

Chapter Fourteen

Liam

Victory's soft ballet slippers retreat backwards, as her body slips from my grip. The alarm on her face signifies I've said something that scares her. Before I have time to speak, she spins around, her crimson hair whipping my face as she flees from me.

"Victory, wait!"

My calls do nothing to slow her, so I give chase. She doesn't get very far before tripping on a gnarled root protruding from the earth. Victory goes down hard, barely able to put her hands out to protect her beautiful face as it smacks hard against a decaying tree stump.

I reach her just in time to see the gash open up across her forehead and the thick, vermilion stream flow down between her eyebrows.

I don't hesitate for a second as I rip my shirt off and place it on her wound. She doesn't resist, knowing she is injured and there is nowhere for her to run.

But why would she run in the first place?

I've asked her over and over if she trusts me and each time, she looked me dead in the eye and answered an affirmative. Was she lying? Just doing her wifely duty and agreeing with her husband?

I thought I had made it clear that we do not have a traditional marriage. I am not her master and with me, she is free to speak the truth. I would never expect anything less from her. I want a partnership, not a dictatorship. Women are raised to expect otherwise, so I suspect that she is having a hard time with this strange truth.

"Victory, why did you run from me?"

"I . . . you . . . you know." She looks up at me with eyes wide and full of terror.

"I understand, but..." I pause, looking into her eyes as I press the cloth to her forehead. "...don't ever be afraid of me." I whisper. The words sound loud in the silence of the trees. "You have no reason to fear me."

The unspoken truth hangs on the branches the same way the mossy foliage does.

"But if they find out . . . what will happen to me?" Water fills her eyes. She blinks, looking away from me. "How could you know?" The words are hushed as she looks around with wild eyes. "Does anyone else know?"

"No, no one knows. How I know isn't important. Look at me, Victory." I wait for her eyes to turn to mine, fear and the urge to run glowing in them. "You need to know something,

wife. I am a safe place. Especially for someone in your predicament. I need you to trust me. I will not let anything happen to you. The Brotherhood will not find out.”

But the question lingers of William. When I first found out the name of Victory’s other husband, I used all of my resources available to research him. I told myself I did it for Victory’s protection, but truth be told, my reasoning was fueled solely by jealousy.

Jealously or heroism, the search did not yield the results to satisfy my suspicions of the man. Government reports showed me he was a pilot for the Brotherhood. No prior jobs listed, no date of birth and no prior address.

It was as if the Brotherhood simply created the shell of a profile not really expecting anyone to research him. Nothing surprising there. They can delete and create people as they wish, and the general population has no idea. They follow their rules and they are safe, so they are told. So we are all told.

Who is he really? I doubt he is just a pilot. But I can’t be sure of what the truth is, not yet.

“Until I know who William really is, you are not to trust him, do you understand me?”

Finally, her eyes move back to me. “Who are you, Liam? Really?”

I pull the cloth from her wound. It’s small, only the blood made it look bigger than it was. I lean in and press my lips to her salty, trembling mouth. “I am your husband. And I am the man that will keep you alive.”

She snuffles and gingerly touches her forehead. “I want to see my mother.”

Rising to my feet, I hold out a hand to help her up. She rises, brushing the dust and leaves from her clothes. “Let me get a fresh shirt and I will take you.”