paper upside down. *Strange!*

As if sensing my presence he puts down the paper and clears his throat.

“Have a seat Mr. Cooper.” He says and nods toward the receptionist’s direction.

“I take it you’re doing good.” He adds once the girl leaves us alone. I cannot help but smile in response looking at his beaming face. There is something in him that can easily put you at ease. I thought of him as an old, frightening personality given his position and here I am sitting before a charming guy with bright hazel eyes who looks everything but intimidating.

“So, what can I do for you Mr. Cooper?” He asks, smiling.

“I’m here for Seren—err—Agent Calme.” I stammer out.

“Per l’aeroporto.” I tell the driver of the cab once I settle in. Nodding he gears up the car.

Millions of emotions surge through me. Getting information out of Mattia about the whereabouts of Serenity has not been fruitful in the end. The moment I told him about my cause of visiting Bucharest, he became somewhat downbeat. He practically started interrogating me, but I remained honest till the end. He kept refusing my hustles, on the other hand, I was too stiff-necked to take a no. Unfortunately, it was all of no advantage whatsoever, because even if he tried, I could not meet her. She is out of the country due to work and Mattia could not be more specific because it is all classified information. I knew from the very beginning before boarding the plane that I was on my way of an already failed trip, but still I was too tangled up in the trap of hope to see past. I hoped for a chance, a chance to make her mine. The illusions of having a chance with a woman like her beside me was far too appealing then and now the “illusion” is justified and I am on my way back home with shattered hopes.

Looking outside the window I see the ancient city blurring past. I close my eyes and the events from the last seven months flood my mind.

I was comatose for over a month after that godawful day. When I reclaimed my consciousness the first thing that came to my mind was her. I asked for her everywhere, but no one knew where she was. I even visited Clarke several times but all he could say was that she was admitted to the hospital that night along with me; she was not hit due to wearing a bulletproof vest, but the impact of the shot was enough to benumb her. Howbeit, she was not there the next morning when they

came to visit. He never bothered to find where she was because she was well known for disappearing once she's done with her missions, which of course did nothing to comfort my aching heart.

The murder cases of my family and Shivanya was opened again and put on trial and Jason was found guilty for each one of them, including Jeremy and Bethany's, which didn't come as a shock to me since everyone knew it was him and strangely he confessed everything. I was only a bit appalled when I found out that it was not me but him who killed Rajveer and Shivanya. But the more daunting information was when I came to know that he killed my family, which was in fact his family as well.

Somehow I feel sorry for him. I feel sorry for losing a healthy sibling relationship which we could form together if he weren't possessed by the Devil himself. What did the vengeance bring him at the end? What exactly he was out seeking revenge for? Probably nothing. It was the blinding rage that corrupted his conscience, only if he knew the truth about us not being a part of his life. It was our father who tortured mother to an extent where she could do nothing but escape for the sake of her two little children. But sadly she could take only one of her kids with her as she was offered a condition which would have either taken her kids away from her or her from her kids. She could not bear to let any of that to happen, so placing an unmovable rock on her chest she decided on leaving one of them alone and promised to never be back in their life and till the end she kept that promise. I have seen her dying every day, not knowing what the reason was, although the gaps were filled when I found her diary.

"Noi siamo qui, Signore." The driver says jolting me awake.

Paying him I clamber out of the cab and make my way inside the airport. Checking my watch I realize I still have seven hours before I board. Initially I thought I would come here and go straight to meet her and confess, I did not care about the what-ifs because I knew those what-ifs could slow me down on my journey and now even if I did not care about those what-ifs, I am practically standing right where I started my journey.

Letting out a disappointed sigh I take a seat. They say if something is meant to happen it will happen eventually. Maybe, I and she were never meant to happen. Commonsensical people will call me feeble-minded for being an emotional wreck over something which was never really there in the first place. Even now that I contemplate the situation I am in, I do find my stupidity. Whatever happened in the past few months between us was merely a pretense from her side. She stumbled in my life for the sake of saving her mission, she got intimate with me to win my trust, I was her bait. However, even if my head tells me it was just her duty she was doing, my heart tells me it was not only that. Even if I did not know a single thing about her, not even her name, I felt for her and now after seven months for the sake of that feeling I came here for her. No matter how stupid it sounds, I love her. I probably loved her from the very first moment I saw her, I loved her when her eyes sparkled gazing at the Cabot tower, I loved her when she threw herself in the line of death to save me and I loved her even when she deceived me. I might feel worsted right now, but somewhere at the corner of my heart I am happy for the little time I had with her. Smiling a little at the realization, I feel my eyes drooping and I doze off.

“Have a happy journey sir!” The beaming stewardess greets me politely. I try to return her smile but find myself grimacing.

Walking through the aisle I flop down unceremoniously upon finding my seat. Passengers start to file in one by one and I look out the window and squint my eyes toward the night sky. I have been sleeping on that seat in the airport for three hours like a wasted caveman, in the end the security had to come to my aid. They took me in and searched me like I was some kind of terrorist, but finally they let me go when they found nothing. *That’s where my life has come to now!*

A bald man with a double chin and a shirt and shorts which look like they have got down path of laundry seats beside me. He grins excitedly when our eyes meet, when he starts to open his mouth to fire up a conversation I instantly turn my head and put my ear buds in. It certainly is rude of me, but I cannot bring myself to deal with a chatty passenger.

The plane starts to move and I feel a twinge of pain inside my heart. It races on the runway making me realize what I am leaving behind, I am leaving the gold I acquired when I was lost in a mine of coal. The plane takes-off in the sky and I envision myself sucked into the coal mine again and that precious piece of gold taken away from my line of vision and the door closes plunging me into darkness again, this time forever.

“So, how did you find Bucharest? Was it how you expected it to be?” A deep voice questions with an amused undertone. I jerk my head fast to the point of getting a whiplash and there she sits with a smile so angelic it stops my heart.

I blink furiously to clear my vision thinking maybe it is true that I am on some kind of acid without knowing it myself, just like those security men said. But whenever I open my eyes after a blink she is still there. I look around in search of the bald man and find him sitting in the middle seat section with his mouth wide open and snoring loudly. Then I look again beside me and start to open my mouth, but nothing comes out. She rendered me speechless, just as she always does.

“Is it really you? How—” I trail off and her smile widens.

“I have my sources, remember?” She winks, smirking. I feel my breath hitch in apprehension.

“Well, let me introduce myself properly here. I’m Serenity White, Special forces.” She outstretches her hand.

I sit still looking into her eyes flabbergasted and for the first time since I met her I see a genuine smile on her face. Awkwardly I take her hand and croak out, “I’m Damon Cooper, mechanical forces, nice to meet you Miss White.” She lets out a musical laugh at my attempt to joke and I too crack with her.

I see the ray of early morning sky accentuating her beautiful face, I see her golden depths sparkling with an unknown promise, a promise which will erase the red and violet colors from the canvas of my life and will scatter it with colors of joy and light, a promise of a new beginning.

The End