

TANGLED SHADOWS

By Assassin Beetle



Tangled Shadows

Chapter 1

She felt tempted to use the tube of sunscreen on the little table, but the hot sun overhead made her feel too lazy to apply the cream.

The halter top and shorts she wore left an amount of bare skin that should tan under the sun's hot rays. She didn't plan on laying there for too long so her skin wouldn't likely burn.

The deep cushions in her lawn chair caused her to feel sleepy. She closed her eyes and drifted off.

Suddenly, she heard the whine of a high pitched motor. The bike sounded like it had gotten past the locked gates at the end of the driveway.

She froze thinking the dark figure riding it planned on driving right into her. She sat up, about to grab her glasses but didn't have a chance to do anything.

The dark form's swift moves getting off the bike appear like a blurred motion. Throwing a dark blanket on the ground, he jerked her off her seat and sent her flying through the air. He pushed her down on the blanket then swiftly rolled her up in it. She could feel herself flying through the air again. A scream came belatedly from her throat, not heard over the bike.

Fear paralyzed her whole body. She tried to move but what held her in place felt harder and stronger than steel. She could feel the speed of the bike under her. It felt extremely fast and if she fought she could cause the bike to crash! She could get hurt!

He held her too tight! Her lungs couldn't get air needed for her to breathe. Dizzy and weak, she felt like falling from a great height. Blackness came.

She became aware of stillness as she struggled to breathe. He carried her over a shoulder that felt like a rock against her stomach. She felt dizzy and numb with fear! About to lose the contents of her stomach, she swallowed hard several times.

A door closed and a rattle of chains followed by a heavy sounding click.

Footsteps walked across a wooden floor. He shifted her weight off his shoulder with fingers of strength. She braced herself thinking he would throw her down. She came in contact with the floor gentler than expected.

She heard him moving around. She slowly lifted the blanket slightly to peek. She expected to see one of the many people her father had sent to prison. As a child of a judge, she had been taught to be extra vigilant, to go the extra mile in safety. She didn't know how he had gotten past the gates and the security.

The dim room had no windows. She could still see his dark form, but without her glasses she couldn't see him clearly. She thought by his strength he would be someone who worked out and buffed with muscle size. His form didn't look overly muscled.

Some of the people who her father sentenced to prison, she knew their names and faces. He took off his helmet and straight long black hair suddenly covered the top of his shoulders. He faced away from her so she couldn't see his face. She wanted to know which criminal had taken her!

He dialed a phone. "Judge Jack Thornton, please. This is an emergency about his daughter, Penelope!"

A chill went down her spine hearing his low harsh voice. He knew her name! She heard her father's voice through the phone. She wanted to scream at him to help her! Fear kept her voice locked.

"I want my daughter, Jack! You know who this is!"

The man's tone sounded lethal while talking to her father and using his given name. Dread filled her veins hearing his hatred and rage. She couldn't even tell what he looked like. If she lived, she needed to be able to describe him to the police!

"I want to know where my baby girl is! I have your daughter, since you are the last person to have mine! Each day that passes I'm going to become more violent! All that I heard and learned while in prison, thanks to you, I'll do to her!"

She could hear her father pleading over the phone.

"No! We're done talking!" He snarled, choking with rage! He threw the phone at the wall. It bounced off and with a lightning move he grabbed it out of the air. He threw it again with a sound of fury!

The phone exploded upon impact!

She flinched hard as the pieces of the phone hit the floor!

The sound of his violent ranting sent fiery ice down her spine, the force of her fear took away her breath!

She laid back down on the floor. She would soon suffer an agonizing death! Just like he had said on the phone, he planned on destroying her! Her courage dissipated as she thought of all the things she had planned for the future. None of it would happen now, she thought as tears fell and knowing her life was over! A dangerous man planned on ending it!

She could see through her tears, him pulling off the dark jacket he wore and flinging it. His boots came next, hitting the wall with loud thuds causing her to flinch.

Foul words flew continuously from his mouth.

He stalked through a doorway and disappeared into the darkness. She guessed he used stairs, since he had disappeared.

It sounded like he continuously hit something, like a punching bag. She had no way to know how long he punched it. She had nothing to gauge time. Silence and then it sounded like a shower going.

Her mouth felt beyond dry and she needed to see if she could escape. She wiped away her tears and stood with extremely weak legs. She straightened up her halter top, where a strap had gotten loose. She tried to pull on the hem of her shorts wanting to cover as much of her bare thighs as she could. Because of losing weight the last few months the waistband hung loose. The clothes she wore in public always covered the bare skin exposed at the moment. She felt extremely uncomfortable wearing such attire around a strange man. Especially one with cruel intentions of violence!

Safe in her own yard, trying to get a tan, never dreaming of someone like him showing up!

The place looked like an old house, small in size with much of the inside walls knocked out and removed. No windows, cheap brown panels covered all four of the outer walls. A small sink had a dim light on over it. A counter had a rice cooker on and another cooker next to it. An enticing smell caught her nose. Food cooking in the cookers caused her to feel the stirring of hunger.

Pieces of the broken phone lay scattered across the floor. Fear sliced through her, she needed to escape! She didn't see his black leather jacket or boots. Too afraid to look directly at him when he had passed, she had kept her eyes downcast.

The exit, a solid looking door, had a large bolt lock running through a hoop made of steel. Without a key there was no way out!

Her heart dropped and she rested her forehead against the icy cold door, in defeat. Her father had talked of how women kidnapped would disappear.

She knew about bad groups that did bad things to women but she didn't see the type of paraphernalia laying around his house. No computer that linked him to others of the type.

Sadness filled her as she thought of her family.

She walked back to the kitchen and saw drinking glasses sitting on a shelf over the counter. She grabbed one and ran water in it. Fear made the inside of her mouth have a bitter taste. Maybe water would get rid of it.

She thought she heard the shower stop. She quickly brought the glass toward her. She didn't want him to find her wandering.

Her fingers slipped and the glass hit the floor with a shatter.

Broken glass scattered all around her! She hesitated then bent down to pick up the pieces.

"Don't move!" he spoke from the shadows. His clipped words scared her and sent a chill down her spine. Would he start beating and hurting her in the ways he had learned in prison? She heard him go down the stairs. She obeyed him by remaining still, she felt too afraid not to!

He came back and set a bucket down, water splashing in it, from the force. He flicked on a bare light bulb overhead. She swallowed hard with his nearness.

He used the broom to sweep up the glass shards and the phone pieces.

Memories of Kohana came to mind. How she hated to get glass slivers in her foot. She would fuss over it like she had broken a toe. Tears came to her eyes. Penelope hoped she wouldn't miss her too much! Maybe she should've been more empathetic about her hurts. With her emanate and torturous death at hand she realized many things she should've done. She forced the tears away, he didn't need to know how much she suffered. She needed to be brave and keep a clear head.

He mopped the floor next. He snapped his fingers and pointed. He wanted her to move so he could mop the area where she stood.

Wiping tears from her eyes, she moved and impulsively looked up. She clearly saw his face without her glasses.

He was a mix of Asian and white. Almost a foot taller than her and arms that bulged slightly with muscle mass. His black hair pulled back in a ponytail showing off rugged features. He had a trimmed mustache and goatee. She stared transfixed, wanting to memorize his face. A weird feeling swept through her seeing him clearly for the first time. A jolt of awareness followed.

She jerked her gaze off the man, trying to deal with the foreign emotions and her racing heart. What he told her father meant he was a monster! He planned on seriously harming her!

He took the broom, bucket and the mop. She could hear him go down the stairs. Her heart continued to race, he didn't look like a monster. He looked really interesting. Her first thought was she liked him! She should only hate him, he intended to hurt her! As a criminal he belonged in prison, where he deserved to live until he died!

She managed to get a drink with a new glass and carefully put it on the counter. She quickly went back to the blanket on the floor and sat. It wasn't that warm in the house. She wrapped the blanket around her shoulders, trying to get warm.

She didn't want to do anything more to anger him, nor give him any reasons to hurt her. How angry did he feel towards her for breaking the glass? She would have cleaned it up, she thought! She kept feeling the need to cry but held it in.

She had to use the bathroom except she felt too afraid and embarrassed to ask.

A couch sat against a wall and about six feet in front of it, a television sat on a stand. Between the two, a small coffee table nearest the couch.

He came up the stairs and sat down on the couch. He reached his bare feet out, one under the coffee table and one on the edge. He gave the table a hard jerk with his feet. The remote sitting on the table flew off and he grabbed it out of the air.

She had always lived with her father and wasn't used to being around such masculine roughness.

He began to go through channels.

She laid down and wondered when he planned on hurting her. Was he going to rape her? Is that what he meant, heinously harming her? Was it something worse?

She wished she had her glasses so she could see him better. But it didn't matter, he probably wasn't going to let her live. He looked like a hard man, even his appearance seemed villainous. She refused to think of him as alluring.

She thought of Kohana and her father, how upset they would be with her gone. Tears came and she let them flow. They rolled off her face and onto the blanket.

What would her father do with trying to find her? Would it be too late to save her?

The man got up and she could hear dishes being moved around. He came back and put a plate full of steaming food on the coffee table. He sat and deftly used a pair of chopsticks between his fingers to eat. He turned up the volume on the tv to watch it.

Her stomach growled from the aroma of the delicious smelling food. She wanted it to stop making noise, he might hear it rumbling!

She worried she would not be able to hold out much longer without using the bathroom. She stood and he ignored her. "Bathroom." Her voice quivered and sounded weak to her ears.

He continued to eat and watch his tv.

"Where is the bathroom?" She tried to speak louder, upon repeating it.

She trembled as she stood waiting for him to tell her. After a long wait she realized he wasn't going to answer. She felt rage stirring in her. "I'm going to wet your floor!"

"You'll clean it up then." His words were harsh and clipped. "With your tongue." He didn't look at her when he spoke.

Shock stopped her thoughts. Never had anyone talked in such a vulgar manner! Her breathing increased as fear combined with her anger. If she made him angry enough he would hit her and maybe even kill her!

"Tell me now, you monster!" She said with a quiver. She didn't understand herself and why she wanted to stir his wrath.

He paused lifting his chopsticks to finally look directly at her.

She noticeably trembled because her insides shook so hard. Why did she childishly call him a monster? What was she thinking? Her father never allowed Kahana and her to be around felons. Human animals like him should be locked up in cages!

She stepped in front of his television and waited for his mighty strike. She closed her eyes, not wanting to see her end. After a minute, she opened them to see why he hadn't hit her, yet.

Him and his plate of food was nowhere in sight. He hadn't made a sound moving past her.

She thought of the shower and the bucket. She headed for the stairs. Clearly he had no intention of telling her, she would have to look for it! Shaky and weak she stumbled down a darkened steep stairwell. Her fingers didn't find any light switches but did catch a guardrail. Using it to step down to the basement floor safely, she felt surprised to see a small nightlight plugged in. It lit up the room slightly which enabled her to turn on the light switch in the bathroom.

Spotless and clean, didn't criminals have dirty homes? She wondered as she looked around.

She decided to explore and look for an escape. It may have had windows at one time but from what she could see without her glasses, mortar and bricks filled the windows.

She couldn't find a way out.

She sighed and persisted with her search. A water heater, a furnace, a washer and dryer. Also, a punching bag, a wide floor mat, and a workout bench, next to some boxes.

She crept back up the stairs. Her stomach rumbled and she grew furiously irritated with it! He likely had no intention of letting her eat! How could she have an appetite anyway? Wasn't he planning horrific things? Maybe he intended on doing it after he ate!

Watching his television and sitting on his couch like a throne, he continued to ignore her. Slouched with his legs spread in a masculine manner, she forced her gaze off him. She refused to acknowledge a feminine interest!

Her mouth grew dry again. Probably nerves, she thought. She had to pass in front of him to get to the kitchen area. Her nerves felt tight as she walked past him. She wished she had decent clothes, she felt embarrassed with such skimpy clothing! She knew some women wore clothes like that all the time, but not her.

She reached for the same glass that she had left on the counter from earlier. Water wasn't getting rid of the bitter and dry feeling. Maybe she should eat something. He hadn't said not to eat!

The lids were off the cookers. She didn't know what spices he used. The rice smelled good like spices had been added and the meat cooker made her mouth water. How did an inmate know how to cook so well? A package of chopsticks laid on the counter, but she didn't know how to use them. She looked around for an eating utensil. She opened a drawer. She should've known better when it slid open too easily. It went too far and slipped from her fingers.

The loud clattering of the silverware hitting the floor with the drawer was too much. Tears came fast, she wanted to be home with her loved ones! Not with some violent maniac!

He immediately began picking up the mess she had made with the silverware. His head near her legs as he worked sent a strange feeling of awareness through her. Tingles ran along her skin with his nearness that she refused to acknowledge!

For a brief moment she thought about hitting him and trying to get away but she felt too afraid! She would need a key to open the door, she had no idea where he had it hid.

He set the pile of silverware in the sink then began fixing the drawer, putting it back on track.

She slowly went to the sink and picked up a fork. She rinsed it and looked around for a towel to dry it.

He swiftly moved and the fork was no longer in her hand. She looked up at him, trembling slightly. Being a felon, he intimidated her! His rough hardness! She didn't know when he planned on attacking her.

"This fork comes with a price." He said, "kiss me!"

For a brief second she thought of kissing him as her eyes swept over his lips!

Sick to her stomach with the thought of kissing the man, she raced back and sat down on the blanket. She refused to acknowledge attraction towards him! The criminal had told her father horrible things he planned on doing with her! He had kidnapped her because her father had likely put the man's baby in foster care while he served his sentence. Clearly the man had problems! Doing what he had done, taking her from her home was wrong! How could she think such thoughts of actually kissing him?

Her stomach rumbled again. She would never kiss such a vile person! The wicked man belonged in prison, locked away from decent people! Tears continued to come with her bewildering emotions.

She laid down, covering herself with the blanket while remaining with her back toward him. She heard him sit back down on the couch.

"It would be like kissing an ugly toad, full of warts!" He laughed at his own joke. "Except I wouldn't be turning into a prince!"

Was he talking about himself? She felt a chill hearing his laughter. She really liked his laugh and that scared her! She needed to only hate him!

"Your father is a racist!" He said suddenly.

She sat up to look at him. He had no right to say anything like that!

He continued talking, ignoring her and not looking in her direction. "Yes, he is one of the worst judges for minorities!"

"You liar! He is not!" She nearly screamed. Her emotions had run amuck and suddenly she had trouble controlling them.

He coolly took a drink from his glass. He glanced at her as he set the glass back down. "I kidnapped you and you say nothing. Tell you the truth about your father and you lose it." He dryly chuckled.

"It's not true! He's a great judge!" She stood up and held the blanket tightly against her chest. She had trouble catching her breath.

"He thinks he is superior and that minorities are all just dirt beneath his feet." He said, with confident indifference. He stood, a foot taller than her and looked down at her sternly. "Your ignorance is phenomenal."

She couldn't catch her breath as she stared up at him. She weakly sunk to the floor after he turned away. Her knees had given in, she felt glad he had walked off.

She didn't know what the feelings were that surged throughout her body. She couldn't even breathe air into her lungs. She couldn't acknowledge any attraction towards him because it would be insanity. Her body felt like it had gone into shock. She laid on the floor with her back towards him, again.

The hard wooden floor started to cause her body aches. The fog in her mind began to clear and she noticed things around her. She tried to not startle every time she heard him moving around. The new feelings surfaced and she did her best to ignore them.

Time passed and by the amount of shows he watched, it had to be getting late. She shifted many times from discomfort and pain from laying on a cushionless surface. Her thoughts swirled in constant conflict.

The coldness of the house seemed to seep into her veins.

A bed sat in the opposite corner of the house. His dark form stood at the foot and he snapped a sheet over it. He got in it and after a while she heard his even breathing. He had fallen asleep.

Chapter 2

A quivering sigh came from her. He hadn't touched her, yet! Trust towards him had won with her mental battle. She really liked his appearance and the smooth way his muscular body moved. If her father had raised her to be racist then she wouldn't like him, she thought. She would hate him! She would believe him inferior. What he had said about her father seemed insane.

She got up and tried to be as quiet as she could, walking out the many pains from laying on the floor. She went downstairs first. The nightlight was still on.

She found a switch to the lightbulb overhead and turned it on. The bare light bulb shed plenty of light through the large room. Boxes stacked in a corner, a floor mat in the middle and an exercise bench. She looked through the boxes first. One box just had books. Another box held exercising equipment. The third had some board games and she opened each game box. He might have a gun, another phone, a key, or a laptop. She found nothing in her search. She put everything back in the boxes. She turned off the light hoping he hadn't awakened.

She went back upstairs and grabbed a drink of water. The glass was still where she left it earlier. The two cookers sat on the counter, both clean. A mix of raw vegetables sat on the end of the counter. The sink appeared clean and empty of any dish.

She opened a rusted old refrigerator. She found packages of raw meat, more vegetables, and a couple of containers.

The freezer held more raw meat and containers. She checked them all, trying to be quiet but opening the containers made noise and she tensed thinking he might wake.

She checked a flour sack, using a large bowl to sort through it. The rice bag was larger than the flour sack. Not finding a bowl large enough to dump the rice in, she used several large bowls as she went through the rice. Rice hit the floor as she tried to put it back in the bag.

She went downstairs to grab the broom. She did what she could, sweeping the floor without her glasses.

After drinking water she tried to lay down on the bumpy couch. She waited to see if he would wake up and yank her off the couch. She wrapped the blanket tightly around her.

She shifted many times with discomfort from being cold. Occasionally she shivered and after a while she drifted off to sleep.

The scent of food woke her. With a violent start she immediately realized where she laid, a psychopath's worn out couch. The insane individual who had kidnapped her and had taken her away from her family. Then forced her to remain with him! The man who thought her father was racist!

She could see him moving around in the kitchen. She quietly stepped down the stairs. The bathroom light was on and the toilet seat up

After washing her hands she tried to do something with her hair. Having no hairbrush or comb made it difficult to fix. She also needed a shower and a change of clothes.

She went back upstairs and sat in her corner of the room.

He ignored her while he watched numerous shows. She wanted to cry but she didn't want him to know how much she suffered. She missed her family so much that it physically hurt. She worried about them. Her stomach caused her agony and eventually her whole body started to hurt. She felt chilled and wished she had a winter coat to wear.

The floor felt uncomfortable to sit on hour after hour, as she continued to shift. Occasionally he watched something she had seen before and it gave her a distraction from her discomfort. She couldn't see it without glasses but she listened.

He went into the kitchen and cooked another time. He didn't offer her anything.

She wasn't about to kiss him, she thought with disgust. She'd rather starve! She couldn't believe she thought of doing it again! She had to force herself to not look at him.

Her glass always sat on the counter where she would leave it. She drank when she wanted, he did nothing to stop her. Maybe he wanted her alive so he could make deals with her father.

She grew more nauseated from not eating and when he went to bed, like the night before, she got up. She went downstairs and considered washing her clothes in the washer. She looked but didn't find any towels to use after taking a shower.

He used the shower the day before, where did he keep the towels?

It didn't matter anyway, she would freeze if she showered. She gave up looking and went back upstairs.

She looked on the underside of the silverware drawer that had fallen. She checked the cupboards more carefully than the night before. She grew weary from her search, she needed to eat and fix her blood sugar.

She grabbed the blanket she had been using since he had taken her from her home. She tossed it on the lumpy couch. She could hear him breathing in the quietness.

She slowly approached his bed and stood trying to decide how to attack. Her heart pounded loudly in her ears. She twisted her hands together painfully as she tried to think what to do. She didn't want to hurt anyone, especially him. She liked him when she shouldn't. The joints in her fingers popped as she twisted.

"Are you going to attack or just stand there childishly grabbing at your fingers?" He asked mockingly.

She tried to think of something to say, just to prove him wrong! "Does this house have no heat?" Her voice didn't sound forceful like she wanted, it quivered. His mocking hurt her feelings.

"It's warm enough! Leave me alone!" He said roughly with impatience. "Unless you're missing action with your boyfriends and want to try it with me!"

She wanted to race away from him! Sickened by what he said she twisted her fingers more and could hear them crackling. She needed to leave him alone but she remained standing by the edge of his bed. She couldn't understand why she wasn't more afraid of him. She knew by his silence she wasn't getting anywhere with him about the coldness. He was as cold as his house!

"You're spoiled and overly pampered, likely why you're fussing. You can't even do a decent job sweeping the floor!" He added insultingly.

His words stung! She wanted to hit him, but she had never intentionally hit someone before. "You're ugly and mean! I hope you go to prison forever for taking me from my family!"

She raced to the couch and fell on it. How dare he criticize her! His censure really offended her! She didn't understand why.

She wanted to be with her family, not him! Tears ran down her cheeks. She hated him! She would never forgive him for taking her from her home! She hoped he went to prison until he died!

She couldn't get over the fact he had criticized her! He was nothing but a criminal! A nobody! Why did it hurt so much? She felt emotionally crushed from his words.

After a long time she fell asleep, tears sliding down her cheeks.

She awoke with a start and noticed another blanket laid on top of the one she had covering her.

He had placed it on her while she slept. Warm feelings grew in her towards him. She fingered the extra blanket while trying to understand him. The positive feelings towards him kept growing. He had mostly ignored her the entire time she'd been there. What did he plan on doing with her?

She heard him talking from a distance. He had gone outside. She felt certain he was talking to her father again, judging by his harsh tone.

She raced to the door and saw it unlocked. She quickly reached for it to escape! Opening the door let in the sunlight. She shielded her eyes from its brightness.

His angry form suddenly stood in front of her, blocking her exit. Standing so close to him she saw all the imperfections of his features. He looked almost handsome but for his rage, tightening his face. The sharp angles covered partially by a trimmed goatee. His eyes clear brown, hardened by his hate. He had no tattoos. His hair hung free and he wore a silver chain around his neck. He wore a button up shirt with loose pants, both solid dark colors. He intimidatingly stepped over the door's threshold.

She quickly stumbled back. Her heart raced but it didn't feel like fear that course through her. She couldn't ever remember feeling such strong attraction before.

The criminal wasn't worthy to be in her presence yet he forced her to stay with him! She couldn't understand why she didn't hate the sight of him!

Hunger caused her whole body to ache. She ignored the attraction and told herself that she wanted to hurt him.

She took more steps back, seeing the angry fire in his dark eyes. Likely, he had not found any answers about his daughter. What if he started taking his anger out on her?

She raced to her corner of the house and dropped to the cold floor. She got up and grabbed the two blankets off the couch then returned again to the floor.

Why would her father leave her with this madman? Why couldn't he tell the man where his daughter was? Tears came and didn't stop. She laid there for a long time with the blankets wrapped around her. She realized he had gone downstairs when she heard him hitting the punching bag.

She got up and raced to the door. She couldn't escape, it was locked. Her quick movement caused dizziness. She saw the chain she had heard the first day. It laid on the floor, in a pile. Did he plan on using it on her? She went back to her uncomfortable spot. Why did she have to stay on the uncomfortable floor all day? She felt tired of lying and sitting there!

The suffering from hunger and weakness had grown worse. What had he called her, spoiled and pampered! Anger continued to surge through her. He didn't have a right to criticize her! He didn't know her! He didn't know how her father hardly let her do anything without his full approval! Spoiled? Not her!

He came back upstairs and went into the bedroom grabbing clean clothes to wear from the tiny closet.

She could feel rage pulsing through her veins upon seeing him, casually walking around. He took her from her family! Rage came in waves and kept increasing. Her breathing became rapid. Blood pounded in her head!

Her father controlled everything in her life! He didn't spoil her! The criminal had no idea about her life and forced her to remain with him! She had grown sick of it! Sick of men controlling her! Just like her father, controlling her! Dominating her!

"You're really ugly and mean and disgusting!" She said harshly. She didn't fear his wrath like she did her father's! "A shower isn't going to clean away your stench!"

He put an arm out to brush her aside. "We can't all be beautiful like you, princess."

She slapped his arm, the contact stung her palm. She felt certain he was mocking her and her looks. Criticizing her again!

She struck him in the chest. It felt like she had hit a rock and her hand hurt. Why did he have to be so muscular?

She tried to shove him but he didn't budge.

"This is the best you can do?" He scoffed and then added with mockery. "I can take you downstairs and dunk your head in the toilet, that might cool you off!"

"You useless animal! You should be locked up in prison for the rest of your ugly and repulsive life!" She screamed. She tried to kick him in the crotch. Suddenly airborne as his arms had her pinned to his chest. Her feet lifted off the floor as he held her against him in a firm hug. She went still with shock feeling his solid body against hers. She immediately discovered just how attracted she was towards him as warmth traveled throughout her body from contact. She couldn't breathe from the shock.

"I warned you!" He said with roughly clipped words, sending a cold chill of excitement down her spine as he swung her up into his arms. He went down the stairs and she couldn't resist wrapping her arms around him, holding him close.

She didn't understand what had happened within her. Warmth continued to travel all through her. She wanted to despise the criminal! To completely hate him! She could never acknowledge any attraction towards him! It was too much like a bad nightmare! She couldn't wish the feelings away, they had become too powerful!

She realized where he had carried her, he intended to carry out his threat! Sickened with the thought of having her face dunked into a toilet became more than she could take. Hurt bloomed within her by his cruelty.

Weak and dizzy, she didn't fight or resist as he set her down in front of the toilet.

His gentle touch belied his actions as he brought her to her knees. He lightly grabbed a handful of her hair to hold it back and wrapped a strong arm under her ribs. He started to push her face down towards the water. She despised herself for going limp and pliable under his light touch. His behavior was violent but his gentle touch sent warmth continuously through as she rested up against him. She wanted him to keep his arms around her. She wanted him to hold her and act more compassionate. It felt so good. Pleasure mixed with her dismay over her thoughts.

"Apologize, princess." The low throaty sound of his voice gave her a strange thrill. "Or you're going under."

Hurt grew from his cruelty, she tightened her lips and refused. He was forcing her to stay with him, he couldn't force her to apologize! She braced herself for the toilet water to hit her face. She had to know just how cruel he would be. Then she would have a reason to hate him! Maybe the attraction would die!

Feeling crushed emotionally and sickened by his brutish behavior she felt overwhelmed by defeat. Her body's betrayal by being so attracted to the man who had stolen her from her loved ones seemed more than she could bear. She never had to deal with such a powerful physical response from her own body. Towards someone like him of all people! An animal, the scum of society! She tightened her eyelids and waited for him to push her into the toilet bowl.

She noticed his breathing had grown faster and he swallowed loudly. Suddenly, she sat on the floor in front of the toilet, alone. He had gone back upstairs.

Her defeat continued to grow. The stress from dealing with herself in his presence had become more than she could take. She let the lid down on the toilet and rested her face on it. She didn't care anymore about germs or anything else. Completely crushed by the new feelings. Powerful emotions swelled and grew.

Her defeat grew intense. She wanted to cry but didn't have the strength. She missed her family! She had passed the feeling of hunger. She didn't feel any need to eat anymore. Her body ached everywhere.

She wrapped her arms around her head and didn't move for a long time. Thoughts running through her mind continuously. Weak and emotionally crushed she couldn't see a way to get away from him. She couldn't understand how she could feel attraction towards such an useless horrible beast! It frightened her by how strong it was.

Her thoughts became scrambled as she remained sitting there.

Dizziness and buzzing in her ears started. She tried lifting her head but she had grown too weak. What was that noise? An icy cold feeling went through her. She tried to get up and move away, panicking.

Her vision went white, gray, then black.

Chapter 3

He touched her again! She quickly opened her eyes to the pain at the back of her head. She grabbed at the place of her pain and came in contact with his warm hand.

"Hold still!" He ordered her sharply. A few foul words followed.

She looked around and saw blood on the edge of the shower rail. She realized that she must have fallen when she passed out.

The floor felt icy where she laid.

"Stop moving around!" He snapped. "I'm trying to stop the bleeding!"

"I'll need stitches if it's bleeding that bad!" Her voice was high and tense.

"We're not going anywhere!" He said harshly, then added, "you probably did this on purpose!"

She closed her eyes and remained silent. She wasn't so stupid that she would hurt herself! She tried to breathe through the pain in her head. He offended her again, implying she lacked intelligence. She didn't want to take offense at his ridiculous comment. He could think what he wanted, she didn't care anymore, she told herself.

"Don't move!" He ordered, turning quickly and going up the stairs. He came back, holding a flashlight.

"Open your eyes!"

She opened them and after a couple times of moving the light beam across her eyes, he turned it off. She closed her eyes again so she didn't see him. She liked being with him and his concern for her. She knew truthfully, he worried about taking her to the ER. His plan would be over.

"Stay awake!" He said shortly as he tossed a pile of bloody toilet paper aside. He grabbed a handful more and pressed at the back of her head.

She sighed. She guessed that was all she would get out of him. She likely had a slight concussion. It wasn't the first time she had fallen recently. She had pills at home, medicine prescribed a week ago. It wasn't like she had been given a choice to pack anything before he forcibly brought her there. Not eating and dealing with him likely had made her worse, plus not sleeping well at night.

She didn't know how long he pressed down on her head wound.

"Open your eyes!" He ordered sternly.

She obeyed and looked at the bathroom wall to avoid looking at him. She couldn't stand being around him, much less having him touch her. Tension filled her as she resisted the need in her towards him.

She sighed in defeat as it filled her thoughts. The feelings had won.

She saw he had the light on in the utility room as well as the bathroom. She noticed bare rafters overhead. She tried to think of other things but being in his presence made it too difficult to come up with a single thought.

His gentle touch continued as he tried to stem the bleeding wound.

She no longer fought against the attraction she had towards the criminal. Even with the sharp pain at the back of her head she could feel her body's response to his touch. If it was a game, she had lost and he had won. She didn't realize she had winced with her thoughts.

"I bet it hurts!" He said. "Maybe you should think about the consequences before doing something so asinine!"

"You're the one who's a stupid ass!" She snapped. She had no fear towards him anymore. The new emotions in her had erased all her fear.

"Do you have a medical condition?" He asked.

"Yes."

"What?" He moved his hand off her wound and looked directly at her.

She winced, "talk quietly, my head hurts!" His brown eyes were so beautiful, yet so emotional.

"I wonder why!" He snapped back.

She lifted her head slightly to carefully turn and look more at him. Surprised to see paleness under his skin. Concerned over him she touched his arm. His lips were a thin line and his brown eyes were fiery. He tossed the handful of bloody toilet paper onto a pile.

"Anemia." She said, feeling uncomfortable being concerned about him. She shouldn't care if he was upset. "Is that toilet paper sterile?"

"It's all I have, princess." He snapped.

"If you had let me pack some things before forcing me to stay!" She said snidely while moving her hand off his arm. She hoped he hadn't noticed.

"What is anemia?" He ignored her comment and thought for a moment then spoke, "low iron?"

She realized he was intelligent. Her father had always said felons didn't have the intelligence to tie their own shoes. The criminal was smart! "I'm really cold!"

He frowned with his thoughts. "Have you been dieting? Starving yourself to be a good little beauty contestant?"

"No! I don't do pageants! My father would never allow that!" She added sarcastically, "Then there's you feeding me such a feast the last couple days!"

He moved forward and slid his hands under her. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders as he stood with her. She thought about asking him what he planned on doing, but remained silent. Slightly dizzy from the movement she brought her face up against his shoulder and neck. His masculine scent filled her air. She closed her eyes from enjoyment. The pleasure of his strength and the tender way he held her.

Her fingers touched his man bun at the back of his head. Everything about him she found attractive. She wanted to hold him her entire lifetime!

"I told you to stay awake!" His words penetrated her fog of intense warmth. He gently set her down on the couch and grabbed the blankets off the floor. He covered her with a single fling that left them bunched up.

He went into the kitchen. He came back with a plate of food and a drink. He set them down on the coffee table and jabbed a fork into the food. He turned and went back downstairs.

She would rather have something for the pain than eat. She ate a few bites.

The tender meat and vegetables over the rice tasted so good!

The pain in her head and her weakness made it hard for her to eat and she suddenly felt nauseated, again.

She drank from the glass and noticed the flavor of ginger in the tea. She drank the whole glass, finding it refreshing. She didn't normally like tea.

With determination she slowly ate all the food on the plate then set it down. She wrapped the blankets around herself, she still felt cold and slightly shivered.

The television sat on, but silent. She guessed he busied himself downstairs by cleaning up the blood mess. He seemed to like everything clean and spotless, not dirty the way criminals were. She felt sure his toilet might be cleaner than some people's kitchen sinks.

She really liked him and all his strangeness! She didn't remember liking someone quite as much. She wished he would come back and be with her. She wanted him to hold her more.

The coldest chill went down her spine. She realized her thoughts weren't rational ones she should be having towards the ex-convict!

How hard had she hit her head?

She heard him come up the stairs. Another icy chill traveled through her. She wondered what love felt like as he approached.

She could feel the blood drain from her face, as chills continued. She could never love the man in front of her, it would be wrong for so many reasons! Her eyes critically swept over him. He wasn't handsome or rich like she had dreamed of the man she would someday love. But her heart had begun to pick him. She hoped it wasn't too late. She needed to get away from him! Blood pounded in her ears. She wondered if she was about to pass out again.

"What's wrong?" He said. "You're pale!" He came closer, standing intimidatingly over her with a frown.

"I'm alright!" She said, holding up a trembling hand. "Do you have any pain medication?" She wasn't about to reveal her thoughts to him.

He went into the kitchen and came back with a bottle and her glass full of more tea in one hand. His other hand carried a second plate of food. He set them all down on the coffee table, watching her.

She picked up the bottle to examine it.

"What, Penelope?" He asked.

Pleasure filled her hearing him say her name. The smooth base sound sent tiny tingles through her veins.

"It's chewable aspirin!" She thought it would be something more adult-like.

"I have a sweet tooth!" He said. He began to pace about half across the room and back.

She tried to guess what was bothering him. She thought of how strange she had the feeling of love stirring in her heart for a man when she didn't even know his name.

"I lived in Tokyo for the first decade of my life. My grandparents raised me. I wasn't allowed sweets. When they passed away I was sent here to the states to live with an aunt and uncle. I got to try every candy on the market then."

"What's your name?" She whispered. She had taken the aspirin. She felt shocked over him sharing details of his life. Trust grew in her towards the criminal. All the years listening to her father talk about men like him and how one should never trust them. Yet, she found she suddenly and completely trusted him.

"Jude Moro." He said.

"Is that Japanese?" She intensely liked his name. She couldn't ever remember hearing him spoken about in her father's conversations.

"My mother was Japanese. My father was white."

"What's your daughter's name?"

"My girlfriend's name was Cindy. She wanted to name our daughter Cindy too. I went along with it, I was so happy being a father!"

"My father hasn't told you anything?"

"No nothing!"

Neither of them said anything for a moment. She finally spoke, "my daddy hired this cook to make our meals and she is mean! She's really hateful if Kahana or I step into our kitchen! She starts screaming spanish at us, except when daddy is around, then she's all nicey nice! Her food always tastes so awful! I've lost weight skipping so many meals. My clothes don't fit and I've been a bit too depressed to go shopping. I think it's what has made my anemia so bad. Kahana and I both have gotten sick from eating her food."

"Who's Kahana?"

"I'm her legal guardian. Her parents have passed on."

"How old are you?"

"21"

He deeply sighed and paced another time across the room. "I thought you were 16 or 17."

"Do I really look that young?" She scoffed. He couldn't be serious.

"I worried they would add more prison time for being a minor."

"Why did you go to prison the first time?" With the new trust she had towards him she felt the need to know everything about him. She didn't want to think about him going to prison for taking her. She liked being with him and wanted him to keep talking.

"They falsely accused me of having drugs! I never did!" He exclaimed.

She knew felons often lied about being, 'not guilty'.

"Why would you do something like this, Jude?" She really liked his name and mentally brought it to heart, it made her happy knowing it. She couldn't understand his desperation in taking her from home. He could go to prison for two decades.

"When I go back this time, I will be guilty!" He ground out the words. He pivoted and paced once more. "If I go back!" He added bitterly.

"What did you do to find your daughter?" She wondered if he was pacing the size of his old cell. What did he mean by, if he went back?

She didn't fully understand him but deeply wanted to help. He needed to let her go home so she could! He would never believe her, that she wanted to do things for him.

"My aunt and uncle retired. They sold their 'mom and pop' store in the city. They loaned me money to hire a lawyer to find my little girl. The second one I hired came up with the same answer. Your father was the last person to have anything to do with her! I know how racist he is! I know about sex trade with children, here in the states! I wanted to know if he did something like that with my little girl!" He stopped pacing, clearly upset over talking about his daughter. He abruptly went down the stairs and out of sight.

Feeling a little shaken up, she reached for her plate and forced herself to eat it. After listening to him she had lost her appetite. She didn't like caring for the criminal and getting upset over his problems. She had never heard of him or his daughter's name in any of her father's discussions at home. She knew about sex trade in other countries. It saddened her to hear it happened in the states. She refused to believe her father might be into something so evil. She still refused to believe her father racist.

Since she fainted she likely needed more iron. Still feeling a little dizzy, she carefully went into the kitchen. She wasn't hungry but he did say how he liked sweets.

She decided to make a gingerbread cake by using substitutions with his meager supplies. Molasses had some iron. Once the cake was in the oven she managed to walk back to the couch. Weak from pain and from overexerting herself she closed her eyes for just a moment.

A touch and the intense warmth that followed with the contact made her jerk her eyes open. She could hardly believe how attracted she was to him. He had just briefly touched her arm.

He stood, frowning down at her. He stepped away and went towards the corner of his bedroom. For a moment she thought he was going to bed. He sat down on his bed to read something. She couldn't see what it was without her glasses.

She began to think over the last three days. What she was feeling towards him was possibly one sided. She suddenly wanted to cry. What she felt was so intense it was almost too hard to deal with. She forced her gaze onto the television screen and blindly watched it. She needed her glasses to see it.

With the horrible cook's bad food, she knew she had lost weight. By some standards she could stand to lose a few more pounds. She couldn't hide the extra few pounds in short shorts and a halter. Her light brownish hair was a tangled mess and now there was dried blood in it. She had to look awful! Maybe she wasn't pretty enough for his taste.

Maybe he didn't feel any attraction towards her. The thought deeply hurt.

Sometimes life wasn't fair.

For her to feel so much and him to feel nothing caused her so much sadness. Suddenly she missed being with Kahana. They would get together and after talking with the young woman she would feel better. With her gone, she worried Kahana would be

upset and have no one to talk to. She wiped at her tears. She thought of the trace of asian in the young woman's beautiful features. She knew her father wasn't racist because he loved the young woman. She sometimes felt the two of them were closer than herself with him. They both talked hours about the law and different cases. Her incredible memory of cases seemed phenomenal. Kahaha wanted to become a lawyer someday. He couldn't be Kahana's father! Her parents were dead and he didn't look old enough!

She jerked when the buzzer went off on the stove.

He got up and walked into the kitchen.

She hated that she loved everything about him, from the top of his thick straight black long hair to the bottom of his bare feet. If she could get away maybe over time she could forget about him. But, she doubted it. The sinister goatee and mustache didn't cause even a trace of fear in her feelings.

She heard him open the oven and remove the gingerbread cake.

"When did you make that?" He demanded.

She couldn't tell if he was angry or what his mood was.

"I need food with iron, Jude." She answered calmly. She wasn't about to tell him how she wanted to please him.

He grabbed what he was reading from the bedroom and went downstairs.

She ate a small piece of the gingerbread cake after it had cooled some. It tasted better than she thought it would. She was too tired to wash the dishes from mixing the cake and from eating it.

She wished they could have sat together and continued their talking while eating the gingerbread. She needed to stop thinking that way! She left her dirty plate on the coffee table, next to the other plate.

She laid down on the couch to rest. She always took naps when she felt a migraine coming on. Her head painfully ached!

"You're not supposed to be sleeping!" His stern voice caused her to startle. "Sit up, you're going to get blood on the couch!"

Embarrassed, she tightened the blankets around her as she sat up. She had forgotten about her injury and planned on taking a little nap.

"You probably pulled this couch out of a dumpster behind a goodwill!" She said snarkily, "so don't fuss, Jude!"

He looked at her and she firmly met his gaze.

He turned and went downstairs. She was almost certain he was fighting a smile, his lips twitched on his clean cut face. He came back with a towel, which he tossed on the couch. He grabbed one of the pillows off his bed and tossed it onto the couch next to her. He put the towel over the pillow.

"I'll get something to keep you awake. Just don't cry when you lose!" He stated before going back downstairs. He came with the box of games. He laid a game out on the

coffee table and set a cup of dice next to it. He sat down on the floor across the coffee table from where she sat. He adjusted the watch he was wearing.

She stared in amazement at the man whom her heart had picked to love. He was wearing a watch to make sure she stayed awake long enough that she didn't slip into a coma. She rolled the dice and made her move with a huge smile on her face. As much as she wanted to stop smiling she couldn't. He made her feel completely happy.

"Your father won't let you watch tv?" He asked conversationally.

"I watch tv. I'm nearsighted and I don't have my glasses. Your TV is too far away for me to see clearly." She enjoyed him talking.

He stared at her for a long time, not saying anything. He finally rolled the dice and made his move.

His stare gave her a fluttery feeling in her stomach. She couldn't think of anything to ask him. Yet, she wanted to know everything about him.

"I'm sorry for criticizing you for your poor sweeping skills." He said, "I didn't know you wore prescription glasses."

"It's alright." She whispered. She never felt so close to someone as she suddenly did towards him.

After three games and him winning everytime gave her a strange rush. He wasn't cheating. After the sixth play she finally won. She wasn't certain if he had let her win.

"Why are you still living with your father?" He asked, surprising her with such a personal question.

"The house was my grandmother's and when she passed she left it to both my father and myself." Was he judging her?

"Why don't you have a boyfriend?" He asked.

How did he know she didn't have one? Did he think she should be living on her own, with a boyfriend like everyone else? He thought she was a failure? How much did he know about her? Did he know she only dated occasionally, only if her father approved. Twenty-one years old and didn't have a steady boyfriend? Did he know she had dropped out of college? That her father had arranged for her job, where she worked at the courthouse doing paperwork. Her life sucked!

"Not going to answer about the boyfriend?" He asked.

She couldn't answer. She guessed he didn't think highly of her and mentally criticized her. Hurt flushed through her veins.

"Send that cook down the road if she can't cook decent meals." He said making a move after rolling the dice.

She stilled her racing thoughts. She couldn't help being fascinated by every move he made. Why him? Why couldn't she find someone she dated so fascinating? A man her father would like. He would never approve of Jude!

"My father would be furious!" She finally spoke.

"So." He made a scoffing sound. "You talk like a teenager! Did you lie to me about your age?"

Her heart raced as she looked at him, he was so masculine. Did he feel no attraction towards her because he believed she was underage? She jerked her gaze off him, she loved him so much that just being near him gave her unending pleasure. For a moment she thought of rebelling against her father because he told her to do it!

She wanted to do everything he said to do. The idea gave her a powerful thrill, going against her father's rules. She felt like she was sitting on a cloud, flying above the earth.

She didn't know how long she played the games. Occasionally they talked about things.

Finally he looked at his watch and nodded at her. He packed up the games and took them downstairs.

She laid down and sighed in relief. The pain had worn her out. The pillow made it so much more comfortable to sleep than laying directly on the lumpy couch. His scent came from the pillow. She closed her eyes and let the pleasures pull her in. She was feeling more in love with him than ever.

It wasn't long before she fell asleep.

Chapter 4

She awoke before him for the first time. She approached his bed and stood looking down at him. His hair loose and all over his pillow. Tender feelings towards him grew. She forcibly pulled her gaze off, she could stare at him all day. She needed to look more appealing and attractive.

She grabbed the first shirt in his closet. Maybe she should ask first, but she didn't want to wake him. She wanted to surprise him. She saw a hairbrush on his nightstand and a bag of hairbands. She quietly took them.

She went downstairs and at first she thought she would just change her clothes. She would wash the ones she wore. She opened the doors on the washer and dryer. She found towels in the dryer.

She decided she really needed to take a shower. Her head continued to ache but she felt better and thought she could do it. She wanted to appear with her best look. Without her things at the house she used what she had.

Exhaustion hit her when she tried to brush her hair after showering. She sat down on his workout bench and tried to brush the extremely tangled mess. She should've taken some of his aspirin, the pain at the back of her head was becoming too much.

"Stop! You're bleeding on my shirt and my hairbrush!" He said rather sharply.

The sudden sound of his voice caused her to jump. Embarrassment flooded through her. She could hear displeasement in his tone. Ashamed, she set his brush down on the bench. Humiliation burned across her skin.

She twisted her fingers painfully as she sat with her head bowed. They popped and crackled as she twisted them.

The last four days she had done the stupidest things, no wonder he didn't find her attractive. He had much more intelligence than her! She probably repulsed him by how dumb she acted! Plus, he believed she was a teenager and treated her like one. Scolding her like one, just like her father!

His hand suddenly put pressure on the back of her head with toilet paper. When she leaned too far forward he sat next to her on the bench and used his other hand to push her back. His warm fingers spread at the base of her neck to keep her in place. The gentleness of his touch made her feel like she was dreaming. It felt so good.

A sigh came from him. He tossed the bloody toilet paper and picked up his hairbrush. He began to gently brush at the tangles. He used his other hand to guide the strands through the brush. She closed her eyes to fully enjoy his gentle touch on her hair. Her heart raced from his gentleness. He spent time on the many tangles.

He brushed his leg against hers to get in a better position for a large tangle.

Unconsciously she moved her hand and rested her fingertips lightly on the top of his thigh.

He abruptly stood and the hairbrush hit the floor.

Confused by his sudden anger, she stared up at him in surprise. She hadn't done anything!

"Go ahead and look at me with those huge gorgeous blue eyes of yours! Put all that fake innocence in them? That pseudo purity!" He ground his words harshly. "Take that overly hot beauty contestant's body and use your natural skill! Get every man to lap at your heels!" He paused, breathing fast in his anger. "Or maybe you have some type of hybristophilia! Is that it?" He thundered. He turned away in disgust and then turned back. "I'm not your friend! I'm not some nice guy you met at some social event! We're enemies! When you go back to your home you'll suffer from post traumatic stress for years! Maybe even Stockholm syndrome! Your hatred towards me for causing all your mental anguish will be substantial!" He swiftly moved up the stairs and out of sight.

She sat completely stunned. Even her mind had gone blank. He used a word she didn't even know. He really had more intelligence than her! Defeat grew and dampened any hope she had of them being together. She felt very foolish.

Intense hurt stormed through her. She wished she could have been born smarter so he would at least like her!

Again, in her life she was a complete failure!

She wanted to burst into tears and sob for hours until the pain faded. She felt burning up in a torment.

She doubted he really thought she looked beautiful! He likely mocked her and her looks.

With the glasses she always wore, her hair pinned back and conservative clothes, plus being overweight, she had never thought of herself as attractive. He mocked her by calling her, 'beauty contestant'? Did he mean she wasn't attractive? That she wasn't even pretty?

She could barely breathe through her hurt, as it choked her.

She realized some of the pain came from rejection too.

Anger followed and grew by intensity. She suddenly felt the need to hit something or scream for a very long time. He didn't even want her friendship. He told her how she would feel in the future. He didn't know her and what she thought! She wanted to leave and get away from him! To try and forget ever meeting him! But she couldn't leave, he wasn't about to let her leave!

She should deeply hate him!

She got up and walked around, trying to calm herself. She could feel her insides shake from her excessive emotions. She picked up the bloody toilet paper and tossed it. She grabbed the hairbrush and sat back down on the bench. With determination, she finished brushing her hair and went to the sink to clean the brush. She braided her hair on both sides, using his hair bands.

She looked closely at herself in the mirror, he mocked her, didn't he? She dated some, always men her father approved of. Often, they would be busy on their phones when she went on dates with them. Men didn't find her attractive!

He likely didn't either!

She wanted to hate him for the massive hurt she felt! She needed to forget him and escape! She couldn't even think she hurt so badly.

She needed another one of his clean shirts so she could wash the one she wore. She'd have to continue functioning around him. Not act like a spoiled teenager, she promised herself. She needed to kill her emotions.

She also needed to take some aspirin and keep ignoring how he made her feel! The entire time with him, she hadn't felt fearful. She should be angry at him for taking her but she didn't feel angry over the kidnapping, she felt extremely angry over falling in love!

He was a passionate man with a temper. She tried to not think of his positive actions and all the kind things he had done for her.

He had kidnapped her! Did she have a problem liking him when he was a bad person? Is that what he meant?

He was human like herself. He wanted to know his little girl was safe! She understood him. She wondered if she would do something like him, if someone took Kahana. She didn't have that kind of courage. She feared her father's disapproval too much!

She still didn't know what caused him to be upset with her. Anger lingered and she put it aside in her mind for a later time. She didn't completely understand him. She often had to put her anger aside in dealing with her father too!

He held her against her will! She should just hate him and not have any tender feelings towards him!

She walked over to the boxes and dug through them. She needed something to get her mind off him! She pulled out a book that looked interesting.

The cover of the book had a little dog staring up at the sky in the middle of a sunflower field.

She followed the instructions on how to read the book and was a number of pages into it when she sensed his presence by the tingling that ran along her skin.

"Come up and eat." He ordered her before walking silently back up the stairs.

The husky timber of his voice gave her the most intense feeling. She may never be able to forget him! If she could leave at that second, she would always think of him! Defeat filled her. She would always love him. She hated feeling that way. Defenseless and hopeless.

She placed the book on the bench and went upstairs. She stood waiting for him to bring her plate. She felt tense being around him, overly worried she might say or do something stupid, again. She still didn't know what she had done to set him off.

"You need to take my shirt off before the blood sets." He said as he put both plates down on the coffee table.

"I can't take it off, I'm not wearing anything under it." She said unthinkingly.

He went still, staring silently at her.

She painfully twisted her fingers as she grew embarrassed by what she had said. She could feel his eyes follow her, judging her as she went to his closet to find another shirt. She couldn't think right around him! She had never acted so stupid as she had the last few days. His presence caused her to not act right. Maybe, because of how much smarter and knowing more he thought himself more superior. She felt certain he mentally criticized her! Since his intelligence surpassed hers he likely mentally judged her. He probably thought her too stupid to be attractive. Maybe, he thought of her as a complete failure.

When her father did things that offended her, she would put it aside. She took the massive hurt and buried it. She would deal with it later.

She took the shirt downstairs and changed. She used the sink in the bathroom to work at the stain. She took her clothes out of the dryer and went to change again, wearing her clothes under his.

For once she felt warmer. She put the shirt in the washer on a cold cycle and went back upstairs.

The bottle of aspirin sat next to her plate. How did he know? After taking some pills, she carefully sat down on the couch and took her plate. She tried to not glance at him as she ate.

He sat in the opposite corner of the couch with one leg drawn up in a seemingly defensive pose. Why did he need a barrier between them? Maybe his hatred towards

her father and felt the same hatred towards her. Her appetite disappeared. She wanted desperately for him to at least like her!

She needed to stop thinking she could force him to like her!

Was that a spoiled trait? Wanting him to like her?

She quickly finished eating, forcing the food down her tight throat and using the tea to swallow. She set the empty plate down on the table. She got up to go downstairs and read the book she'd found.

"I'll be downstairs when I'm done cleaning up." He said.

"Do you want me to stay up here?" She asked, confused.

"I'm going to teach you self-defense techniques." He took the dishes into the kitchen.

"You know martial arts?" She asked as she followed him. She felt surprised at his offering to teach her.

"What? I'm Asian so I know Kung Fu? That's racist." He quipped as he began cleaning the dishes.

Hurt and feeling anger build again she went back downstairs. He definitely seemed impossible to deal with! She needed to stop talking and remain silent the rest of the time there. Besides, her head hurt and she didn't think she would be up to any major workout.

He silently came down the stairs and motioned her forward.

She hesitatingly approached.

"Hit it." He said, motioning towards the punching bag.

She timidly tapped it.

A huge sigh came from him.

"Have you not taken any self defense classes?"

She tightened her lips and shook her head 'no'. She wasn't talking to him!. Again, he thought she was an idiot! Is it something she should've done better? She didn't know how to hit things.

"Hit it harder!" He ordered.

She imagined his face there and struck it. She thought she did good but he just shook his head in disappointment. She added more anger to what already built up in her. She was a failure, she got that! It hurt so much, what he thought of her.

"Let's start with your stance. Look at mine!"

She really didn't want to look directly at him. She liked the masculine form of his body too much. She saw how he stood. She tried to imitate it.

He stepped forward and firmly pushed on her shoulder. She stumbled back, almost losing her balance.

"Push on my shoulder." He ordered her.

She didn't want to touch him. She tried to push with one hand but he didn't budge. She pushed with both her hands and he shifted his feet slightly. She suddenly understood what he had been trying to teach about being defensive in one's stance.

"There's different ways to use your hands in combat. For now just use a fist. Never wrap your fingers around your thumb."

"This is how you hit." He said. His moves were slow and slightly exaggerated. He followed with a single swift strike and the bag swung. She could hear the air being cut by his speed.

She saw a huge difference in the two ways.

"Copy my moves." He said as he slowly hit the bag and then froze.

She followed his move and then froze.

"Hold still." He moved and held her arm, warmth grew from his touch. He pointed and spoke, "keep your arm straight and don't bend here." He said pointing to her wrist.

"When you come in contact, pull away as fast as you can, like you've hit hot volcano lava."

She wanted to be with him for the rest of her life! She forced her thoughts aside. She wanted to learn how to defend herself and he could teach her! She practiced a number of times, copying his strikes slowly and gradually increasing speed.

"Slowly, hit me."

She didn't know where he wanted her to strike.

"Just do it!" He said impatiently.

She aimed at his chest. His forearm came in contact and pushed her arm downwards with gentle force.

"Do it again." He ordered her.

She repeated the move and his forearm pushed her arm upwards. She understood him and what he tried to convey.

"I'm not going to wear you out since you had a slight concussion yesterday. Go over what little I've taught you in your mind. Think of how you will use these moves in a fight. Use your imagination. We're done for now." He turned dismissing her and began using the punching bag with his quick strikes.

She went over to the bench and sat. She picked up the book and watched him instead of reading.

She felt an icy chill go up her spine and took away her breath when she realized if he told her to go home at that moment she might not want to leave. The thought terrified her!

He stepped away from the punching bag and began to do a strange exercise. His moves seemed similar to the few he had shown her. She put the book down on the bench and watched. The simple slow moves seemed easy.

His back was towards her. She nervously stood, she wanted to continue learning.

She imitated his moves using his widened leg stance and arm movements. She could hear him breathe in and out. She tried to copy that as well.

He turned and saw her arm still up and widened leg stance. He sighed and waved her to where he could watch.

Her heart raced, she wanted desperately to please him. Her head ached, but she ignored it. Happily she continued to imitate him and copy his movements. She was glad he was allowing her to learn more. He went through numerous motions with the exercises.

Her head throbbed and she knew she would have to sit for a bit to relax but she couldn't stop. She wanted to be near him.

"We're done with your lesson." He said firmly.

She turned to look questioningly.

He placed his palms together in front of his chest and bowed towards her. "Thank you, Sensei."

He stood waiting.

"Thank you, sence.." She stumbled over the word as she folded her hands and bowed. She enjoyed his presence so much.

Sadly, she went up the steps. She sat on the couch. Her thoughts were on him, she couldn't focus. He kept hurting her feelings by seemingly rejecting her. An emotional wall stood between them.

She didn't feel hatred towards him. She discovered she didn't agree with her father about criminals. They were not inferior beings! The man downstairs was just another person like herself. An angry one that missed his little girl! He felt terrified of what may have happened to her. He had emotions and hurts just like herself. He had so much more intelligence than her.

She wandered into the kitchen and saw the gingerbread cake gone. He had eaten the whole pan of it. She couldn't help smiling. He did have a sweet tooth.

The rest of the evening they didn't speak to each other. He stayed mostly in the basement. When he came up and snapped his sheet she moved to the couch with her blankets.

Chapter 5

Her dreams kept waking her. Horrific dreams that kept repeating. She awoke again, from one of the worst nightmares she ever had, covered in cold sweat and shaking in fear.

The room felt freezing cold, like the air itself was frozen by the coldest winter ever.

Shivering and hardly able to move, she slowly turned, sensing a presence.

Her body felt like solid ice.

An image stood before her, in front of the couch. It had eye holes, in a head and human form. Its fingers seemingly reached for her. Terror came like a tidal wave! A scream cut short as she dove towards Jude, falling on all fours. Scrambling, she fell on his bed and smacked right into his solid warm body.

She shook and couldn't speak. She jerked around to see if the figure still stood by the couch or if it had followed her. She gasped for air.

It had disappeared, but her terror lingered and her whole body trembled.

"What is it?" He asked, indifferently.

"Didn't you see it?" She whispered frantically.

"See what?"

Tempted to get off his bed, but her fear stopped her. Afraid of the dark form she had awakened to, she stared in the direction she had seen it last. "Ghost, I think!" she quivered in almost a whisper.

"Go back to the couch!" He ordered her.

"No!" She whimpered. She frantically grabbed at the pillow he laid on. She got it loose and burrowed down into the pillow and mattress. She wasn't leaving, even if he tried to make her!

He partially leaned over her, his mouth near her ear. "Are you missing action from your many boyfriends? You're about to bite off more than you can chew!"

"You're not a tenth as scary as that ghost, Jude! I thought you said, I 'didn't' have boyfriends!" She pushed him back and out of the way so she could fearfully continue watching for the ghost to appear again. Him leaning against her caused warmth and comfort. She resisted the urge to pull him close in a hug. Maybe even kiss him, the urge felt right and suddenly so powerful.

He jerked the pillow out from under her and put it under his head. "You probably have a bunch of men." He muttered.

"Please, go get my pillow and blankets!" She begged. His back rested towards her as he continued to ignore her.

Feeling too afraid to fetch her things. She timidly reached out and gently ran her fingers slowly up his tricep. She closed her eyes, enjoying the warmth and smooth hardness of his flesh. She could feel her heart start to race.

Foul words suddenly came from him as he abruptly got up out of bed in one smooth move.

She felt full admiration of how his body moved so fluidly.

He stormed to the couch and yanked off the blankets and pillow. He stormed back and flung them on his bed. He laid back down on his side and kept his back towards her again.

Being close to him in bed she began to have a deeper understanding that he had no intention of ever harming her, not even touching her!

She loved him even more! Every part of her loved him with the most intense love.

Neither of them spoke again and eventually she started drifting off to sleep all the while staring as long as she could in the direction she had seen the dark frightening ghostly figure. Jude's presence gave her comfort and his pleasant masculine scent lingered as

she fell deeply asleep. She felt completely safe next to him. She could lay there forever, by his side.

The next morning after she came up the stairs she saw two plates of food on the coffee table.

Chopsticks in one hand and remote in the other he was surfing the many channels. He found a movie with an Asian actor. The movie looked old and the skills of the actor when in combat impressed her. The tv sat closer so she could see the picture. He had moved the TV for her and it gave her a warm feeling.

She sat on the couch and took her plate. His food tasted good like always.

He ignored her while he ate with chopsticks and watched his show.

"What are the chains for?" She needed to know. A weird feeling went through her. It was much easier to talk to him then her own father!

"I had a dog and I was hoping it would let me know when the cops showed up." He shrugged not looking in her direction. "Stupid dog, ran off after breaking loose from the chain."

She sighed in relief, hearing he didn't plan on using them on her. He seemed sensitive and didn't really act like a felon. She didn't know they could be kind. Was it a con? Did he think he could convince her to not send him to prison for kidnapping her? He hadn't said anything about it.

He took the dishes into the kitchen and she went downstairs, she felt comfortable walking around his house without fear of angering him.

The book laid on the bench where she left it. She picked it up and sat down to read. She read for a while when suddenly he spoke, startling her.

"He died violently, years ago. Someone beat him up and hung him from the rafters here."

"What! Why?" She stood to face him, an icy chill sliding down her spine. "What happened? These rafters?" She asked, pointing to the ceiling and feeling completely spooked remembering the image.

He nodded. "No one knows, only the dead."

"He really scared me, Jude!"

"One night, he grabbed me on the shoulder in the bathroom."

"They're not supposed to touch us!"

"Tell him that!"

"Is that the reason for the nightlight?"

"Maybe." He answered, turning away evasively. He seemed to avoid looking directly at her.

She couldn't help but smile. The tough felon was afraid of ghosts too.

"Come, I'll teach you how to kick." He swiftly turned and kicked the punching bag with a loud sound, swinging the bag. He used a number of different techniques in a slow manner.

She put the book down and approached, watching closely. She wanted to learn and her head injury seemed better. Being next to him during the night had helped her sleep deeply. Being near him brought her comfort, happiness, and so much more. She never felt like she did before, the experience exhilarated every part of her.

He showed her three different ways to kick and how to work on her stance. "If you're wanting to learn these kicks we should probably do some stretches first.

He sat down on the mat and began to do stretches.

She followed all his moves.

She enjoyed watching him and imitating his slow exercises. His gaze always averted from her.

She practiced kicks with him patiently correcting her. It seemed he watched her from the corner of his eyes. After showing her again a number of ways to kick, he went back upstairs. She guessed he was making more to eat.

She practiced punching but found kicking worked better for her.

When she grew weary she sat on the bench and read. She would go back to practicing kicking after resting.

Eventually she became immersed in the story, reading to the end.

Huge hacking sobs came from deep within her. The loving little dog and his owner had died! Miserable and alone!

She got down on the floor and rested her arms on the bench. She dropped her face down on her arms and her shoulder shook with sobs.

Her heart had fallen in love with a bad man and he would ruin her life. She just knew it! All her life she had listened to her father talk about them.

How they selfishly ruined people's lives with their criminal acts. How they were nothing but dumb animals. Not even humans like themselves! All they did was lying, stealing, doing drugs, not working, rape and murder, sometimes even worse crimes.

The very sad story's ending caused her to feel overly emotional. Tears ran down her cheeks and she choked on a sob.

Again, he didn't make a sound coming down the stairs. She could feel his presence near her. The feeling of love kept giving her awareness of his presence.

"Why are you crying?" He roughly asked.

The book was suddenly jerked from her hands. She looked up at him with wide eyes full of tears. She wanted comfort from him.

"This manga book is making you cry?" He asked rather sharply.

She nodded, twisting her hands. His tone wasn't nice. She trembled slightly.

"Stop crying!" He snapped.

"I can't! It's so sad!" She whimpered.

"Then I'm throwing it in the trash!" He turned and went back up the stairs.

"No!" She screamed at him. She grabbed the back of his shirt.

He stopped and turned to face her, jerking his shirt from her grip. "I'm not your friend! Another thing, don't sleep in my bed again because now it smells like you!" He ground out, his words stinging deeply.

She became frozen with the most intense hurt, sweeping through every part of her, to the very core. She dumbly stared at the wall. She noticed with detachment that she wrenched her fingers and hands together in a violent manner. The emotional pain grew so severe that she couldn't breathe. She drew in a huge gasp of air. He hated the way she smelled!

She would just hate him from that point on! The only feeling she should have for him was hate!

"Get up here and eat!" She heard him say, from a distance.

She slowly moved, every part of her had gone completely numb. She crept up the stairs and stood waiting. She suddenly wished she could go home, or maybe die in front of him. Would he even care? Did he hate her because of what her father did to him? He kept her there against her will! She tried to hate him and the way his body moved, everything about him, she failed. Love a powerful thing, leaving one helpless and raw with vulnerability.

He set the plates on the coffee table and sat down.

She didn't want to sit on the couch near him since he disliked how she smelled. She slowly sat, waiting for him to say more hurtful things to her.

She forced herself to take the plate and eat. She didn't need to pass out again. Purple chunks riddled the meat and rice dish. She didn't care for the texture and dry taste. She hesitated thinking it was rude then spit out the purple chunks.

She didn't care what he thought. He probably wasn't paying any attention to her. Using her fork she pushed the ones she spit out, on a pile. She didn't care if she was being disgusting, spitting out her food while eating around others. She moved all the purple chunks on her plate, putting them all together.

Her father would've been extremely displeased had he seen her. She didn't care what the criminal thought. She suddenly didn't care what her father would think either. It was her life and she was done pleasing everyone! She didn't care about what people thought anymore! She was done pleasing others.

He watched another 70's movie with the same actor he had watched before.

She didn't bother eating and set the hardly eaten plate on the table. She still felt emotionally numb and had no appetite. He didn't care about her and never would.

He gave her a sweeping and questioning look. "You sick again?"

She shook her head. "No, I just don't care for the purple things. I'm not that hungry anyway." She wasn't about to tell him how much he hurt her. He probably won't care.

"Sweet potatoes? You don't like them?"

"I like sweet potatoes. Those are sweet potatoes?" She needed to stop talking to him! What was wrong with her? Why was she so weak?

He nodded. "Japanese." He stacked her plate on top of his empty one. Using his chopsticks he began eating off her plate.

She stared at him as he ate what was on her plate with no qualms. Didn't he see her spit some of it out? Should she say something?

"I spit some of it out." She managed to whisper.

He shrugged his shoulders, continuing to eat.

She didn't think he was listening. He never looked her way when he talked so she didn't know if he heard. She needed to go back downstairs and get away from him. She got up and went back to the basement, searching for sanctuary. She didn't think she could find peace anywhere because restlessness filled her. She sat for a long time trying to think. Trying to get past the hurt, but seemed impossible.

She used the bathroom and quickly went upstairs. She paused, needing a female product but didn't know how to say it. A hardened man like him wouldn't know what she needed. Embarrassment and a flood of emotions filled her. He needed to let her go to the store, so she could buy what she needed. He stopped watching the tv and looked directly at her. He leaned back, waiting for her to speak.

"I need feminine products!" She said barely over a whisper.

"In a bag in the closet." He said indifferently.

She grabbed the bag and opened it. Tampons and incontinence pads. She took out the box of tampons and went to stand, staring at him. Like he was sitting on his throne, thinking he was better than her because he was so much smarter. His rejection burned and flamed her anger. He likely preferred whores, prostitutes, or beautiful women. Jealousy burned flames through her. Someone decent like herself, he didn't care for. He wasn't attracted to her! He thought she didn't smell pleasant!

"I don't use these!" She said shakily. Her rage was becoming difficult to control! If he hadn't forced her to stay with him she wouldn't have fallen so deeply in love! She could be home right now! Living in her own house, lovefree.

It was all his fault! He had ruined her life by causing her to fall in love with the wrong person! She might never feel that way towards another man. He had ruined everything!

"Wrong brand, princess?" His tone mocked and she could feel her control slipping away!

The wrong man, she thought angrily! Didn't he say she was pampered and spoiled! He had no idea how controlling her father was! How miserable her life could be at times!

"They're uncomfortable." She whispered hoarsely. She started to visibly shake. She felt so tired of people not caring about what she wanted! About her needs! About her feelings!

He sat ignoring her. Her breathing became rapid. Everything was his fault for taking her from her home!

He deeply hurt her! She didn't have her clothes to shower and change into everyday. What did he expect? She couldn't smell good because of him!

He sat ignoring her like he was superior and above her!

Rage caused her head to pound in an extremely painful manner. Her whole body shook, she wanted to hurt him! Her father didn't care about her feelings either. She couldn't hurt her father. She didn't fear hurting Jude. He needed to feel pain, like herself! He took her from her home and caused her to fall in love with a criminal!

She threw the box at his face! She wanted to wipe his face out of her memory! She wanted to crush him!

He grabbed the box and flung it angrily away after it had struck him. He stood up in a threatening manner, rage contorting his face.

"Maybe you prefer women who can use them!" She hissed full of rage, hoarsely with overly intense emotions. She fought back a sob from hurting him. It wasn't fair, it hurt her, in hurting him! "Maybe you would like to mock me for being such a loser that I don't have experience!" She grabbed the box off the floor and threw it again, hard as she could. Her whole body shook violently. "Go ahead, mock me!" She screamed loudly "Make fun of my miserable life! Mock me for living with my father and not with some boyfriend! You've probably been mocking my looks too! Making fun of me being overweight by calling me a beauty contestant!" She picked the box off the floor and threw it a third time. The box broke on contact with a strike of his forearm. Small packages of tampons fell across the floor.

"Here!" With violently shaking hands she tore off the shirt she wore and flung it at him. "I wouldn't want my stench on it!"

She grabbed a handful of the little packages and rubbed them swiftly over the front of her body. "There! Now they stink like me! Stick them in a small orifice of your own body!" She screamed as she threw them at him. She grabbed more off the floor and rubbed them on herself. Her scream came out hoarse. "Stick these into your even smaller orifices!" Everything was completely his fault!

All of it!

She grabbed the box of incontinence pads and stormed down the stairs.

Chapter 6

Much later, with many tears and hardly calmer, she headed back up the stairs. Hurt constantly lingered but she felt like she had finally spoken about how she felt. It had given her some grain of relief.

She wanted to do the same with her father, a mission that she would fill, she promised herself. She experienced a small sense of freedom. It had released something inside her and the feeling was exhilarating. She could tell people how she felt and the world wouldn't come to an end.

He wasn't sitting in front of his tv, it was off. An eerie silence filled the house as well as solid darkness.

Her heart began to race and she worried she might fall in the darkness as she made it to the kitchen. She turned on the dim light over the sink that normally always stayed on. Her heart began pounding harder. Where did he go and why had he turned off all the lights? How angry had she made him? Did the box hurt him? She regretted throwing it at his face. Every time she thought about it, she wanted to cry. She had to find him and apologize. She never intentionally hurt someone before.

She walked towards his bed and turned on the small lamp.

He sat on the floor with his back up against the bed. His knees drawn up and his forearms resting on them. His face laid down on his forearms. The silver chain he always wore dangled from his fingers. His hair hung loose. His posture looked like one of defeat.

Each of her heartbeats felt painful as she slowly sat down on the edge of the bed. Her throat grew tight and tears fell. She couldn't think what to say.

A painful pinch came from under her ribs. Had she been too mean? Had she hurt him with the box? She noticed she twisted her shaking fingers so hard they had become bright red and hurt. She stood suddenly, he had said to not use his bed because of how her scent lingered.

For a long time they both remained still. She didn't know how to ask him what was wrong. Should she apologize?

He moved suddenly, startling her. His face flushed red with emotions. She didn't know if rage had made it so darkened and it frightened her. She thought about taking off but he motioned for her to stay.

"I have to say something, princess." His voice sounded different and it worried her. Husky yet harsh. "I never said your scent was offensive! I like your smell, it torments me with nonstop desires. I like every inch of your body, and every single thing about you! Sit down on the bed!"

She timidly sat, painfully twisting her fingers.

He confused her! What was he saying?

He came to kneel at her feet and gently grabbed her hands. "Stop grabbing your fingers and twisting them, Penelope!" His firm but gentle touch calmed her. She wanted to reach out and hug him. She wanted to apologize, but she couldn't speak and couldn't move. "I don't want you hurting yourself, it bothers me."

"I would lick the soles of your feet . . . that's how I feel. Everything about you . . . You have no idea what I feel. That first day when you walked past me . . . I saw a woman who was beyond beautiful! Not even in this ugly toad's dreams! I knew I was in trouble! I wanted to treat you the way whoever had my daughter." He paused and swallowed. She noticed his throat work. She caught a few of his fingers with hers. She desperately wanted him to not suffer. She wanted to comfort him. She clung to his fingers.

He continued, "But I have suffered way more than your father this past week! Not for the same reasons of course. You probably don't know what I'm talking about but someday you'll find someone and then you'll understand."

The intense hurt burned through her like a wave of fire, making tears fill her eyes and run down her cheeks. He was rejecting her again! The tears continued down her cheeks and she choked back a sob.

He brought the silver chain up and down over her head.

"I crown you the winner!" He whispered huskily, "Miss beauty contestant! And I mean what I say! You are beyond beautiful!" He firmly kissed her forehead.

He drew back and sat in his previous position, on the floor, with his back against the bed.

"I should just do 'cops by suicide.'" He said in defeat. ". . . like I planned."

She lost her breath with what he said. Terror spiraled up and down her spine. She couldn't let that happen! What was he talking about? She wouldn't ever let anything happen to him! She would protect him with her own life!

With violently shaking fingers, she brought what hung from the long chain and blinked at her tears so she could see it. Hurt still came in waves. Her heart came to a stop.

It was a key!

Her heart pounded painfully hard under her ribs, in her head, and all through her body! She felt like she might pass out. She slowly stood on quivering legs.

"The key to the bike is under the mat outside." His voice was muffled, his face buried on his forearms.

Slightly dizzy, she stumbled forward. She thought of him wanting to commit suicide, she couldn't let him do that! She would never forgive herself! She knew he could be using it as a ploy to keep her there. She had to know if she could really leave.

She slowly went to the door and tried the key. The lock opened.

She couldn't believe she was free! She slowly set the lock into the loop and closed it. She walked outside breathing hard from the shock of being free. The darkness seemed thick and frightening to her, and sent a small chill through her body. The fullness of the

moon lit up the night, but she still felt afraid. She looked closely under the mat and grabbed the key.

Dumbly she sat down on his bike. She started it up and just sat there for a minute. She had never ridden a bike before.

Was he really letting her leave? Her heart felt an agonizing pinch. He didn't want her around anymore! She needed to leave, forget about him. Now she had a chance to get away.

She didn't have her glasses with her. She needed to drive, but she had to know if he would stop her. She lurched forward and continued to lurched a few more times as she drove down the road a little ways. The bike felt like it might topple over, she had trouble keeping it upright. The engine had a lot of power and she went much further than she wanted down the road. She turned around and came back, trying to not let the bike fall over. Swerving everywhere, she drove up to the house and past it. The front of the bike flew right into a huge row of untrimmed bushes. It stalled and fell over. She crawled out of the bushes with her heart racing. He would have to teach her how to ride it.

She felt her insides still shake from nerves after driving it and dealing with him. Now she had scratches from the bushes that burned a little.

She would have to choose who she wanted to be with, him or her family. She could walk to a neighbors house and ask to use their phone. Tears filled her eyes. Hurt filled her, thinking of her family. She was afraid he could be really planning suicide. He didn't seem the type but she couldn't risk being wrong. She loved him too much and she couldn't let anything happen to him.

She blinked hard to rid the tears. She looked up and saw a shadow flit through the trees. A powerful chill jolted through her. She frantically raced back into the house and slammed the door behind her. She ran to Jude's side, breathing fast from fear.

Seeing him calmed her. He had become everything to her.

He picked up his head. He still sat on the floor. "He's out there?" He dryly asked.

"Shadows among the trees!" She gasped.

"Could be an owl." He said complaisantly.

"This place is creepy! You need to find a better place to live!" She said grumpily. She climbed into the bed and covered herself with his sheet. She wasn't leaving and if he took her away she might even return.

She wasn't about to explain why she remained. He might ask. She couldn't explain how she chose to stay with him. She would let her family know in the morning, she told herself.

"I'm going to have sex with you" He stated.

"No!" She said, "Gross!"

"I'm not fighting the temptation anymore, especially knowing about your innocence, Penelope! It's like liquid aphrodisiac lighting a fire all throughout me!"

"No! Let me sleep!"

"Why are you still here?"

"We'll talk tomorrow!" She said, "I'm not leaving with that ghost out there and that's final!"

Silence filled the room for a long time. She couldn't fall asleep but she remained still. She felt happy that he wasn't bothered by her staying. He said she was beautiful. It might be a con but she didn't care. Everything he had said went through her mind.

After a while he started whispering something and she couldn't hear what he said.

She moved across the bed and to get closer to him. He continued to whisper. He spoke Japanese.

She felt a thrill hearing him speak so fluently in another language. She leaned close so she could listen. Joy filled her as she laid on the bed near him. The foreign language sounded musical.

"They loved each other. . ." He suddenly switched to english. "a rare love. . . she would spend the day preparing his meals. . . setting up his clothes . . he would buy whatever she needed. . . all she wished for . . he grew old and the job took so much out of him. . . she would stand outside waiting for him to arrive, rain or shine. . . she would help him walk into the house. . . he was so exhausted from trying to work when so old. . . so worn out . . . she helped him undress and have him sit on the bed. . . she would clean his face then hands, on her knees she would clean his feet. . . she would gently lay him back on a stack of pillows. . . set the tray down and slowly spoon feed him, gently whipping his chin. . . they would kiss, so much love and she would tenderly tuck him in. . . morning the same. . . she would feed him a light breakfast with some tea and then dress him. . . they would affectionately kiss and part. . . they died six days between them. . . together forever in love. . ."

"You're grandparents?" She whispered, wiping tears on her cheek.

He didn't answer right away.

"Why are you still here?" He asked. His tone different, friendly.

He reached and pulled something out from under the bed. It was the book he had taken away from her. "It's my favorite book." He said, giving it to her.

"Thank you." She whispered, taking it and setting it aside. "Why did you take it away from me?"

"Your crying really hurt me! I didn't expect it. I didn't like being so vulnerable! Made me angry, Pen! Really angry."

She liked his shortened version of her name. She desperately wanted to touch him. She reached out and ran a few strands of his hair between her fingers, a thrill surged through her, even if it was just his hair. She did it a number of times, she couldn't stop and he wasn't stopping her.

"I'm going to kiss you." He whispered.

Happiness filled her.

He softly groaned and leaned closer to her.

"So beautiful . . . beautiful blonde with gorgeous blue eyes and a body that's so beyond hot. . . this ugly toad is going to kiss" Moving slowly he gently slid his fingers along the side of her head.

His passionate kisses were everything she wanted and more.

Chapter 7

She slowly awoke. Warmth wrapped around her, she wanted to stay there forever! Warmth, pleasure, joy!

She heard radio voices from a distance and opened her blue eyes in shock meeting his brown ones.

"Did you call and tell them?" He asked with cool indifference, pulling his arms away.

"No! No one!" She sat up. A cold feeling of dread iced her veins.

He casually got off the bed.

"Police, open up!" A loud knock on the door followed.

"Down on the floor!" He sharply ordered. He snapped his fingers and pointed.

He casually pulled his shirt on. "Idiots!" He said as he pulled a gun from his nightstand drawer.

She frantically got up and raced to his side. She grabbed at the gun where his hand gripped it! The metal felt so icy cold to her touch.

He had planned a suicide!

He had planned it from the beginning!

"I'll visit you in prison!" She sobbed emotionally. His eyes held a hard determined glint. He had become everything to her and she wanted to always be with him! She couldn't watch him be murdered in front of her! The horror! It would take a lifetime of something she could never forget!

"Please no!" She knew how stubborn he could be. She wrapped her arms around him.

"Please! No!" She sobbed, her whole body shaking as she pressed herself against him.

A louder bang.

"Don't stop me!" He said, his voice harsh and thick with emotion.

She pressed kisses along the firm line of his lips. She could feel his tension softening.

The third bang made a loud shattering noise.

"Please! I promise I'll visit!" She begged with tears running down her face. Terror filled her in a way it never had in her life!

"Clear!" She heard a strange man's voice swiftly moving closer. She wanted to be with him her whole life.

"Please, Jude!" She whispered in raw anguish, begging him.

He suddenly lay face down, pulling her with him.

"In here!" Another said.

Rough hands stood her upright and pulled her back. They had so many guns pointing at him. His face had grown tight as he refused to look in her direction.

She saw through her tears the cuffs roughly placed on him. She still felt full of terror over him wanting to take his life in front of her. What if she hadn't been able to convince him? He would be dead at that moment!

She breathed fast as she watched him being led away, new horror swept through her. She became terrified they would hurt him! She grew nearly petrified by their aggressive manner.

Hard hands grabbed her again. "Stop touching me!" She screeched angrily, suddenly finding her voice. She jerked her arm away from the man. Fear anew, as she wondered if they planned on arresting her. What if they used their guns on Jude and her? Who would stop them from shooting them both?

She allowed them to lead her from the house. She noticed the bolt lock rested in the steel hook where she had carefully placed it the night before. The door frame looked completely shattered. Like Jude had said, they really were 'idiots'. The door hadn't been locked, all they had to do was open the door.

The sight of him being led to a police car, his shirt open and the wind blowing at it, his feet bare as he got into the car sent a thought through her mind. What if she never saw him again?

They put her in an unmarked vehicle and drove off. Her fear didn't abate until they drove to her home. She couldn't stop her concern for his safety. Fear continued to vibrate through her body as a constant.

She frantically got out of the vehicle, almost falling on her face in her desperation to get away from them, their cold violence, and guns. The image of Jude wanting to die, still lingered in her mind. A sob of grief cut through her, she loved him and didn't want any bad thing to happen to him.

Kohana stood outside and ran straight into her arms. Happiness suddenly filled her, she had been so worried about the young woman. They both stood crying and holding each other until Penelope's father approached.

"I need to leave for work." He said in a distant tone, "and she needs to be in school."

He avoided Penelope's eyes and didn't offer to hug her. Hurt swept through her. Why was he being so standoffish? "Go inside and change." He said before walking off, taking Kahana with him.

Embarrassment burned like fire through her veins. She wore her halter top with Jude's lung dragon shirt over it. She had the shirt buttoned and her shorts were hardly noticeable since the hem of his shirt hung so long down her thighs. She looked modest, she didn't understand him! Did he mean for her to shower and wash away the criminal's filth? She knew what he thought of criminals, believing they were less than humans, inferior creatures. Did her father think she had become a criminal too? Did he no longer love her? It hurt so much to think of him not loving her.

She wanted to spend a little time with Kahana too, she had missed her more than missing her father. Her maternal love towards the young woman had been so intense while she had been away. She had worried and missed her so much.

She began frantically twisting her fingers, stress from being around her father once again.

Sobbing in anguish, she ran into the house alone.

The man she loved had been taken from her. He would go to prison for a long time!

The way they had busted Jude's door down and had come in with their big guns left fear lingering over the next day. She remained in her room, dealing with what had happened to her and Jude. It left her emotions in wild turmoil.

She missed him more than she could imagine.

She woke during the night and thought he slept next to her. She sobbed in pain over losing him, pain that made her feel insane. How did she fall so deeply in love and so quickly? She hardly knew him and yet he meant everything to her.

It felt like she could die, without him.

After her father went to work and Kahana had gone to school, she remained in her room. She heard the cook leave, and she sighed in relief.

She thought about Jude's unlocked house and wondered if she should drive to his house. She needed to pack his things before someone broke in and destroyed his stuff. Deciding to get some boxes for packing, she would put his stuff into storage.

She slowly drove to Jude's house, afraid of how angry her father would become, knowing she was helping out a felon. She trembled thinking about her father.

She hesitated getting out of her car as memories swarmed her. How did she feel about Jude and what he had done? Did she feel any anger towards him for kidnapping her? All she felt was a need to be with him, for the rest of her life.

She approached the damaged door and doorframe. She could be charged with breaking and entering. The law had already done the breaking, she thought. She couldn't leave his things where they could be taken. She had to do something about it! Her father's anger seemed second to keeping Jude's things safe. She didn't understand why her father treated her so dismissively. She had remained in her room and he had yet to come and talk to her. Did he not love her anymore? Did he believe she had become vile like a criminal after spending time with Jude. The thought deeply hurt.

She slowly pushed open his broken door. It hung barely off a single hinge.

Silence filled her ears.

She felt intense emotions as she walked past the damaged door. Tears ran down her cheeks, unchecked, she felt raw. Her heart pounded hard unchecked, fearing the consequences from her father, if he found out what she'd done.

She had just broken the law entering his house.

She was trespassing!

Her eyes grew wide as she saw the completely trashed condition of his things! Had someone already burglarized his place? Debris covered the floor! Should she exit the house, were they still there?

Silence filled the air.

She carefully stepped over the rubbish and closed the refrigerator door. It hung open. His television laid on the floor, the screen cracked. His lumpy couch sat shredded, the metal springs noticeable and the stuffing laid on the floor.

What were they looking for? Thieves didn't tear up couches. Did they?

Was it vandals?

She saw his mattress and pillows, torn.

She picked up a shredded pillow case off the floor, it had been on her pillow. She had stored his chain with the keys in it. Her heart beat with gladness to catch the chain with her fingers. She hung the chain around her neck and tenderly touched the keys.

She loved him so much. It was her first gift from him and the book the second. Where was his book? She frantically looked for it, on all fours, tossing trash aside to look. She found the book, a few pages bent. She ran her hand over the cover, knocking off the debris. She bent the pages back, trying to smooth the creases out.

Her heart ached, missing him and seeing his things destroyed.

A chill went down her spine. She suddenly realized it had been the men who had broken into his house, who had done the damage! She suddenly needed to sit down and process what had happened. She breathed in a quivering sigh. She couldn't believe the destruction around her. She didn't want to believe the law had a dark side. The truth in sight. They were looking for drugs and weapons. She knew he didn't do drugs, she had been with him the whole time.

She looked for his gun and couldn't find it. He had slid it across the floor when he had pulled her down with him. They likely had the gun, she couldn't find it anywhere.

She would have to pack up anything of his that wasn't destroyed and put it in a storage unit. She needed to save as much of his things as she could. She no longer worried about what her father thought. She wanted to be with Jude and if he didn't want her around, then she would stay away, but would do everything she could to help him. Suddenly she realized he could be telling the truth about his past charges. He really could be innocent and hadn't dealt with drugs.

She needed to find him a good lawyer. She had money saved, she'd use it for her love. She would always love him.

She knew whoever they would appoint for his case could be someone who wouldn't make a real effort to help him.

No one from the district attorneys' office had contacted her yet, so she had time to find him an attorney.

She began shaking out his clothes and putting them all on a pile. She would wash them and hang them on hangers in her own closet. And box up what she could.

She slowly went downstairs, fearing the ghost in the darkness. When she turned on the light she grew shocked to see his washer and dryer missing. The game pieces scattered across the floor and torn boxes.

She gathered up the remainder of everything, including each tiny game pieces, sorting everything, tenderly.

She made a few trips to her car as she put everything of Jude's things still intact, all she could find.

She remembered his bike. Had they destroyed that too? She looked in the bushes where she had driven it. Heart racing, she wheeled it out and examined it. They hadn't found it, and it looked untouched.

She decided to try and drive it back to the house.

She grew full of fear as she slowly drove it. Eventually, she started to relax a little. It felt good having the wind blowing on her hot face.

She shook with weakness as she got off the bike, she had made it home. She parked it in the garage, in front of where she parked her car.

She called a taxi and went back to pick up her car.

When she arrived home again, she began to feel exhausted. She needed to hurry and get his clothes washed before anyone came home. Even the nasty cook wasn't there.

When she finished his laundry, she remained in her room. She heard them return for the evening and resisted joining. She finished hanging up his things in her closet and arranged the few boxes she had packed for him and sat down on the bed to rest. Except for his bike, everything fit inside her closet.

She laid back on a pillow to relax. No one bothered her.

Later, Kahana knocked and came in. She sat on her bed next to her.

"You didn't come down for supper, Penelope!"

"I'm not hungry." Penelope replied, her stomach loudly growling.

Kahaha giggled.

Penelope briefly laughed and hugged the young woman. "I missed you!"

"I missed you too!"

Kahana finished doing her homework with her then left for the night.

Hunger would get to her sometimes. She would remember how good Jude's food tasted and she would burst into tears. She heard people visit over the weekend but she refused to leave her room. She felt rebellious towards her father, but mostly hurt.

He had yet to knock on her door to talk and it had been several days. Sunday night he finally knocked. She had refused to go down and join the guests at supper, even though Kahana had let her know. He didn't wait for her to say "come in." He stepped in and closed the door. "I told you to come down to eat with us tonight, Penelope."

Unthinkingly, she twisted her fingers. "I'm sorry." She whispered. "I'm not feeling..."

He interrupted her. "You need to get past this!"

She knew he meant doing what he ordered. Even if it wasn't what she wanted. She didn't like the people who had visited. They weren't her kind of people and didn't share any of the same interests. The horrible cook was a relative of theirs. She had heard her screechy laugh all night and it made her sick. She needed to move away, the house would never be hers. It would always be her father's!

She wanted to talk to him about how afraid she had been when they busted Jude's door and came in with guns. She couldn't tell him how she loved the criminal. He would never understand. He especially wouldn't understand the felon's stuff in her closet. He would become so angry if he knew! Fear laced her veins. Her fingers began to ache from twisting them.

"Tomorrow, you need to go back to work, I told them you would! Good night." He said firmly. He left her room, closing the door behind him, never coming near her nor asking about what had happened. Not even to ask her what was wrong. She no longer wanted to work at the job he picked for her, years back. She didn't feel like the same person after spending time with Jude. He had changed her. She wanted to work a job she liked, instead. A job she picked out, she thought with rebellion. She needed to be more independent and make her own decisions.

Jude seemed more in tune with her needs. Knowing that gave her a new perception of her life. It had become suffocating to live with her father. She couldn't do anything without the stress of needing to please him. She didn't want to live that way anymore. Like Jude said, she needed to stop acting like a teenager.

She hated the job her father had picked for her, office work at the courthouse. She had dropped out of college and he had seen it as a disgrace, a failure. He had picked the degree for her. It had not been a degree she had any interest in. She knew he thought she couldn't succeed in life. She couldn't measure up to what he deemed right. He never said it, but she felt certain he thought she just wasn't intelligent. Her fingers grew red as fire and they ached. She breathed past the pain, emotional and physical.

Kohana shared his interest in law. She looked eagerly toward the future and studied everything about law, her only dream. Her young mind was brilliant. When her father appointed Penelope guardian, she actually had been happy with one of his decisions. The one and only time. She thought it strange when he could've appointed himself guardian. Both the young woman's parents were dead so why appoint her? She wondered about it.

She loved the young woman and was on older sister, mom and best friend all rolled into one.

A fleeting thought swept through her mind. Was the young woman Jude's baby girl?

Chapter 8

After a nearly sleepless night she got ready for work. She sat down on her bed and grabbed her cellphone.

She heard a noise out in the hall and went to check. She saw her father's study door open. She saw Benita, the mean cook as she entered.

"What are you doing here?" She asked the woman in a cold, hard tone. She intensely disliked the woman and her nearly three inch nails.

"Your father had me get him some things." Benita replied.

"She's lying!" Kahana said quietly behind Penelope.

The woman's face scrunched up in rage. She started screaming at them in Spanish. She went to pass them, pushing something down the front of her blouse. She suddenly came at Penelope with her long nails spread wide. Kahana cried out in fear.

Jude's teaching of self defense filled her with confidence. She immediately took the defensive stance and brought her arms up, planning on what moves she would use. She braced for the pain of the long nails scratching her.

She continued to scream and reached for Penelope's face. Something flickered in her cold eyes. She moved closer to the door and suddenly moved toward Kahana.

Fear iced in Penelope's stomach. She braced herself for a swift kick if she moved any closer. The horrible woman wasn't about to touch Kahana.

"Step back!" Penelope ordered sharply. She swiftly snapped a kick towards the mean woman, barely missing her face.

Banita turned and ran out of the room with a piercing scream.

Penelope turned to see if Kahana was safe. The young woman had been recording Banita on her phone. Banita had been reaching for Kahana's phone. Or maybe she had been attempting to hurt the young woman. Penelope didn't really know.

Kahana followed the woman with her phone still recording.

Banita paced in the kitchen with her phone to her ear

"I told you to leave or we're calling the police!" Penelope said sternly, with anger. "You are no longer welcome here!"

"This is Jack's house!" Her head reared back as she spoke. "You little children should respect me!" The profound arrogance of the woman shocked Penelope. She really thought herself superior over Kahana and herself. She wondered why she thought that.

Penelope slipped her phone out of her pocket and handed it to Kahana who was partially behind her.

"Call the police!" Penelope said firmly, while keeping her gaze fixed on the cruel woman. "Now, Hana!" She continued the defensive stance, ready to defend. "Banita! The title of this house is in my name as well! Get your things out of the guest house and leave!"

A stunned expression lit the cruel woman's face.

"You attempted to attack a minor!"

"I just wanted to look at the phone!" Benita hissed angrily.

"911, what's your emergency?" Someone said on the other end of the phone.

"Tell them she's trespassing!" Penelope ordered her ward.

Kahana repeated what she said and gave their address.

Benita made a short screech sound and stormed out of the house.

They stepped out on the large front balcony on the second floor to watch the woman as she raced into the small house she had been living in for the last few months. Trash quickly littered the yard as the woman threw things out.

A police car drove slowly down the driveway.

They raced quickly down to meet the car. Penelope explained what had happened. While they were talking Banita approached.

Penelope motioned for Kahana to go inside with her. She didn't want her to be around the woman.

The police came to the door after talking with the cruel woman. They told her that Benita lived there and that their father allowed her to live on the property. She would have to use the courts if they wanted to evict.

Penelope closed the door carefully. Sudden rage towards her father swept through her. She couldn't even breathe past it and her hands shook. Her emotions had grown so intense.

"Are you alright, Pen? Your face is all red."

"I'm fine, Hana" She whispered. "She robbed us. She'll steal more stuff when I take you to school. I can't understand why father gave her the key to our house!"

"Wow! You're really angry!" Kahana said, nodding. "I think she's jealous of how pretty we are. She said something about how 'she'll scratch the beauty from our faces', in Spanish."

"You're much more beautiful than me and so much smarter!" Penelope said, she wasn't surprised to hear Kahana had taught herself Spanish.

"I'm not so smart! I'm getting a F in one of my classes! I didn't know how to tell granddaddy! I hate this teacher!"

Rage pulsed in her head thinking of her father.

"Don't tell him!" Her anger was causing her to rebel. She didn't feel like pleasing him anymore. She needed to do what Jude said and make her own decisions!

"I've needed to talk about the fto either granddaddy or you. I know it was terrible what happened to you with that criminal!"

Penelope thought what had happened with her father seemed more terrible. "I'm fine, Kohana." Years of anger continued to grow.

"I can't believe you just said that about granddaddy!" Kohana let a nervous giggle slip. "You're different."

"Hana, I'm really okay."

"I need a paper signed. I've never heard you say anything like that about granddaddy! I thought you'd be mad about the grade."

Penelope signed the paper and handed it back. "You're harder on yourself than I could ever be."

"Thank you. I'm sorry for bothering you." Kohana treated her like someone badly damaged. She wanted to tell her just how wonderful Jude treated her.

"I'm really angry at my father, not at you. I would move out of this house right now except grandma left half the property to me and I don't want to leave!"

"You are angry! You've called him father instead of daddy several times. Did that man do horrible things to you? I read the transcript online about his court case."

"What! What case!" She could feel the blood drain from her face. "I've called the courthouse but Wendy keeps telling me Jude hasn't been arranged yet."

"She's lying. He was arranged right away. This morning, the lawyers may do their summations."

"No!" Penelope cried out in shock. She started sobbing in agony and walking in a circle, consumed with emotions.

Kohana looked confused. "Why did you say, no? He's going away for a very long time. He'll never bother you again!"

"I have to leave for the courthouse right now! I have to stop them!"

Kohana stood looking even more confused. "What violent things did he do to you? You're not acting right!"

She grabbed her purse when Kohana grabbed her arm. "I'm in love with him." She said hoarsely. She pulled the silver chain from under her blouse. "Keys to his house and bike."

Kohana took a step back in her shock.

"I'm sorry if you're hurt by this."

"Granddaddy is going to disown you, Penelope. Either that or have a heart attack." The girl was quick to put things together. At twelve her intelligence surpassed many adults.

"Kohana, grab the picture of you and your mother off your nightstand. Quickly!"

She was about to argue, but stopped seeing Penelope's expression of desperation.

She raced to meet up with her in the foyer, while trying to take the photo out of the frame.

"Just put the whole thing in your purse! Let's go!" She raced to her car and after they were driving she asked, "why didn't anyone talk to me? I don't understand!"

"I think granddaddy had something to do with that. He thought you had been through enough."

"It was like being on vacation without having father around. We played board games and he kept beating me! In the game, not literally." She chuckled. "He didn't cheat either! He taught me self-defense too."

Kohana had an expression of sheer shock. She didn't say anything for a moment, thinking.

"Sometimes we would watch tv together. He can really cook like a master!"

"Do you think he's my father? Is that why you wanted me to get my mother's picture? You really like him, don't you?" Kahana asked.

"I don't know. He kept saying something about his baby girl. There's a slight resemblance between you two. Yes! I really like him! I love him!"

"I thought both my parents were dead, Penelope."

"I thought so too. I really don't know, I could be wrong about this. Please don't think anything of it. I'm just speculating."

"You shouldn't need to go on the stand, just tell the lawyer what you told me."

"I called Jerome's phone a number of times and he never answered." Penelope said as she pulled into the parking lot. Her heart pounded painfully hard as they went to look for the location of the room in the large courthouse.

Her father may never forgive her! What happened with Benita, she considered not forgiving him either!

Chapter 9

The bailiff opened the door and Penelope immediately could see Jude's defeated form. Her heart felt wrenched.

Kohana scribbled something on paper and handed it to the bailiff. She pointed to the lawyer sitting next to Jude. The bailiff let them inside and took it to Jude's attorney.

Seeing his defeat left her emotionally hurting. She wasn't sure she could help him. Sudden tears made it hard to see as she followed Kohana, who knew what went on in the courtroom. She stumbled into the back of a chair and almost fell.

Kohana grabbed her arm and led her to a seat. She looked older than her twelve years and her eyes gleamed brightly. She enjoyed every second in court.

Penelope saw Jude's posture had changed. He somehow knew walking into a chair was something she would do. He didn't turn around but he did sit straighter in the chair. She didn't know if it was too late to help him or if she even could. But she had to try!

She heard her name called. Every eye in the room turned towards her. She had to stay strong! After being sworn in she nervously sat in the chair.

Her gaze swung straight to Jude. He wore a suit and a blue tie. Clean shaven with his hair cut stylishly short, her breath caught, he looked beautiful. Not an ugly toad as he had said in the past. She smiled happily at him.

His lips twitched and he politely nodded at her. The sight of him sent a surge of happiness through her.

"Your name?" Jerome repeated loudly.

She said her name barely over a whisper. Her heart raced seeing Jude after a week of not seeing him. She loved him so much! He looked so handsome! She wanted to run to his side.

"Speak up!" He said. "How do you know the defendant?"

She cleared her throat. She was a daughter of a judge, she knew how the law worked. "I've seen him around a few times. We talked." She spoke firmly. If she didn't carefully say the right answers he could go to prison!

He knew she lied and likely everyone in the room thought that. She felt a pinch in her heart. She could do this! She had to for Jude and herself because she wanted to be with him! What if he didn't want her in his life?

"When and where?"

She didn't answer fast enough. He would go to prison because she couldn't lie. Everyone could tell! Her hands found themselves and began twisting. No, she had to stop! No weakness! She had been weak her whole life, doing everything her father told her to do! She was done being weak. She had her own life to live!

"Do I need to repeat myself again?"

"In town, near the park. He is really nice." She glanced at him and smiled again. Seeing him gave her courage.

"Do you know what perjury is?"

"Do you know hearsay is inadmissible? I wasn't kidnapped . . ."

She was a judge's daughter and she was fighting in an arena she knew. Jerome, the prosecutor, went to school for his knowledge. She lived it her whole life.

"What day did you meet him?" He said, cutting her off.

"A week before, I met him on the other side of the gate. I told him . . ."

"So you agreed to commit a felony?"

"should disallow this as evidence. ." She cut in.

"Are you saying you stayed for a week with the defendant and cruelly let your family suffer?" He interrupted her speech again.

She didn't answer. She hated hurting them.

"Did you know about his gun?"

It still hurt thinking of what he had planned with the gun. She glanced at Jude.

"Answer the question, miss!" Ordered Judge Handers, a strict judge and a friend of her father's. She guessed her father had told him to make sure to send Jude to prison, no matter what!

"It's my gun . . ." She tried to say with force. Fear burned along her skin. If it had been used for a crime, she could be charged.

"The gun is yours?"

"Yes!" She replied firmly.

"Did you commit the crimes linked to the gun?"

"No!" She answered. "You're lying!" His eyes had flicked off to the side. "The gun is cle . . ."

Jerome interrupted her again. "You were found in his bed. Did he make you have sex?"

"I was on the floor when they busted his door open and came in with guns..."

"Did he rape you?"

"No!"

"Do you know what Stockholm syndrome is?"

"It's not listed in the DSM!"

"Are you saying he didn't have sex with you?"

"Again, this case is based on hearsay!" She said quickly before he could interrupt her again.

"Answer the question!" Judge Handers barked. He was getting angry at her. "Or I'll hold you in contempt!"

It was none of their business if Jude and her had sex! "I have the key to his house and bike!" She pulled on the chain and held it up. She needed to distract them.

"Are you saying that is the key to his house? Do you have proof?" Jerome asked.

"What proof do you have that it's not?" She heard someone snicker in the jury group.

"Enough!" Thundered Judge Handers as he struck his gavel down hard. "If anyone makes a sound again, I'll hold them in contempt!" He looked sternly down at her. "I'm going to ask you questions and you are going to answer me!"

A trace of fear bolted through her. Judge Handers knew way more tricks than any lawyer.

"Where did you meet him?"

"In town, he walked up to me and we talked . . ."

"You talk to ex-convicts regularly?"

"He's nice." Her fingers were finding themselves and twisting. He was like her father, a controlling superior being! How dare she seek her own happiness!

"Just . . . Jude, he's sweet . . ."

"Did he take you from your father's home . . ."

"My home too . . . my grandmother willed it to both of us . . ."

"Don't interrupt me! This is your last warning, I'll cite you for contempt! Answer 'yes' or 'no!'"

Tears slid down her cheeks. She felt suffocated by his bullying treatment. She had been with Jude for a week and she had gotten used to his gentle ways.

Something had captured the judge's attention. "Bailiff, let him try attacking me!" Judge Handers exclaimed. "I'll lock him up with added charges of assault!"

She saw Jude standing with his lawyer pulling on him, rage visible in every fiber of his body.

She was trying to get him off the kidnapping charge, he couldn't attack the judge! She twisted her fingers hard to make them snap loudly in the courtroom. "No, Jude!" She finally said when he didn't look at her.

Jude glanced at her and she slowly winked. She could handle these men, she grew up around them!

She didn't need any help! It was time for her to grow up! She wiped her cheeks dry and flipped her hair back then casually crossed her legs.

Jude slowly sat back down.

She sighed in relief and heard a pen clatter to the floor. She glanced at Jerome. He fumbled with his papers and picked up his pen. He didn't look in her direction.

"I'm citing you for contempt!" Judge Handers looked down at her, sternly.

"Aren't I the so-called, 'victim', your honor?"

"Speak only when you're asked a question!" He barked.

"This case should be dismissed, it has no standing. You know this, your honor!" She said feeling gratified for sounding superior for once.

"Bailiff, if she says one more word, arrest her!"

A murmur went among the jury.

"Bailiff, have the jury escorted out! They are excused!"

"We've voted 'not guilty.'" The foreman said. "Raise your hand if voting 'not guilty!'" Every jury member raised a hand as they exited the courtroom.

"Order!" Judge Handers exclaimed.

"I'm sorry, your honor." She said with false meekness.

He leaned towards her looking stern and angry.

"Is that really the key to his house?"

"Yes!" She leaned in towards him. "Please talk to daddy! He won't listen to me about Jude . . ."

"Enough!" He snapped while getting up. He started walking to his chambers and paused leaning to grab his gravel. He smacked it down. "Case dismissed!" He walked away and slammed the door behind him.

She got up looking at Jude. He looked stunned by what she had managed to do.

"Bailiff, clear my courtroom! Now!" The judge said, slamming the door to his chambers behind him, again.

Jude's attorney stopped him and spoke with him.

She grabbed Kohana's hand and rushed out of the courtroom. She went directly outside trying to get air in her frozen lungs. She found a bench under a tree and weakly sat down. She knew how angry her father would be when he found out. She'd just let a felon walk for a serious crime!

She wanted to go back in to talk to Jude but her bold behavior had her second guessing if she had done the right thing.

"You succeeded, Pen!" Granddaddy's rage will have no limits with you!" She squealed in excitement. "All this time, acting like you've known nothing about the law!"

"I don't care, Hana. If he wants me to move out he can pay for my half of the property."

"You're really good! I've never dreamed of you being this way, especially about a criminal."

"Aren't you missing class? I've been so wrapped up in all this that I forgot to take you to school." Relief slowly came to her. She was finally at peace with herself just doing what she wanted and not fearing her father's wrath. She could live with the shame and embarrassment. She didn't have to live her life following his commands anymore. She was free! The feeling was new and exhilarating.

"Hush, this is too much fun! I'm not missing anything important at school today. Granddaddy is going to be so angry at you. My little hooky..." she made a posh sound. "won't matter at all."

Why do I get the feeling you're happy about all this?"

"I've never seen you have an interest in something with so much passion too."

"I'm setting a bad example." Penelope said.

She happened to notice him coming out of the courthouse. She stood and quickly walked towards him. He opened his arms and she rushed into him. She slid her arms up and wrapped them around the back of his head. She gazed up into his very warm eyes.

"You're not an ugly toad! You're beautiful!" She exclaimed, caressing her fingers through his hair.

"I love you!" He murmured huskily, his lips catching hers.

His kisses quickly grew intense. She had never felt so much pleasure and happiness. His arms tightened and his kisses deepened. She felt like she was floating on a cloud of happiness as she passionately returned his kisses.

"Excuse me! Such lascivious behavior! Right in front of the courthouse too!" Kohana said mockingly, yet teasingly.

Penelope pulled away, breathing hard. She wanted to kiss him for the rest of her life! But she needed to behave properly in front of Kohana. She had already shown her too many bad examples. She tried to steady her fast breathing. Once her senses cleared enough and she could focus, she turned.

He had gone still as he stood staring at Kohana.

"The picture." Penelope whispered.

"Right. I don't remember him very well, but he could be."

"Penelope?" He said quietly, almost under his breath while staring at Kohana.

After digging it out of her purse Kohana held it up so he could see it.

He took the frame from her and after looking at it he handed it back with a hand that trembled slightly. "I took..." his voice was suddenly thick with emotion. He cleared his throat then spoke again, "I took that picture."

They both looked at him in shock. "I was told both my parents are dead, but I'm starting to remember you."

"I was told that too, Jude." Penelope said. She had guessed right about Kohana and him.

He remained frozen.

"Daddy Jude. I remember calling my father that."

"Your mother would frequently say 'Jude do this, Jude do that' and my baby would say 'Daddy Dude'." His throat worked and his eyes suddenly had tears pooling. "You couldn't pronounce 'j' sounds."

Kohana stared up at him. Her bolder nature seemed suddenly shy and timid. She nervously rubbed her hands down the sides of her skirt.

"Can I hug you, baby girl?" He whispered brokenly with intense emotion. Tears running down his cheeks.

Penelope felt like she couldn't swallow as emotions built up in her throat.

Kohana shrugged nervously and took a tiny step closer to her new found father.

Penelope moved further away. She wiped her own tears. She felt his pain which left her feeling raw.

He stepped closer and gently brought Kahana against him. They both stood together a long time, neither speaking or moving.

Penelope noticed Jerome exit the courthouse and went to intercept his path.

"Penelope," he said, fidgeting.

"I'm sorry. I tried calling you numerous times," she said. She could have saved the court cost if she had become more assertive sooner.

He carried a briefcase and a stack of folders. He set his briefcase on the ground and handed her the stack. "Hold these and don't look at them!" He said, pulling out a card from his wallet and handing it to her.

"I thought everything was done on computers now." She said, motioning the stack of folders.

"Judge Olmire. He's at the old courthouse today."

He didn't have to say more. The old judge liked paper and was adverse to computers.

"I had to change my number recently." He glanced over at Kahana and Jude, sitting on a bench. "Don't give him my personal number."

"Can I give it to Kahana?"

He nodded. "She's the baby girl he was talking about, isn't she?"

"They both remember things."

"You may need a good lawyer."

"I'm looking at one."

He visibly preened. "Not my area of law."

She knew what he meant and felt impressed by him seeing problems before it happened. "Thank you, Jerome. Likely her guardianship papers weren't legal."

"Maybe we could get a cup of coffee sometime and talk." He said as he picked up his briefcase.

She tried to not show her surprise. "Maybe." She nodded and he briskly walked off.

Jude was staring at her as she approached. "He asked you out, didn't he?"

She couldn't figure out how he knew stuff. She nodded. Kahana immediately got excited and let out a tiny squeal.

He leaned back slightly to look at Kahana sternly. "You are too young." He turned to look at Penelope.

"He gave me his number." She could feel Jude's intense stare.

"Let me have it!" Kahana exclaimed excitedly. She handed her the card. She pulled out her phone and began typing.

Penelope sat next to him on the bench and pulled her own phone out of her purse.

"Do you have a phone, daddy?"

"No."

"I have an extra one. I tried selling it, but haven't yet." She dug in her purse and handed it to him.

"Kahana, I don't remember you having two phones." Penelope said.

"Granddaddy bought me a new one!"

Jude shifted his gaze off his daughter and on her. "Judge J. Thornton?"

Penelope nodded.

He closed his eyes for a moment. He pressed on the bridge of his nose, with a thumb and forefinger. He opened his eyes but remained silent and didn't say what he thought. Penelope could guess. She took the phone from him and typed in her number. Leaning slightly into his firm, warm body.

Kahana still typing and happened to glance up. "Let me put mine in it!" She passed the phone back to Penelope.

Penelope looked up at Jude and noticed a breeze had blown a strand loose. She reached up and pushed it down. He caught her hand as she pulled away and tenderly kissed her palm. The suit he wore and his masculine appearance made her heart race. His clean shaven face tempted her to kiss him. He leaned in to do what she was wanting, kissing her with tender kisses.

"Hey, lovebirds, I'm hungry!" Kahana interrupted them.

"He is a really good cook, Kahana!"

"I'll cook for you both." He said with affection. "Judge's place?" He asked dryly.

"Yes." Kahana said.

He winced ever so slightly.

"Half mine, Jude." Penelope said. "I think, maybe, I should get a restraining order." She added with hesitation.

"Definitely!" Kahana said. "Let's get it now. Food can wait!"

Chapter 10

With the phone video Kahana had recorded on her phone, the judge granted a temporary restraining order against Banita.

As they pulled in past the open gates, they saw a truck full of the furniture from the guest house.

"Oh no," Kahana said under her breath.

Penelope felt her stomach dropped seeing all the woman planned on stealing. Jude glanced at her seeing the tension in her face. They got out of the car after she parked it in front of the house entrance.

"Put the furniture back into the guest house," she yelled at the aggressive woman as she approached.

She responded with a screech in Spanish while putting a small lamp in the bed of the truck.

Penelope felt her heart race hard in fear at the obvious building tension between them. "Benita!" She could feel tears fill her eyes. "Please!" She begged.

A man came next to Benita and put a small cabinet into the truck.

"Stop stealing all my stuff!" Penelope tried to say firmly, but her voice quivered.

A police car slowly drove up the driveway. Penelope didn't feel relief seeing the car, remembering how it went the last time. Who had called them? She glanced behind her and saw Kahana on the phone and Jude approaching her side.

"I'm officer Jamie. We received a call about property being taken." The woman said firmly, "who made the call?"

Benita muttered something under her breath to the man at her side.

Kahana spoke first, "I called, they are stealing our stuff!" While pointing at Benita.

"Ma'am, can I talk to you?" Said Jamie.

The two of them ignored her and continued to stand behind their truck.

"Please,

They got in the car and drove. She parked and was glad to not see her father's car. Sometimes he came home for lunch.

"Daddy, can I show you my room first?"

He nodded, clearly uncomfortable in the house of a Judge he had hated for years.

Kahana was ecstatic, sharing as much as she could with him.

He followed her back into the kitchen and it wasn't long before the scent of his cooking filled that side of the house.

Kahana chatted happily while sitting at the table and Penelope nodded, smiling at intervals. She couldn't shake the feeling of impending doom.

The food was placed on the table and a search for chopsticks ensued. Once in hand Kahana excitedly tried to learn how to use them. Much laughter and talking as time slipped past.

Penelope looked up to see her father's pale face, two red spots on his cheeks. His eyes raging in a way Penelope had never seen before. She stood, not sure what to do.

"Granddaddy." Kahana said quietly. She put down her chopsticks and slowly stood.

"Get out!" He hissed at Jude.

Jude's eyes narrowed slightly, the only sign of emotion on his stoic face. His defiance upset the Judge even more.

The Judge took a step closer, with his fist rising, breathing fast.

*I'M GOING TO PUBLISH THIS NOVEL SOMETIME IN THE SPRING OF 2025
THANK YOU, GOD BLESS.*