She unbuckled her seatbelt and leaned in, close but still out of range. “It’s two in the morning, Jinx. I’m just trying to satisfy your desires.”

Oh, no. My stomach fluttered. “And, what do I desire, Raven?”

Her eyes shifted to my lips, then dropped lower, before meeting my gaze.

Notes

This story was originally posted on fanfiction.net under the same title. I will leave that version as-is, and post the re-written version here. New and improved, for your viewing pleasure.
Chapter 1

Friday evening was as good a time as any for an existential crisis. Held captive by monotony, each day the same as the one before, forever and ever, ending with me tending drinks and skulking behind this lacquered oak bar.

“Jen, you all right?”

I blinked up from the sink, brimming with soapy water. “What?”

Ben, my co-worker, shouted over the roar of the crowd. “Are you all right?”

All wrong, maybe. I gestured with an empty glass and shouted back. “Just thinking.”

“How the hell can you think in here?”

After a lifetime of bad luck, thinking was all I did. Pondering and replaying past mistakes. I shoved a tray of dirty glasses into the dishwasher.

“Heeeeeere kitty-kitty!” Some drunken asshole bellowed. “Another round!”

Existential crisis didn’t, however, diminish my unadulterated loathing for humanity. Teetering dangerously close to the limits of my patience, I located the offender on the far side of the bar. Packed like pickles, it would be tricky to target just the douchebag with a generous helping of fuck you very much. Tingles raced down my arms, gathering like an electrical current at my fingertips. One flick of my pinky could knock the asshole’s glass over, or bring the roof down on every sorry bastard in this dump. I’d been out of practice far too long to hope for precision. Then again, collateral damage had always been my specialty.

Ben touched my elbow, drawing my glare. “I’ve got it. Take a breather.”

Probably for the best. My 583 days without hexing someone into oblivion counter ticked higher with every passing day. Why ruin that record on some unworthy dumbass?
I grunted to Ben and strode into the back, past coolers and the small kitchen, to the quiet reprieve of my reflection in the dingy bathroom mirror. The harsh fluorescent light shrunk my vertical pupils to slits. I looked angry. Tired. Some nameless emotion growing in size and intensity. I turned on the faucet and filled my hands with cool water, watching it pour over my fingers.

Ten years ago I’d walked away from everything I knew. Left the Brotherhood, abandoned my friends, and took off. Unraveling and aimless. With my hair an ordinary dirty blonde, cut short and worn messy, I could pass for any other twenty-eight year old woman in California. But no matter how hard I tried to blend, to be normal and unremarkable; my eyes always gave me away.

I didn’t have it in me to conceal them. Most people assumed the opposite, wondering where I’d gotten such rad cat-eye contacts. *Born this way, baby. Just look at me now.* Forearms braced on the sink, I splashed water over my face and sighed. How many nights had this same tired scenario played out? Living this uneventful, unfulfilling, pointless life day after day. How many more could I endure?

I dragged myself back to the bar, motivated only by the dim glow of the time on my cell phone. Ten minutes till two. Almost time to go home and do . . . nothing. But at least it wasn’t here. I wiped down the liquor shelves for the seventh unnecessary time.

“Excuse me?”

*Goddamnit.* I glanced over my shoulder to find a woman perched on a barstool. “We quit serving in five minutes.”

“Lucky me.” Her low, smooth voice sounded like water bubbling down a brook. And sober. Odd for this hour. “Something with vodka, please.”

“Cranberry or orange juice?”

“No,” she drawled. “Maybe something a little stronger, and sweeter.”

Who the fuck goes to a bar five minutes before closing—sober—and then doesn’t know what the fuck they want? What an inconsiderate, indecisive, motherfucking ingrate. “What about a chocolate martini that’ll knock you on your ass?”
“That would be lovely.”

It’d be lovely if she fucked off. “I’ll get right on it.”

“No rush. I’ve nothing but time.”

What a snarky shit. I glanced at her again. Chin rested on her fist, she studied the illuminated liquor shelves behind the bar. Dark hair fell past her shoulders, side-parted and shadowing her eyes. An attractive woman, and something about her seemed . . . familiar. It only took a moment to whip together a potent concoction of liquor and chocolate. I slid a napkin in front of her and as I set the glass down, our gazes met. Without a doubt, I knew this woman.

My mouth went dry. “Raven?”

Panic flashed across her face, followed by disbelief. “Jinx?”

Jinx.

I just stood there gawking with a handful of chocolate martini, as if my name from her lips brought me back from the brink. It took a moment for the embarrassing stupor to pass. Holy hell, Raven had matured into a stone cold fox. Move over existential crisis. Shit just got real.

I pulled my hand away, suddenly unsure what to do with any of my appendages. “I haven’t gone by that name in a long time.”

She studied me in the growing silence. “I’ll bet.”

What was she implying? Then I remembered the woman could basically read minds and sense emotions. Judging solely on the fact that she was both alive and staring me down like a fine cut of Kobe beef, I assumed her terrifying powers had only grown. Naturally, I was unprepared.

Heart thundering, I turned and retrieved my washrag. The potential of running into a Titan was fairly
low, despite me currently residing in the same state as their headquarters. But what were the chances of this encounter? Of all those irritating vigilantes, why Raven? Why now? I felt her eyes follow me as I cleaned. Did she know what I was thinking? Could she sense my unease? As if my behavior wasn’t obvious enough. Christ, pull yourself together.

After I couldn’t stand it any longer, I spun around. “Isn’t a bar a little too social for your tastes?”

She arched one brow. “What are my tastes?”

“I don’t know. Solitary confinement. Doom and gloom. Herbal tea.” Although, from the vibes she gave off, something suggested more interesting tastes. Involving leather and implied consent.

The ghost of a smile curved her lips. “There’s a lot you don’t know about me.”

A dangerous trap. Mustn’t fall into it so easily. “You’ll have to forgive my disbelief. You were in a leotard the last time I saw you.”

“Let us not forget your infamous pink hair and miniskirt.”

Infamous? How could I defend myself against that? “Yeah, well. Where’d your demonic gemmy thing go?”

“Gemmy thing? You’re aware you said that out loud?”

“I am.” She avoided the question, but more importantly, where had my A-game gone? Why was I sputtering like an incompetent fifteen-year-old?

“This look suits you.” She picked up her glass. “I didn’t recognize you until I saw your eyes.”

I mmm-hmmmed, transfixed as she sipped her drink. “You look good—nice—ah, I mean—you’re attractive.” My cheeks ignited.

“So glad you approve. Though, it makes me wonder.” She leaned forward as if to tell a secret, while
I stewed in my own ineptness. “Would it still be lovely if I’d *fuck off*?”

“Ohmygodno. “Well, it’s been swell, but I’m gonna go now. Drink’s on the house.” I turned on my heel and launched into the back at warp speed. I scrambled for my keys and jacket and bolted out the door, into the cold February night.

The first peer I’d seen in a decade and it took less than five minutes to make an utter fool of myself. Seemed things hadn’t changed at all. I strode down the alley to my Mini Cooper and climbed inside. Started the engine. Stared at my reflection in the rearview mirror.

“What are you doing? What—the—fuck? Why didn’t you just climb over the bar and molest her? That would’ve been less embarrassing, considering she already knew what you were thinking, you animal. Goddamnit!”

Good pep talk. Time to head home and sulk on the couch for the next millennium. I switched on my headlights, illuminating a figure leaned against the car ahead of me.

“Jesus Christ!”

Raven, striking in her short leather coat and dark jeans. She uncrossed her arms and glided to my driver’s side. When nothing happened, she said, “Roll the window down.”

I most certainty should not roll the window down. Then again, she could teleport through objects and astral planes. A quarter inch of glass was a joke to her. I should just put the car in gear and floor it. Flee for my life. I didn’t want to fight, least of all with this demon who likely hadn’t forgotten about all the mean, annoying shit I’d done to her in the past.

“I’m not a Titan anymore,” she said. “You’ve nothing to fear from me.”

Oh. A freelance demon with no obligations to laws, morals, or the preservation of society. Sure. Nothing to fear. Where do I sign my life away?

Instead of her request, I opened the door, forcing her to back a step as I stood to face her. I stood a few inches taller than her, but that meant nothing. She outclassed me in magic, therefore my physical strength and agility didn’t matter. I could throw a few curses her way, but hard-earned wisdom and experience knew she’d blast me into the next dimension before I could raise a finger.
“What do you want, Raven?”

She looked dangerous in the moonlight, breath fogging the air. Dangerous and captivating. “Why’d you run off?”

“Are you screwing with me?” She had to be. Wasting time on a washed-up villain defied all other logic.

“No.”

“Look, I haven’t forgotten what you’re capable of. We weren’t on friendly terms when we last parted, if you remember correctly.” I narrowed my eyes. And you’re reading my fucking mind.

“That was a long time ago. Things change.” Her gaze ran down my body too slowly for a mere once-over. Whether it was predatory or sexual remained to be seen, but I seized the opportunity to admire the line of her jaw on the off chance this was foreplay.

A very kissable jaw, leading to tempting lips. It’d been so long since I’d been with anyone, even longer for a quality partner. And here stood a cunning, capable woman worthy of my time. Stone cold fox, indeed.

“Also, I can’t read minds,” she said. “But I can sense and translate emotions.”

My stomach warmed. Stop thinking about her. Holy shit, stop thinking about her! Raven hadn’t moved an inch since I’d gotten out of the car, but she felt drastically closer now. As if she’d switched from standard definition to HD. Somewhere in the background of my lizard brain, a red flag waved.

“Would you like to grab something to eat?” she said. “There’s a little diner a few blocks away. Decent food, quiet atmosphere.”

“Uh, what?”
“Food. Sustenance. Would you like to get some with me?”

Was this real life? Raven appeared out of nowhere and wanted to hang out? And judging by the looks, she also wanted to do more than hang out. Something I was totally okay with, even if none of this checked out rationally.

Her brows furrowed. “You do eat food, yes? You’re not an android?”

Jesus, this was weird! But I liked it!? Food guaranteed a boost to glucose levels, and if I was lucky, a higher functioning brain. I couldn’t deny my hunger on any level. What else did I have to do, other than go home and stare at the ceiling fan?

“All right.” I glanced to the grey BMW she’d been leaning against. “Is that yours?”

She blinked to the car. “No.”

“Then how did you get here?”

“I teleported.”

“Ah.” I shuddered at the memory of being dragged through space, her black magic that stole all warmth and joy from the world. “You can ride with me.”

“You don’t want to ride with me?” The wave of her fingertips spawned a black mist, swirling ominously beside her. “We’ll be there in a jiff.”

“No, no. I insist.” I sat behind the wheel and unlocked the passenger door. “Ride with me.”

“As you wish.” The mist vanished. She circled to the opposite side of the Mini, eased into the seat and shut the door.

I imagined her cataloguing my life from the contents of my car. The old soda can stuck in the cup holder. Unopened junk mail on the back seat. Bar aprons I hadn’t bothered to wash. Whatever that
mysterious sticky stuff was on the passenger door. The subliminal message read: *Hot mess. Emphasis on mess. Did you get the messy part?*

“Where’s this diner?”

“On fifth.” She pointed east. I shifted into gear and pulled onto the street. After a few minutes of silence, she said, “You know, I was only teasing.”

“About what?”

“That was my car.”

“So, what you really meant is that you lied.”

She made an unconvinced sound. “I’m just conscientious about lowering my carbon footprint.”

I snorted. “You’re just evil.”

“*Just evil* doesn’t seem that bad. Scarcely wicked. Minimally depraved. I’m only part demon, after all.”

“Evil’s overrated. You have appearances and reputations to uphold. Obnoxious do-gooders harass you at the grocery store. You never get a moment of peace.”

“Sounds awful. Maybe I’ll strive for insufferable. That worked for you, didn’t it?”

I laughed. “You’re a shit, Raven.”

“Still an overachiever, I’m afraid. This’s the diner on the right.”

I pulled the car into a parking space at the curb and killed the engine, feeling more alive than I had in
my entire life. Whatever she had planned—because Raven had a plan, of this I was sure—it would make my night infinitely more interesting. Not that I had any clue where this headed, how we’d gotten to this point, or why now? What changed in my cosmos that resulted in Raven appearing out of the blue?

She unbuckled her seatbelt and leaned in, close but still out of range. “It’s two in the morning, Jinx. I’m just trying to satisfy your desires.”

Oh, no. My stomach fluttered. “And, what do I desire, Raven?”

Her eyes shifted to my lips, then dropped lower, before meeting my gaze. “Hash browns.”

Damnit. She was right.

O.O.O.O.O

The trip from my car to the diner was one of the longest walks I’d ever experienced. Raven had sent my circuits haywire with only a handful of syllables, and the prospect of further exposure suggested my downfall.

I couldn’t wait.

“Booth?” she inquired.

“Please.” I followed her through the warm diner to the far corner and sat opposite her, cheap vinyl seats creaking. The aroma of coffee and bacon mingled with the dull murmur of a dozen patrons lost in their own little worlds.

Raven pulled a menu off the condiment rack, brushed a strand of wayward black hair from her eyes and casually scanned the laminated paper as if she wasn’t the most fascinating creature on the face of this earth. “See anything you like?”

I’m not sure I had any capacity left for embarrassment. “As you said. Hash browns.”
An amused look softened her baseline stoicism. Amusement suited her. What other carnal emotions suited her? My interest and arousal only grew. Someone save me.

I cleared my throat. “What are you having?”

She tilted her head, lips curving. In that instant I’d given anything to know what she was thinking. She slid the menu back in its place and folded her hands on the table. “What have you been up to these last ten years, Jinx?”

Another avoided question, and ploy to pique my interest. “Absolutely nothing of merit. Spent a few years in Phoenix, long enough to burn every bridge possible before moving on to Denver. Then Salt Lake. Seattle. Portland. And here we are in northern California.”

“Oh the run from that bad luck.”

“You could say that. What have you been up to these last ten years?”

“I’ve been on the run from the law.”

“Experimenting with sarcasm, I see. Not bad.”

“No, really.” Her calm, cool stare didn’t change.

“I don’t believe you.”

“Why?”

“Because.” I gestured to the diner, hoping articulation would come to me. “You don’t strike me as the type to take up a life of crime. Also, I don’t think you’d be very good at it.”

She arched one brow. “You don’t think I’d be a very good criminal?”
After that tone, I wasn’t sure, but I double-downed. “Terrible, in fact.”

She stared. Reminiscent of her younger, broody days, and yet infinitely more intimidating. Nothing about her appeared to change, but the air seemed to vanish, leaving me in the silent vacuum of that dark, endless gaze. After a few seconds it grew most uncomfortable, but I didn’t squirm. Because I didn’t squirm. Not for anyone . . . *goddamnit*. I fidgeted.

This had gone from playful banter to horrifying tension in record time.

An older woman in an apron appeared at my elbow. “What’ll it be, ladies?”

Raven’s attention remained fixed on me. “Two coffees and a hash brown plate. One check, please.”

The server scribbled it down and stalked away, leaving me alone in the crosshairs.

Apparently we were fighting now, and Raven hadn’t blinked once yet. Perhaps she didn’t require ocular lubrication. I did, but blinking did not seem to end the battle. Nor did squirming. Her intention was obviously to cause as much discomfort as possible, and I clenched and unclenched my jaw, refusing to back down.

“I’m afraid to report, Raven, that your stare has lost it’s impact.”

She threw her head back and laughed. And holy hell, what an experience to behold. Guttural richness, unnervingly exhilarating. I’d never heard her laugh before. Hell, I’d never seen a real smile.

I shifted on the bench, assaulted by a flood of goosebumps. “I, however, haven’t lost my poignant sarcasm. Lucky you.”

“Lucky me.” She sobered, regarding me as if I’d suddenly grown more interesting.

Our server shuffled over, setting our food, coffee and the check on the table. Gone just as quickly as she appeared. The aroma of fried potatoes cued my stomach to growl. Shouldn’t have skipped lunch.
“Eat,” Raven said. “You’re hungry.”

Three mouthfuls into the hash browns I remembered to breathe. My appetite had never been this ravenous, even after forgetting to eat. Perhaps the stress of her appearance triggered my senses to muster all hands on deck before we drove ourselves into an iceberg.

Raven sipped her black coffee, seemingly undeterred by my absent table manners. “You know, we used to pull the video surveillance.”

“Hmm?” I looked up, forkful of starchy goodness halfway to my mouth.

“Back in Jump. We watched the footage from all the locations you’d raided. The recordings were always the same. You’d sneak in, pick through the inventory in one long, graceful dance and be gone before anyone knew otherwise. So bold and blatant. You could have shut down the cameras, but you didn’t. The other Titans labeled it sloppiness, but I knew better. You wanted us to see. To know it was you and masterfully done. You wanted a captive audience.”

Sometime during her speech, my jaw had unhinged. Not only had she unearthed something I’d done a decade ago, in a lifetime away, she’d also spoken more than one sentence completely unprovoked. A lot to process individually. Happening simultaneously, it derailed me.

“I enjoyed watching those performances,” she continued. “Especially in person. No matter the circumstances, when the Hive and Titans collided, you always found me. At first it infuriated me. The way you bounded, curved, evaded my attacks. You were better at hand-to-hand combat, and spared no expense when it came to getting under my skin. In retrospect, I wish I’d spent a little more time appreciating the show.”

My stomach turned in upon itself, no longer occupied with food. I was a better fighter when we were kids. Even a burnt out tree stump could tell the odds had shifted entirely in Raven’s favor.

She slid her mug aside and folded her hands on the table. “Now I’m wondering if you’ll dance for me.”

*Jesus pole vaulting Christ.* The seconds dragged, leaving me floundering under her simmering gaze. I’d dance for her. I’d crawl. Fuck, where had this desperation come from?
“I see.” I set down my fork and took a swig of coffee to buy a little more time. “Awfully bold of you to ask.”

“You’ve no idea how bold I can be.” Raven smiled, and in that instant, I knew she’d be the death of me.

I’d give anything to keep seeing that smile. To be her reason to smile, and laugh, and moan. Her reappearance stirred something inside me, and I was most eager to indulge. I wanted lips and teeth and tongue. Nails in flesh. I needed release—needed to explode.

“Well then.” I fiddled with my plate, pushed it aside and cradled my coffee. “If you expect anything else from me you need to start returning the courtesy.”

She liked that response. “What would you like to know?”

Go big or go the fuck home. “What happened after Trigon?”

Her gaze wandered past me, into a far-off place.

It was a pretty shitty thing to bring up. I couldn’t begin to imagine what she’d endured during that awful prophecy. What she’d lived with before and since. Her still being here was proof enough to her resilience. But I needed to test the waters before diving into the abyss. I needed to know I’d survive Raven.

A moment passed before she spoke. “Things were different after Trigon. I was different, in a way I’d never imagined. The other Titans noticed. I suppose living with a conduit for evil made them uneasy. How could they trust a demon? How could anyone?”

The powers she’d matured into were absolutely terrifying. Only her capacity for compassion and a healthy dose of guilt separated her from absolute darkness. Fiercely maintained restraint protected the world from annihilation. Without Raven, we might not exist. And with her, we toed an invisible line.

“You left the Titans?” I prompted.
“Jump made it clear my help was no longer desired. The mayor and chief of police sent a letter requesting I not show up with the other Titans. My presence unsettled the officers, scared citizens. The best-case scenario for everyone didn’t include me. Richard and I had a disagreement about my resignation, and after unpleasant words and a few broken bones, I haven’t seen him since. Any of them.”

I didn’t need to ask whose bones were broken. But the implication that she’d grievously injured one of her friends left me wondering where I fell on her trust hierarchy. Our night seemed to be going well, but how quickly could that change?

“Why didn’t he want you to resign?”

“Because we were friends.” Her soft tone masked a near-fatal dose of venom. “But deep down, he followed that old, tired adage. Better the devil you know, than the devil you don’t.”

“He wanted to keep tabs on you.”

“He wanted to try.”

“I always figured he was a little prick. Nice to know I’m right on occasion.”

She snorted and sipped her coffee. “I can’t really blame him. After all, I’m just evil.”

“You are, of course, familiar with my resume? Just evil is just fine with me. Where did you go after you ditched the goody two-shoes gang?”

“Seattle.” She sighed, tracing shapes on the tabletop. “I really liked Seattle.”

“Then why did you leave?”

“I killed three people there.”
I paused, waiting for some subtle indication that she’d made a joke. Murmurs and clattering silverware filled the silence. Raven kept staring, presumably waiting for my reaction.

*Oh, fuck.*

My earlier concerns were warranted. She was beyond my level, and I needed to carefully consider my next words. “Were they . . . deserving?”

“They deserved worse,” she murmured, murky emotions coloring her eyes. “Does my opinion of their character matter?”

Sitting here with just a cheap Formica table between us while discussing her murdering people rated pretty high on the danger meter, but knowing she adhered to some form of ethics helped my indigestion. Raven was part demon, after all. Having killed didn’t surprise me as how long it had taken for her to indulge.

“It matters to me,” I said. “Everyone rationalizes to get through the day. Some days are just rougher than others.”

She turned her hands over, studying her palms. “I spent my entire life following and upholding the law. Years suppressing my emotions to keep everyone safe. But before that day, I had never felt such a sense of justice before.”

I knew what she meant. Righteousness that was both morally ambiguous and wholly satisfying. Despite my initial alarm, I really wasn’t disturbed by her confession. Maybe because of my own sordid past. Maybe because I had contemplated killing before. Growing up a villain exposed me to a multitude of sins, none of them beyond reach. Even for the most virtuous, given the right circumstances.

“You enjoyed killing them.”

“I did.” Her gaze snapped to mine, dark and unblinking. “Does that also matter to you?”

“I certainly appreciate your honesty.” It was very warm in this diner. I wet my lips. Swallowed the rock in my throat. Didn’t the optimists of the world decree: do what you love? Did that apply in Raven’s case?
What were their names, they who crossed Raven? Their crimes? What were their last thoughts, staring down this . . . demon.

An absolutely stunning demon who’d decided to invest her time in me. Why had I been chosen? Was this a trap? Were these my last thoughts? If so, had I left enough of an impression on her that she’d put me out of my misery sooner rather than later?

She sat back in the booth. “There’re so many emotions pouring off you I’m surprised you haven’t bolted out the door yet.”

My skin pricked. “I was working up to it.”

“Perhaps we should call it a night.” She suddenly looked small. A thin, wispy woman hunched in the booth of an all-night diner, lonely and directionless. Nothing like a demon’s hell spawn, capable of untold atrocities. The compulsion to help her and run for my life burned with dual flames. I’d been on the straight and narrow so long, the thrill of danger gave me heart palpitations. And this prime specimen before me was the epitome of dangerous.

“Stay with me,” I blurted, like an absolute idiot.

Raven blinked twice.

“I meant, I have a spare bedroom. If you need to lay low for a while, you’re welcome to it.”

Then she smirked. The tiniest, most terrifying little smirk, unleashing a rush of potential from my lips to my toes and everywhere in between.

“I appreciate the offer, but that was years ago. I’ve the means to elude law enforcement without endangering anyone else.” She set a twenty on the check and stood, adjusting her jacket. “Thank you for the company. It was nice.”

This hadn’t ended the way I’d anticipated. She’d just confessed to murder and I was disappointed she now displayed all the social cues for her desire to end this interaction. Had I said something wrong? Was I not as interesting or amusing as I’d thought? Could I ruin things or what? And how
insane was it to even think that?

I slid out of the booth and followed her to the door. “Let me drive you back to your car.”

“Nonsense.” She waved the suggestion away. “You live the opposite way.”

Shit. How did she know that?

“It’s just a feeling.” She held the door open, expectant. “Maybe not opposite, but not on the way.”

Was she always this attuned to emotions? Or had she lied about being a mind reader? Either way, I remained at a severe disadvantage. I couldn’t decide if I’d actually offended her, or if this was her version of hard-to-get, a distorted cat-and-mouse game. What were the rules? How would the victor be decided? She wanted to watch me dance, but another metaphor came to mind as I willing approached the daughter of Trigon.

Rendered dumbstruck in her midst, a fresh spring lamb, longing for a knife.

The murmurs of the diner were silenced with the slam of the door. Brisk night air returned a smidge of composure. We paused at my car. Raven remained a respectable distance away, body angled for departure. Awkwardness descended, likely my own construction, but was I even capable of creating such a scenario? What were we doing? Why could I not read this woman?

“Suppose I also owe you an apology,” I said, grasping for any reaction.

Her attention sharpened, a tiger examined her prey. “Oh?”

“You’d make a fine criminal. Better late than never.”

In a split second she loomed before me, impossibly close. Jesus, I hadn’t seen her move! My neural transmitters crackled incessant Morse code. Look out—in danger—will eat you alive—why aren’t you running—look out—fucking moron—look out—
“Apology accepted,” she murmured, lips a mere thought from mine.

She needed to be closer. I lowered my chin, closing the distance to her lips, but she remained out of reach. It took a few heartbeats too many before I realized she had placed the tip of her index finger in the center of my chest, keeping me back with so little effort I might as well have been frozen in time.

Centered in her sights.

Good as dead.

Her gaze burned into the back of my brain, transcribing an archive of minute details. “You’re free tomorrow?” A command masquerading as a query. One that made my stomach clench and toes curl.

I would be free. Without question. Just kiss me, for the love of all things—devour me.

“I’m free right now.” I heard my voice, but couldn’t fathom managing to speak at a time like this.

Her lips brushed mine in the barest of kiss. “I’ll find you.”

And she dissolved in a dark mist, leaving me alone on the curb.
Chapter 2

I’ll find you.

That whisper had slipped beneath flesh, winding through muscle and sinew, seeking the deepest, darkest spot to take root. Raven had conveyed unspoken promise in those three simple words. Potential. Challenge. The thrill of an exquisite hunt.

She knew I’d take the bait. How could I not? She’d appeared from nowhere, having transcended her previous form, and emerged a hellishly capable woman who’d disarmed me with one look. Her otherworldly abilities were not only unfair, they were beyond terrifying.

And yet . . . I wanted to pursue. To be pursued. Needed to tempt fate in a game without rules, where my life rested in the hands of demon. My existence so far in the law-abiding world had been purely survival, and I was far over due to experience living. Why not with Raven?

Normally my Saturdays consisted of crawling into bed at dawn and sleeping until dusk, when I’d drag myself into the kitchen for something edible and motivate myself for the week’s final shift. But after last night, sleep was not on my mind.

Around noon I left my apartment and piloted my Mini into town, aiming to treat myself to coffee brewed for pleasure, not necessity. And more importantly, aiming to shake up my routine. Because while it was likely that Raven hadn’t been stalking me, it was just as likely she’d already deduced a plethora of information about me via my scatterbrained emotions. She knew my car, where I worked, and where I lived. But she didn’t know what I would do. Didn’t know the lengths I’d go to best her.

At a quiet little café, I sat in the window and cradled a cappuccino, watching cars pass by. I’d never been to here before. Not even to this side of town. If hard-to-get was Raven’s intention, I’d be more than happy to indulge.

After my coffee, I grabbed a sandwich to go and cruised towards the outskirts of town, following old county roads for miles and miles of trees and rocky land. When I stopped to eat, I called the owner of the bar and told him I needed the night off. Considering I’d never missed a shift in three years, he didn’t protest or ask why.

February sunsets happened suddenly, but when caught at the right moment, gave off a spectacular red-orange display. I’d been raised a city-dweller, over the years occupying numerous urban jungles,

Did Raven also appreciate such things? It seemed likely. Always seeking distance, creating space between her and everyone else. Way out here, there was room for her; for what she had become. Maybe I’d ask her when she found me.

Because she would.

She’d be the death of me, if I let her. And was I ever tempted to indulge her.

When darkness settled, I turned my trusty Mini towards civilization, meandering back to the sleepy little town I’d claimed as my own. Population: enough. Down the main drag, I drove past the bar, already crowded. Cars lined both sides of the street for blocks, providing plenty of cover for my plan. I circled towards the bar, then parked on the side street two blocks away and settled in for the wait.

When Raven realized she’d missed me leaving my apartment for the day, her only other option to pick up my trail would be to return to the bar. She didn’t know what time my shift started, but it wasn’t a hard guess that by after ten I’d be up to my elbows in thirsty fools looking for their Saturday night buzz. Normally, that is.

At quarter after eleven, my coworker Ben called my cell. I sat up in the driver’s seat and answered. “Hello?”

“Hey, you okay?”

“All good. Just needed a night to decompress. What’s up?”

“There’s a woman here asking for you. She’s intimidating as hell.”

Probably mad as hell, too. “Oh? What’s her name?”

“She wouldn’t tell me. Something’s different about her, I just don’t know what. I wanted to make
“Sure you weren’t in trouble.”

“You know, I always thought you were kind of a dick, but you’re all right, Benjamin.”

“Oh, shut up. She’s still waiting at the bar. What do you want me to tell her?”

She wouldn’t wait long. What were the chances she drove again? “Are you in the office by chance?”

“Where else can you make a phone call in this place?”

“Would you just poke your head out the back door and see if there’s a grey BMW parked near my normal spot?”

He laughed under his breath. “Wait, wait. Is she your ex?”

“No, no. Just a very old friend.”

“Right. What’s her car have to do with anything?”

“You ask a lot of questions.”

“Well, I have a lot of questions.” Muffled bumps and scratches on his end were followed by a muttered “Jesus, it’s cold. Uh, yeah. There’s a b’mer by the power pole.”

“Thank you. Now, would you give her my number and kindly ask her to call?”

“Give your very old friend your phone number?”

“Yes, that’s what I asked.”
“This’s kinda weird, but okay.”

“You’re the best. See you Monday.” If I survived that long.

I slipped out of my car, sprinted down the connecting alley, crossed ninth street, and then tenth. The cold air burned the back of my nose by the time I reached the BMW, parked a few spaces away from where it’d been last night. Relatively new model, with a California license plate. I bent over and peered through the driver’s window, finding the interior pristine. I’d always imagined her as a minimalist, so this wasn’t a shocking discovery. Still, had Raven lied, or was this really her car? Only one way to find out.

But the blinking red light on the dash presented an obstacle. Nothing that would’ve stopped me in my younger, bolder years. However, technology had changed in the last decade. Who knew if this shit would work?

Alarms were always the bane of any thief’s existence. In the past I would’ve jinxed the hood release, disconnected the battery, and then picked the lock. But high-end vehicles with laser cut keys and enclosed locking mechanisms now prevented the old-school methods. I had to go all-magic on this one. Because the idea wasn’t to steal anything. All I wanted was a little information. In and out without a trace. My favorite game.

I steadied my breathing, focusing on the consistent blip of the red light. This required a level of finesse that maturity had honed over the years. With a small dose of luck and flick of my fingertips, the red light turned off. A little more effort and the automatic locks clicked open. Imagine the havoc I would’ve caused if I had mastered this subtlety in my teens. I grabbed the handle, lifted, and eased the door open without a hitch. Too easy.

My cell blared from my coat pocket, scaring the absolute shit out of me. Rookie mistake, not silencing my phone. You idiot. I glanced at the screen, noting an unfamiliar number, before easing into the driver’s seat and shutting the door.

“Hello?” I answered.

“You think you’re clever, don’t you?” Raven said.

Fifty-thousand volts shot across my heart. Did she know? Was she watching? Her end of the line was too quiet for her to be in the bar. Shit. I craned my neck, looking out the back window,
microseconds away from launching out of this car at the speed of sound.

“I do think I’m clever. But let’s pretend that I don’t know what you mean. Just for fun.”

“Where are you?” Tone light and razor sharp. Just to be expected.

“Where are you?”

“I’m standing next to your car.”

“And . . . where is my car?”

“Parked in the alley on eighth. Unoccupied.”

Whew. She was good. I lifted the center console cover and found nothing of interest, then checked under the visor. “You were supposed to find me.”

“Mmm-hmm.”

I didn’t have much time before she figured out I was up to shady shit. Had to keep her talking. I reached for the glove box and found a folded pack of documents. “I wasn’t at my apartment all day, was I?”

Silence.

Oh, was this exciting! “Makes it difficult to tail someone when you can’t find them to begin with, huh?” I flipped through the vehicle documents, finding the current license plate receipt and insurance, both under the name Evelyn Waterson. Pseudonyms were the hallmark of any superhero in disguise. Was this Raven’s alias? Or had I broken into a stranger’s car? I snapped a quick picture of the name and address while Raven took an obscenely long time to reply.

“Difficult, yes. But not impossible.”
“You seemed so sure of yourself last night, when you left me on the curb. I assumed you’d manage somehow. And here you are. So close, but not quite.” I carefully returned the documents to their place, hit the power locks and let myself out of the car. “Although, I think it’s cheating to harass my coworkers.”

“I hardly harassed him, considering what I’m capable of.”

“You’re right. Ben could be eviscerated and hanging from the streetlight.”

Now for the tricky part. I needed the alarm to switch back on to complete this plan. Raven was observant, and even the slightest thing out of place was bound to catch her eye. Come on bad luck, don’t fail me now. I snapped my fingers, but nothing happened. Shit.

“What are you doing, Jinx?”

“You can’t sense my emotions over the phone, can you?”

“No, I can not.”

“So for once we’re on a level playing field.” I tapped the windshield, releasing a flash of pink sparks. Come on, dammit. “We should have conversations like this more often.”

“I can, however, sense that you’re preoccupied.”

“Right, right.” I kicked the tire, giving an extra umph of magic, and the little red light turned on. Yes! “I’m just standing over by your car, wondering how motivated you are to watch this dance.”

And not three seconds later, Raven appeared out of thin air, dressed to kill.

“That’s pretty motivated,” I said, phone still to my ear while I took her in. Leather jacket, v-neck button-up, skinny jeans and boots. Black on black, as if the color existed only for her. She’d upped her game this evening. “Hi.”
“Hi.” Such ire crammed into one syllable. That’s the Raven I knew. Better rub more salt in those open wounds.

“Well, you finally found me.” I put away my phone, stuffed both hands in my coat pockets and rocked back on my heels like the sarcastic, insolent little shit she used to deal with in my Hive days. “What now?”

Raven stared, like always, stoic expression betraying nothing. A gust caught the ends of her hair and lifted it over her shoulder, exposing the line of her jaw and neck. Why that particular spot fascinated me I couldn’t say, but the compulsion to taste her smooth, soft skin made my mouth water.

“Are you interested in watching a show?” she said.

“A movie?”

“Live theatre.”

Interesting. “As long as it’s not a one man show.”

“Hardly,” she said. “But it’s in San Francisco.”

“Uh. That’s a five hour drive away.”

She extended her hand. “Only a moment, actually.”

My chest tightened. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but I’d rather hurl myself into oncoming traffic than experience that creepy darkness again.”

She chuckled. “It’s not always like that. I made it intentionally unpleasant.”

“Intentionally?”
“At the time you were annoying.”

Fair enough. But I’d just spent the entire day purposely annoying her, and now she expected me to believe she wasn’t going to make this time unpleasant?

“Trust me,” she said. As if that wasn’t the most absurd concept currently in existence.

And like an idiot, I took her hand.

O.O.O.O.O

One moment we were behind the bar, then with the seamlessness of a blink, we stood on the sidewalk outside a brick building. How far had we travelled? The temperature and humidity change certainly felt like San Francisco, but we could potentially be anywhere.

“Was that to your liking?”

“You don’t have to sound so smug about it.” I looked over the building again. Blacked out windows, no signs, and a non-descript steel door. “Is this the theatre?”

“They like to keep things intimate.” Raven held the door open for me, though the motive behind this habit remained unclear. Was she being courteous? Was this persuasion? Subtle manipulation? And did it really matter, considering the things I’ve already accepted about this long lost Titan?

Inside, club music thumped at a manageable level, some familiar song remixed into oblivion. Dove grey walls and a concrete floor scattered with low couches and benches. A few dozen people lounged about, cradling drinks and glasses of wine. Two heavy tapestries hung on the far wall, the blues and reds of a dusky night sky. It didn’t seem like the lobby of a theatre. In fact, it felt like one of many clubs I had frequented in my younger years.

Then a woman walked past wearing a translucent muslin wrap that only held her breasts in place by some divine will. I triple-blinked. She straddled a man’s lap and proceeded to devour him like he was made of candy and they were the only two people in the world.
Huh.

My gaze jumped to another woman on a couch, her feet propped on someone in a full-body latex suit, knelt on all fours like an ottoman. Near the front door, a man in fishnets and a corset handed out pamphlets. Someone walked by with a pinup girl on a leash. Arousing anxiety twisted my stomach. One of the tapestries shifted, revealing a doorway as two men emerged with drink trays, clad in leather strips and chains that left little to the imagination.

Raven moved up beside me, hands in her pockets, as if the embodiment of casual.

I swallowed. “When you said live theatre you didn’t mean Broadway, did you?”

“I didn’t specify.”

“No fucking shit.”

She tilted her head. “Does this make you uncomfortable?”

“You can’t ask that right after I’m blindsided by a fetish club. I was expecting a Tennessee Williams production—a musical. Something else.”

“You’re right, I should’ve given more of an explanation. I just assumed you’d manage. You seemed so sure of yourself, after all.”

She would be the death of me.

“Raven!” A breathtaking Indian woman glided towards us. In her late-thirties, with long black hair spilling over an intricate red and black sari. “So good to see you again,” she said, posh English accent smooth as cream. “And you brought someone. Excellent.”

“A friend.” Raven’s tone held more possession than the term required.
“I see.” She continued to dissect me with a dreadfully unnerving gaze. “I’m Veronica.”

“Jen.” I hoped my smile didn’t come across nervous. I wasn’t a prude by any means. My work experience exposed me to all manner of freaks. But I felt out of my element in this place—especially with Raven—and wasn’t afraid to tuck tail and run if it came to it. Some badass super villain I turned out to be.

“Pleasure.” Veronica gestured to the room. “Planning on a quiet evening together?”

“A little more quiet,” Raven said. “If there’s room.”

“My dear, there is always room for you. This way.” She headed for the tapestries at a determined pace. Too determined.

My feet remained welded to the floor, seemingly the only thing left in me with any sense.

Raven waited beside me, illogically composed for the situation. “Are you coming, Jinx?”

Heat spread across me, radiating in time with my throbbing heart. I wanted to. Jesus Christ, despite all rationale I wanted to, and that was petrifying. I hadn’t prepared for this, let alone this level of mind fuck. Should have known better trying to outdo a freaking demon. What was I getting myself into?

Veronica pulled the tapestry aside, waiting expectantly. Another example of subliminal manipulation. Come this way, Jinx. See? I’m holding the door open in a gesture of good will.

Well. If I didn’t make it out of here, at least it would be a good death. Right?

“I won’t let anything happen to you,” Raven said. “Scout’s Honor.”

“You were never a scout.”

“Titan’s honor?”
“You beat the shit out of your team leader before quitting.”

She flashed a thousand-watt smile, level of charm well into the realm of demonic. “But I didn’t kill him. Are you coming?”

“Unfortunately, yes.” I followed her to Veronica, who’d watched our interaction, aware and amused. The thump of the house music faded as she led the way past door after door until settling on one.

“What would you like to drink?” she said.

Drink? We were swarming in leather and latex and this woman thought I needed lowered inhibitions? No fucking way. “Coffee, please. Espresso if you have it.” Awake. I needed to be awake and alert.

She turned to Raven. “The usual?”

“Please,” she said. Purred.

Veronica opened the door. “Make yourself comfortable.”

We stepped into a dimly lit space. Love seats lined three of the walls, surrounding a large bed in the center of the room. No head or footboard, but four thick posts rose from the corners and crossed about the mattress, providing a stunning visual. A closed armoire centered the last wall, flanked on either side by sliding doors. Soft music played, methodical drums and strings. If they really were going for live theater, they’d nailed the atmosphere.

Raven led us to a vacant couch on the far side of the room and settled down as if this were her favorite spot in the world. She looked up at me, expression neutral. The closest she could get to non-threatening. She really wanted me to stay and was trying not to scare me off. Not a comforting notion. I sank into the distressed leather beside her, close but not touching.

Adjacent to us, a man and woman curled up together, lost in their own little world. Another couch housed two women, both assessing me with a discerning gaze. Six couches in total, all close enough to the bed that whatever happened would be live and unfiltered. I’d been to a few small venues, but
this all seemed a little . . . intimate.

I cleared my throat. “Do you come here often?”

“Now and then.” Raven crossed her legs and rested her arm behind me on the back of the couch. The body language was not lost on me.

“Enough that you get free seats?”

She gave a non-committal shrug, which might as well translate to free seats for life.

“You’re being awfully evasive, Raven.”

Veronica reappeared, balancing a tray in her hand. She extended a saucer and cup towards me. “Your coffee, Jen.”

“Thank you.” I set the saucer on my knee, holding the delicate porcelain with both hands. The aroma suggested a bold brew that would hopefully take the edge off my jitters in a way only caffeine could manage. Or perhaps make them worse. At least it gave me something to do with my hands.

Veronica extended a matching cup and saucer to Raven, who took it with a gracious smile. Gracious and so very unsettling.

“I hope you both enjoy your evening.” Veronica’s gaze ran over me before she left.

I blinked. Looked to Raven. “What the fuck is about to happen?”

“A scene between consenting adults.” She pinched her cup between her index finger and thumb, and brought it to her lips. “But if you change your mind, just say the word and I’ll take you home.”

“The word? Did you just make a safe word pun?”
“No, I used a common idiom.” She looked over her cup as she sipped. “You’re being awfully paranoid, Jinx. Relax.”

What the fuck? Relax?

The lights dimmed and music changed. Less drums, more strings, to match my stuttering heart.

The door to the left of the armoire slid open. A woman glided towards us in a black dress with long, flowing sleeves. Pale skin, brown hair pulled back in a braid, she circled the four-post bed, making eye contact with everyone, one by one. She lingered on Raven with a secret smile. When she looked to me, that smile blossomed into a full-blown grin.

Not a good sign.

Raven leaned in. “Her name’s Sara.”

On a first name basis with the performers. Also not a good sign.

Barefoot, Sara drifted around the bed in a tasteful, mesmerizing dance. Classically trained and conditioned to meld her body with the ethereal howl of a lone violin. Some of the tension eased from my shoulders. Maybe this wasn’t what I’d thought it was. Maybe I should relax.

With a sharp squeal of the strings, the other door slid open. Veronica emerged, having traded her sari for skin-tight pants and a loose white tunic. Long hair snug in a French braid, channeling androgyny with startling confidence, she moved towards Sara, hunger palpable with each stride.

At the last moment Sara darted out of reach, light on her feet with a dancer’s grace. She circled the bed, placing it between them.

Veronica’s lips quirked, a smile that said, oh, you shouldn’t have done that. She moved clockwise around the bed, slow and purposeful, while Sara mirrored the movement, keeping her distance. A spellbinding display of power and elegance, scored now by tandem violins.

Then Veronica angled towards the armoire, shifting her focus from Sara. She opened the doors wide,
revealing a collection of whips, switches, and all manner of squirm-worthy implements.

Never mind. This was definitely what I’d thought. Back to not relaxing—never relaxing again until the end the days.

She took her time perusing, touching each item in consideration while Sara paced at the foot of the bed, watching her every move. Veronica turned, revealing a length of leather cord. So simple and mundane. Innocuous.

“Come here,” she said.

Sara froze, clutching the bedpost for dear life.

Music filled the silence, tension growing with each note.

Veronica folded the binding on its self and pulled it taught with a snap.

Sara winced.

I winced.

“Now, Sara.”

Slowly, she took a step. Then another. Conflict rippled across her, from the clench of her jaw to the curling of her toes. But whatever would come of this encounter, it wasn’t fear that had Sara trembling before that imposing woman. It was rapt anticipation. She wanted this.

And Veronica knew. “Turn around.”

She tensed at the command. Veronica watched the rebellion, raising her chin in challenge. Are you sure?
Still, she refused.

Veronica trailed her free hand down Sara’s arm, delicate and purposeful. With a simple twist, she wrenched her wrist at a sharp angle, and Sara dropped to one knee with a gasp.

“No, no.” Veronica twined her fingers in her hair, half caress, half threat. “I didn’t tell you to kneel.”

“And?” Sara growled.

“You’re in a mood today.” Hand fisted in hair, Veronica yanked the woman to her feet, arm locked behind her back. “We’ll have to remedy this.” Pushed her towards the bed and slammed her to the nearest post, earning a moan from Sara.

Oh, god. The coffee cup jiggled loudly in my lap. Raven placed her hand over mine, muffling the clatter.

While I knew this was an act, a display that both participants eagerly enjoyed, I couldn’t help the god-awful anxiety. This was the dance Raven had spoken of. The long, slow burn. A smoldering ache that never died, no matter the time or distance from the source. She’d been thinking of this dance with me for a decade, wallowing in unanswered questions, all the while holding out for the possibility. To someone like Raven, nothing tasted as delicious as delayed gratification, and for her that time had finally come.

Fuck me.

Sara struggled for a moment, cheek pressed to the dark wood. When she stilled, Veronica released her grip and spun Sara to face her. Though roughly the same size, Veronica seemed to tower over her. “Give me your hands.”

Sara allowed her wrists to be bound with the leather cord, raised above her head, and tied to a metal ring bolted to the bedpost. Stretched and on display, willing, eager, and vulnerable. An act of submission to sate her desires.

For a few precious seconds, Veronica’s intensity eased. She lingered in that closeness, traced the line of Sara’s jaw, down her neck, across collarbone and shoulder. “Very good.”
I shifted, reminding myself to unlock my own jaw before I shattered my molars.

Veronica reached into her back pocket, retrieving a strip of cloth. Another seemingly benign object that rendered Sara to stillness. Her gaze flickered from the blindfold, to Veronica, to the door in a barrage of emotions.

“Do you have something to say?”

Sara wet her lips, holding eye contact.

“I see. Maybe this will change your mind.” Veronica slipped the cloth over her eyes and backed away, movement masked by the building music. As the minutes dragged, Sara snarled and thrashed. Turned her head left, then right. Jerked her bound wrists with growing desperation while Veronica circled, predatory and calculating.

Raven remained maddeningly placid despite my surging emotions. Probably eating this up like prime fucking rib, the sadist.

Veronica eased up to the bound woman and firmly planted her palm between Sara’s legs. She gasped, rolling her hips into the contact before Veronica pulled away.

“Do you have something to say?”

Sara remained silent, shoulders heaving, chin high in defiance.

Veronica’s hand connected with her cheek hard enough to wrench her head to the side.

Sara hissed, ending in a low, throaty groan. “No, mistress.”

Veronica pulled another object out of her pocket, something metallic that caught the light. A knife.
Alarm crept through me, followed by startling anticipation. Raven sat calmly beside me, no more visibly excited than if she were attending a history lecture. I’d never been so aroused in my entire life. And she knew. Goddamnit, she knew.

“Don’t move.” Veronica traced the knife along the woman’s throat.

Sara froze. The tip of the blade dipped below the material of her dress, parting it effortlessly between her breasts. Veronica tilted her head, tracing the newly exposed skin with her fingertips. Sara bit her bottom lip, arching into the contact.

Veronica moved her hand away. “Don’t. Move.”

Sara worked her jaw. Nodded faintly, quivering on the verge of explosion.

“Turn around.”

She shifted her feet, turning to face the bedpost. The blade traced the back of Sara’s neck, trailed beneath her dress, slicing down, down, down. The curve of her spine now exposed, Veronica slipped her hand across that pale skin, her own darker tone in fascinating contrast.

“Tell me what you want,” Veronica said.

But Sara only tensed further, chest rising and falling with increasing urgency.

Veronica eased away, tearing a ragged sound from Sara as she tried to follow.

“Wait!” She panted, desperate.

If only she could see Veronica’s smile. “Yes, Sara?”

“I need . . .” She squirmed, grinding her hips against the post. “Please.”
“Please, what?”

“Please touch me. Make me come.”

*Jesus Christ, hold it together, Jinx.*

Veronica leaned in, lips brushing along Sara’s neck, and murmured things far too softly for me to hear. Then her hand slipped around Sara’s waist and disappeared between her trembling legs. Sara bucked and writhed between the post and Veronica, frantic and unraveling and unabashedly vulnerable. When she finally climaxed, primal sound tearing from her in the epitome of ecstasy, I was amazed I hadn’t spontaneously combusted.

“Shh,” Veronica soothed in Sara’s ear, bringing her down. “You did very well.” With a few tugs, she’d released the binds from the post and Sara fell pliant in her arms. Veronica helped her onto the bed and allowed the woman to curl into her lap, caressing her back and shoulders with startling tenderness. All the while staring at me.

I stared right back, unhinged and seconds from bolting.

Raven touched my knee, startling me. “Are you all right?”

*Absofuckinglutely not.*

I cleared my throat. “I need some air.”

Raven stood. I set my forgotten coffee on the arm of the couch and took her offered hand, not entirely confident my legs would support me after being clutched together with nuclear fusion. The other couples remained in their seats, watching us with interest. Did they think I was next? I pointedly ignored Veronica and headed for the door.

Outside, the cold fresh air burned by lungs in a welcomed reprieve. I paced the sidewalk, trying to ease the throb between my legs. Raven waited, lips curved and eyes dark.

“You’re an asshole,” I said.
“I know.”

I pointed to the club. “That—it—she—” I didn’t even know what to say. There wasn’t language for the feelings churning inside me.

Her smile grew.

I wanted to ravage her. To be ravaged. Wanted to slip into the darkness with her. My skin itched for her touch, for pressure and release. It didn’t matter what happened, so long as it happened immediately before I imploded.

“Take us back.” I held out my hand. “Now.”

She took it, and the world went dark and sideways. A heartbeat later we stood beside my car on the deserted street. I snatched her by the jacket and pressed my lips against hers. My free hand gripped the hair at the back of her neck, keeping her close. Her scent and warmth hit me hard. Our tongues met, sending a jolt through my synapsis and momentarily rendering me inoperable.

“You’re an asshole,” I panted against her lips. “That was torture.”

“You managed somehow.” Her gaze darkened. “And here you are. So close, but not quite.” Raven ghosted out of my hands, disappearing in the wind.

She would be the fucking death of me.

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