

Chapter 1

It was the first time she felt the rush and horror of killing. Feeling the brisk winter breeze ruffle her frizzy black hair. The warmth of the blood on her hands and her pale skin oozed downwards, sticking to the cracks and crevices on her body, wrapping itself around her like a warm blanket to shield her from the cold. The voice in her head praising her for a job well done. She bit her blood covered finger and giggled to herself, filling her mouth with the taste of metal and concrete. A dark smile crept across her face as she made the shape of a gun with her fingers and playfully blasted the still corpse beside her. A thick puddle of blood and intestines gathered, tangled together on the wet pavement like vines on a dying tree. The eyes of her kill still open wide, as if staring into the very essence of her dead soul. His mouth twisted, forever stuck in a never ending cycle of pain and fear. The sound of car horns and sirens cried from the city behind her.

Shortly after dumping the body into the deep bowels of the Hudson River, she made her way back towards the city, it was only the early breaths of the morning and the sun had yet to rise its yawning head. But the city that never slept consistently lived up to its reputation. To her surprise it took little effort to dispose of the man she had just killed. Throwing his body into the throws of the icing river would do most of the work for her. While the blood stained pavement would soon be washed off the sin she had just committed thanks to the rising sun that would melt the snow and ice away in just a few short hours. She had gotten back to the city so quickly. It was as if she had been walking on the air the entire journey back. Her mind was clear, not giving a second thought to what had just transpired. She was free. As she pranced back into the never

resting streets the gaze of curious pedestrians met her own. She returned those looks with flirtatious winks and lip licking. I suppose it was not too off putting to see someone walking through the streets of New York, covered in blood, even in the middle of the winter season, so close to Christmas, especially at this hour. The city was full of strange characters.

Smearred velvet stained her cheeks and dug underneath her fingernails like dirt. Her fingers looked as if they had been claimed by frostbite. Her oversized sweater hung off one shoulder, small tears and rips revealed her flat stomach. Her dark blue jeans clung to her skin like tape, fashionable holes formed comfortable circles around her knees. Her favorite pair of converse were stained with tiny drops of blood at the white tip. Although it was not her choice of fashion and blood soaked attire that garnered most of the stares she received. You could thank her abnormal beauty for the attention.

She stopped abruptly in front of a small shop labeled 'Candy Land'. The enigmatic, flashing red sign drilled itself into her skull, filling in the whites of her eyes with red. There was nothing special in particular about this shop; but the consistent gleam of the bright light seemed to take hold of something inside of her. The title of the shop was seemingly misleading, as there was no candy to be seen through the dark windows. In fact, nothing could be seen at all, the shop was empty. All but an old table and a few broken chairs called this place home. As she looked closer through the glass she saw what she believed to be a person weaving through the shadows. Their silhouette only roughly visible thanks to the sign above. Whoever she might have seen had vanished in an instant and the small shop became a silent brick house, draped in cold mystery once again. Must have been her mind playing tricks on her in the wake of an exhilarating night.

She rarely came out to this side of the city, so close to the water. Looking up and down the crowded and busy streets she seductively waved her hips and hands, hoping to catch the

attention of a cab with wandering eyes. She had a body to match the beauty. It worked. Almost five cabs rushed to pick up the bloody girl. The sound of screeching tires grinding against the pavement filled the air. Citizens swiftly twisted and turned their body out the way as the cabs nearly crashed into one another, nearly over running the sidewalks. As she waved her hand slowly in the air, the shape of her body became more clear than it had been before. Men and women both turned their necks so quickly to look at as they walked by, they nearly obtained whiplash. She was so alluring to those around her, even the cab drivers ran like they were in heat just to give her a ride. With a smirk on her face, biting her lower lip she entered the nearest cab, slamming the door behind her. The driver was burly. Stubble lining his jaw and neck. You could say he was in his mid 40's. He shyly eyed the peculiar girl in his back seat.

“So.. Where to doll?” he asked in typical New York fashion.

She crossed her skinny legs. Her dark blue skinny jeans dipped in red that was now drying. Spots of pale skin poking through the holes in her knees. She pulled out \$25 from the small bag slung across her chest and shoulder, quickly handing it to the man.

“East village, i'm in a bit of a hurry” she said, voice as smooth as silk.

“I take it fast and rough is good for you?” the driver asked.

“Oh that's just how I like it big boy” she said with a bright smile as the cab quickly sped from the curb in front of Candy Land and disappeared into a sea of metal and smoke.

The sun was making its way down and the chill in the air was biting harder as the cab pulled up to a gorgeous apartment building. The bricks were all white and sparkled underneath the winking stars and city lights. The double doors were black with silver hands. Even the stairs

and surrounding buildings and streets were spotless. The young killer quickly opened the cab door but paused as she was about to run out.

“Thanks for the ride doll” she said sweetly as she softly kissed the man's cheek.

Done with her task she paced out of the cab and gently made her way up the stairs and through the black doors. The cab driver couldn't keep his eyes off of her as he watched her disappear.

“I love New York” the driver whispered as he sped off into the cold.

The beauty lived on the middle floor of the complex. She found the elevator a bit too boring tonight so she decided to pace up several flights of spotless stairs. She hummed the words to one of her favorite songs as she fumbled in her bag for her keys. Finally she stopped in front of a red door with the number thirty one placed on it. It seemed that her door was the only special one in the building. Every other looked completely identical. But Lilith wasn't one for conforming; no, she never wanted to be like everyone else. In fact, her entire life she had been *different*. So she just ran with that label, carved it into her identity, making it a part of who she was. The day she moved into this prestigious building, with the sounds of classic 90's rock to keep her company, she painted this door a beautiful amber red color. She never knew why she chose that color, she just says it sort of spoke to her when people ask. She placed the key into the lock and quickly turned the door knob.

“Shower, shower, shower” she whispered to herself as she entered the room behind the door. It was a gorgeous apartment. One that a normal person would not be able to afford unless they were made of money. Everything was either black, grey or white. Her favorite colors. The entrance faced a small hallway, she placed her bag and keys on a marble black stand and made her way into the heart of the apartment. The hallway opened up into one large studio. There was

a kitchen to the far left and a bathroom behind its walls. A bed/living room made up the remainder of the home.

She quickly began to undress. Kicking off her black converse as she slowly pulled down her blood stained jeans, revealing smooth and spotless pale skin. Next she quickly removed her oversized black knit sweater. Her slim fingers and hands were still dressed in dry blood. There she stood, half naked in all black lingerie that you could almost see through if you strained your eyes enough. It was impossible for someone to be capable of harboring such beauty and physique. But she wielded both masterfully. Two clear, grey eyes sat indented in her skull. Somehow her makeup was still perfect after everything. Her legs were long and skinny, like the beautiful models you see walking the runway during fashion week. Her waist was slim and her stomach flat. Her chest was not the biggest, in fact it was quite small but it was just perfect for her. Her arms matched her long legs, although they housed dozens of horizontal and vertical scars on each wrist. Her fingers ran through frizzy hair that dropped atop her freckled shoulders. Although she was pretty, to more realistic eyes she would take on the appearance of someone who was sick. A girl that hadn't slept or ate properly in quite some time. But no one seemed to see her realistically as of late.

She looked towards the white, glossy counter in the kitchen to see her phone light up and quickly fade back to sleep. Someone had left her a voicemail.

"There you are" she spoke with relief. Her cell phone lay face down on the counter. "I thought I threw it in the river with that dead guy".

She quickly picked it up to see who was trying to contact her. Her eyes narrowed as she looked at the screen.

"Ugh" she said in disgust.

A missed call. It was her mother.

She jumped to sit on the counter as she listened to the voicemail.

“Lilith? Honey, it has been over a week and your father and I haven’t heard from you” the woman spoke.

Lilith’s face was deformed in sickness as she listened to her mother. Mocking every word she was saying.

“Your psychiatrist called as well, you’ve been skipping your meetings.... Have you been taking your medication? Is everything alright? Please honey, we know you’re an *adult* but we’re worried about you. Call us, okay Lilly. I love you baby” the voice cracked and flatlined as the message ended.

Lilith sat quietly on the kitchen counter, her legs swaying back and forth over the edge. The room sat quiet for a few minutes. Only the sound of the living city broke through the perfectly crafted walls.

“SHUT UP” she suddenly screamed.

But no one else was around.

She wrapped her arms around herself.

“I KNOW what I did. YOU told me to do it, so don’t blame ME” her screams echoed throughout the dark apartment.

She bounced off the counter and paced over to a small cabinet behind her. From inside she pulled out two small, orange colored bottles.

“If I take these then you’ll get the fuck out” she whispered to herself as she began to open the bottles.

But she suddenly stopped. She dropped to the floor and burst out into laughter. Covering her face with her dry palms.

“We killed him, that’s right,” she admitted through the laughter.

“We killed him, we killed him, we killed him, WE KILLED HIM, WE KILLED HIM”

She paced back and forth, her bare feet colliding with the floor beneath her in consistent strides. Suddenly she stopped as she looked through the window. Her reflection beamed the brightest smile back at her as she looked on. Her eyes were a beautiful, burning amber color. They dug through her skin and into her veins. Suddenly her reflection was covered in blood. It ran down her body and dripped onto the floor. Drip, drip. “You.. No, it was YOU” She manically pawed at her face, trying desperately to wipe the blood from it. But as she looked at her hands, they were dry and bare. “You, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you..”

It was almost like she was singing a song. Each time she said the words her voice grew louder, each time she said the words the water in her eyes swelled up a little bit more. Until it was impossible to hold back the flood. Lilith burst into a violent cry. The makeup on her eyes and face mixed with the dry blood already in place. It ran down her white skin in streams. Like an untouched river in a quiet forest. She rocked back and forth, crashing against the wooden cabinets behind her.

Until she suddenly stopped. Slowly she picked herself up from the ground and pushed her hair back with her hands.

“Well, time to shower, shower, shower” she said as she danced into the bathroom. Closing the door behind her. The sounds in her head grew quiet as she gently turned the knob of the shower on. Piping hot water quickly streamed out the shower head, filling the small room with a thick layer of mist. She jumped into the boiling liquid, barely remembering that she was

naked. She tilted her head under the water, letting it run through her flowing hair and gentle skin. Her eyes, wide open, stared down at the tub floor. Her feet were still protected by her favorite pair of converse. She smiled as she watched the blood slowly become cleansed from her treasured shoes. The blood cleanly mixed with the scalding water, slowly circling around and around the drain. Until it was no longer visible any longer. As she stood in the shower, Lilith felt a weight being lifted from her soul. The blood in her veins had settled. What had once been crowding itself in her mind had been replaced with a thick, foggy haze of confusion.

“Why the hell do I have shoes on in the shower?” She asked herself in an annoyed tone.

The red aura radiating from the clock continued to blink ‘12:00 A.M’. The city outside is still wide awake. It never seemed to sleep, neither did Lilith . Most nights she would wake up, usually drenched in sweat, unable to recall anything before her slumber. This night was no different. She cleared her face of sweat as she sat still, atop the window frame. Watching as her breath clung to glass and disappeared as quickly as it came. Her face was bare of all makeup, yet she was as beautiful as the young sun greeting the morning. The only thing covering her body being a snug, wool blanket.

She sniffled as tears began to flow down her pale cheeks. Her hand catching them like a net.

“When will this end?” she muttered to herself.

Suddenly a small rattling noise rose from the frame her delicate feet were planted on. Her phone. A small smirk carefully leaked out from the corner of her mouth as she bit down on her pink lips. In a swift motion she was dressed and out the door. The streets were lit in a low,

orange light. The sky full of clouds, protecting the city with a sheet of endless grey. But slivers of darkness found salvation among the hidden cracks and countless alleyways.

Her black mane wrapped in a messy bun, she wore a long black sweater, edges frayed and worn. Dark blue skinny jeans and black converse. Wherever she was going, she would be going comfortably. The destination took her to the edge of the village, a place she frequented quite often. The buildings were beautiful, much more so under the low light of the city. With small, carefully planted trees racing up and down the streets. Some buildings were dressed in red brick, while others with wood. Some even wore wild vines on them. It was a peaceful and quiet place. A break from the rush of typical city life.

She paced up a flight of concrete stairs, connecting to one of the buildings laced in red bricks. She knocked three times and waited for someone to answer the shallow call. A few seconds later the door clicked and turned open. Revealing a young girl. About the same age as Lilith. Red locks pouring from the ponytail she kept it in. She wore a large, grey hoodie, leaving her legs exposed to the brisk night air. Freckles still sleeping on her carefully crafted face, one that housed clear green eyes. She flashed a sweet, warm smile at Lilith.

“Hey there, pretty girl” she spoke sweetly.

The girl with the raven hair smiled as she slowly approached the beautiful fire in front of her. Softly cuffing the girl's face in her pale hands. Their lips connected. Both let out sighs of happiness and comfort.

“Hey there” Lilith spoke between kisses.

The inside of her apartment was spotless. Every book tucked neatly into its bed on the perfectly crafted shelves lining the maroon walls, every article of clothing neatly folded away or

hung up in the closets. Pictures of her parents and siblings decorated the hallway behind the door. The hardwood floors glistened under the moonlight, kissing the low orange glow of the lamps. Before making her way into the small living room, Lilith quickly removed her shoes, her firecracker hated mud trackers. Small noises could be heard leaking from the bright screen mounted on the wall.

A large, dark brown couch surrounded the room in a cozy circle. The cutest wool blanket and small pillows were sprawled across it. She must have fallen asleep down here, again, Lilith thought to herself. In the center of the room sat a small, glass table. Video games and magazines with Japanese anime characters were neatly tucked on the bottom shelf of the table. In a black vase rested flowers, with beautiful pink petals floating above the stem. Sakura flowers, cherry blossoms sprouted from the seeds the two of them brought back from their visit to Tokyo last spring.

Lilith loved this small, cozy home. She loved how Ella always smelled so sweet, the scent seemed to flow throughout the entire building. It was nothing like her apartment, cold and dripping in loneliness. Lilith spent most of her time here, rarely leaving for a change of clothes or for food. She felt safer and more at home in this space than anywhere else in the world. She had Ella to thank for that feeling.

“Want some tea?” the redhead asked. Her voice was as soft as cotton.

“I would love some” Lilith spoke as she skipped over to the red head.

Wrapping her arms around her other half as she prepared the kettle on the stove. Why didn’t she come here earlier? She buried her face in the grey sweater.

“And what are you pouting about?” the ginger teased. “And where have you been all day? I called twice”

“I, was um.. doing homework?” Lilith spoke through a mouth full of hoodie cloth. She surprisingly couldn’t remember what exactly she had been doing before coming here.

“Oh sure, that’s where you were” she giggled.

Lilith quickly darted towards the chair beside the girl and took a seat.

“I was... busy. Y’know my life is busy” she said carefully. “I’m glad you asked me to come over tonight though. I missed that sexy, red bush you got going on up there” she teased as she looked down, “And there”

“STOP” the redhead shouted playfully. As she smacked Lilith on the shoulder.

“It’s your fault Ella. You make it impossible NOT to love you”

Ella’s skin was suddenly brightened. Her cheeks filled with the heat of the sun. When she was nervous, she would cross her legs as she bounced on the tips of her toes. All while doing her best to avoid eye contact. The special thing about it is that no one but Lilith made her resort to such self comforting tactics. She loved that. She slowly turned towards her raven haired angel, edging closer and closer, until she could smell the scent of oranges on her neck. Lilith always smelled like them, it made Ella feel safe when they were like this.

“Getting awfully close, aren’t we princess?” Lilith prosed.

“You’re seriously gonna turn me away, make the princess cry? It’s my castle y’know, you can’t be mean to royalty here” Ella teased.

“Well look at you! My empowered and go get ‘em attitude must be rubbing off on you. Who said I wasn’t a good influence?”

Their lips were inches apart. Breathing becoming unsteady under the weight of wanting to taste each other again. The kettle began to cry with steam and heat. Without taking her eyes away from Lilith, Ella carefully turned off the heat of the stove. Lilith’s slender hands

drove across her soft stomach, underneath the hoodie that was housing her skin. A soft sigh ran from Ella's lips, right into Lilith's ears.

"Should I gooooo, lower" Lilith whispered, a smirk sketched across her lips.

Ella could no longer fight or resist. She carefully guided Lilith's hand underneath the black shorts covering her thighs. Her entire body quivered. It was like a jolt of electricity was sent flying through her entire body. As the pulsing between her thighs picked up pace, her legs began to weaken, shaking as if she were left out in the cold streets of the city.

Ella wrapped her hands around her lover, her hips swaying back and forth. Suddenly both were standing in the middle of the kitchen. Their lips intertwined. Sweet sighs and echoed over the voices on the television. Taking Lilith's hand, she led them to the couch in the living room. Where the two of them sat, face to face.

"Are you sure?" Lilith asked as she gently rubbed Ella's cheek.

Her vision of Ella's face became blocked as the grey hoodie flew in front of her face and onto the floor. Revealing the naked, freckled chest of the woman she loved.

"I'm sure" Ella nodded, her smile could cut through the thickest darkness.

Lilith quickly undressed, revealing herself to her love for the first time. Both started at each other. In awe of what was being presented right in front of their eyes. The moment that both had only dreamed of was unfolding, like a page straight out of a love story. The warmth of the orange lights and television glow tickled their naked skin. Lilith ran her hands up and down Ella's freckled arms.

She always did know how to moisturize she thought to herself. She carefully ran her fingers across her small breasts, causing Ella to let out a soft sigh from the cold touch. She leaned in and felt her lips collide with Ella's skin. Carefully guiding her until her back met the

surface of the couch as her black hair trickled Ella's freckled nose. Both giggled before their lips collided once more.

Lilith could feel the redhead's body tremble again as she placed her fingers back between her legs. The warmth of each other's bodies was all they needed. They swayed back and forth, through sighs and moans of pleasure and the promise of more to come. Ella bit down on her lip as she felt the tip of Lilith's tongue sneak between her legs.

"Sneaky" she laughed.

This night felt like it could last forever for the two of them. Nothing else mattered. In this exact moment, with Ella, Lilith was free. While underneath that river of red and black, she could feel the weight on her mind lighten.

"I love you, El" she said as she came up for air.

"I love you more.."

"Not possible"

The two girls lay there. Bodies intertwined as the sun rose over the city and rays of light crept through the silk masking the windows of the apartment. Freckles of snow formed in tiny crystals in the sunlight outside. Making the room resemble the inside of a glacier hit by bright light. Lilith was wide awake, watching her love sleep silently and peacefully. Her fingers ran through sun kissed hair.

Suddenly her heart began to race and the time itself seemed to freeze in her mind. She could hear the deep thump of the blood bumping, like war drums in her ears. But the pressure didn't belong to her.

“Do you feel that?” the ever so present voice in her head spoke in voice dripping in lust and hunger. “The hunger... it grows inside of you. Why deny what it is that you desire? A small taste would be enough to fill the hole in your stomach” The sound of this voice made Lilith’s bones rattle underneath her skin, sending a chill so cold that it froze the very blood pumping through her veins.

What was this feeling Lilith thought to herself? What was this hunger, this overwhelming need for the warmth of blood on her tongue? Drool began to leak out of the corner of her mouth. Her breathing became uneven, heavier and faster. The urge to harm the dreaming girl beside her was proving too much to hold back.

“I-I can’t” she whimpered through clenched teeth. It was like something was fighting for control of her body and she was losing.

She inched closer to the sleeping girl. Her mouth clicks away from her. Slowly Lilith’s tongue ran up and down the girl’s neck. The taste of her soft, unblemished skin was euphoric in Lilith’s mouth as she moaned with the utmost pleasure.

“More” the voice sang. “Imagine the blood streaming down your throat, the feeling of bliss... You need it, do it” As the voice barked inside of head, fragments of the murder she seemingly committed began to pulse in front of her eyes. Suddenly this feeling became frighteningly familiar to her.

It was taking all of Lilith’s strength not to give in to this unfamiliar impulse. The urge to kill was strong, but this desire for the taste of blood and flesh was new, or so it seemed. Everything was different now, though. This time it was the one person she loved most in this world, not a stranger she could barely remember. The muscles in her neck and arms tightened,

the saliva in her mouth slowly seasoning her hunger. She opened her mouth, no longer able to hold back the impulse.

“What is this, why is this so familiar?” She wondered to herself.

Just as she was about to bite down, the girl began to move and let out a precious yawn. Wiping away the night's rest she had just recovered from. Gently, she grasped Lilith's hand. Just like that the manic hunger that was exploding from her chest was fading. Drifting back to sleep.

“Good morning” Ella spoke with a wide grin.

Lilith smiled as she quickly wiped away the drool from her lips. “You were sleeping like a rock”

Ella's warm eyes began to drift across Lilith's naked body. Stopping at the glossed over scars on her wrists.

“You've never talked about those” she spoke gently as her fingers ran across them.

“That's because I don't really remember them... My parents say they found me one night, on the roof of our building in Manhattan.” Lilith's voice began to drift. “My wrists were cut like this, they think I tried to kill myself... but I can't remember why. I just remember all of the blood around me and my mom screaming, my dad trying to wake me up..”

Ella sat up as she listened to Lilith speak.

“I didn't come back to school for almost a month, remember?”

“So that's why you disappeared? We all just heard that you were sick... If we had known we would ha-” her sentence was cut short by a finger to the lips.

“It's fine Ella. Really.” She quickly pressed her lips against Ella's. “It was a long time ago. I'm all good now, see?” Lilith struck a pose that made Ella burst with laughter.

“Yeah I can see that” she giggled as she locked her fingers with Lilith’s. “But if you ever feel like that again, we’re here for you, please remember that”

“Yeah, yeah I know” Lilith’s words drifted off as the thought of a murder she didn’t remember plagued her mind.

“Now get off of me so I can go and shower. We have class this afternoon”

Lilith raised her hands in defeat as she watched Ella glide over to the bathroom. As the seconds passed she shook herself from her daze and sprinted towards the bathroom. The sound of water splashing and laughter filled their home as the sun gave birth to another day in the city.

Chapter 2

In a steam filled room, Lilith emerged from the shower. Heat and water laced her slender frame as she wiped the mirror in front of her. The itch in the back of her throat was still pulsing. Thumping like a trapped hornet in a glass jar.

“What was that all about before?” she asked herself. Biting down on her lower lip.

The silence was broken by the sound of the sink spewing out cold water as she brushed her teeth. She looked into the mirror to confirm that the brush was doing its job. But she was met by a different vision. Her reflection was indeed in the mirror but her toothbrush was nowhere to be seen. Her reflection stood still, amber eyes gazing into hers.

“What the hell” Lilith slowly reached her fingers out to touch the glass. Her reflection copied her motion but held a dark smile on its face in the same breath.

Suddenly her vision began to crack. Slowly fading in and out like static. A sound cut through Lilith’s ears. Her reflection had its mouth gaped open as it screamed like banshee. Blood ran slowly from its mouth, its amber eyes stretched open and unblinking. Lilith dropped to her knees as she cradled her soaking black head in her hands.

“What is happening”

When she opened her eyes, she found she was no longer in Ella’s bathroom. No, this place was barren and devoid of any life. Blood was sketched on the cracked walls on either side

of her. The floor was wet and smelled of metal. The screeching in her head released her for the moment. Lilith stood there, her body bare.

“Hello?” she shouted into the darkness in front of her. Nothing but the walls were visible to her. Everything in front of her was black, so thick.

Unsure of what to do next, she started to continue forward. Searching for a way out of this place she was relentlessly thrust in. The dark never frightened Lilith, then again nothing ever did. If anything she felt strangely at peace in it. Suddenly she stopped. Footsteps could be heard coming towards her, steadily.

“Is someone there?” She asked the dark.

The footsteps stopped directly behind her. A cold spark sent electricity up Lilith’s spine. She could feel rough, callous hands gliding against her bare skin. A steady breath teasing the hair on the back of her neck.

“You have grown beautiful” a voice spoke. It was clear as day but carried so much weight. Lilith could feel it slamming against her chest. It was highly distinguished, she could feel the weight of what she envisioned as royalty clinging to every word that was spoken. But there was also admiration, a longing that felt familiar to her. Something about this voice was calling out to her. Making her heart ache in a way that she had never felt before.

“Who are you?” she asked in response as she slapped the hands away from her waist.

The unseen man let out a soft chuckle. “All will be revealed, in due time”

“Awfully dodgy aren’t we?”

“I thought it best if I saw you, as you are now” the voice paused. “Now that you have tasted death it is but a matter of time before we are finally reunited”

Lilith realized that she recognized the voice, though she could not quite remember from where.

“This is all in my head... I just forgot to take my meds...” she closed her eyes. “All in your head Lily. Wanting to hurt Ella, this place.... Wake up”

Suddenly she felt those rugged hands close in around her neck gently. The voice now directly in her ear.

“Oh this all very real, I assure you Lilith”

As she opened her eyes she was met with a familiar sight. Familiar amber eyes gazed through her. Lilith could feel the warmth of his skin around her neck. She could feel his grip tightening slowly, making it increasingly difficult to see and breathe. This place wasn’t just a dream or a manifestation of her lucid mind. This man was all too real and he was killing her.

“We will see each other sooner than you think. Just continue to walk the path laid out for you” He whispered in her ear before releasing her.

The air was suddenly filled with the screeches that brought Lilith into that darkness. When she opened her eyes she was facing the same steam laced mirror. She was greeted with a message upon her return.

“What the fuck is happening?” she whispered as she stormed out of the bathroom.

Drawn in the dripping steam was an upside down cross and underneath was but a single word. ‘*Remember*’.

The smell of roses and strawberries filled the room. The space was dancing in old memories and buried secrets, as were most locations on the upper east side. But this home was different. There was a thick layer of pain and sadness underneath all of the fortune and the

illusion of happiness. It made you wonder what kind of void these people were trying to fill. The room was painted a wonderful ruby red as the sun shined through the laced curtains dressing the windows all around. Countless pieces of expensive furniture and art decorated this place, making you feel as if you were walking through a museum.

The sound of people speaking bounced off the walls and echoed through the halls. A rather tall man, dressed in an all black suit stood in the foyer. His light blonde hair was groomed back, his skin fair and smooth. A singular red rose slept in his breast pocket. His amber eyes examining the space that he was in.

“I assume that you know why I am here today?” he asked the couple standing in front of him.

There was a woman, of middle age. Her brown hair woven perfectly in a ponytail on her head. Her elegant blue dress dripping to the floor beneath her. She looked like she was stolen straight from a painting. But her eyes were filled with panic and sadness. The man beside her shared that vision. Though he didn’t share his wife’s beauty, he was still captivating on his own. He wore the mark of money and power very well. Dressed in an all black suit, much like their visitor. The hair on his head seemed to have faded with time but his face was carefully sculpted.

“We are aware but your visit is premature” the bald man spoke.

“Premature?” the blonde man inquired softly. He unlocked a wide smile across his face. “If my information is indeed correct, she has already tasted her first kill. That poor man from the harbor the other night. I assume that you people watch the news?” He spoke in a tone that most would label as arrogant or superior.

The women flinched at the coldness in his voice. “Please, Vincent; if only we could have a little more time” she uttered through her fear.

Vincent shifted his focus to the woman as he clapped his hands together softly. That manic smile still sketched on his face. “Time?” he asked politely.

Her husband swiftly grasped her hand, hoping to calm her in the presence of this mysterious visitor. “Yes, time. We only need but a few more weeks... We simply aren’t prepared” he spoke.

The smile on Vincent’s face formed into a heavy frown. “You have had plenty of time. twenty two years if my math has not led me astray”. He turned to look towards the shaded windows. “She is her child. I trust that you remember the vow made to honor her wishes?”

“You can’t take her from me, not yet” the woman screamed. Tears began to float in her eyes. She was doing her best to hold them back, refusing to let that callous man see the desperation in her soul. The fear shaking her to her very core.

Vincent began to twitch as he slowly pulled the rose from his breast pocket. He twirled it around his lengthy fingers, staring intently at its beauty. “You insects with your sickening obsession with preserving emotions and memories. I must say that it continues to bore me to no end” He tilted his head back to face the couple. It was as if the life from his eyes had been drained instantly. They were nothing but empty, black pits in his skull.

“Arthur, I am becoming quite annoyed. You would do well to hold your wife’s tongue and gain control over her emotions, otherwise I may just pluck it from her pretty mouth. I did not come here to negotiate. You of all people should know how the one I walk with feels. Correct?” The way he spoke was haunting. The weight of each word attempted to thrust through the walls. “Although, I would not be opposed to a bit of fun. Imagine how euphoric the site of blood raining from the ceiling would be” Vincent seemed to command every inch of the room, along with the people inside of it. His stature matched his shifted personality. Wherever this man came

from, he carried the weight and history of that royalty and power with him. And where there is power fear soon follows. He wielded that fear perfectly without ever lifting a finger. A simple look from those deathly amber eyes was enough to bring the couple to their knees.

Arthur quickly stepped in front of his wife, shielding her. Failing to fight back his nerves as his hands shook from the pressure floating throughout the room. Even though he was similar in size to Vincent, he could never dream of overpowering him. He knew exactly what the result of that action would be. “We hear you, Vincent.. But I can’t imagine that she has changed this much since we last saw each other. This type of cruelty is out of character” he spoke in a deep, defeated voice. The strength and courage to look Vincent in the eyes had disappeared from his body.

“So serious you two are. No matter, I will have what I seek in due time. Please don’t do anything idiotic in the meantime. No need for you lot to die an early death” he spoke. Charisma and charm dripping from his mouth. Freeing the room from its gloomy shackles. “As for my partner, neither of you have the right to ever speak or even think of each other. You both forfeited that pleasure when you started all of this. Remember?” The feeling of death’s presence had faded from the room as the air became lighter. Less threatening. “I shall see myself out. Marlow, as radiant as ever. And Arthur, it was such a pleasure to see you after all of this time. Do take care yourself” and with an elegant bow and smile he was gone.

The two stood there in place, unable to move. Still paralyzed from the fear. Suddenly Marlow fell to her knees. Waves of blue and red mixed together on the black marble floor. The levy had broken as the tears flowed from her eyes. Arthur kneeled down beside his broken spouse. Unsure of how to comfort her. Unsure of how to comfort himself. The two of them knew this day would come but for years, they prayed that it never would.

By this time the sun was already fully awake and the streets of the city became packed with bodies. Lilith was slugging along with the masses. She had left Ella's apartment so quickly after what had happened. Her black hair was a frayed mess on her head, still wearing the same clothes from the night before. Her eyes focused on the uncharacteristically spotless concrete blending beneath her feet. Every thought in her head trying to analyze the hunger she felt as she watched her love sleep. Why had she wanted to rip through the veins in her throat and feel the warmth of the blood on her lips and skin? She wanted to know why she felt so close, so familiar around that man, in that dark place. Reality was something that was fleeting for Lilith.

Suddenly the loud snap of bodies colliding filled the air as she stuttered back.

"Shit" she yelled through gritted teeth. "Sorry, I kind of spaced out and forgot where I was for a sec"

Through squinted eyes she looked up. Dressed in an all black suit, a rose placed neatly in its breast pocket home, stood a blonde haired man. He was handsome, she thought, as her eyes looked directly into his. It was like an enchanting spell had been briefly placed over her. His attire was precisely placed over every inch of his tall, slender frame. They fit him perfectly. Underneath his black jacket rested a matching black dress shirt, not a wrinkle in sight. Holding a gentle grip around his collar was a bleeding red tie, resting peacefully on his chest. Sleek black gloves gave his hands comfort as the cold wind of the city blew through everything in its path.

"No need to be sorry darling, the fault is mine" he spoke so charmingly. His gaze tracing over her body like a scanner. He held his pitch black covered hand towards Lilith. "I'm Vincent" Lilith had never heard someone speak with such poise before. Not even her father, who

had become more polished as he aged. Even offering to help her back up proved that he was not from New York.

“Hey, I’m Lilith” she still managed to smile through the headache attempting to burst through her brain. “You’re dressed to impress my friend, special occasion?”

“Oh, just a meeting with a few associates in the area” he chuckled.

The same feeling from the bathroom was coming back to Lilith. Something familiar, a feeling of home.

“I’m sorry, have we met before?” she asked as she rubbed her head.

Vincent tilted his head as if puzzled by the question.

“Man, I’m sorry. I-I just feel like I know you from somewhere”

“I have been told that I have one of those faces” he spoke. That sly smirk began to form across his mouth. “Well, it was a pleasure to meet you Lilith but I am afraid I have to go. Perhaps we will see each other again”

He flashed a wink towards Lilith and quickly disappeared into the cold city streets. Still dazed by the painful encounter, Lilith stood still. Racking through her brain, trying to pull out any memories she might’ve had of the man she had just met. But nothing revealed itself. She was so sure that she had heard that voice before.

“There’s no way. That was just a dream.. Couldn’t be real” She ran her hand through her hair as the wind continued to blow. “Dreams mixing with reality? I seriously need a nap” she whispered as she entered the building beside her.

Across the street, in the cold breath of the season stood Vincent. Carefully watching as Lilith entered her parents' building. He slowly reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone, smiling as he held it to his ear.

"I saw her" he spoke softly.

"Did you feel it" the opposite voice spoke.

"She lacks proper etiquette but yes, I felt the connection" Vincent ran his hand through his silk blonde hair. "Her beauty is beyond measure. The spitting image of you, inf act"

"Do nothing but guide and observe. I will be in the city soon"

"As you wish... I did as you asked and granted them more time with her"

"Make sure her journey goes smoothly and without unnecessary bloodshed. Do what you must to safely guide her"

"I understand" With the press of a button the voice faded from Vincent's ear. Licking his lips, it was if he could taste the blood in the air. Like he could taste the pain and carnage that was arriving as it set is soul on fire. A parade of death flowing through the heart of the city.

As she entered the building that smelled of roses and strawberries a wave of nostalgia washed through her body like a hurricane. Memories of her childhood flashed through her mind as she ran her hand across the walls painted with old photographs. She smiled as she looked at a photo of herself and her parents, when she was just a little girl. Her long, black hair was tied in a neat ponytail. A beautiful, black and white dress covered her small limbs like an elegant blanket. Her tiny body was tucked between her mother and father as they both leaned in to kiss her cheeks. She remembered that day so vividly as she stared at the photo. She remembered

laughing, riding on her father's back like he was a race horse. Her mother chasing after them like a villain after Lilith's treasure.

It was one of the best days of her life, at least one of the only days she could remember clearly before her breakdown years ago. She examined the rest of the space. A fire kept the room nice and toasty, allowing her to remove her coat. Greens and reds laced the room in the form of Christmas decorations. Stockings hung over the fireplace and a gorgeous tree slept in the far corner of the room, in front of windows that greeted the bustling city outside.

"Ho ho ho" she laughed to herself. "Mom? Dad? I'm here, checking in" As she inquired for her missing parents the sound of quick footsteps filled the air. As quickly as she spoke her mother, Marlow, appeared in the room to greet her illusive daughter.

"Goodness Lilith, where have you been?" Marlow scolded as she embraced her daughter tightly.

"Can't breath mom"

"Quiet young lady" she hugged Lilith tighter until her embrace was reciprocated. "You could at least call. Your father and I have been worried sick. Let me look at you" Marlow held Lilith at arms length as she examined the angel in front of her. A soft smile was born onto her face, Lilith could feel the warmth radiating from her eyes.

"Well?" Lilith's voice peaked with curiosity. As much as her mother may have annoyed her, she still loved her with all of her heart.

"As beautiful as ever" Marlow placed her hand on Lilith's cheek. Her touch was smooth against her skin.

"Yeah right" Lilith smiled as she brushed her mother's hand away.

Marlow couldn't help but smile at her daughter's bashful nature. It reminded her of how she was when she was that age. "So where have you been?"

"Don't start mom, please"

"I won't pry honey. We just want to make sure that you're doing ok. You stopped going to your appointments" The tone in Marlow's voice shifted as she spoke to Lilith. "At least tell me that you're taking your medication, it's impor-"

"I know" Lilith quickly interjected. She sighed, her eyes felt heavy from speaking about a topic she had no interest in discussing any longer. "I'm taking them, don't worry. Ella won't let me forget"

She walked over to the giant Christmas tree guarding the window silently. She stood silently as she looked at the city thriving in front of her. The bustling streets guided passersby to their destinations. They all moved like cattle through a concrete jungle, disguised in bright lights, tinsel and joyless celebration. Growing up in this neighborhood was always quiet, lonely too. Everyone in this district came from mountains of money, something Lilith never really cared about. In her mind money made people boring, that went for the children that came from that money as well. Growing up arounds kids she couldn't relate to made Lilith wonder if that's what made it difficult for her to connect with people. Having no one to talk to or to play with until she met Darren, Anya and Ella during her years in elementary school. Normal kids that came from normal families. The thought of them filled her heart with so much love. The opposite effect that this pretentious space had on her.

"Lilith are you listening? Lilith?" her mother's voice had become lost in the sea of her thoughts. She quickly snapped back to reality.

"Sorry, what?"

“Honestly young lady.” Marlow sighed as she placed her hand on her forehead.

“You’re just like your father. Always daydreaming”

“Sorry mom, you were saying?”

“I was saying that you should bring Ella and your friends home for Christmas. We haven’t seen them in so long”

“Sure. I’ll run it by them and let you know. Darren loves your cooking so you can count on him showing up, even if no one else does” Lilith met her mother’s smile with a soft one of her own. Suddenly her forehead wrinkled in thought. “Where’s dad?”

“Oh he’s... resting upstairs. He hasn’t been feeling that well lately” Lilith sensed a cold shift in Marlow’s voice.

“Is everything cool?”

“He just works so hard and worries about you just as hard. You’re his little girl..”

“Yeah” Lilith suddenly couldn’t meet her mother’s gaze as she looked away. “Well, I should get going... I promised Ella and the gang that i’d meet them before class later” She brushed her hair behind her ear before the loose strands could escape, grabbed her coat and made her way to the front door. Marlow followed after her quietly.

“I’ll tell your father that you came by, i’m sure that will help lift his spirits a bit”

“Just... Tell him to rest and not to worry. Tell him that I’m sorry too, for not being around much lately” Lilith pulled her long, wool coat on as she leaned in to hug her mother. “I love you guys. I’ll be better at checking in, promise”

“Promise to keep your word this time?” Marlow asked playfully as she breathed in Lilith’s sweet scent, running her hand through her soft black hair.

“You know me” With a smirk she disappeared behind the door, braving the winter streets.

For a while after she left Marlow stood and watched the door. As if waiting for Lilith to walk back through them. Tears flowed from her eyes as she cried to herself. The sound of wood crackling in the fireplace did its best to hide the whimpers of a heartbroken mother from the ears of the listening and intruding world.

For people as young as Lilith and her friends; New York City was the best place to live, let alone go to University in. Having all grown up together in the city it was only fitting that the four of them enrolled at New York University together four years prior. Now they were all enjoying their last year as undergraduate students.

As the cold tried with all its strength to break through the glass windows surrounding the quiet cafe, Ella sat comfortably on a couch overlooking the busy Manhattan streets. It was almost noon, so the city would be bursting with life more than it already had been soon. Her beautiful crimson hair was actually let loose from its normal restraints as it flowed over her right shoulder. Though in replacement of restraints she wore a wool, dark green hat with a crescent moon stitched in the middle. Her freckles were popping under her eyes and on her nose, seemingly dancing in the twilight of the cold blue showering from the outside as it mixed with the warm interior of the cafe. Her foot paced to beat of the soft music that played, strumming along with the coy guitar riffs and pleasing vocals of the songstress.

“It’s almost noon, where are they?” she questioned as she looked back at the clock hanging next to a picture of Stevie Nicks, who was hugging a person who seemed to be the owner of the cafe. As she looked around similar pictures laced the walls of the building. Actors

and actresses, musicians, artists. So much history surrounded this small cafe that she loved so much. With Ella being an art and music major, it all held a special place in her heart. She had been coming here with her friends since they were teenagers. Which would explain why them being late annoyed her more than it would a stranger on the street.

She looked over towards the door as customers began to file in. In the crowd she spotted her friend Darren. He was a rather tall young man, so he quite literally stood above the crowd. His curly, dark hair fell over his forehead like a blanket. He was rather handsome, as Ella liked to tell him when they were younger. He wore a purple hoodie with slim blue jeans, while his backpack rested over his shoulder. He smiled when he saw Ella waving him over.

“You’re such a tree, she can’t even see me babe” a rather small girl shouted behind Darren. She poked her head out so Ella could see her. The girl was of Asian descent, her cuteness rivaled that of Ella’s. Strands of her green hair slipped out from underneath the yellow hat she wore. A plain black peacoat swept down just above her knees and faded black jeans covered her legs. She locked her finger with Darren’s as she smiled towards the redhead waving at them.

“You guys are late,” she said with a stern look. As she looked back at the door another thought awoke in her mind. “Lilith isn’t with you?”

The couple placed themselves on a soft couch across from Ella’s. Anya immediately spread her legs across Darren’s lap.

“You know I’m not your personal, portable sofa right? I mean we are sitting on an actual sofa” Darren said as he swept his hair from his line of sight. “Stop kicking me you troll”

“You’re my boyfriend and my legs are tired, you’re supposed to support me in my time of need” Anya pouted. Suddenly her legs flopped back to the ground with a loud thud.

“Tired from what, we rode a cab here from home” he leaned in and gave Anya a quick kiss. “If anything you should have all the energy in world”

Anya’s eyes rolled as her curly haired boy kissed her. Just as quickly as the argument started, it was over and her attention turned back to Ella. Although she was annoyed at her companions lack of punctuality, she couldn’t help but smile as she watched them together. They had been like that since they were children. Darren was always so rude to Anya but he was the best at calming her down and knowing what she needed. That’s why Anya fell in love with him.

‘What’re you smiling at Red?’ Anya asked curiously as she flew over to her bestfriends side. She wrapped her short arms around Ella as she made a purring noise.

“Oh, so you’re a cat today then?” Ella asked cutely as she gently patted Anya’s cap covered head.

“It’s the mood of the day” Darren sighed.

“An artist must always try to live life through different perspectives” Anya chimed. “Plus I was watching this super kawaii anime last night and the girl got turned into a cat! She was soooooooo cute”

“There it is” Ella responded sarcastically.

“Oh and to answer your question, Lilith is outside” Darren remembered.

Ella slowly turned to look out the window. The weight of Anya twisted around her body made moving next to impossible. Her eyes softened as she saw the black haired beauty, talking on the phone outside of the cafe. For a second she forgot where she was.

“I think we lost her Anya”

“Geez it’s like everytime you see Lil, it’s like you’re seeing her for the first time” Anya began poking Ella’s cheek. The pressure snapped her out of the daze that she had

inadvertently fallen into. Realising her embarrassment, her face began to turn red, almost like a stop sign.

“S-shut up” she put up her hands as if trying to wall her face away from the gaze of her bestfriends. Suddenly her heart began to race as the sound of a familiar voice rang in her ears.

“You are totally blushing” Lilith laughed as she grabbed Ella’s hand, bringing down the makeshift wall that had been built. “You must’ve spaced out and embarrassed yourself, again”

“Totally did” Anya chimed.

“Absolutely did” Darren mirrored.

“I did not,” Ella retorted in a stern tone. “You’re late, sit”

Lilith straightened up as she leaned in and kissed her girl on the forehead.

“Alright, alright”

“Now, as you all know, we officially graduate in a few weeks” Ella pronounced.

“Right, cause you made us all take summer courses like a bunch of nerds, honey”

Lilith teased. Darren and Anya snickered quietly like children with a secret to tell. They quickly ceased as Ella’s stern glare paralyzed them. A sly smile began to tug at the corner of Lilith’s mouth.

“Talking back while the chief was speaking, bold” Darren retorted in a shifted defense for Ella.

“Well in any case, with final exams finally over with I was thinking that maybe we could do something to commemorate our final moments at NYU?”

“What’d ya have in mind?” Anya purred.

“I was thinking that we could throw a party! I could ask the band to get the word out about it and you guys could invite whoever you want too” Excitement poured from Ella’s mouth like an overflowing sink. They were all so used to the ginger being so studious and serious when it came to school. The suggestion of a party shifted the entire paradigm of their group. “So, what do you guys think?”

“I’m down. Just as long as we have it at my place, your apartment can’t hold that many people babe.” Lilith chimed with a cool grin.

“Anya and I should probably help you plan it” Darren said as he attempted to pry his kitten girlfriend off of Ella. “Otherwise I have a feeling that it’ll just feel like a *grown up* party”

Ella let out a cry of offence as she looked around the group for immediate validation. The repeating sound of muffled guitar riffs echoed through the silence. Her gaze fell upon Lilith, surely the love of her life would come to aid her in her time of need.

“He’s right” she shrugged casually. “Ella, we love you but if you plan this party everyone is going to end up coming in their Sunday bests. It’ll feel like a ball, not a college party. It’d be like a pre-graduation, graduation”

In a shocking turn of events the chief had finally been overthrown. By her own minions at that. In her mind she knew that this was a battle she would not win, so compromise was the only option left in her arsenal now.

“Fine. But I’m in charge of the music” Ella puffed in a defeated tone.

“You got it” Lilith spoke.

“Sounds good” Darren mirrored.

“Alrighty! *Operation: Party at Lilly’s* has commenced, ready yourself plebs” Anya shouted as she thrust her finger in the air. People posted around the cozy shop looked at the

commotion radiating from such a small girl. The group stared at the cat queen in silence before breaking out into laughter. Darren shook his head in awe as he watched Anya command the room like a seasoned military general. People were hanging onto every word the woman said.

As the snow fall began to quicken, the four friends continued to take refuge in the warm cafe. Deciding on plans for the upcoming party. Who to invite, what to eat, what music to play. Every single detail had equal planning and thought put into it. As the hours passed by they laughed and argued until it was finally time to head to their final afternoon classes. With Ella and Lilith being in the same major, they naturally took the same courses. The situation was the same for Darren and Anya as well.

“Alright so we’ll call ya when we pick up the food and everything. See you guys later” Darren waved through the falling snow.

“Sounds good! Get to class safe and on time you two, just because today is the final day of the semester doesn’t mean you get to be late” Ella lectured as she hugged Anya goodbye.

“You got it chief! Bye guys” Anya quickly grabbed Darren's hand as the couple disappeared into the herding mass of people escaping the winter weather. Lilith and Ella stood side by side as they waved goodbye to their friends.

“We should get going too, come on.” Ella wrapped her arm around Lilith’s as she guided them in the opposite direction. Even in the cold, Ella was as warm as the sun.

“Lead the way” Lilith said softly as she leaned her head on Ella’s as they walked. “Oh by the way, my mom wants you guys to come over for christmas. We don’t have to this year though.”

“Of course we’ll be there! We would never miss a party at the Godfrey mansion” Ella teased as she held onto Lilith. Their voices faded into the overwhelming voice of the city as they walked away.

The sound of the bell to the cafe door echoed into the streets of the city. People filtered in and out of the door. In the crowd was a man that stood out from the crowd. From his hair, down to the shoes that he dared to wear in this weather. He distinguished himself, purposely trying to set himself apart from the regular people that walked the concrete beneath him.

“Thanks for holding the door man” a young boy said as he rushed past the man.

“Of course. This weather is troubling, best stay inside where it’s safe” the words were spoken so smoothly. He pulled on his gloves as he walked in the direction Darren and Anya had moments before. “But I do believe that this weather carries the good fortune that I have seeking with it”

The snow fall was beginning to consume everything in sight. From the streets littered with slush, all the way up to the sky kissing building that stood watch around the city. Everything was covered in a sea of white. The shine was enough to cause Lilith to shield her eyes from the light as she looked out of the window from her apartment. The soft sound of soothing guitars and moody vocals echoed throughout the place. It was also strangely more clean and organized than it usually was. That was most likely a symptom of the red haired beauty scurrying back and forth. Dusting, sweeping, mopping, washing. Ella had made it her life’s mission to make this over-sized space party ready.

“Everything’s covered in snow and ice. I wonder if everyone we invited will make it at this rate” Lilith spoke as she averted her eyes away from the white light and back to her focused girlfriend. “Woah, i-it’s all so clean”

“Don’t just stand there like a dork, take this rag and clean off every speck of dust in this room” The girl was clearly on a mission. “I’ll take your dirty clothes and start the laundry” Lilith stood there, her mouth gaped open, unable to refute or fight the instruction given to her. She knew better than that after learning the hard way time and time again.

“Aye aye captain”

Ella gathered up all of the clothes lying on the floor around the loft, placing it all in a big basket that she carried under her arm. “Honestly Lilith, you have got to become more organized. You can’t find a single thing in this place, let alone wa-” Her word’s choked on the air flowing through the loft as she bent down to pick up a strange looking cloth. The shirt was stained red, so deep that it shined out from the black fabric, taking a life of its own.

“What were you saying Ella?”

“What is this?” Ella questioned in a soft voice, layered with a nervousness that Lilith recognized.

She examined the shirt, scanning her brain for any memory of where it came from and why it was so bloody and smelled of mildew and metal. But she couldn’t find it. She didn’t even recognize the shirt in Ella’s hand, let alone remember why it was stained so heavily. That same feeling of nervousness washed over Lilith.

“Lilith?” Ella pursued further.

“Um.. Oh yeah, that must have been back from Halloween” Lilith spat out the best lie she could up with in such a short time. “Remember? Anya had all of that fake blood and it must have spilled on the shirt. She had a bottle the size of my head, a bit extreme if you ask me”

Ella’s gaze pierced through Lilith like a laser. She could always tell when Lilith was lying to her but Lilith prayed that the universe would do her a solid this time. The wrinkles on her forehead relaxed as she moved closer to Lilith. Suddenly her arm began the flail wildly in front of her.

“O-Ow, what the hell?” Lilith shouted in surprise.

“You’re so gross! This is from halloween? It’s the middle of December! Do you ever do laundry if I don’t do it for you?” she continued to beat Lilith with the shirt in her hand as the music played in the background. “I swear, you’re so hopeless. Keep dusting” Growing annoyed with her helpless girlfriend she continued on her path to the laundry room.

Even through her sweater Lilith felt the sting from Ella’s sharp strikes. At her angriest she was a force that Lilith did not want to tangle with. As she watched the red head disappear into the far corners of the apartment; that fleeting sense of panic and anxiety set back in. No matter how hard she searched her memories, nothing came up. She couldn’t remember anything about that shirt or where it came from.

“Maybe it was just Halloween... Or maybe I do need to go back to therapy” she spoke to herself. An unsettling feeling of anxiety hatched inside of her chest. Her mind had been a maze of confusion and hazy fog and she could fight past it to see the truth. She always knew that she was different, that her mind worked in a strangely different way than everyone else's. But could that really explain everything that she had been feeling, everything that she had been seeing?

“If you have time to talk to yourself, then you have time to clean! Get to work” Ella yelled from the laundry room. Her nagging quickly smacked Lilith in face, waking her up again.

“Wha- How did you even hear me?” Lilith yelled back.

“CLEAN!”

“Okay, god” she placed the rag in her palm and quickly began dusting. Quietly cursing out the chief under her breath.

The hours raced by as the couple cleaned the apartment. The sun began to set in a beautiful orange glow, setting the dormant blankets of snow on fire. Everything smelled of cinnamon and berries. Christmas cookies were sprawled across the countertop, alongside eggnog, alcohol and various other snacks that had been brought over by Darren and Anya. The sound of christmas music rang in the ears of all who were present. Ella appeared from the backroom, dressed in her normal cute attire. A red sweater with the collars of a white dress shirt clinging to her neck and draped over her torso. A normal pair of black jeans hugged her legs like a cozy blanket. Her red hair was tied in a neat bundle behind her head as strands of loose velvet fell over her forehead.

Everyone’s eyes shifted to her as she entered the room.

“Cute socks” Darren spoke through a mouthful of cookies.

Ella’s feet were housed by socks with pictures of baby reindeer on them. Everything about this party told the secret of what her favorite holiday was.

“You’re getting cookie all over the floor you animal” She snapped as she rushed to Darren’s side. “Don’t talk with your mouth full either”

Anya made her way to Lilith, who was sitting on the couch. Quietly observing the scene in the kitchen with a smile on her face. She sat down and crossed her tiny legs, housing a cup of

hot chocolate in her hands. The smell of the warm cocoa filled Lilith's nose and heart with so much peace.

"Only minutes in and your boy is already driving Ella up the wall with his messy eating" Lilith spoke as she tucked her black hair behind her ear. "He'll die before the guests even get here, what a shame" Lilith clicked her tongue in a dooming manner.

"He can be such a kid sometimes" Anya giggled as she sipped her steaming drink carefully.

"I see you're out of anime mode tonight" Lilith teased as she pinched Anya's leg.

"Hm? Oh yeah. I figured I'd give Darren a break and be '*normal*' in front of everyone tonight"

"And?"

"Feels weird, dude"

The two friends burst with laughter as Darren and Ella scampered around the kitchen. Lilith looked at her best friend. The small girl she had known since she was in kindergarden. A feeling of nostalgia and sadness washed over her all at once. Anya returned her stare with a smile that showcased all of her extremely white teeth.

"I'm gonna miss you two when we go, Lil"

"We've always been in the city together. Never living more than a block apart since we were kids." Lilith tucked in her legs to match her friend's stance. "And now you're going to be whole continent and ocean away"

"I know... Darren is pretty excited to come live in London with me. Yeah, he says it'll be the perfect opportunity to obtain an english accent and learn to drink tea the proper way" Anya giggled.

“Ohhhhhh Darren” Lilith laughed as she gazed over towards Darren. Who was still getting followed around the kitchen by the fierce red head as he ate. “When are you guys heading out?”

“A couple days after Christmas. With graduation before the holiday we figured it’d be a good way to kick off the new year. Couldn’t miss celebrating at the world famous Godfrey estate, right rich girl?” Anya shot a wink towards the raven haired beauty who seemed to be blushing.

“Shut up before I sit on you, mighty mouse” She nudged Anya so hard that she almost spilled her drink. “Speaking of Christmas, there’s another reason why I agreed to have it at my parents place”

“Ohhhhhh a secret, tell me tell me tell me!”

Lilith quietly got up and made her way to her bedroom. Making sure to move so quickly and silently so that Ella couldn’t detect her. As quickly as she left, she was back before Anya could take another sip of her cocoa. Her speed surprised Anya so much that she let out a small scream when Lilith began to speak again.

“SHIT you scared me! I didn’t even see or hear you come back” Anya yelled in the most quiet tone she could push out. “Oh my god”

In Lilith’s hand lay the item that generated Anya’s reaction. It was small but extremely beautiful and well crafted. In the orange light filtering in through the windows it sparkled the most alluring crystal tone through the small stone intricately placed in the middle of the ring. Lilith’s eyes were warm, almost overflowing from joy and excitement as she showed Anya her prize.

“Is that a ring? Fuck dude, that’s a ring” Anya squirmed.

“Will you calm down you little troll, she’ll hear you” Lilith laughed as she quickly shoved her hand over Anya’s mouth. “Yes it’s a ring. I’m going to ask Ella to marry me”

“Oh my gooooood” the words were muffled thanks to Lilith’s hand.

“Christmas day, after everyone opens their gifts I’m going to give Ella this. Wrapped in that cute ass wrapping paper that she loves so much”

“Can I talk now?”

“Will you be quiet?”

“Yes”

An intense look of skepticism was painted on Lilith’s face as she slowly moved her hand away from Anya’s mouth. It was silent for a moment and the feeling of having her plans ruined began to fade from Lilith’s mind. But that moment was fleeting, as was Anya’s promise of silence.

“HOLY SHIT”

Lilith’s eyes opened wider than they ever had in her life. She quickly dove towards Anya’s body with her own, tackling her down to the floor. Luckily the cup of cocoa she was drinking was empty now. The two girls crashed down to the ground. In the same moment of impact the doorbell sang its song.

“It’s party time friends, look alive” Ella shouted as she made her way to the door. She stopped to observe the two girls rolling around on the ground for a brief moment before rolling her eyes. “Unbelievable”

“You guys are dead after the party. I’ll pray for you” Darren shouted from the kitchen, still enjoying the taste of Ella’s cookies.

The sound of the door unlocking and swinging open filled the apartment, mixing with the jolly music that would greet the guests as they walked in.

“Welcome” Ella spoke sweetly.

“Come on in, there’s plenty of food to go around” Darren waved.

“Sup” Lilith grunted from the ground with a wave.

“Please, have a seat. Get a drink, enjoy yourselves” Anya smiled.

Ella was forced to keep up appearances in front of the guest at the door. But in her mind she was thinking of ways to make Lilith and Anya suffer in the worst ways for embarrassing her.

Chapter 3

In just a few short hours, the party had come to life in the luxurious apartment space. People were dancing, laughing, drinking and enjoying each other’s company. Ella was doing her best to manage her guests, making sure they were having a good time and keeping the space neat and tidy. Lilith sat back and watched her girlfriend scurry around like a crazy person, a smile was softly sketched across her face.

“Spaz” she whispered happily.

She suddenly felt a light tap on her shoulder, she turned to face the hand it belonged to. Darren stood behind her, a plate of cookies comfortably at home in his free hand. Accompanying him was a rather tall man. His hair, the most beautiful shade of blonde, strands of it slept quietly on his forehead. It was like someone sculpted him perfectly and placed him on earth. His striking beauty made Lilith uneasy in a way that she couldn’t explain. But she instantly recognized the person Darren was introducing to her.

“Hey Lil, there’s someone I want you to meet! This is-”

“Vincent, yeah I remember you. From the other day right?” she took the hand he extended out to her and placed it in her own.

“It’s wonderful to see you again, Lilith. Under less painful conditions” Vincent spoke smoothly.

“Oh, you two already know each other?” Darren asked as he scratched his head.

“Yeah, I basically crashed into him in front of my parents place the other day. Nearly took him out”

“You seem considerably more at ease at the moment, though” Vincent teased.

“Think so? My girlfriend threw a party, so I kinda have to be on my best behavior. Can’t go around tackling every man and woman in sight can I?”

“No, I suppose not”

He couldn’t keep his eyes off of Lilith as they stood there and talked. It was like he was entranced by every word she was saying, wrapped up in every last breath. His insides were exploding with a euphoric feeling, it was almost impossible to hold in. Quickly he was brought back to reality by a rather rude nudge from Darren.

“Still with us?” Darren laughed.

“Oh I-I apologize. What were you saying?”

“No worries man, I was just asking where you and the cookie monster here met.” Lilith spoke as she judged Darren and his plate with a sly side eye.

“Ah, yes of course” he slicked his blonde hair back as he recalled his memory. “Darren and Anya over there happened to be in the same store as me, picking up groceries. I heard that they were short a few dollars as they were checking out, so I offered to pay for all of it”

“You really saved us back there, you know? Ella would’ve killed us if we came back empty handed. College really knows how to take all of your money”

“I can hear her now” Lilith chimed in. “You had one job! Buying food should be second nature for you” Her impression of Ella was so accurate it made Darren burst out with laughter. “She can get a little uptight about this stuff”

“Well from what I have heard, she seems like a lovely girl” Vincent laughed. “And I was more than happy to help. In turn I was rewarded with new friends, so I suppose I should thank you as well”

The newly formed friends talked while the party around them continued on. Darren quickly took off on another mission to retrieve cookies while also searching for Anya in the crowd. Vincent left Lilith to mingle with other guests but his gaze continued to leave an impression on her. Even from across the room. He watched as she danced with Ella. Her laugh rang through his ears like sweet music. It was like his entire body ached for her. Longed to taste her, to swim in her hypnotizing scent. As Ella kissed her his chest became hot as his eyes narrowed in on them.

“I think a little game is in order” he whispered. As a young man walked by he quickly grabbed him by the arm and drew him in closer. The words he spoke into his ear became drowned out by the swaying music and overlapping voices of the buzzing guests. The young man gave a subtle nod as Vincent released him and vanished into the crowd.

In the far corners of the room a large group of people gathered together in a comfy circle. People sat on the furniture, holding each other close as they listened to the soothing noise emanating from Ella’s mouth. Her voice echoed through the apartment as it was laced with

sounds of Lilith's precise guitar playing partnered with Ella's illuminating piano playing. The couple were performing the sounds of 'Hatsukoi' by Utada Hikaru, one of their favorite artists. It was like Ella's voice was made for moments like this. It had captivated everyone at the party, not a single eye wandered from the couch they were sitting on as she sang the words in their native Japanese tongue.

“moshimo anata ni deawazu ni itara, dareka ni itsuka konna kimochi ni, saserareta to wa omoenai. Urusai hodo ni takanaru mune ga, katte ni hashiridasu ashi ga ima, tashika ni hoo wo tsutau namida ga, watashi ni shiraseru kore ga hatsukoi to”

The two girls had both studied the language extensively, having visited Japan numerous times throughout their relationship, alongside their friends. Ella was fascinated with the culture and beauty of the country. In turn roping in Lilith to take language classes throughout their years at University.

Anya and Darren sat close by, swaying back and forth to the rhythm of the music. As she sang, Ella would take warm glances at Lilith as she played. Flashing a smile overflowing with pride and love. Lilith returned the glance with a soulful wink as she continued playing. As the song came to an end the walls bounced the sound of applause and cheers around. Ella blushed at the response their performance had granted as she got up to thank everyone for listening. For a second Lilith and Vincent's eyes met as he raised his glass in approval. Lilith quickly averted her eyes and turned her attention towards her friends.

“That Vincent guy has been looking at me the entire party” she whispered as she tucked her hair behind her ear.

Darren and Anya quickly looked towards the observant man as he casually waved back at them. The couple returned the wave in unison before resuming their conversation with Lilith.

“Maybe he likes you?” Anya teased.

“That’s probably it. Guys are instantly charmed when they meet you for some strange reason.” Darren added. “He’s a nice guy, harmless really. Don’t worry about it”

“If you say so” Lilith looked around the room, clearing her mind of Vincent’s strange aura.. “You guys see where Ella went? She’s usually nervous after performing. Better go find her”

“Uh yeah she’s over there by the kitchen, I think” Darren pointed.

“And what about you? Were you instantly charmed when you met Lil? WERE you?” Anya questioned Darren in a tone that almost made her seem like a normal, jealous girlfriend.

“Well of course not me! That would be gross, we’re like siblings”

Suddenly there was a loud crash. The sound of glass shattering in the kitchen, spilling into glittering shards on the chilly surface.. Everyone’s eyes darted towards the commotion, as did Lilith’s. The sound of Ella’s voice rang through her ears, but it wasn’t the sweet sound she was used to hearing. Her voice was nervous and laced with fear. She quickly darted through the crowd of people as if no one was even there. She finally made her way into the kitchen, her heart began to thump uncontrollably at the scene before her.

“Ella” she yelled as she lowered her body to the ground.

The floor was covered in crimson and eggnog. Glass surrounded them, cracking under the pressure of Lilith’s shoes. Ella was holding her hand as blood streamed through the cracks of her fingers, pooling underneath her aqua painted fingernails Lilith placed her hand on her lover's cheek as she examined her.

“What happened?” she asked as tears ran down Ella’s freckled face. She took Ella’s hand in her own as she examined the deep cut engraved on her palm. She could see her beautiful eyes direct her to something behind them.

“H-He cut me.” she spoke through staggered breathes. “I think he’s drunk but he just... broke the bowl and swung at me with the glass”

Lilith quickly turned around to face the one who attacked the one person that mattered most to her. As she observed the young man she noticed the blood covered glass cradled in his hand. But she also noticed that he was oddly quiet, even for someone who had drank too much and had done something stupid. He stood completely still, only blinking every couple of seconds. But his strange disposition was soon forgotten. Lilith’s chest began to swell with air as her breathing became deeper, her stomach was on fire. She could feel the pressure of the blood boiling in her palms as she squeezed tighter and tighter.

In the blink of an eye she was in front of the boy. Her hand was covered in hair as she slammed his head into the wall. She could feel the blood pumping through her veins, fueling her uncontrollable anger. She felt the impact of her fist colliding with his skin. Over and over and over again. She heard nothing, she felt nothing. The anger was all that was present.

“Lilith”

“Lilith stop”

“*LILITH*”

The sound of her friends muffled voices knocked against her eardrums, attempting to bring her back. Suddenly she was pulled in by a strong force. She turned to find that Darren was the one restraining her. She had forgotten how strong he actually was. His tall stature was partnered with incredible strength. She looked around at all of the people around her. Their faces

painted a horrifying picture, a bone chilling story in which she played the main character, or possibly the villain. She turned back to look at the boy that laid still against the wall. His face covered in cuts and bruises. Spots of purple and red decorated his face like an abstract painting. He was conscious but clearly wasn't present. His mind was gone, leaving behind the empty shell attached to the wall.

"What the hell was that?" Darren spoke in a deep, angered voice.

"Ella" she whispered as she quickly turned to face her love. Her heart sank instantly.

Anya stood there, holding a crimson haired damsel in her arms. As she moved closer to them, they moved back further. The air in the apartment was thick and overwhelming. Not a soul dared to venture even an inch towards Lilith as she stood in a sea of violence and rage. Tears began to run down Ella's eyes as Anya took her and vanished into the far reaches of Lilith's home. Finally it was Darren who came to Lilith's aid. Providing a life raft in the abyss that she was sure she would never escape or be rescued from. He gently placed his hand on her shoulder, pulling her into his ribs. Suddenly Lilith began to shake, her vision wavering. The image of the mirror rang in her head. Her reflection clear one second and covered in blood the next. It seemed as if the dream, or rather the vision she had a few days before was coming to fruition in the most horrible way.

"Alright, I'm sorry but the party's over guys" Darren cleared his throat. "Thank you all for coming and uh, we'll see you at graduation. Merry Christmas" He looked back at his friend as he guided the guests out of the apartment.

Vincent looked back at Lilith before exiting the party with everyone else. A grin touched both sides of his face as he flipped the collar of his coat up, preparing to face the cold winter night. "Well that was very entertaining" he whispered to himself.

A little over a week had gone by since the incident at the christmas party and Lilith hadn't seen Ella since then either. All of her calls went to voicemail, all of her visits ended in empty knocking. Why was she still avoiding her? The incident that unfolded that night must have hit her deeper than Lilith thought. Darren and Anya had told her about what she did at the party but she herself couldn't remember any of that. It was like she blacked out and someone else took control of her body, a sensation that had manifested itself too well in her life lately. She pulled out her phone as she walked down the crowded street and put it to her ear.

"Hey babe, it's me" she paused. "Look, I know I must have scared you the other night and I'm sorry... I-I... don't remember anything about what I did and I could really use your help with figuring this all out because I don't know what's going on with me. We're a team, after all. Just.. call me when you can okay? Please. I love you.. I miss you" As she hung up the phone she had just entered central park. Perhaps a walk could help clear her mind and make sense of everything again, she thought. The walkways were spotless, an army of naked trees stood guard on both sides of her. She could see the beautifully structured buildings fading in and out of view as she walked passed. Lights that guided the night owls of the city were adorned with festive tinsel, reefs and red bows. The park was one of new York's most beautiful sights during the holiday season.

Everything was sparkling and white. The snow seemed to glow in the sunlight. Lilith would bring Ella here sometimes; just to get away from the never ending panic of the surrounding city. But she was alone today, unfortunately. She took a seat on one of the clear benches overlooking the frozen pond in the center of the park. She blew her warm breath into the palms of her hands. Every part of her body was covered in winter wear aside from them.

People came and people went as she watched, as she thought about everything that had been going on in her life recently. The excitement of graduation and a future with Ella seemed to take a backseat to the chaos wrapping its demanding hands around her existence.

“What the hell am I doing?” she whispered to herself.

Her phone let out a quick beeping noise. She dug into her pocket quickly to see if it was Ella returning her calls.

“A text from Anya?”

‘Hey Lil... Look, I know you mean well and that you miss Ella. We miss you too but you need to stop calling; at least for now. She isn’t ready to see you yet, she’s still really freaked out about what happened. To be honest so am I... She doesn’t know what’s going on with you and she wants to help. Just give her some time to process, okay? Talk soon.’

“That’s better than nothing I guess” she sighed. She analyzed the words from the message in her head a thousand times over. Hoping that something in it could help her break through the fog blocking her memory. If she could get past then she could remember what she did and why she did it. Time seemed to slither by slowly as she pondered. People passed, sat down and went along with their lives while she was tucked away in her own personal universe.

“Lost in thought are we?” a voice asked.

She shifted her gaze upward to find Vincent standing in front of her, he was accompanied by a beautiful woman that she didn’t recognize. She was just a hair shorter than Vincent and her rare amber eyes gave a warm gaze towards her, there was a strange familiarity behind them. Tugging at a distance string in the back of Lilith’s mind.. Her face was rather perfect, she was beautiful, she thought. Her raven hair fell in a long line behind her back. Her smile made Lilith’s

heart warm, chipping away at the ice and snow around them. It was like she had known this woman her entire life, she couldn't explain the feeling rising in her chest.

"Uh, yeah. Looks like it" she spoke, trying to break through the confusion and wonder presented to her by this woman. "Haven't seen you since the party. You have a habit of mysteriously showing up when I least expect it y'know?" Her defenses were building up again.

"I suppose this is fate how we keep meeting like this then"

"Right." Something about this man made Lilith uneasy. He was too polite. If one wasn't careful they could fall for every word that rolled off of his silver tongue. The quicker she could get this conversation over with the better. "You dashed out of the party pretty quick. I don't remember seeing you leave after what happened. Don't remember much of anything regarding that at all, actually"

"You don't remember?"

"No. But from what I gather I really fucked that guy up. Badly" she stared off into the distance. "Now i'm sitting here alone, racking my brain to make sense of everything that's happened lately" She had said too much and had lingered too long already. There was still something that was nagging at her though, so she asked the question. "I'm sorry, have we met?" She motioned towards the woman who had silently and patiently been listening to their conversation.

"No, no I don't think that we have. My associate failed to introduce me, my name is Celine" she extended her hand out to Lilith. She spoke in a sweet, exoctic accent.

"Are you sure? I just feel like I know those eyes from somewhere, can't put my finger on where though" Lilith smiled as she shook her hand. "I guess my mind is playing tricks on me again. I'm Lilith"

“It’s a pleasure to meet you Lilith. Please forgive Vincent and his lack of manners. I don’t know where he gets it from” she spoke politely as she gripped Vincent’s shoulder. “Must be this coatic city. It’s my first time back here in almost twenty some years, I’m here on business and Vincent’s family have been long time associates of mine. I’m originally from Greece”

Lilith could see Vincent suddenly tense up the moment Celine touched him. She watched as the two of them spoke without even exchanging a word between them. As if there was some sort of kinetic bond between the two of them that allowed them to talk through a simple look. Jealousy began to rise within Lilith’s stomach for some reason that she couldn’t explain. She quickly checked her watch and realised that she wanted to be anywhere but here.

“I’m sorry but I have to run. It was good to see you Vincent and it was really nice to meet you, Celine” she spoke in a hurry.

“Wait” Vincent shouted carelessly. He could feel Celine’s eyes burning into his skin. “Forgive me if this is too forward but would you like to grab a cup of coffee sometime? I don’t have many friends in this city and I’ve taken a liking to you. Strictly platonic, of course”

“I don’t know. You’re a really nice guy Vincent but I don’t know if I have the time for stuff like that right now, y’know? We barely know each other” The air was heavy with an awkward and tense feeling, it was practically falling like fresh snow from the sky. Lilith looked towards Celine, who was observing intently as the two of them spoke. Her gaze brushed against Lilith’s skin, digging through her veins and into her heart. There it was again, that intense feeling of familiarity and warmth, breathing through the fog in her mind. Lilith quickly grabbed Vincent’s phone from his leather black hands. “Tell you what, here’s my number. When things settle down I wouldn’t mind hanging out sometime. As friends” Friends. The word tasted like acid in her mouth. She didn’t want to spend any time with this strange man that she barely knew.

But after everything that had happened recently, Lilith knew better than to let an opportunity like this pass. This was her chance for answers. “I really need to go. It was nice meeting you Celine. Hope we can get a chance to really talk next time”

“I’ll give you a call soon then” Vincent spoke as Lilith turned to walk away.

“I have definitely met her before” Lilith whispered to herself as she quickly disappeared into the sea of bare branches, rising concrete and damp metal. She would have to continue to put up with Vincent if she wished to follow this curious thread. Whatever connection she had with this woman, it was too intriguing to leave it fleeting.

“It seems the memories are still there, just sleeping. You are playing a dangerous game darling” Celine spoke in a short tone. “I hope you have not forgotten why I sent you here in the first place. She is remembering too quickly, she could spiral downward if this continues. Perhaps I should step in early”

“You sent me here to do a job and I am doing it” Vincent smiled at the screen of his phone. “And never call me darling again. It tarnishes my image of you”

Celine let out a quiet sigh and closed her eyes. “I sent you here to help her and from that touch we just shared I felt just how far she is slipping. It will all be too much for her if she is pushed too far. I will intervene if I feel th-”

“Do *not* intervene, please. I will guide her” Vincent interrupted loudly. “I’m the only one who can”

“I can sense your passion. I just hope that it is not misplaced like it has been in the past. Be careful. I won’t lose her again, you of all people should understand that” Celine spoke sternly as she slowly walked away, blending into the crowd before disappearing. She held a sense of nobility and grace in her strides. An aura that mirrored Vincent’s in many ways.

Vincent quickly dialed a number as he put the phone to his ear. The sound of ringing danced around in his brain for a few seconds before the rhythm was broken by a strange silence. The sound of a steady breath cut in and out.

“Stop what you are doing and begin your task” Vincent spoke smoothly.

“Yes” a young man replied back. He spoke as if all of the life had been drained from his body, he spoke as if no emotion could ignite his soul.

“Good boy” Vincent added as he ended the call.

“That’s the fourth time she’s called today Ella. Maybe you should hear her out?” Anya questioned. She and Ella were shopping in their favorite music shop in Brooklyn. They would hide away here when the pressures of the real world became too much for them. Ella’s delicate fingers browsed through a sea of records in front of her. The rings on her fingers softly collided with the plastic covered vinyl until they locked onto their target. ‘Riot’ by Paramore, one of Lilith’s favorite bands. She held it up for Anya too see. “Look, you’re even thinking about her without knowing it. You know that’s her favorite band, call her back”

“I miss her... but I’m just not ready Anya” she spoke quietly. She hesitated before placing the record back in its slot.

The air in the shop had an old, dusty scent to it. But Ella loved it. She loved the history surrounding this place. The posters that decorated the walls, telling the story of the music scene, past and present. All of these things made her feel like she was home. She slowly made her way to the guitars posted in the far corner. Taking a beautiful 6-string with a glossy, red oak finish in her hands, she sat and began to play softly.

“Well I told her to give you space earlier. Since you’re failing at communicating with each other”

“Why would you do that?” Ella’s voice was laced with a slight irritation as her playing became muddled for a split second.

“Judging from that reaction you *do* want to talk to her! So stop lying to yourself and go make up with your girlfriend already”

Ella sighed softly as she continued to pick the strings of the guitar with deadly precision. As she played a jolt of electricity shot through her body. It was the same feeling she got whenever she thought of Lilith. No matter how far apart they were or how mad they were at each other, that feeling withstood the distance between the two. Reminding them exactly why they love one another. Ella’s mind had been made up since they walked into the shop, she just didn’t realize it until now. The sound of the guitar faded out as she pulled her phone from her jacket pocket. Her fingers quickly tapped across the bright screen.

Hey you. Look, I’ve gotten your messages and think that i’m ready to talk. Maybe we can figure out what’s going on with you; together? Let’s have dinner. I’ll call you with details later.

Talk soon.

“There, now wipe that smile off of your face nerd” Ella teased.

“You two would be soooooo lost without me”

A couple of minutes later, in Manhattan, Lilith’s phone buzzed in her pocket. She reached down to pull it out, examining the message displayed on the screen. As her fingers moved more quickly than they ever had before, her face beamed radiated like the first ray of sunshine breaking through the night sky.. If she smiled this hard long enough her face would get stuck that way. As she walked forward the crushing sound of car horns wrestled in her ears. She

quickly looked up to see a flash of yellow speeding towards her, it was inches away from her in fact. Preoccupied with her phone she must have inadvertently wandered into the street. She quickly did her best to move her body. The speeding cab flew by in a blur but Lilith suddenly found herself safe, on the other side of the street.

The buzzing sound of a car horn faded into white noise knocking against the city walls. Lilith stood on the sidewalk unharmed, not a single mark on her. She knew in her mind that she should be smeared on the pavement right now. Her body couldn't possibly move that fast through her will alone. So how did she avoid that hit? How was she alive right now? Her breath was surprisingly even and her nerves were calm. She could hear people around her whispering under the breathes as they walked by. Their wandering gazes burning holes into her skin. She took a step forward and suddenly it was like the world had been flipped upside down. Her limbs turned to slush beneath her as her knee hit the ground. A familiar screeching noise filled her ears and her vision began to fade in and out. The same vision of an alternate version of herself flashed before her. In the pit of her stomach Lilith could feel something building up. Swimming through her bloodstream, becoming a part of who she was in the most intimate way. She briefly remembered this feeling at the christmas party, it was fleeting in that moment, but she felt this urge before.

As quickly as her body began to shut down, it regained its energy. Lilith quickly picked herself up from the damp ground. Reassuring the people around her that she was going to be fine. The visions sank away into the deepest corners of her mind again but the feeling in the pit of her stomach was determined to linger a bit longer.

“What the hell is happening to me?” She silently asked herself. An irregular sense of panic twisted around her words. Strands of air stuck to her cheek like a thick strip of tape. This

wasn't an ailment that could be cured with normal medicine. Lilith could feel that this was something else, something abnormal. Whatever it was, she knew that she needed to figure out what to do about it, before memory loss threatened to control her mind once again.

The sunset lit the sky above Manhattan in a beautiful sherbet blanket. The snow and ice clashed perfectly against the sleeping sun as Lilith made her way to the restaurant. She wore a cozy, dark green flannel shirt. Her black coat fell down to her knees which were covered in dark blue jeans. She had her hair in a comfy, black ponytail behind her head. What had only been a little over a week felt like a lifetime for her, being away from Ella. The sound of metal clattering together sung from her jacket pocket as her fingers danced around with her keys.

Her unsteady breath partnered with her weak legs made her feel uneasy. Biting down on her lip she examined her destination.

"Don't you dare fuck this up Lilly" she whispered to herself as her palms collided with both sides of her face. She secretly pepped herself up in head in an attempt to calm her nerves before Ella showed up. Suddenly the lights hanging on the barriers of the buildings flickered on in unison. Some multi-colored like the rainbow, others shined a gorgeous shade of yellow and white. Christmas lights. Placed meticulously around the city for its inhabitants to gaze and wonder over. As the nightlife crowds began to dwindle down, Ella appeared from amongst them. Lilith could feel her heart thumping against her chest.

She was as ethereal as ever. Her silky red hair slept quietly over her left shoulder. It was almost as if her freckles were dancing in the lights that illuminated her smooth skin. She smiled as her eyes met with Lilith's, tucking strands of loose hair behind her ear. She wore a dark grey jacket that dropped down to her knees. Underneath was a cute black dress, small images of roses

were placed on it in random spots. Her legs were covered in black tights and black boots. The sun was setting just right, acting as the perfect backdrop for her arrival.

“Hey you” Ella spoke sweetly.

“Hey” Lilith smiled.

The night had been going extremely well for the two of them. It was as if the past few days hadn’t happened and things were getting back to how they used to be. The shining city lights were leaking into the soft lit restaurant that they were in, casting a beautiful glow on everything and everyone inside. It was as if spring was blooming inside while winter was playing on the outside. The room smelled of well cooked beef and toasted buns but Lilith could only focus on Ella as she ate her food.

“Is there something on my face?” Ella giggled as she dabbed a napkin on the corners of her mouth.

“No, no I just missed you is all” Lilith smiled.

The pause between them was accompanied by the sound of pots and pans clashing from the kitchen in the back. Ella took a sip of her drink and let out a soft sigh. She straightened herself in her chair, placing her chin on the palm of her hand.

“We should talk about what happened” she said as her finger traced an invisible circle on the table. “What were you thinking Lil?”

“I... I honestly don’t know. I remember you on the ground, bleeding” Lilith searched her brain for the memories of that night. “I saw the guy that hurt you just standing there with that empty look on his face... Next thing I know Darren is pulling me away and everyone is leaving. That’s all that I can remember”

“You could’ve really hurt that kid, you know? Has something like this happened before? You need to tell me so I can help you”

“This is the first time I’ve blacked out, as far as I know. I just got so angry...” Lilith’s voice trailed off, her eyes averting Ella’s gaze.

“Well, from what I know, the guy is completely fine. You got lucky. Things could have been a lot worse if Darren hadn’t stopped you” Ella grabbed Lilith’s hand. “I’ve never seen you so angry and violent before... You really scared me”

“I’m sorry... It scared me too, hearing about what I did, learning that I’m actually capable of something like that?”

Failing to hold back the water swelling in her eyes she gripped Ella’s hand tighter. Attempting to pull herself together again. The natural warmth that her girlfriend’s skin radiated was something that Lilith missed dearly. The days without her sun were some of the coldest she had ever experienced in her life. A moon without its sun is just a rock stuck in a cold, never ending purgatory after all.

“Hey” Ella whispered sweetly as she wiped the small tears drops from Lilith’s blushing cheek. “Whatever’s going on with you, we’ll figure it out okay? Together. You just have to promise to come to me about this stuff. We’re partners, always have been and always will be”

“Promise?” Lilith sniffled. “God, look what you did. Making me get all sentimental and shit in public, Jesus” She wiped her eyes as she proceeded to finish her remaining french fries. Ella couldn’t help but laugh as she watched the beautiful raven haired girl in front glow red from the embarrassment of being vulnerable.

Suddenly they were interrupted by a man and his wife. The two girls had noticed them as they talked throughout the night. Both were wearing rather strange and uncomfortable looks on their faces.

“Excuse me” the man spoke in a scratchy voice. “We couldn’t help but notice you two from out seats over there”

“Ok? Can we help you with something?” Lilith spoke as her eyes narrowed.

“We just wanted to ask if you could keep the PDA to a minimum. We have children here and we don’t want them getting the wrong idea’ The woman spoke in a distinguished voice.

“I’m sorry, what?” Lilith laughed in surprise. “Are you serious?”

“Lilith” Ella snapped at her girlfriend. “I’m sorry, excuse her... But if I want to touch the love of my life in public, then I will do just that. We’ve been coming here for years and it’s never been a problem. It certainly shouldn’t be a problem since that couple has been sucking face over there for about an hour” She politely pointed towards the man and woman engulfed in a rage of kisses in the corner.

“Is it because we’re gay?” Lilith hissed. She could feel a quiet rage boiling up in her chest. Unaware of what it was but its familiarity lingered on her heart.

“Oh no honey, that can’t be it all. You see if they had a problem with us, they were certainly going over to confront the hetero couple after speaking to us” Ella smiled at the couple who were seething with annoyance. Sensing the anger rising up in Lilith she took her girlfriends hand to quell her incoming rage. “Isn’t that right guys?”

“Of course, enjoy your evening ladies” the man spoke in a defeated tone. He was jumbling his words as his eyes averted their gaze. “Let’s go dear”

As the man pulled his wife away she glared at the girl's with eyes that were laced with judgement. Lilith shot the women a forceful glare paired with a middle finger in the air as they gathered their children, preparing to leave the restaurant. As they exited through the door they passed the kissing couple, saying nothing as they entered the biting cold blowing through the night.

"Homophobia should be punishable by law" Lilith laughed. "That lady got really silent while you called them out, in your oh so shade dropping way"

"See, not everything needs to be solved with cursing and yelling" Ella winked. "It's 2018 though, you would think people would have learned to be more accepting by now"

"Their closed minds only make my love for you stronger though. No one can tell me who I'm allowed to love or who I'm allowed to kiss" She stared at the blooming rose before her.

"Thanks for calming me down"

"I'll always be here. Now come give your cute girlfriend a kiss, we can't lose to those face suckers in the corner now can we?"

"Damn right we can't"

The two girls leaned into each other over the table, their lips locking together in a sea of red and black. Everything around them blurred out of existence. Every sound, every movement, even time itself stopped for them. Lilith had missed the taste of Ella and the red head clearly returned the sentiment. The sun had finally been reunited with her moon.

Chapter 4

The city in the middle of the day was a nightmare to traverse. Streets were polluted with citizens, going to and from their respective destinations. One would find it hard to even hear the thoughts inside their head due to all of the commotion. From inside the crowd that spread like an ocean; emerged a rather tall boy. His curly hair resting upon his head, falling over his forehead like a curtain. With headphones in his ears he made his way up to a familiar building, seeking refuge from the cold and busy jungle outside.

A loud buzz broke through the silence of the warm foyer as his finger connected with a button.

“I’m coming up” he blew into the tiny speaker.

“We’re all here, hurry up” Ella spoke in a rushed tone.

His slender legs glided up the first flight of stairs effortlessly, almost naturally. Darren was not only artistic but he was also fairly athletic as well. After several more sets of stairs he arrived at Ella’s apartment, quickly turning the doorknob and entering the room. A familiar sense of home washed over him, just like every other time he entered this apartment. It was like he and

friends practically lived here for the past four years together. As he faced the living room he could hear the sound of Anya and Lilith laughing. Joining them was someone that he recognized.

“Hey he’s finally here” the boy spoke happily.

“Hey, sorry I’m late. Got caught up with something” Darren spoke casually as he ran his hand through his curls. He took a seat next to Anya and laid his head on her shoulder. She quickly tucked her arm around him before kissing him on the head gently.

“What was it this time? Food? Reading Tokyo Ghoul again?” Anya teased.

“Yes and yes, actually. But something else too. Lilith called when I was leaving, she wanted to hang today. She said that you were busy, so she needed something to do. Did you lie to her about today?”

Anya’s gaze quickly shifted to her best friend. A faint shadow of surprise and guilt washed over Ella’s face as Darren questioned her.

“Well, I didn’t want this to be weird or uncomfortable” she whispered.

“I thought you guys made up?” Anya asked.

“We did! It’s just...”

“You don’t want her to be around the guy that she almost beat into a coma” the boy smiled. The room grew silent as they searched for the proper way to segway into this conversation.

“Guys, it’s fine! Really. I don’t blame her for what happened” the polite boy sitting next to Ella spoke.

“I know, Luke. But it’s her I’m worried about” Ella picked her phone up from the coffee table to see a text from Lilith. “She still thinks that you tried to hurt me purposely and I just don’t

think that it's a good idea for you two to be around each other right now. Especially while we're still trying to figure out the cause of Lilly's sudden anger".

"Hey, I get it Ella. I do. It's just that I feel bad. I was really drunk and I didn't mean to knock you over in the kitchen, I can't apologize enough guys". Luke's gaze shifted down to the carpet covered floor as he spoke. He was a handsome young man. His skin was chocolate colored brown, a green flannel covered up most of it. His hair was cut fairly low, wave like ripples danced on his head.

"Look man. What you did was pretty stupid, for sure. But you made it right, that's more than most people would do. We forgive you dude, so don't stress about it anymore". Darren chimed with a supportive tone.

"The doofus is right. The most you can do is focus on being better. We all make mistakes, just gotta learn from them! Trust your senpai, I'm hella smart" Anya spoke in a chipper voice as she smacked Darren lightly on the head.

"Seriously, Luke, I'm not angry" Ella giggled while watching the couple fidget. "You apologized and I forgave you, we all forgave you, simple as that. Now we're friends. So just try to focus on the good, okay? I'll work on Lilly. She'll come around, promise" she placed her hand on Luke's shoulder, flashing that beautiful smile of hers at him. His body felt lighter, warmer all of a sudden. No one could ever feel sad for long after spending a second with Ella. Luke returned his new friends' sentiment with a smile of his own.

"Thanks, guys"

The afternoon began to wind down, the sun dropping further from its throne in the sky, reluctant to relinquish it to the surfacing moon. New York was always so beautiful this time of day, when things were quiet. Red and orange painted the cloudless winter landscape as the sound

of a movie playing in Ella's living room bounced off of the walls. The smell of hot chocolate and fresh popcorn filled the air. A faint buzzing could be heard coming from a glowing screen next to Ella, but she didn't notice. Before the light faded once again, a small message could be seen:

*"I'm sleeping over tonight.
I like it when you're close. See ya soon."*

The sound of Lilith's footsteps echoed throughout the quiet lobby of her girlfriend's building. With a backpack slung over her shoulder the young girl made her way up the familiar stairs that she hiked up and down for years. Her black, frizzy hair was pulled into a messy bun and her face was bare. After a few short minutes she was in the hallway that would lead to Ella's home. She quickly reached for the doorknob and turned it gently, her tired gaze was met by the sight of friends. Laughing and lying around the television in the living room. Her eyebrows furrowed as she tossed the bag to the ground with a loud thump. The deep noise caught the attention of everyone in the room as the sound flowing from the screen died down.

"What the hell is he doing here?" she spoke through gritted teeth. Her steps quickened as she inched closer to an intimidated Luke. "Are you deaf? Why are you here?"

"I invited him" Ella spoke, her eyes burning with anger. "And hello to you too. What are you doing here?"

"This is what you were busy with? Watching movies with the dick head that hurt you?"

"Calm down Lilithy, stop being a brat" Darren chimed. He was positioned comfortably, resting his head on Anya's lap as he stuffed his mouth with popcorn. He could feel Lilith's deathly glare burning holes into his soul.

“Sorry Lilith, but he’s right. I mean come on, at least let us explain before you go all Bruce Banner again” Anya spoke.

“By all means” Lilith motioned to Ella. “Explain, please”

“Maybe I should go” Luke spoke in a nervous tone. Lilith’s eyes narrowed as she watched him squirm.

“No. We’re going to squash this right now” Ella pronounced as she sat next to Lilith. “Look, I didn’t tell you that we were hanging out with Luke today because of how you’re reacting right now. Yes, what happened was pretty bad. But everyone has talked about it and has moved past it. Everyone except for you. You have to stop carrying all of this anger of what happened that night around. You made a mistake too, just like Luke. He’s trying to make it right so why aren’t you?”

Lilith looked around at all her friends. The swelling anger in her chest began to sink as she felt Ella lean into her. Her tired eyes shifted back to Luke, the boy that hurt the person she loved most in the world. “He hurt you Ella”

“I know... and you hurt him. But he’s making an effort, can’t you do the same? Please?” she playfully nudged Lilith again. A silent smirk painted on her face. She could feel Lilith’s body loosen up, the intensity draining from her muscles.

“Fine” Lilith gave in. “Just don’t expect too much too soon”

“Thanks, Hulk” Ella gently kissed Lilith on the cheek as she pulled Lilith over to the couch. “Can we get back to watching the movie now?”

“You guys go ahead. I need to shower” Lilith quickly paced over the bag she placed on the floor, passing Darren on her way to it.

“OW, what the hell” Darren yelled as a pale fist collided into his shoulder.

“That’s for talking shit and calling me a brat”

Luke watched as Lilith and Darren argued with each other. Seeing how at ease and comfortable they were with each other, in spite of the conversation that had just occurred. He turned to look at Ella who flashed a quick wink towards him.

“Give her a little more time. She’ll come around” She assured him.

“If you say so” he responded. He wondered if he could ever have that same kind of bond with Ella. She was the one who came to his rescue, after all.

She could still hear the sounds of the television blasting through the walls as her friends laughed and talked. The rapidly dropping water from the showerhead did its best to drown out the noise as Lilith mixed a tropical smelling shampoo into her hair. Every drop of water that hit the floor was like a ticking clock, beating to the sound of the anger still swelling inside of her.

“I can’t believe she brought him here” she spat out the soap that was seeping into her mouth. “Now she expects everything to just be cool?” She soaked her black locks in the falling water and quickly turned the knob, forcing it to come to a halt. Grabbing the nearest towel she wrapped it around her slender figure, exiting the bathroom. As she walked through the door her body came to a sudden stop. Luke was standing in front of her.

“Woah, i’m sorry” he murmured as his eyes quickly shifted to the ground. “I was looking for the bathroom”

“Well you found it. Knock yourself out” Lilith spoke as she turned to walk away.

“Lilith, wait a sec” his voice barely able to reach her ears. “I uh.. I just wanted to say that I’m sorry for how I acted the other night. I was drunk and completely out of line”

“No kidding” her eyes narrowed.

“I regret what I did and I’m doing everything that I can to make up for it... I just hope that you and I can somehow work on making things better between us as well? For Ella’s and everyone else’s sake?”

She looked the nervous boy up and down. Water dripping onto the shining floor, her hair sticking to her damp skin. Even as she looked at him now, all she saw was the vision of him hurting the girl she loved, her blood falling onto the floor in calculating drips. Intentional or not, all she saw was a wall of red, a wall made of anger. Ready to crack at the slightest provocation.

“I promised her that I would try, alright?” she started to walk away, wrapping her hair in her hands. “Try not to piss me off from here on out. Also, from the way that your body is shaking it’s clear that you’ve never seen a naked woman before. Grow up” Her words faded from Luke’s ears as she entered Ella’s bedroom, closing the door behind her.

“Oh boy” Luke whispered as he entered the bathroom.

Soon after the conversation with Luke, Lilith made her way back to the living room. Her friends had all disappeared. Only Ella remained as she dashed back and forth from the kitchen to the living room. Cleaning up the popcorn left behind by Darren and the remaining cups of drunken hot chocolate.

“Need some help?” Lilith asked as she poked her neck over the couch. Lilith did not answer, though. She continued on her blurring rampage of cleaning. Glasses clashed together in the sink as she placed them in, one by one. The pile became bigger within seconds. As the last cup was placed, Ella finally stopped. Her hands gripping the outline of the sink.

“You didn’t need to be so rude” she spoke. Her tone was laced with a hint of disappointment. A tone that Lilith had picked up on too often lately. “I know that it’s hard, okay? But you have to try Lilith. We can’t move past this, past your anger, if you don’t”

Lilith silently paced her way into the kitchen and towards her flustered girlfriend. The sink began to shoot out a stream of warm water, bubbles created by the soap floated and popped in the air. She washed hard and quickly, an indication that she was clearly upset by the events that transpired tonight. Lilith's eyes softened as she looked at the gentle and flustered redhead. She carefully pushed her ginger locks to reveal her shoulder. Lilith rested her chin upon it, wrapping her arms around Ella's torso. The warmth of Ella's skin against her cheek reminded her that she was exactly where she needed to be.

"Stop it. You need to take this seriously" Ella responded to the embrace. "You can't cuddle your way out of this Godfrey" Lilith's arms tightened softly around her, her cheek rubbing against her red hair. The feeling forced the corners of her mouth to curve upward, only slightly.

"I can feel you smiling" Lilith teased.

"Liar" Ella retorted.

"Don't think that I haven't realized how much this means to you, moving past what happened at the party.. Helping me get through all of this" Lilith spoke calmly. "And if you think that working to forgive what Luke did... forgiving what I did, will help soften my anger, then I promise to do my best. Okay?"

"You often make promises that you can't keep, as much as you don't intend to"

"I'll keep this one" Lilith's mind drifted off to the moment she picked out the engagement ring for Ella. Remembering the feeling of wanting to be with her forever, to protect her from any and everything that could hurt her or cause her pain. Making a promise that she would keep until the day that she died. She locked her arms around Ella's neck like a necklace, her hands close enough to touch the running water. Her face was directly next to hers.

“I believe you” Ella spoke as she kissed Lilith on the cheek. The sound of the running water was the only sound that filled the apartment for a while. The two of them sat there in silence, as they often did together. It was like they could communicate without the use of words. You could feel the bond between them, bouncing off of the kitchen walls like an electrical current. As she washed Ella handed the dishes to Lilith for drying. The ginger would occasionally reach back to ruffle Lilith’s soft black hair with her hand, setting her heart on fire.

“Thank you” Ella spoke as she leaned her head against Lilith’s.

The thrilling chill of the New York night was being shy tonight. Allowing the nightwalkers of the city a reprieve from her punishing bite. Luke walked, alone, down a dimly lit sidewalk; just a few blocks away from Ella’s apartment. His eyes swept from left to right as he entered the strangely quiet street. Nothing but the distant sound of train horns and police sirens could be heard. As he made it to the other side he noticed someone perched quiet comfortably on the metal fencing protecting a cozy village home. Clouds of silver smoke appeared and faded from his mouth at a steady rate. Had he been waiting for Luke?

The young boy approached the blonde haired man as he now laid across the fence. His chin resting in the palm of his hand, a wide grin covering his perfectly crafted face. “Eventful night?” he spoke with a scent of someone who was unbalanced. The way the man spoke made Luke’s skin crawl, wishing that the cold would come to his aid and freeze the villain in front of him, allowing him to escape. Standing in front of this man was testing the limits of Luke’s courage.

“You’re afraid?” the man pouted. “As you should be. But i’m in no mood for games tonight” In an instant the blonde haired man began walking atop the fence, inching closer to Luke who was stepping back with each eerie advance.

“What the hell?” Luke whispered as his jaw dropped watching the man walk so gracefully. His shoes collided with the ground in a silent wind and suddenly he was face to face with him. As he stared the man in the eyes he saw nothing reflect back into his. But in the back of his mind he was recalling something. He had seen this man before.

“H-Have you forgotten me already? Goodness I must be out of practice” The blonde demon spoke in a defeated tone. He clasped his palm against Luke’s neck, pulling him close enough to feel his breath on his skin.

“Please just take my wallet and go. Take it all” Luke spoke through unsteady breaths. The man narrowed his eyes, examining the young man in his grasp. Suddenly he broke out into a shattering laugh, his grin sharp enough to cut glass.

“I don’t want your money boy! I want what’s in your brain, I want the information I sent you to retrieve” He softly poked Luke’s head repeatedly. “And once you have given me all that I require, I shall take your life” As he spoke he glared directly into Luke’s eyes, as if peering through his soul. The nightmarish fear running through Luke had strangely subsided, his breathing became steady and his mind clear. It was if he had been put into some sort of trance, with just one look from this man.

“What would you like to know, Master Vincent” Luke asked in an uncharacteristically chipper tone.

“Tell me everything about your friendly little get together this afternoon” Vincent spoke. Satisfaction leaked from his lips as he listened to the boy recount every detail from his meeting

with Ella and her friends. It was like Luke had been turned into some kind of puppet version of himself. With Vincent being the one pulling the strings. Crawling closer to the object of his obsession with every detail relayed. Crawling closer to Lilith.

As the days passed by, Luke found himself spending more and more time with Lilith and her friends. She hadn't particularly warmed up to him being around but her hostility seemed to have calmed for the time being. He imagined that he had Ella to thank for that. The read head had taken him under her wing and welcomed him into her small family. Showing a kindness that few others had shown him in the past. The smoke rising from his coffee mug blurred his eye sight as he daydreamed away. The music from the cozy shop kissed his ear drums softly. He found himself coming to this place a lot, given it was Ella who had brought him here. It seemed like all he could think about lately was Ella.

"No, stop it" he whispered to himself as he slapped his cheeks, snapping him out of his daydream. If Lilith could see into his mind right now he'd be as good as dead. Luckily she had not accompanied Ella to this little get together today. The young man was so excited to see the beautiful ginger again, his eagerness made him the first to arrive at the usual spot. Drumming his fingers in a rhythmic pattern on the countertop, he waited for his friends to arrive.

A sharp buzz radiated from his jeans, breaking his focus for a split second. He reached into his pocket to check his phone.

"Important text?" a calm voice spoke from behind Luke.

He spun around to find Darren walking towards him. A cool smile placed on his face. Luke admired Darren, simply because he looked so comfortable and calm everywhere that he went. It was as if nothing ever bothered him. "Um, no actually. I think the guy had the wrong

number.” Luke mumbled as he pushed his phone back into its pocket home. He had just lied to his friend. He recognized the number, it had been contacting him for days. He just didn’t know why.

“Have you heard from the girl’s yet?” Darren took a seat next to a still puzzled Luke. “Ella made plans with Lil last minute and Anya has some business with her mom. Looks like it’s just us dudes today”

“Oh?” Disappointment leaked from Luke’s voice.

“I’m going to pretend that I didn’t just hear that depressing response to us hanging out”

“No no no! It’s not like that” Luke leaned in to pat a defeated Darren on the back. “I just thought we’d be seeing everyone today is all”

“Everyone including Ella, right?” Darren spoke with a playful smirk on his face.

“What do you mean?” Luke asked nervously.

Darren let a small chuckle as he placed an order for a cup of hot chocolate. His curly hair sat comfortably on his head, even in all of that mess it still looked properly groomed. He smiled at the waitress as she brought out his drink. Taking a sip of the steaming drink injected a stream of warmth into his veins. Slowly his attention turned back to Luke.

“What I mean, is that you like her, of course”

Luke’s mocha colored skin bloomed with a strawberry red color. His hands began to wave persistently towards Darren. How did he know? Did Anaya know as well? What about Ella, was she aware of his feelings too? A sickness began stirring in his coffee filled stomach as he watched Darren smugly sip his drink. “I don’t know what to say to that” The words slowly fell from his lips like a sad song on a record player.

“Relax man! It’s not a big deal” The reassurance shocked Luke. It wasn’t the reaction that he had expected. “I’m the only one that’s noticed, so far”

‘So far’. The phrase choed in Luke’s brain like a fly, bugging him every chance it could get. Swarming around him. He felt a gentle knock on his shoulder, it was Darren again. “Don’t look so freaked out Luke, it’s fine! Seriously, you can’t help how you feel, right?”

“R-right... Just so you know, I won’t act on these feelings. It’s more of a crush really. It’ll go away soon” Luke could hear Darren laughing as he continued to sip his drink. “My misery amuses you huh? Some friend”

“No, no it’s not that” he placed the now empty cup down on the countertop. “It’s just that if you *did* act on said feelings, Lilith would grind you into dust. Like erase your entire existence Luke” Darren could see the newborn fear in his friends’ eyes. He knew that fear all too well, growing up with the beast they called Lilith.

“Trust me, I *know*. The woman is terrifying. Plus, we’re actually in a neutral place right now. She called me her ‘friend’ the other day. Although, she did seem reluctant to do so but still; that’s progress! I don’t want to ruin that” Luke’s voice trailed off.

“Buuuuuut?”

“But, there’s just something about Ella. Something different y’know?”

“Yep. The girl is basically an angel. Must be that heavenly effect. It’s been that way since we were kids. Every boy our age had a crush on her. Girls too”

“Really?”

“Oh yeah. She was so sweet, almost like a mom or sister. She was insanely beautiful, still is! She just had such a warm presence, you felt a peace when she was around” Thinking back on

those early days with Ella and his friends made Darren smile as he spoke. Listening to him made Luke's heart ache.

"It's still like that, even now?" Luke asked.

"Even now" Darren chuckled quietly.

"I wish that I knew you guys back then. Maybe it could have been different with her and I..." Luke's voice trailed off. At that moment he could feel Darren's eyes piercing his body like tiny needles. Did he say something wrong? "I'm sorry, I didn't mean it the way that it came out..."

"Look, I get that you can't help how you feel. But Ella loves Lilith. It's always going to be Lilith. They've been together since we were in grade school, those two girls have loved each other in a past life, I'm sure of it. I hope you understand that there is nothing that you can do, that could change the way Ella feels about Lil." Darren spoke in a stern, almost fatherly voice. It was rare to hear him speak so seriously to another person.

"I hear you" Luke spoke in a clear tone.

"Good! I won't say anything to anyone, just work on sorting those feelings out alright? I'd hate to lose you as a friend because you made it awkward" The curly haired boy quickly removed himself from his seat. "Be right back, bathroom is calling" and just like that he had disappeared.

Luke smiled quietly as he traced an invisible circle into the countertop, silently trying to sort out the feelings rushing through his body.

"You've been ignoring my calls" a slick but familiar voice danced into Luke's ear. He turned to see who was speaking to him. His heart sank as he stared straight through Vincent. A terrifying chill made his heart skip a beat. The blonde menace smiled at the sight of flustered

Luke. “Ah, so you actually remember me this time? Seems all of the fun I’ve been having in my free time has made my abilities more, potent”

“You’re the man that I keep dreaming about? The one who keeps calling and texting me?” Luke hurried to squirm out of his chair but Vincent quickly grabbed the back of his neck, pulling him back down. The waitress eyed the scuffle between the two boys.

“Oh everything is fine love! He’s just feeling a bit sick, can you run him another cup of water please?” Vincent spoke as he smiled at the girl. She flashed a smile back as she turned away to prepare the drink. “Make a scene and I kill everyone in this building, understand?” Luke nodded obediently. “Good, now, it seems our past encounters have come to you in dreams?”

“I’ve seen you in my dreams, yes... and you’ve appeared as some sort of demon everytime” Sweat rolled down Luke’s cheek.

“Well you aren’t wrong but it is strange that your memories of me have reverted to dreams. Strange indeed. Seems like it’s time for a more direct approach, no more mind control” Vincent teased as he moved his fingers like he was sprinkling salt over Luke’s head.

“What do you want?” Vincent paused at the question, searching his brain for a proper answer.

“Well, I couldn’t help but overhear that you’ve fallen in love with the object of my affection’s girlfriend. Ella was her name, correct?”

“How do you know her name and what do you want with her?” Luke asked as he struggled to break Vincent's subtle but strong grip on his neck. The grip tightened after Luke’s defiant answer.

“*You*, my little spy told me, of course. You just can’t remember. I’ve been using you for days and now I’m going to use you some more. And then when you’ve outlived your usefulness,

i'll snap your neck and be done with you" Luke detected a cold, inhuman and maniacal aura radiating from the blonde haired man as he spoke. The words that he spilled into his ear made Luke's soul shiver, his heart beating at an alarming rate.

"I won't help you hurt Ella or Lilith... So you may as well just kill me now and get it over with." Luke whispered, fear dripping from his false bravery.

"I see you need me to show you exactly who has the power in this current situation. I was hoping for a little fun today" A ghoulish grin spread across Vincent's face as he waved the young waitress over to him. "Hello love, I need you to do something for me"

"Anything, master Vincent" the girl spoke in a sweet, robotic tone. Luke stared into her eyes, they were blank and lifeless as she spoke to the blonde man.

"Take that gorgeous body of yours" Vincent slowly pointed towards the bustling, snow covered street outside. "And throw into the first speeding car that you see" He leaned in and kissed the girl on the cheek as she quickly walked out of the coffee shop. The sound of car horns and screeching tires rang through the building. Residents of the coffee shop began to gather around the windows in panic. "The next person to speak without my permission will rip out the heart of the person next to them, then proceed to eat it" Vincent yelled. In an instant the shop was as silent as a graveyard. Luke watched as Darren stood still in the crowd of people, as if frozen where he stood. "Do you still want to play the hero?"

Tears rolled down Luke's face. A burning rage sat in the darkest pit of his stomach, an anger at his own weakness. There was nothing that he could do to help anyone except for Vincent right now. If he tried then everyone, including himself, would be killed in an instant. "I'll do what you want" Luke spoke through running tears.

“Good” the demon smirked. “All you have to do is force yourself between Lilith and her love. Doing so will create a rift so deep that it will be impossible to mend. Then I will be free to claim my prize. Once the job is done, I promise you a swift and painless death. Understand?”

The weight of Vincent's presence and word's toppled down on Luke like a boulder, pushing him further and further under water until he could no longer breathe. He had never experienced fear like this before, he had never seen a demon in the flesh before either. Vincent had changed that. There was nothing human beneath the skin that he wore as a ruse, the only thing that Luke saw in those eyes was a terrifying hunger, a deep darkness. “Please just let everyone go now”

“I’ll be back when your task is complete. Do not try to hide from me” Vincent whispered in Luke’s ear before exiting the coffee shop. As he slipped through the door the shop began to breathe with life again. Everyone continued to rush towards the window, looking on at the scene unfolding on the street. The young waitress lay dead in the middle of the street. Her body twisted and broken, covered in blood stained slush. The sight made Luke sick to his stomach. He could hear Darren talking to him, asking what had happened while he was in the bathroom. He tried to respond but the words just wouldn’t manifest in his dry mouth. He quickly grabbed his things and raced out of the building, disappearing into the crowd of people gathered outside. Leaving Darren with a puzzled look on his face.

“I need to find Ella..” the panicked boy spoke to himself. Despite everything that just happened his heart was still set on something. All that he knew was that he had to keep Ella safe, even if that meant sacrificing Lilith to hell’s favorite son. “It’s the only way to keep everyone safe... I’m sorry...” As he stumbled down the New York street a woman followed him with her eyes, watching everything as it unfolded.

“What have you done...” the woman spoke as she faded into the shadows.

Lilith walked down the streets with an uncontainable smile on her face. She had just spent the most amazing day with Ella, although she did feel bad for ditching their friends last minute. But today was exactly what the couple needed. Lilith’s erratic behavior had seemed to be under control as of late. No fits of uncontainable anger, no voices, no blackouts. But due to her past indiscretions there seemed to be a widening gap between her and Ella. A gap that was visibly noticeable to the both of them. An entire day, just the two of them was something that was greatly needed, to reconnect. And the two of them did just that, it was written all over Lilith’s gorgeous face.

She pushed her hands deeper into her jacket pockets, her hair blowing over her face as it knocked against the wind. Suddenly she felt a heavy brush against her shoulder as she was knocked back slightly. She looked up to see what the cause of the commotion was.

“Shit! I’m sorry, I wasn’t even paying att-” her apology was cut short as she noticed that she was talking to air. The only thing she could see was a familiar face speeding past citizens on the street in a dizzy rush. “Luke? Hey, Luke wait” she shouted after the boy. But he didn’t give a second to look back at all. It was like he didn’t even notice her at all.

Thinking nothing more of it she wiped the puzzled look on her face away. As she turned to continue her walk she bumped into another pedestrian yet again.

“Dude, seriously?” she snapped at herself as she looked up at the man she had run into. “Vincent?” Surprise and curiosity dripped from her voice as she gathered her composure. But the blonde man did not return the same favorable look. His eyes did little to hide away the concern and worry he carried inside of him.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” Lilith asked as she observed his face.

“There’s something that I think you should know, Lilith”

“You’re kind of freaking me out here, what’s going on? And how do you keep bumping into me like this?”

“A little while ago, I overheard young Luke and Darren talking..” Vincent’s eyes carefully avoided Lilith’s. “Talking about Ella”

Lilith’s interest in the conversation suddenly peaked as her eyes widened a little. “What about her? Is something wrong, what is it?” Vincent was silent in response to the barrage of questions coming from Lilith. “Vincent what is it?”

“It appears that Luke is in love with Ella... He left the cafe in a hurry, to tell her how he felt. I was in the process of following him, but I seemed to have lost his trail” As she listened to words leaking from his mouth, Lilith felt a surge of anger. She could feel every second of the time spent with Ella burn away and all she could think about now was confronting Luke.

“We crossed paths not too long ago. So that’s why he was in such a hurry?” As she turned to chase after the boy she felt a hand stop her from going any further. “Let go of me Vincent” The words came out like a venomous python hissing. The sound of her anger made Vincent’s heart race.

“Are you sure that this is the path that you wish to follow?” He asked sternly.

“Let me go” she hissed back at him.

Her stern demand put a smile on Vincent’s face. He quickly pulled her closer, looking directly into her eyes as she squirmed to move away. “Let him feel every inch of rage and do not stop until your hunger is satisfied” he whispered into her ear. As he spoke the words her squirming suddenly stopped. It was like her anger had been quelled, replaced with something

new. Her eyes grew cold, the life that filled them only minutes ago had faded. Vincent released her from his grip and she quickly continued on her path back to Ella. As he watched her silhouette fade into the valley of bodies moving across the streets, he wore a most sinister grin. “Finally”

As she moved through the lively streets it was as if her body had found an unrelenting source of vigor and life. Everything felt lighter, she was moving as if everyone around her was in slow motion. Something that a normal person would not be capable of doing. Lilith’s muscles felt like they were made of steel, like she could run for hours and feel nothing but a light sweat on her brow. It reminded her of that near fatal accident just the other day. A bus barely missed her before she magically appeared on the opposite side of the street. There was little that she could do to explain it but even then she knew that something was different. Whatever thoughts she currently had about her new source of energy was quickly blocked out by a burning rage.

In an instant she found herself in front of Ella’s building. Arriving much faster than she previously had. She entered the building and quickly scaled the stairs leading upward in an instant before landing at her girlfriend’s doorstep. She tossed the thought of knocking from her mind as she forced the door open to a sight that would be burned into her mind for eternity. Ella quickly pushed Luke away from her mouth, a look of surprise and sadness washed over the redhead. Her focus quickly shifted to Lilith, the room fell so silent that you could hear every heart racing at the speed of sound.

“You snake! I *knew* that we shouldn’t have trusted you” Lilith screamed as she lunged towards the fearful looking boy. Her head felt like it was going to explode. All that she could hear was the sound of a faint voice, a voice that had long been absent until now, telling her to rip Luke apart. She could feel Ella gripping her limbs tightly, holding her back, stopping her from

doing something that she would later regret. But she didn't care, all that wanted to do was punish Luke for even going near her treasure.

"Lilith *stop!* Please" Ella pleaded as she cupped Lilith's face in her hands, hoping to sooth her rage with her soft touch. A method that had proved most successful in the past and would hopefully come through one last time. She could feel the fiery rage burning from Lilith's skin as she touched it. "Calm down baby, please" she spoke in a soft, comforting tone. The voice in Lilith's head collided with Ella's. One telling her to inflict her rage onto Luke, the other asking her to bury it. It was all noise that rattled around in her head, she winced as she fought the battle in her mind.

"Kill him, he is a cowardly insect that doesn't deserve to breathe. Do it now!" The voice spoke sharply.

"Don't defend me; Ella... I'm not sorry about what I just did" Luke's voice was even, but you could sense the fear hidden underneath as he crawled on thin ice. Ella could feel a surge of unnatural strength coming from Lilith as she held on tighter, attempting to calm her. Luke turned to look Ella directly in the eye. He could see what she was thinking just by looking at her. It was written all over her face, begging him not to say what he was about to say. But he had no other choice, if this was going to keep her safe then he would do it without hesitation. "I love you, Ella, and I think that you should be with me... not her"

The words sent a chill down Ella's spine as she closed her eyes slowly, it was as if she lost every inch of strength in her limbs as she fell to the floor. In that moment she lost control of Lilith. With a light gust of wind Lilith had quickly pinned Luke to the wall. Her hand clasped around his throat tightly. The look in her eyes made Luke's heart sink. He saw a dark rage

coupled with puddles of pain and sadness. It didn't matter how hard he squirmed to get away, her grip was far too tight. Much like it was the night of the party.

"You know I'm right" he coughed out. "Just look... at what you're doing to her... Right now, you're just a burden to her. Sucking out all of the light and goodness that she carries with her." His sentence was cut short as Lilith tightened her grip.

"Kill him!" The voice screamed.

"You know *nothing* about how she feels or who she is." Lilith was prepared to make Luke's determined face a part of the wall behind him. The voice in her head relentlessly begging her to do it. That's when she heard Ella's faint plea resonating behind her.

"Lilith, please... just stop. I can't take anymore of this..." Ella spoke through falling tears as she watched Lilith nearly choke the life out of Luke, helplessly. "Just stop..."

"You know I'm right" Luke whispered through short breathes. The grip around his neck slowly let up until he was free.

"You are weak, Lilith" Disdain dripped relentlessly from the voices words.

The anger continued to swell inside of Lilith but the cries and pleas of Ella did their best to fight it back. Nothing was making sense to her anymore. She could barely remember why she was so angry in the first place. As she turned to look at Ella her heart sank. The one person that she lived to love, the only one that had been there since the beginning, staggered away in fear as she looked at her. That sight alone was enough to bring Lilith back to reality and snatch her away from the mighty grip of the voice inside her head.

"Get out" she screamed at Luke. The young boy looked towards Ella. His heart reached to her as he watched her cry on the floor beneath them. "Leave" The pain in Lilith's voice made it clear that it was time for him to go. As he rushed out he could feel the pain and longing in the

room attempt to pull him back. With that lingering feeling, he knew that he had accomplished what he set out to. He knew what was about to happen next. But as much as he felt for Ella, his heart broke for Lilith as well. Even if Vincent was to kill him as soon as he set foot outside, he would die knowing that he destroyed something that most people never get the chance to experience in their lifetime. The weight of that thought was enough for him to embrace death. He had broken a bond that could never be broken. He deserved whatever twisted fate the blonde devil had planned for him.

The air in the apartment was heavy with the stench of fear and regret. The spell that seemed to egg on Lilith's anger had seemed to subside for the time being; as she watched Ella pick herself off the floor slowly. The dark feeling in the pit of her stomach wrestled with her anxiety, Lilith knew what was coming next. But as she opened her mouth to speak the words couldn't find their way out. So she forced herself to speak, to break the silence.

"Say it, Ella.." her voice was sharp, dripping with regret and pain. She took small, quiet steps; closing the gap between herself and Ella. The hesitation binding the redhead was written all over her face. "Say it"

"I don't know what to say, Lilith! I don't" nothing could mask the sadness in Ella's reply. It rocked Lilith to her very core, hearing her partner speak with such agony. Agony inflicted by her actions. "I don't recognize the person standing in front me... This isn't you, Lilith.."

"Maybe this is who I always was, deep down" Lilith replied somberly.

"No, our actions define who we are. And what you just did to Luke, *again*, shows that you've let this anger inside of you warp you into someone that I don't even recognize anymore"

"Is this version of me someone that you're afraid to get close to then? Someone that you can't trust?"

“Listen to yourself! Are you incapable of feeling any remorse for what you just did? You burst into the apartment and immediately jump to conclusions, without letting either of us get a word in to explain what happened. *He* kissed me Lilith, as soon as I opened the door. He was panicked and spouting out nonsense about you and I. He was confused and scared about something. Luke wasn’t in his right mind. But that doesn’t matter to you does it? You continue to let your anger control who you are. It’s like you see me as some prize that no one else can obtain except for you now... I can’t be with you like this Lilith, not if you’re going to continue down this path. You aren’t the girl that I fell in love anymore...”

“The girl that you fell in love with is dead, Ella. I can’t even feel her anymore... But if you can’t love me as I am now, if that’s how you really feel about all of this, then you’re right. We shouldn’t be together” the words left Lilith’s throat so fast that she did even realize that it was her speaking them. The impact made Ella flinch, her lips quivering.

“So that’s it then?” Ella’s words were quiet at first. Lilith could feel the fragile ground that they had tried for so long to repair, breaking underneath their feet. The destiny binding them together came undone with each passing second but for the two girls time seemed to drag this painful moment on for had felt like an eternity. “You *need* to leave” the somber ginger’s cries echoed throughout the apartment and slammed into Lilith’s chest. The last light within her began to burn out.

“Fine” Lilith whispered as she turned her back on Ella. As she walked out of the door she could feel Ella’s heart screaming at her to come back, begging her to make another attempt to work things out. The sweet broke down the moment Lilith shut the door and disappeared from her life, maybe for good this time. “Maybe Luke was right. You’ll probably be better off without me”

The winter wind outside held a scent of calamity in the air and Lilith allowed it to wash over her. She was exhausted and her body could not hide it any longer. Unable to cope with the pain swelling in her heart, she buried it deep within her. Allowing it to be consumed in the burning flames of her anger. She wondered what would happen if she just flipped the switch on her emotions for a while. Would it make this hell on earth that she now lived in easier to navigate alone? Or would it open a new path that led to more pain and suffering. It was a gamble but she no longer had the energy to play the odds. As she wandered the streets alone, she could hear a faint, familiar voice swelling into a bone chilling crescendo. Its laugh drowned out the living sounds of the city around her, engulfing Lilith in a whirlwind of hate and anger. The restless night spelled out disaster and ruin.

Chapter 5

_____ Luke wandered the streets after the events that transpired moments ago. His mind still going in circles, his heart beating so hard against his chest. What had he just done? Did he really protect Ella, or did he just do more harm than good? He stood there and watched a love bond by

destiny crumble in front of him. With the main cause of its destruction being himself. Sure he and Lilith weren't the best of friends, but she was doing what she could to move on from what happened at the party. She was doing what had to do in order to make Ella happy. He should have known better than to give in to Vincent's plan, despite everything that he had seen at the coffee shop. But it was too late for regrets now, as he saw Vincent appear from the shadow lit streets. That mysterious and taunting grin plastered on his face.

"Well done, my little puppet" he clapped as he slithered closer to the boy. "I honestly didn't think that you had it in you but here we are" His voice was filled with joy, an underlining hint of ulterior motives slept underneath it.

"All of this... pain, just for one person. What exactly do you want with Lilith? Why are you so obsessed with her?" As quickly as he spat out the words, Vincent had his hand wrapped around Luke's neck in a tight grip. His eyes sharp and his breath steady. He definitely wasn't human, Luke thought to himself. "Why her?"

"I don't care for your questions very much. All that you need to know is that you have outlived your usefulness" His words were so clear, precise enough to cut holes into Luke's skin. "Anything you want to get off your chest before you die?"

Everything felt more intense to Luke. The cold air on his skin felt more brisk than ever. The dimly lit streets of New York seemed brighter in his eyes. His mind flashed over to his friends, the people that had become his family in such a short amount of time. Darren, Anya, Lilith and Ella. All of them had welcomed him into their little family in one way or another. Despite how rough their beginnings were, they never gave up on him. Something that his old family did all too easily. He didn't have much memory of his life before his parents abandoned him as a baby. But since that day, his heart had been searching for a place to call home and after

all this time it finally found it. He may have been a pawn in Vincent's twisted obsession but if he was going to die, then he would do it as a free man. On his own terms.

"You'll get what's coming to you, demon. Rot in hell" Luke responded confidently. Somehow, in his heart, he knew that Vincent's plan would never succeed. Humanity was something that a demon could never understand. He sent all of the power left in his body into his fist and launched it into Vincent's face. The impact was barely enough to make him flinch but it did leave a large cut on his annoyingly perfect skin. The sight of it made Luke smile.

"Quiet rebellious, dripping with sentiment. A proper last act of defiance from a dying man... I respect that" As he spoke softly his grip on Luke tightened even more and the boy didn't resist. The sound of the bones around his throat caving in filled the strange silence on the street. As he coughed up blood he could feel the life draining from his body. One last snap and he would be dead but he just continued to smile. It made Vincent uneasy and annoyed. "Strange" he whispered as he snapped the remaining bones in Luke's neck and watched his limp body drop to the snow covered ground with a loud crunch.

He slicked his hair back and dusted off his long black coat in one quick motion before walking away from the young boy he had just murdered. As he disappeared into the shadows once again the lifeless body he left behind slept in the snow. A familiar, unnaturally beautiful woman, leaned over Luke. A somber expression sat on her face as she put her hand on the dead boy's eyes to close them. "It seems that you are the one that is in need of saving, Vincent... I won't let you corrupt her" As she lifted her hand and suddenly vanished, Luke's chest began to rise and fall, slowly but surely. He was still alive.

She could feel the aching in her heart, her legs giving out beneath her. She could still feel the words leave her lips, see the look on Ella's face as she said them. Lilith kept telling herself it was for the best, to end things with Ella. Something terrifying was happening within her, something beyond the limits of nature. Her body was hollow and void of any feeling or emotion, but in her mind the voice was more present than ever and she no longer had the strength or willpower to fend it off.

"Blood" the word repeated as a steady whisper in her mind.

Her long, black wool coat flapped in the cold city wind as she dragged through the streets of midtown. Her black hair hung over her face like a blanket. People on the street could barely see her face as they stared while passing her by. Her phone buzzed quickly as she pulled it out to read the text on the bright screen. It was Vincent asking her to meet him at a club nearby.

"Blood" the voice screamed.

"No. Alcohol" she whispered to herself, or maybe to the voice in her head, silently guiding her as well.

A couple of blocks away loud, pulsing music could be heard bouncing through the walls of a club. Without hesitation Lilith made her way towards the sound, tripping on piles of snow and ice along the way. Laughing to herself as she picked her broken body up each time. The club was packed outside. Young people lined up in the cold, waiting to enter the building. A flashing, red sign hung above their heads. *'Intensity'* was the name.

Lilith slowly made her way to the front of the line and was met by a small but rather burly man. His arms were traced with tattoos and his beard was nice and full. He held out his hand towards Lilith.

"Fuck, you look like hell girl!" the man spoke with a heavy, hispanic ascent.

She stroked her black mane behind her head to reveal her face to him. Her skin was more pale than it ever had been, as if no blood was flowing through it. Her once excited eyes were nothing but empty holes in her head, granting her sight, sleeping in the bags placed under them. Her lips were cold and could probably freeze the next thing they touched.

“You have no idea” Lilith spoke in a flat, lifeless voice.

The man looked behind to examine the restless line of youth behind her. “Alright, go on in” he said as he waved Lilith through the entrance. The bodies waiting in line lifted their hands in disbelief. Even at her worst Lilith still attracted the wandering eyes of men. The inside of the club was extremely large. The outside hid away the larger interior deceptively well. The music was blaring and Lilith could barely hear herself think, which is exactly what she wanted. Red lights flashed on and off as she made her way to the crowded bar. Bumping and swimming through the crowd like a lifeless fish.

The music was vibrating through her body, giving her limbs life once again. The only thought running through her head was dancing and drinking until she collapsed. She aggressively forced her way through the sea of people crowded around the bar.

“Vodka, the entire bottle” she yelled as she pointed at the bartender.

“I don’t think you have the cash for that sweetheart. Maybe try something smaller” the bearded man spoke sarcastically. Lilith reached into her jacket pocket and pulled out her credit card, thrusting it at the man.

“Shut up and hand me the damn bottle you sexist freak” noticing that he clearly made a mistake, the bartender swiftly swiped Lilith’s card and handed her the bottle. “Thank you”. Lilith brazenly opened the bottle, pouring its contents into her empty stomach. Never pausing as the sharp taste of alcohol stung her throat. Bumping into every person in her path she made her way

onto the dance floor, letting the rhythmic thumping on the music guide her body. She swayed her hips slowly as her hand ran through her hair. She didn't care how crowded the floor was or how hot everything had become. For once her mind wasn't being occupied by a menacing voice and she loved the feeling of this kind of freedom. She felt like a normal girl for the first time in a long time.

The red lights continued to flash. The soft echoe of the word *blood* crowded her mind. The music began to thump lower and louder. Like a war drum through the club. Lilith began to dance harder, sweat rolling down her face and under her jacket. In that instant time began to slow down as she looked through the flashing red light.

"Blood, blood, blood, blood, blood" the voice repeated.

In the gaps of darkness and light she could feel someone watching her, studying her every move. As the red flashed through again, Vincent's perfectly sculpted face could be seen. Wearing a devilish smirk paired with observing eyes. He quickly made his way through the crowd to face Lilith.

"Even in misery, you are stunning" he spoke in her ear. His words like honey coursing through her body.

"Don't talk" she replied as she clung to his black suit, swaying her body to the music. "Just dance with me" Her voice drained of all hope, she resigned to simply floating into a vodka flavored oblivion.

"As you wish"

The two of them danced in red, blood boiling and sweat soaking their clothing and streaming down their bodies. Lilith danced and danced, surprised that Vincent could keep up with her movement. Suddenly she turned to face him. Their faces close enough to feel their

breath tickle each other's skin. Her mind was quiet for a moment and the only thing she could feel was the rhythm of a slow but steady heartbeat. That was all she had, nothing else. What she craved she could no longer have, she didn't deserve it anymore. She wasn't sure if she deserved anything close to happiness anymore after everything she had done, after who she had become. Her dead gaze fixed on Vincent's lips as she placed them on her's. He pulled her in closer as the kiss grew deeper, heavier. The feeling that Lilith was craving failed in conjuring itself up but she no longer cared.

He bit her lip softly as his hand ran through her hair. Blood began to trickle from the wound, slowly hitting the floor. He pulled back to examine her lips. He gently rubbed his thumb across the cut and placed the soft ruby liquid into his mouth. His eyes closed in pleasure as he tasted the warmth of Lilith's blood stream through his entire body. Lilith, in her dazed state lunged towards his lips and locked him once again. The sound of glass crashing against the floor was masked underneath the pulsing vibrations born from the music. A cold feeling began to well up in her chest, a feeling of hunger and something else. But Lilith just pushed it back down below the surface, for in this moment the only thing she wanted to indulge, was Vincent's tongue down her throat.

Nothing was ever black and white in this world. Lines became blurred and morals glossed over with the slightest push or provocation. Lilith's love for Ella was something that consumed every part of her, every fiber of her being. But her heart stopped beating the moment she lost the one thing that was keeping her feet tethered to the ground. The feeling of Vincent's hands rubbing across her naked skin was numbing, but she did not care. So desperate to feel

something, anything, as she pulled him closer to her lips. The feeling of soft silk sheets caressed her back. Like honey dripping over her cold skin.

They had moved to her apartment, away from the eyes of everyone else. He was so gentle while handling her, she thought. Cradling her body like a handful of roses. His lips slowly indenting themselves on her own. He smelled of honey and steel. Suddenly Lilith rolled him underneath her, pinning his arms to the sheets beneath them. Her messy, dark hair covering her face. Vincent's eyes scanned the decaying beauty before him. Begging to taste her again.

"Stop being so gentle. We aren't lovers and we aren't friends" she spoke dryly. "If we're going to do this, then let's just get on with it"

Vincent's eyes hardened at the words spoken to him. He quickly grabbed the back of Lilith's head and forced her face down to his. Her breath steady and her heart beat as quiet as the night.

"So empty" he spoke deeply as he brushed aside the hair blocking her face.

His hands ran down her stomach, then between her legs. Her hips swaying back and forth. Vincent sighed with pleasure as his hands traced her frail body in the darkness. Lilith stared blankly into the moonlight shining through the window beside them. Her eyes showed no signs of life within them, as if they had lost all hope. Despite having Vincent beneath her, she felt like she was alone. Wandering in the darkest corners of her mind, with no one to console her anymore. Not even the voice that had made her mind its home spoke to her anymore.

The sound of his moans blurred together with the defining silence she was now facing within her. Her stomach began to struggle, her bones trembled like they never had before but she no longer felt pain. She imagined that she was finally being relieved of her life. That her suffering was coming to end, finally. She closed her eyes, still swaying like a tidal wave on top

of Vincent. The warm feeling boiling up in her stomach began to swell. The blood in her veins began to burn through her skin, giving off the illusion that she was glowing in the dark.

The vision of the blood dripping from her lip in the club replayed itself, over and over. The red lights flashing so brightly, so quickly. It was like a record skipping or a tape replaying the same static image on a loop. Each drip became louder in her ears, until it finally broke the barrier of silence that she had built up in her mind. The taste of that red, liquid metal swam across her tongue and down her throat as it mixed with the fire swelling from her stomach and into her chest.

Whatever this vision in her mind was, Lilith was holding on to it with every ounce of strength she had left. This euphoric feeling was something that she had quickly grown attached to. She would kill to keep this with her, even into the after life that she so desperately longed for. She could feel it swimming up through her throat as the hair on the back of her neck stood up like needles. Every inch of her body had come back to life in this brief moment. The voice in her head had returned. Echoing in her brain, telling her to bury humanity, commanding her to revel in the hunger and blood. She just simply obeyed.

Finally it was out. Spewing from her mouth like rain from a grey cloud. Drops of dark, rose colored liquid covered every angle of the room as Lilith tilted her chin towards the ceiling. Giving off a sigh of what sounded like relief and pleasure. In the same breath Vincent did the same, as if he had seen everything that was happening within her mind. She ran her hands through her blood covered hair, feeling the warmth of it all on her body.

When she opened her eyes she was greeted with the sweet kiss of the moonlight on her face. Vincent still sprawled beneath her, covered in sweat. His face twisted in that menacing grin. That strong feeling of life and power had quickly left Lilith's body. She felt nothing but the

heat and sweat mixing on her skin. She was left with nothing but a consuming hunger, but this wasn't the feeling she was used to. It wasn't food that she craved. Vincent clapped his hands around her own, her nerves still numb. He gently kissed her skin before speaking in a dark, chilling voice that could freeze time itself.

“Welcome back. You must be famished” he spoke.

She was as still as the ice frozen on the dark concrete of the city that night. Her glowing amber eyes fixated on the moon lighting up the abyss outside of the window. It was like nothing was left of her at all. Like Lilith no longer existed, only the dark hunger for something she had no knowledge of. The faint taste of familiarity lingered on her lips. She slowly moved off of Vincent and began making her way to the bathroom door. Before leaving the room she paused, her frail frame looking like it could give out at any moment. When she spoke you could hear the despair laced within her breath. The scent of emotion stripped from her vocabulary.

“You have no idea”

Through her eyes it was like everything was painted crimson. Her senses magnified. She felt mighty in her frail body, feeling as if she could race a speeding train or cave someone's skull in with a single punch. But her craving for death was deeper than all of that. The voice in her head sang like a faint echo, blowing in and out of her mind rapidly. Lilith had given up control the moment she ended things with Ella, letting the pain buried deep beneath run free in the streets of the moonlit city. Having Vincent close by was the only sense of comfort that she could muster up, although it wasn't ideal for her.

Even in the darkest, latest seconds of the night this city still flashed with life, people flooding the streets and alleyways. The feeling of the crisp winter chill biting their noses, the

smell of gas and metal kissing the air around them. Providing endless possibilities to feed Lilith's craving.

The two of them had walked all the way to Brooklyn through the cold night. Lilith was dressed in her usual black attire. A sweater frayed at the ends, a hole torn in the collar, a dark red hoodie spewing from underneath the sweater. Poking through the stitchings. All partnered with tight black jeans and black boots cased in mud. Vincent, in all of his royal, prestigious glory was covered with a gorgeous all black suit, covered with what seemed to be a long jacket that probably cost more than most city residents monthly rent. The difference between them was like night and day, but in this case opposites attract when a mutual craving for death rocks electrifies every inch of your body.

"Why are we in Brooklyn?" Lilith quietly asked as she paused in front of a convenience store, it's sign flashing dark pink. "Well, if I remember correctly your little school friends live here, do they not?" Vincent responded in a whimsical tone. Almost as if he was about to enjoy the game that was about to begin before him.

Pink flashes clashed with the dark streets, slowly putting the borough to sleep it seemed. The flashes polished the dark bags under Lilith's lifeless amber eyes as she stood silently in place. The sound of her heartbeat growing faster and louder as she swam through the thoughts spinning around in her broken mind. Never in her right mind would she think of hurting the people she cared about most in this world. She followed the memories of them all together in her mind like a movie buff in a theater, watching as each one passed by.

She saw a time where she was happier, her heart full enough to feed the empty vessel she called home now. The Lilith from her memory was brutally biting at the cage the current Lilith built for her, desperate to be released. Slowly the blood began to fill the cage, drowning out the

voice of her past self. Leaving her with nothing but the craving and blood stained memories of the people she once knew. They were nothing but a corpse to drain now.

“They keep secrets. Secrets bring nothing but pain and I want them to feel mine” she said as her lips quivered like a drug addict looking for their next fix.

Vincent had her right where he wanted her. He was priming her for something, but for what exactly? He held out his hand toward the empty street. The ambient pink light illuminating his shadow onto the cracked concrete.

“Then by all means, lead the way” he hissed with a hint of amusement. His skin was glowing underneath the moonlight. As she looked back at the quiet convent store behind them Lilith thought she could see the faint outline of someone hidden in the shadows. It was rather tall and slender, a lot like Vincent. But it was as still as ice, unmoving.

“Dancing shadows?” she whispered to herself as she flipped her hood over head and paced steadily down the snow covered street.

After fifteen minutes of aimlessly casing the Brooklyn streets, the pair came to a rather large apartment building. Its exterior was much different than the one Lilith lived in. This building had soul. Its faded ash red brick housing blended in perfectly with the aesthetic of the burrow. Warm, yellow-orange light leaked from multiple window frames, giving the building the appearance of a giant fireplace. This familiarity sent a rush of warmth through her otherwise cold body.

“Is this it?” Vincent spoke with disgust in his mouth. “How.... quaint”

Lilith shot a dark look at him from the shadows covering her face as she made her way up the old cement stairs. The sound of low music and a smell of scented candles intertwined with cigarette smoke welcomed them as they entered the building. The inside was just as welcoming

as the out. Although it was littered with young, college students it was very well kept. Not a speck of dust or dirt could be seen on the floor or stairways.

“Thank god they can at least afford proper maid services in this hole” Vincent hissed.

“*Stop* talking” Lilith spoke as she flipped her hood back.

“So irritable”

Vincent examined her with lust and longing in his eyes. Fighting off the urge to taste her skin again. His obsession grew stronger every minute he was around her.

“Will you be able to do it?” he asked her.

She turned to look at him. Every cell in her body was on fire, her blood boiling within her veins. The pit in her stomach crying out for something she had never craved before. She didn’t care what she had to do to satisfy it, or who she had to sacrifice to do it. She slowly paced up the stairs with Vincent creeping by her side. With each step her heart pounded against the walls of her chest. Would she be able to kill Darren and Anya, the two people that had become her family? That thought couldn’t penetrate the barrier that the voice had conjured in mind, she could only think about one thing.

After two flights of stairs the pair stopped in front of apartment 17. Lilith pulled out a small keychain from her back belt loop and inserted a small key into the lock. The door silently fell open as they made their way into the sleeping room. The faint sound of the television was the only sign of waking life in the open space. There, interlocked and asleep on the couch was the unlikely pair. Darren was so tall that his feet were hanging on the couch, Anya was burrowed deep in his chest, wrapped in a blanket. Vincent kneeled down to examine the two of them as they dreamt innocently.

“I think it’s time that we woke them, don’t you?” he inquired sinisterly. “Rise and shine children” He swiftly grabbed Anya by her messy hair, causing Darren to abruptly come to. Anya screamed in pain as Vincent dragged her into the open space of the living room, throwing her to the ground.

“Wha-what the hell is going on?” Darren shouted, still shaking off the dizziness of his sleep. That dangerous smile found its way back to Vincent's face, he wore it so well. With silent, long strides he appeared before Darren on the couch.

“This way please” he laughed as he grabbed Darren's hair and dragged him to his crying girlfriend. His sheer strength surprised Lilith as she watched from the darkest corner of the room. He was tossing them around so effortlessly, it was like he wasn’t human. Shaking off the rust of his slumber Darren finally came to. Looking over to Anya as she cried on the ground.

“Anya are you okay?” he shouted as he curled her up in his arms. He looked up towards Vincent, who was patiently sitting on the metal coffee table in front of the couch. “Who are you, what the hell do you want?” he shouted towards the blonde demon.

The corners of his mouth twitched profusely as he ran his hand through his falling blonde hair. It happened in one, quick stride. So quick that Lilith couldn’t begin to follow the movement. He rose from the metal table, his foot swiftly connected with Darren’s chin, sending the boy hurtling back into the kitchen.

“I want nothing. You young ones, so quick to speak out of turn” he slowly kneeled down towards the terrified girl trying to scratch her way to her boyfriend. “She has business here, i’m just the delivery boy”

Anya followed Vincent’s pointed finger into the dark corner of the room. Her eyes opened wider than any humans’ should, as tears flooded from them. Lilith slowly emerged from

the dark and into the flashing glow of the television screen. Her pale skin gleaming like fresh snow, her lips quivering at the sight of the blood flowing from Anya's cheek.

"L-lily?" she spoke with desperation. "Lily please help, please" The tears fell to the floor one by one, mixing with the drops of blood from her face. "LILY PLEASE HELP ME, PLEASE"

The words echoed throughout her ears, rattling around in her brain, sinking into her skin. For a brief moment she felt pain and sadness for her friend. She wanted so desperately to help her, to save her from the fate that was about to engulf her. Until the voice came back like an alarm in her brain. Reminding her of the hunger and the pain that was scorching her entire being. She wanted nothing now, she saw nothing but a screaming blood bag. A walking med-kit for her own mental injuries.

She made her way towards her fallen friend. Calmly stroking her hair and wiping her tears. She stopped to look at Anya's face as it twitched and shook from fear. "You knew, didn't you. Both of you?"

"Knew what? What are you talking about?" Darren screamed at the shell that looked like Lilith.

"You knew how he felt about her, but yet you chose to keep his secret knowing the pain and damage it could cause... That's not very friendly" her voice was dry and cold.

"We didn't think he would tell her Lily" Darren cried out. "I should have stopped him and i'm sorry, ok? I'm sorry but we can fix this, we can help you get Ella back. Just.. let us help" Lilith glaced at Vincent as he mocked Darren's pleas.

"Let's get her back, Lil. We'll get her back, I promise" Anya spoke through broken tears.

“You really shouldn’t lie. It’s bad for your health, y’know” Lilith spoke as she cupped Anya’s face in her nimble fingers. “You look disgusting when you cry, Anya” There was nothing left of the Lilith that they knew in this moment. She had been stripped of all emotion and humanity.

The sound of blood hitting the floor and bones cracking filled the apartment. Vincent began laughing, clapping like a clown at a circus show. Extremely proud of what just transpired. Anya twitched as she fell onto Lilith. A blood covered arm sat still through Anya’s chest, her heart slowly beating in Lilith’s hand. She couldn’t understand what had just happened and she didn’t want to understand. All she could focus on was the warmth of the blood on her skin and the gem sitting comfortably in her palm. She swiftly pulled her arm from Anya and watched her body sink to the ground like an anchor.

“No! What did you do?” Darren cried. You could hear the pain dripping from his screams as he fought to move closer to the dead girl beside Lilith.

The pulsing in her throat was raging as she brought the heart closer to her face. The smell of the blood sent a shock through her nose and aroused her like nothing ever had before. Her mind went blank as she licked the heart clean of the ruby liquid. She had tasted anything so astounding before. She savored the feeling of the blood flowing through her throat and into her aching stomach. Feeding energy to her frail body and giving it life again. She moaned and laughed as she reveled in deep pleasure. Sucking the remaining blood from her fingertips. Vincent sat in awe of the sight before him. Indulging in every second of it.

“More.. I want more” she growled at Vincent as she bent down to lick the stray blood from the floor. Her blood stained face resembled the vision in the mirror that had haunted her the

darkest corners of her psyche for so long. It had finally broken through its glassy prison and found its way to the surface.

“As you wish” he spoke softly.

He quickly made his way to the kitchen, Darren was curled on the cold ground sobbing after watching the life drain from the love of his life’s body. Vincent placed him next to the still body of Anya. Her body was still giving off an aura full of warmth. Lilith was like a statue, unmoving and intimidating.

“You really shouldn’t cry in front of a woman, it shows weakness” Vincent whispered in the young boy’s ear as he jammed his hand into Darren’s spine. The crunching of bones on impact made Lilith’s heart race even faster. His screams of pain made her thighs quiver.

“How could you?” Darren cried painfully as his dying eyes burned into Lilith’s skin.

The sight of Lilith covered in Anya’s blood terrified and confused him, but the look in her eyes made him want to die. There was nothing behind the glossy amber he looked into. The girl he grew up with drowned in those empty pits that pierced through him.

“You don’t have to do this... please, remember who you are! *This isn’t you*” he begged through staggering breaths.

“I do like it when they beg” Vincent jested as he twisted his hand in Darren’s spine, making him writhe in pain.

Lilith couldn’t recognize herself or her surroundings anymore. The only thing she could see was a thick red sea, dripping seductively onto the floor beneath them. Was she even human at all anymore? In this moment, the pain was finally gone and all that was left was the hunger. She sighed as she pressed her body against Darren’s, feeling his rapid heartbeat on his chest. She looked at him through the eyes of a starving predator.

“This is who am I. It’s who I’ve always been deep down” she whispered in his ear. Tears bursted from his eyes as he screamed in agony. The sound of splattering blood and breaking bones filled the apartment; the white noise of the television tried its best to cancel out the horror. The ominous glow of the screen collided with the blood flying through the air. A view that could be considered art in lighter circumstances. Something was born from Lilith that night, something that had always been inside of her, creeping in the darkest corners of her soul and tonight; it was finally and truly *free*.

The busy flash of the television echoed through the room. Clashing with the moonlight spilling from the sleeping windows of the apartment. She stood still, watching her steady breath slowly vanish, then reappear on the stainless glass. The city seemed like it was fast asleep, but its streets were sleepwalking. Vincent’s light footsteps could be heard dancing around the room, exploring in the dark. He walked to Lilith’s location by the window. The scene of suffering had been playing on repeat in her head, trying to make herself feel anything for what she had done. But the hunger controlled her mind, it was the only thing she cared about. Everything else was just, too far out of her reach.

Lost in thought she didn’t realize that Vincent was speaking, until she turned from the window view to look at the apartment behind her.

“Lost in thought are we?” he asked playfully.

It was like nothing had happened in the room. Everything was back to the way it originally was. No blood, no broken glass, not a trace left. Aside from the two dead bodies sitting side by side on the couch.

“I thought they would enjoy watching a little television, after the night they’ve had” he said tactlessly. “You should go and clean up before we go, I am just about done in here so I can wait.”

Lilith knew that she should feel something in that moment. Any kind of emotion would do, but none were rising within her. She slowly slicked her hair back with a hand covered in dry blood. She wondered why he was barely fazed by any of this, he was ignited by it all. She knew he was a twisted freak but the only emotion he displayed was masked by a soul chilling smile. Looking at him casually move the corpses around like dolls stirred something within her. She recognized the sensation. The warmth filling her cheeks, the beating of her heart intensifying, her mouth void of any moisture. Unable to contain it any longer, she erupted.

“This has happened before, hasn’t it?” she shouted as she paced over to Vincent.

He turned to look at the blood covered angel standing before him and frowned.

“Do try to keep your voice down. There are people trying to sleep, Lilith” He gestured towards the corpses beside them.

“Cut the shit, I know you know what’s been happening to me” Her black locks were beginning to stick to her face, laced with sweat and dry blood. “I just tore into two people like they were made of paper. I feasted on their blood because I have an all consuming hunger for nothing else, all I want to do is bathe in it. You’ve been stalking me for god knows how long, tell me what you know”

This anger and confusion were the first things Lilith had felt in what seemed like decades and she was clinging to these emotions with every fiber of her being, fighting back the monster she had managed to cage up temporarily. Vincent let out a soft sigh as he ran his hand across her cheek. Lilith sharply swatted it away, her gaze could burn a hole through metal.

“I said *talk*” she demanded.

“Oh alright... I suppose I could divulge a sliver of information prematurely” he spoke as he elegantly made propped himself atop the kitchen table. “Sit, I’ll tell you what you want to know, darling”

She remained standing, opting to cross her arms across her chest instead. Her tired eyes rested on Vincent as he spoke.

“What exactly did your *parents* tell you about your birth?” he inquired.

Why was he questioning her about that she wondered?

“My parents? Nothing really... Just that my mother had a really hard time getting pregnant at first but then some kind of *miracle* happened and she had me” Her lips pursed together, not a single thread of emotion could be read from her face. “She told me that it was painful, she almost died during the birth”

“Wow. They really went for the biggest lie they could conjure up, didn’t they? Well done Marlow and Arthur. Your birth was indeed complicated, that is true, but not for the reason that you have been led to believe” Lilith’s eyes widened a bit. Shaking off fragments of the stillness and fatigue that was layered upon them.

“What do you mean?” she inquired.

“Come now darling, recall what just transpired here, the things that you have done tonight” He lightly slipped off of the table and paced towards the window view. “Something rests inside of you, it has always been there. I know that you have felt it your entire life. It is what caused your doubt, your anxieties, your sadness. It is the reason why you have always felt like you don’t belong anywhere. Aimlessly floating in the void alone”

Lilith flinched as the words cut her skin like knives, yet she couldn't feel anything but anger welling up inside of her chest.

"Tell me the truth" she snapped.

"Are you sure you really want to know, it may only make things worse and feed your rage. That will be an enormous weight to bare. I'm sure you can put two and two together by now, though"

"Tell me"

"Hm" he turned back towards Lilith, her pale red skin drowning out in the white noise of the still running television. "Before you were born, your parents struggled to conceive a child. Your mother was recovering from her fourth miscarriage and they were crying to anyone who would listen. Pleading to the gods for answers, or for a miracle. But no one answered. The stress and pain of not being able to have a child naturally drove a wedge between your parents. It seems that it drove your father away the most. In his grief he came across a beautiful woman, a stranger in this city and this country. She spoke with the sweetest accent, so sweet that it enticed your father to learn more about her. The two instantly fell in love and engaged in an affair together. That affair resulted in the pregnancy of the damned angel... But when your mother found out about your birth, she nearly died from the anger and the pain that began to crush her heart. Feeling so badly about what she had caused, the woman explained who she was or rather, *what* she was. Knowing that she would not be able to stay and raise the child she offered up her newborn baby, a beautiful baby girl, to the broken family in hopes that it would mend them in her absence"

“What?” Lilith’s voice was dripping with disbelief. Her father had an affair? Her mother wasn’t her real mother? The information sat like a weight on her nimble shoulders. But deep down she knew that every word of it was true. It had to be.

“Would you like me to stop?” Vincent asked with a raised eyebrow.

“No... Keep going”

“The woman was a demon empress, one of the oldest and most ancient ones on the planet. She was the keeper of both life and death. So, as much as it pained her heart to leave you with your father, in the mortal world, she bestowed your life onto your current family. In hopes of giving you a life where you could be loved. A life free of the pain and anguish that had cursed her existence. But she made a vow. That when you came of age, she would return to watch and guide you as your power manifested. She knew that without her guidance your mortal life would fall apart at the very seams she and your father worked so hard to stitch together. She knew that you were not meant for this world. So she took the steps to ensure that you would have all of the guidance that you needed, when the time was right”

“Is that why you’re here?” Lilith asked somberly. Her hollow voice reflected her empty soul. Her entire life was a lie and the people closest to her knew that.

“Yes. I serve your biological mother. But our views differ a bit. I’d rather you bask in your power, like you just did moments ago. But she insists that you must be taught the right way” Vincent could sense the anger boiling within Lilith. With the just the right string of words he could manipulate her into doing whatever he wanted. And what he wanted, was to see the dance of blood on repeat.

“Knowing exactly what you were, your parents did everything they could to try and bury it. Raising you to be naive about your true nature. They filled you with medication and false

therapy to help you with your '*mental illness*'. But you were not truly ill, you were filled with such emptiness and loneliness simply because a piece of you was missing, a piece that you needed so desperately and spent your entire life searching for, until now"

Her true nature? This is what she was born to be? Something that only craves death and carnage. An empty vessel that could never be filled, no matter how hard she tried to change it. It was no wonder why everything in her life would lead to a dead end, it was because she was not meant for anything else aside from this.

"So I'm just a soulless killer. Is that what my mother wanted for me?" She hissed through her teeth. Her eyes seemed more tired than they ever had before. But there was something else behind the hopelessness. Sparks of anger were fighting for control. "Why did they keep it a secret? Why did they make me believe that I was sick, that there was something wrong with me? The people who were supposed to protect me hurt me the most, for their own selfish reasons, out of fear"

"Facing the truth would mean accepting that they would eventually have to give up their precious little Lilith. Their miracle. Your adoptive mother in particular. You are her entire world. Losing you would destroy her. Your father on the other hand, well, he's one step away from killing himself out of guilt. He misses your birth mother. Spending all of those years in a dead and loveless marriage has rotted him from the inside out" He placed himself back on the tabletop, resting his chin in the palm of his hand. "Or, they simply could not handle raising a child not meant for this mortal world. Try not to take it personally, humans are petty creatures"

"So they never loved each other. All of those years?" Lilith thought back to her days growing up. Her parents never really argued, in fact, they hardly spoke to each other unless she was around. Sure, they slept in the bed but she had never seen them show any love to each other

unless it involved Lilith. “Who exactly are you to my mother, to me? You talk as if you’ve been involved in all of this since the beginning”

“All in due time darling! I think it is high time we leave this place. The happy couple are such boring hosts, I might choose to share their fate if I linger here any longer”

The way Vincent moved was so quick and elegant, it was like his feet never touched the ground. He removed himself from his throne on the table, positioning himself next to Lilith. She was too preoccupied to notice his sudden presence.

“That is all the information I can relay for now. Come, we must get you cleaned up. Although you are still as radiant as ever covered in blood, I much prefer you in your former, well kept state”

His hand was stretched out towards the front door. His eyes traced Lilith’s body with an intense gaze. She sighed as she ran her hands through her messy hair. The television’s soft glow trapping the still bodies of the young students behind them, trapping them in a polaroid like state.

“What are you hiding?” Her gaze cut into Vincent’s perfect skin.

“A magician never reveals the truth behind his tricks” he grinned back at her.

She quickly flipped her hood back over her head as she made her way to the entrance of the loft. She stopped before turning the knob. The memory of her fallen friends played in her mind, their screams filling her ears like nails on a chalkboard. It didn’t matter how much she attempted to feel something for killing them, it was always overwritten by the hunger for blood. It was only about the blood now and she was tired of fighting it. If she really was a demon, then she was a sorry excuse for one. She took the lives of the only people that ever loved her, it was too late to turn back even if she could. Lilith craved the truth just as much as she craved the blood and there was only one place that she was going to get both.

The night seemed like it would last forever. It wouldn't matter if it did, Lilith had no sense of time anymore. Everything felt like it had melted together, combining with the sea of blood she was swimming in. Her apartment lacked any sign of life, losing its familiar sense of home and safety. It was cold and dark, clothes carpeted the floor under her bare feet. It smelled of vanilla and cherries, it smelled like Ella. That night was the last time she remembered being happy, feeling alive with Ella blanketed in her arms. It felt like a lifetime ago now.

Lilith quickly stripped off her blood stained clothing, adding to the cluster already compiled around the room as she made her way to the kitchen sink. Bottles of medication sat neatly on the counter. She grabbed one in her hand, letting out a soft sigh of exhaustion.

“What were these even for?” she whispered to herself.

She uncapped the orange bottle, turning it upside down to watch the contents descend down the drain. They sounded like coins as they collided with the metal piping, echoing throughout the silent apartment. She was relieved to finally be free of Vincent's intruding commentary as she savored the defining silence, having parted from him for the time being. She needed time to decide how to confront her parents, if she even wanted to confront them at all. If she went in her current state blood was sure to flow. It's not like she would feel anything afterwards but she no longer wanted the hunger to decide for her.

Running her hands through the layers of black on her head she turned away from the sink, her eyes opened wide at what was behind her.

“Hey” the voice spoke.

She tried with all of might but words wouldn't form in her mouth. It was like a towel had been stuffed down her throat, hindering her from creating any noise. Ella stood there, a sweet

smile on her face. A long white sweater covered her body, blue jeans and black boots laced her legs. She had her hair down for once. Red strands colored her face like straws of wheat in a field. She was even more beautiful with her hair down, if that was possible. Her eyes didn't show anger or even sadness, they were flooded with kindness and love. Seeing her like this cut a hole in Lilith's stomach. The pain from the surging hunger was unbearable but she couldn't show any signs of it, not around Ella.

"I- I let myself in a while ago. I wanted to talk... I'm sorry, I forgot to give my key back" she said.

"I thought I was clear before, we have nothing to talk about" Lilith uttered through the pain. She gritted her teeth behind her closed mouth. It was like a hammer was forcing nails into her gums.

Ella flinched at the coldness in her voice. She paced over to the light, flipping it on. Her eyebrows burrowed at the sight of Lilith in the light. All of the dry blood on her pale skin and clothes were clearly visible now. The dark bags under her eyes, the paleness of her skin, the weight she had lost, everything was clear as day to Ella now.

"Oh my god" Ella covered her mouth in shock. "What happened to you?" She ran over to where Lilith was standing, attempting to get a better look at the ghost in front of her.

Lilith quickly averted her gaze, attempting to escape the incoming barrage of questions. She wasn't prepared for this moment, she never thought it would come after how she ended things with Ella. She should have stayed away. Ella swiftly cupped Lilith's hand in hers, her cheek in the other.

"Please talk to me, what is going on with you?" her voice began to crack.

“You need to leave” Lilith yelled. She tried to break from Ella’s grasp but the girl had her locked in.

“No, you don’t get to do this anymore, you don’t get to push me away” The kindness in her eyes had shifted to worry, to anger as her grip tightened around her hand. “Tell me what’s going on, I deserve that much at least don’t I?”.

“Get out” Lilith growled.

“No”

“*Leave*”

“I won’t leave you”

“LEAVE”

“I’M STAYING”

For the first time in what felt like an eternity, Lilith began to feel. Seeing Ella in this state, her heart breaking all over again, it killed her. It filled her empty soul with something other than the hunger.

“I’m not who you think I am Ella” she screamed as she broke from the read head’s grip. “I’ve done horrible things... If you knew what I was you would run and never come back.”

“That’s not true”

“You don’t understand”

“So explain it all to me then. Help me understand because I can’t do this Lily, I can’t keep watching you walk further and further away from me” Tears fell from her eyes and collided with the cloth covered floor.

Ella’s heart was calling out to Lilith, begging her to come back home. It was taking everything that she had to not answer that call because she knew exactly what it would mean.

Letting Ella back in would seal her death, it was inevitable. The hunger would take Ella from her, just like it did Darren and Anya. With Ella here she could finally feel again, let everything she denied back in, silence the monster in the mirror once again. Realizing that she had murdered her two best friends was eating at her insides, the pain was overwhelming. If she killed Ella, the love of her life, then she wouldn't be able to continue living. The hunger was becoming restless with every second that passed, threatening to take control.

"You really want to understand? What if the truth broke your heart, what if it changed the way you looked at me at me, completely to the point where I was unrecognizable to you?"

"Nothing could change the way that I feel about you"

She locked into Ella's fixed gaze. Fighting the hunger and her feelings at the same time. Conflicted on what to say to the angel crying in front of her.

"I'm a murderer"

"What?" Ella flinched.

"This blood I'm covered in, it's from the innocent people that I killed tonight"

"You're lying"

"Darren and Anya, Ella.... I left their bodies in their apartment and I enjoyed it. I enjoyed tearing them apart and watching them die by my hand"

Ella stumbled away from Lilith, her face drenched in confusion and sadness. She had no idea how to process what had been said to her, she didn't want to believe it. But the evidence had been laid right before her.

"I told you that you wouldn't recognize me... I'm a monster" Lilith spoke in a somber tone, unable to look at Ella any longer. "Leave, don't ever come back here. I don't want to end up hurting you too"

The sound of Ella's shuffling feet filled the apartment. Keys sang in her hand as the front door stood open. Lilith looked up to see Ella staring at her, with puffy red cheeks and eyes crystalised with water. The door quickly closed and the apartment was once again filled with silence. The beating of her heart was the only thing that filled Lilith's ears, it had been obliterated into a thousand tiny pieces.

"You'll be safe now" she whispered.

As much as she wished for it to happen, the tears just wouldn't fall from her eyes. She pressed her back against the wall and slowly fell to the floor. For the first time in her life she was truly alone. Unable to feel, no voices, no hunger, just her own weak, beating heart.

Ella burst through the entry doors, with a heart rate blasting a mile a minute. Her brain on sensory overload, attempting to process every moment of what had just transpired in that apartment. She could only come up with error codes, her body unable to pump blood fast enough to her brain. Dizzy and in shock she gently sat on the concrete steps in front of the snowy, moonlit Manhattan street. People passed her by, one after the other. Couples holding hands, parents with their sleepy children wrapped in their arms, lone wanderers looking for a way to pass the long night. It was like all of them were walking in slow motion as Ella surveyed them with pursuing intent.

She wiped her hand over her cheek, half expecting them to be drenched in tears. But they were dry. Her body shook in the brisk breeze of the winter but she couldn't feel the bite against her skin. She was numb. All that was going through her mind was the fact that her friends had yet to return her constant calls and array of text messages. The fact that the one person she loved

most in this world confessed to murdering them, what's worse, claiming that she was a monster enjoying every part of it.

Ella knew Lilith better than anyone. She knew when she was lying and when she was telling the truth. She knew what made her happy and what made her sad. She knew every inch of that girl by heart and in this moment she knew that Lilith was telling the truth, as much as she wanted this to be one her many ways of pushing people away, the truth was cutting Ella in the heart and the cuts were deep.

“God” she sighed as she picked herself up from the steps.

The snow crunched beneath her boots, clouds of hazy smoke filtered from her mouth as she breathed. Where was going to go now? To the police?

“No” she whispered to herself.

Doing that would only destroy half of her heart, half of herself and Ella could not put herself through that kind of pain anymore. Being away from Lilith for this long has already crushed her enough. But she had no idea of what to do next. The love of her life was a killer. That fact alone numbed her body worse than the advancing winter chill.

“Lost in thought, are we darling?” a voice inquired from behind.

Ella quickly turned around to see a man, dressed in all black, hair slicked back, wearing a invoking smile that sent a chill down Ella's spine.

“Oh where are my manners....My name is Vincent, from the party remember?”

“Hi, I'm sorry but I should get going” Ella quickly spoke as she turned away from the handsome devil. As she turned away there he was, blocking her way. Something about just looking at him terrified Ella, she needed to get away from him. There was something different

with Vincent. The charm that laced his words was now replaced with a dark, deep terror. The stunning smile he once wore was now twisted into an ominous, cracking line.

“I think it’s time we skip to the finale. I’m growing tired of this game” The words dripped from his lips like a drug addict getting his fix as he reached out towards Ella.

Sensing the danger she quickly swatted his hand away, taking off in the opposite direction and not looking back. As she was running she couldn’t help but notice that the once busy streets were now empty. So quiet that you could hear a pin drop in Long Island. The only thing that she could do was keep running. Turning a corner at every opportunity available, making it impossible for Vincent to find her. Out of breath and stamina she finally stopped. Looking up and down the empty streets of Manhattan for the man pursuing her. She let out a sigh of relief, sure that she had lost him. Suddenly something warm began to drip on her face. It was a nice sensation against the biting cold on her cheeks.

She gently rubbed her finger against her cheek and examined the substance. Blood. She quickly jumped away from the wall that was housing her safety and looked up. It was him. Perched like a lion stalking its prey, watching Ella so intently. There was something in his hand, it was difficult for Ella to make out in the dark. The shape was rather round, it almost looked fuzzy. He suddenly tossed it to the ground below him. The item hit the concrete with a loud thud and slowly rolled to the tip of Ella’s boot. She slowly pressed her hands to her mouth as her body gave out, forcing her to the ground.

“N-n-n” the words wouldn’t pass her lips.

“A gift; from your beloved” he spoke as he burst out into a chorus of unbalanced, hysterical laughter.

The blood pooled underneath Ella's boots as the head of Darren pierced her eyes. She wanted to move but she couldn't. She wished for her body to respond but it refused. All she could do was look. Her chest was on fire and her mind on the brink of breaking. The area suddenly began to fade into black, the walls and streets were suddenly turning upside down. She slowly collapsed completely onto the blanket of snow beneath her, everything fading to black.

Vincent quickly jumped down to the unconscious girl, gently stroking the strands of red poking out from her grey hat.

"Humanity is so, weak"

The night felt like it would bleed into eternity for Lilith. There she stood, unmoving from the spot Ella had left her in. She had done it, she thought to herself. She had successfully pushed away the only person that she could love and trust. No longer could she put her trust in Vincent, his motives were still unknown to her, all he seemed to do was push her further back into the abyss. Her two best friends had been murdered, torn apart with her own hands. The weight of that guilt was teetering within her, dancing on the brink of her humanity. She had not even the slightest idea of what it meant to be human anymore.

There was only one thing left for her to do, something that could lead to the end of this nightmare she had been living through. The sound of keys clashed with the silence of the dark apartment, singing with the slam of the front door.

She arrived at the most familiar place to her. As she walked up the perfectly crafted steps leading to the front door, chills ran through her spine. Something didn't feel right, the air was thick with a smell that she recognized all too well.

“Just breathe, Lil... Breathe, block it out” she whispered to herself.

The enticing aroma of blood filled her nose. In a city this large, the scent could be flowing from any back alley in this maze. Every single one of her senses had been on overdrive safter that regretful night with Vincent. She was like an animal, a beast perpetually in a frenzy, hungry for its next kill. It was a wonder that she had been able to hold back the cravings within her for as long as she had.

She picked the ring of keys from her jacket pocket, slowly placing it in the stainless lock before her. The lights from the window gave off a warm, peaceful glow, letting Lilith know that the owners were present and awake, despite it being so late. The scent of roses and strawberries quickly erased the painful smell of blood as she walked through the doorway. Pictures of a young, raven haired little girl decorated the walls of the entryway. She was laughing in most of the frames, holding up toys, dressed in school uniforms and backpacks. A beautiful, angelic woman with blonde hair was with her in all of them, hugging the joyful little girl and a tall, handsome man was holding her hand. You could feel the love radiating from the photos as Lilith paced steadily down the hallway.

“Hmph” she sighed.

The hallway suddenly unfolded into a large foyer, with steps leading up the left side of the room. The walls were painted a dark, ruby red accompanied with rather large and expensive furniture. The building was home to people of major wealth, that was apparent. But it also gave off a warm, welcoming aura. This was the home that Lilith grew up in and this was the place where she would confront her parents, about everything.

She looked around, unable to find a trace of life in the building.

“Mom, dad?” she yelled. “Are you home, we need to talk”

Her voice echoed against the quiet walls of the building, her words reaching the ears of none.

“Weird”

She looked down at the chair beside her and to her surprise she found something very familiar to her. A beautiful, silver chained necklace, holding half a heart at the very end of it. She quickly grasped it in her hand. ‘Half of me goes with you’ was inscribed on the back of the half heart. Her eyebrows furrowed as she racked her brain. Quickly she grabbed at her chest, pulling out an identical necklace, one with the very same inscription on the back. With hers around her neck, the duplicate could only belong to one other person.

“Ella?” she asked herself.

“So predictable” a voice whispered softly in her ear.

Lilith quickly turned around, startled by the sudden voice in her ear. A hand covered in a black glove quickly cupped around her neck, lifting her off of the floor with ease. She recognized the glove and she recognized the figure it belonged to. Her heart sank at the sight of Vincent before her. His face stained with dry blood and sweat. His usual slick, blonde hair was beginning to become undone, falling over eyes like dead flowers.

“I knew you would come here, searching for answers are we. When I specifically told you that they would come in due time. Trying to skip to the end of the book?” he asked. His voice was uneven, almost like he was on the verge of losing his mind. “I told you everything you needed to know, gave you all of the fuel needed to make you perfect. But here you are, making everything more complicated than it needs to be”

“What did you do with them?” she screamed with a burning rage, pounding at Vincent's arm, attempting desperately to free herself from his bond.

His strength was inhuman, on a different level than what Lilith possessed. He pulled her inches from his face, his stare pierced through her skull and into her brain.

“So... beautiful” he hissed as he slowly licked Lilith’s cheek. His entire body writhed with pleasure, the taste of her skin sent an electric shock through his entire system.

“You were always meant to be mine, it didn’t matter how all of this ended”

“What the hell are you talking about? Get off of me”

The look in his eye was like none Lilith had ever seen, from anyone in her entire life. She could feel her soul being lit on fire, her blood became ice in her veins. Sweat dripped from Vincent's chin, colliding with the carpeted floor below their feet. He pulled her closer, his grip never wavering from her neck. Suddenly his lips collided with hers. She could feel his tongue clashing against the inside of her mouth but she didn’t have the power to fight him off. His breathing became heavier, deeper. Suddenly she felt his free hand glide up her shirt and onto her bare skin. The feeling of slick leather covered her exposed breasts under her shirt as he began to grope her.

She screamed and screamed at the top of her lungs, still attempting to free herself from his grip but his mouth would not free itself from hers. Kicking and scratching were having no effect compared against the strength of this man. It was like fighting against a brick wall.

Suddenly he pulled his mouth back to speak to her, that same crazed, piercing look in his eyes.

“Everything will be brought to the light my love, I promise you” he spat out. “But for now... I need you to sleep for me”

“Wha-“

Her words were cut short as her back suddenly collided with the floor. Knocking every inch of breath from her body. Every single one of her limbs felt like they were broken, the pain

was immense. Her vision began to fade in and out, like a flashlight losing its source of power. She could see Vincent position himself on top of her. Sweat and blood began to drop on her cheeks. He slowly began to remove the gloves from his hands. He quickly pinned her legs down with his, she could feel his deep, hot breath on her exposed stomach as his tongue traced her skin.

“N-No.. stop, please” she whispered. She tried to fight but her body just wouldn’t respond anymore. Her voice was giving out.

He lifted her torso up to remove her jacket and tank top. Exposing her bare, naked body. Tears began to flow from her eyes, mixing with the blood and sweat. Her muscles felt like dough, she couldn’t lift a single finger to defend herself against Vincent. He began undoing his belt buckle, the sound of metal racking against each other filled Lilith’s ears. She could feel his hands against her thighs now, so slimy and unwelcoming.

It was happening, she could feel him inside of her. No matter how much she wanted to rip through him, the strength would not come to her. He was entirely too strong for. She wished that the craving would overwhelm her, much like it did when she was with him the first time. She wished it would come to her rescue right now. It didn’t matter what the cost was, she would gladly pay it. With each stroke she was losing part of herself, slowly losing her humanity and everything that came along with it. All she could hear was the sound of flesh clashing together and the grunts of Vincent echoing in her ears as she became lost in the darkness that was now granting her wish of death.

The weight of the world felt like it had been resting on her shoulders with everything that had happened the last few weeks; Lilith was ready to give up. Maybe it was time to quit?

Perhaps this was her destiny all along, to just fade into oblivion and allow the monster within her to roam free. The human side of her faintly beating heart could not take anymore pain.

As her eyes slowly opened the pain in her muscles became unbearable. She couldn't remember anything before she blacked out, before Vincent raped her. Remnants of her clothes were scattered across the floor of her parents living room. Telling the story of the events that came to pass here. As she struggled to walk she made her path to a blanket, one that covered the back of her father's favorite chair. She held it close to her body, taking in its smell. Traces of his familiar scent filled her nose. A scent that triggered a reminder of the fate that awaited her family.

The blanket gave her naked body shelter, hiding the indented hand marks and bruises left behind by that beast. Her dark hair stuck to her skin like tape. She was sweating immensely, her body lacked the strength to keep up with her movements. Slowly she searched the house for any sign of her parents, of Ella.

"Where are you?" she groaned through gritted teeth. Tears streaming down her cheeks.

Her head was beginning to throb, harder than it ever had before. She dropped to the floor, cradling her head in her hands. Her screams echoed through the empty space, cutting through glass and waking the heavens. Images began to flash in and out of line of vision. Memories of the past, of her parents, of Ella and her friends. The visions placed her somewhere that she was not familiar with. A flashing sign read 'CANDY LAND' was placed just a couple of blocks away from the docks hugging the Hudson River. The vision zoomed over to a blood soaked Lilith, giggling to herself as she sat next to a man. His body was still. Red oozed in a puddle underneath his back. His chest had been completely caved in, revealing his insides.

Just as quickly as the vision arrived at this scene it switched to another. This time to a building overlooking the docks. Vincent stood atop this building, watching Ella with an unwavering gaze. His eyes could cut through steel. He turned as if looking Lilith directly in the face through this vision.

“You know where to find me... dear *sister*. Come, it’s time for a family reunion. Claim the answers you seek or these worthless insects die. Fear not, all you have forgotten will soon be regained. We will await your arrival” A wide grin was glued to his face as he fell from the building.

Suddenly the pain radiating from her Lilith’s skull subsided as the image of Vincent faded into smoke. She slowly picked herself up from the carpeted floor, her palm still attached to her head. Her eyes darted around the room, looking for any trace of the devil from her vision.

“What the hell was that?” she asked herself. She had no memory of ever being at that dock, over ever seeing that store. Let alone ripping that man apart. “Did I really kill that man too?” The image of her dead friends’ blood on her hands raced through her brain.

Lilith felt like her mind was on the brink of falling apart. What was put in the absence of the hunger that plagued her, was the pain that she had never felt before. Not just her body but her mind felt like it was slowly decaying.

“Sister?” the word slid from Vincent’s tongue like the hiss of a snake. Its venom piercing Lilith’s heart. A dark feeling began to rise in her stomach. As it broke out her mouth and onto the floor her eyes flooded as her screams collided with the sound of her fists hitting the ground echoed into every inch of that house.

“No” her voice cracked as she spoke the word over and over. Her throat could barely summon the air to speak. It felt like dust had exploded in her throat. Pain came from every

direction and she had no defense to stop it. It all began to make sense, as the memories rushed through her mind. Him watching over her all of these years, the jealousy she felt when she sensed the bond between Vincent and Celine back then. It was feeling a sibling would harbor towards another when they felt their mother favored one over the other. But she never knew why she felt that way until now. The thought of it made Lilith sick to her stomach.

With the strength and will she had left, she picked herself up and made her way to her old bedroom. After she left for university her parents packed up what little remained and left it all in boxes. There was an entryway leading to a bathroom, that was Lilith's destination. She clung to walls as she reached to flip the light switch on. Seconds after that the sound of falling water filled the room.

The water ran as hot as a raging fire. But she didn't feel a thing as it ran down her skin. The perfect porcelain tile lining the shower floor began to run red from the dry blood washing down from her legs. She watched as it swept through the cracks of the tiles and circled the drain. With every drop the image of Vincent forcing himself inside of her forced itself into her mind. Inflicting pain on her body as she lay there, unable to fight back. The sound of the water colliding with the floor filled the sleeping bathroom as the seconds ticked by. Soon the flood stopped and a hand cut through the fog that covered the mirror, revealing Lilith's face.

The person staring back at Lilith was all too familiar. Her skin was so pale and bruised that she couldn't pass for a living, breathing thing. The six letter word uttered by Vincent stung her brain like a thousand needles. Her heart sunk even further even further from the sanctuary of humanity as she remembered the night they spent together. The night she let go of Ella and lost control of herself. Remembering how she let her own brother touch her in ways that siblings shouldn't touch. Then she thought back to the moment of her rape. Feeling his breath on her

neck, his hands running against her skin as she fought to move her limbs. Feeling every second of her body and hope being destroyed.

Who could she save in this state that she was in? With a weight this heavy holding her down she was no use to anyone. Her fists gripped so tightly into the palms of her hands that blood began to drip onto the floor. She looked at herself in the mirror once more before her fist collided with her reflection. Blood and glass flew around the room. Tiny shards poked out of the grooves of her knuckles like claws. As the tears ran down her face she plucked them from her fist and threw them onto the ground. As she finished the task she took a deep breath.

“Find the strength Lilly.. Find it and get moving” she paused as she glared at the disfigured reflection of herself that had formed in the broken shards on the ground. “Move god damn it”

Her eyes lacked any semblance of life but her words were sharper than the glass that pierced her skin. Whether this new found strength to move forward was an illusion or reality, it didn't matter. She knew what she needed to do. But what was she willing to sacrifice in order to do it? She had nothing left to give but her life itself.

Interlude

The summers in New York could be just as cruel and unforgiving as the winters. The sun was beaming down on the pathment, heating the ground like a freshly lit crockpot. Arthur Godfrey had been traversing the streets of Midtown by himself that entire afternoon. He had no particular destination, he just knew that he didn't want to return home. Things had been tense with his Marlow as of late. The couple had been trying so hard to have a baby but the result remained the same at every attempt. Thousands of dollars spent on tests and different doctors, trying everything possible to start a family. It all just seemed like money down the drain to Arthur but to his wife, it was all that mattered.

She had become so obsessed with having a child of her own, so much that she lost sight of everything else. That included her husband. Their home, nested in the heart of the upper east side, was no longer a home. Marlow spent her days in bed or moping around the quiet halls. She rarely saw the city anymore, Arthur had done his best to convince her to come on a walk with him as he was leaving. But she simply brushed him away and went about her depressing routine. Arthurs heart sank as he thought about the sorry state that his wife was in, that their marriage was in. He missed the way that she used to be, when they were young and just starting their lives together. In his moment of thought the suffocating humidity snapped him out of daze.

"Maybe I should get out of this heat for a little while" He spoke to himself. His throat tickled with a sharp dryness as he talked. Averting his gaze in every direction he locked on to a cozy looking cafe. Without giving it a second thought he made his way over to the small building. A gust of cold air smacked against his skin, sending a refreshing chill through his body. The inside of the cafe immediately caught Arthur's attention. Records and beautiful instruments

were intricately hung on every wall. Framed photos of famous musicians occupied the space behind the counters. Customers sat comfortably in the soft seats and couches, Having conversations with each other, watching the busy city streets buzz outside.

The sound of ‘Return of the Mack’ rang throughout the cafe, causing Arthur to smile a bit. Months ago he sang this song to Marlow, he even invented a dance to go along with it. He bathed in a pool of embarrassment to try and lift her spirits after another disappointing visit to the doctors office. He remembered it as clear as day because that was the last time he saw his wife smile. As the song faded from the speakers, his nostalgia for happier memories went with it. He wiped the glistening sweat from his forehead and took a seat at the counter.

“Hey, could I just get a glass of water please? Thanks” He smiled towards the young woman taking orders behind the counter. As quickly as she took his order she was returned with his water. He grabbed the sweating glass and drank slowly. Savoring the cold liquid as it flushed down his throat. Bringing his body back to life, providing a brief armor from the heat he would soon have to endure once again. As he looked around he wondered to himself how he managed to overlook this place for so long. It was fairly close to home and it seemed like it had been around for awhile.

“The heat must really be getting to you. You look absolutely exhausted” A voice sang in Arthur’s ear. He could have easily mistaken it for the gentle voice singing along to the melody playing over the speakers. But as he turned towards its direction his surprise was met with a pleasantly beautiful sight. Her voice was patterned in an accent that Arthur did not recognise. As the sunlight peered through the glass of the windows and onto her fair skin, it was almost as if she were sparkling. She looked at the stunned man with rare, amber eyes. They were warm and welcoming as they locked onto his. She brushed strands of her wavy, black hair from her eyes as

she extended her hand out to the man, who still had yet to speak a word. “You need another glass”. With a gentle expression she made a quick gesture to the young woman behind the counter and urged Arthur to sit back down.

“I guess the sweaty forehead gave it away?” Arthur inquired. The barista set the fresh glass of water in front of him. He could practically feel the chilly liquid dripping down his throat without even taking a sip. He reached into his back pocket to retrieve his wallet. As he nearly had it out the beautiful woman’s hand pushed it back down.

“My treat”

“Are you sure?”

“Please, it’s just a glass of water. Let this be my good karma for the day. Pay it forward” Arthur couldn’t help but stare at the vision in front of him. Her skin seemed as soft as the clouds in the sky. She wore a simple black tank top and blue jeans, but she made the outfit look like it was made by the most talented designers in the world.

“I really do think I should repay you somehow, though” Arthur was a kind man. He spoke with the utmost respect and carried himself in the same manner. He couldn’t just allow this stranger to do something nice for him without showing his gratitude in some way. “Please” His gentle smile was enough to break the wall of mystery that had surrounded this woman.

“Alright. It’s my first time in New York and I want to see the city. If you really wish to repay me, then be my guide”

“I had a feeling that you weren’t from around here”

“What gave me away? Was it the accent?” She raised an eyebrow towards him with a magical curiosity that he had only seen once before in his life. In Marlow, when they first met. It

brought up a strange feeling within his chest. It was warm, a different breed from the warmth melting away the citizens of the city.

“It makes you stand out a bit, yes. Where are you from?” As the question slid from his lips he decided to give in to his curiosity as well. He couldn’t explain why but this woman reminded him of the Marlow from his past. A place and a person that he would give anything to return to.

“I was born and raised in Greece. I figured that now was as good a time as any to see more of the world” The way she spoke was almost childlike. In the sense that it was like her voice was full of wonder and longing. Her freckled face supported a smile that could cut through the darkest night. “So what do you say, will you be my guide? Or do I need to feed your curiosity a little more?”

Arthur smiled as he looked down at his half full cup of water. Something in the back of his mind was telling him that he should go back home, be with his troubled wife. But there was also a conflicting feeling that came as well. Something about this woman struck the depths of his heart, pulling out memories and feelings that he had long since buried. He wanted to explore the reason behind this more than he cared to admit and going back home to Marlow would not allow him that chance. His palm became drenched in a cold liquid as he placed it on his lips. Feeling energized by the water that felt like a jolt of electricity in his veins he made his decision. “Sure, I’d be happy to show you around. I didn’t catch your name?”

“Celine. It’s very nice to meet you, Mr?”

“Arthur. Arthur Godfrey.” He took her hand in his. Her skin felt like cotton against his rough palm. He couldn’t help but smile as he looked at the goddess in front of him. “It’s nice to meet you.”

The two of them spent the entire day together. Embracing the growing heat of a New York summer together. He showed her everything there was to see in the city. The MET, Times Square, Broadway, the Statue of Liberty. He even showed her a few of his favorite spots in Midtown, places that were just for him. When he needed a break from his whirlwind of a life he would go to one those spots, just to clear his head. The pair stopped at a food truck to pick up a few hot dogs to eat as they walked. It was days like this that made Arthur fall in love with the city all over again.

“You’ve got mustard all over your face Mr. Godfrey” Celine giggled as she took a bite of her hotdog. She watched Arthur frantically rush a napkin to his face. It was strange how the heat seemed to have little effect on Celine, not a drip of sweat could be seen on her smooth skin. “No no, leave it there! It makes you look more distinguished”

“She has a sense of humor” Arthur replied playfully as he took another bite of food. When was the last time that he smiled and laughed this much? The memory couldn’t form in his head, it had been that long. Now that he had tasted what happiness was like without the weight of the world attached to it, he was afraid to go back. He didn’t notice how hard he had been lost in thought until Celine brought him back down to earth.

“Anyone home?” She gently nudged him on the shoulder. “I lost you there for a second. Is everything alright?”

“Oh yes! I’m sorry.. I was just thinking about how long it’s been since I smiled this much in one day. It’s been really nice”

“Is there something in your life that’s keeping you from smiling?” Curiosity was tangled within Celine’s words.

Hearing that forced Arthur to hesitate in his response. The truth of the matter was that there was no one answer for the question proposed to him. Sifting through the wasteland of emotions that he had felt these past few months, just to find a believable answer to give Celine, would take more time than they had been granted. Just as he was about to give his answer, a floaty jingle sang through his pocket.

“Saved by the cell phone” Celine teased. “Go ahead, I don’t mind”

“Thanks” He quickly put the phone to his ear. “Hello? Yes, I’ll be back soon... I’ll pick some up on the way home... Alright, see you soon. Bye”

“Is everything alright?”

“That was my wife. It seems like I lost track of time, I should have been home a while ago”

“You don’t seem very excited about going home to your wife, though” She could sense the dread and disappointment hidden behind the false layers of his voice. She picked them apart and went directly for the source. “Are you happy?”

“I... Don’t really know how to answer that question at the moment” He had finished off the last of his hot dog before speaking again. Making sure there weren’t any lingering traces of the infamous mustard on his face. “I’d like to give you an answer though. How long will you be in the city?”

“I was planning on leaving within the next few days but I think I want to stay a little longer now. Shall we meet at the coffee shop tomorrow?” She didn’t have to paint a smile on her face, her eyes did all of the talking for her. They struck the chords of Arthurs heart like an arrow in the night.

“Tomorrow afternoon then” Arthur smiled back.

“It’s a date”

By the time that Arthur had returned home the heat that once scorched the city had died down. A cool breeze was floating through the air, healing everyone who had been scorched by the raging sun. For being in the heart of the city, the neighborhood was fairly quiet. Only the faint murmur of car engines and horns could be heard from the distance. Everything felt so cozy in this nook of the bustling city. Arthur removed his key from his pocket and inserted it into the door, causing it to slowly push open.

“Marlow? I’m home” He spoke in an elevated tone. It was silent for a moment but then the sound of light footsteps filled the gaps. Marlow appeared from around the corner, wearing a wry smile on her face as she looked at her husband. “I brought you those cookies that you wanted” He was surprised to see a smile painted across his wife’s face as he embraced her for the first time that day. She smelled of flowers and oranges, a scent that Arthur loved to embrace.

“Thank you honey” She kissed him gently on the cheek before taking the cookies and returning to the room she appeared from.

“How was your day? Did you get out of the house?”

“No, not today” Although she smiled her words told the truth of how Marlow truly felt. Arthur had learned how to see through his wife’s tricks well enough throughout all of this.

“Marlow”

“Don’t. I don’t want to get into this with you again”

“I’m just worried about you. We don’t talk about any of it anymore ”

“Is that why you leave the house as much as you can? Because you’re so worried about me that you can’t be around me?” Her words were plain and her voice never once raised from the

soft murmur that she spoke in. Yet they cut through Arthur like a knife nonetheless. The room was quiet. Enough to hear a pin drop in the occupied space next door. “You don’t have to answer. Thank you for the cookies” With that she disappeared into the bedroom. Leaving Arthur standing there alone. He lowered his head and let out a brief sigh. The warm liquid in his eyes began to overflow and rain down his cheek slowly. He could feel his grip on Marlow slipping and he had no other ideas on how to stitch the pieces back together. He didn’t know how to help her anymore.

“What am I supposed to do here?” He asked himself. He placed himself in his favorite chair, next to an unlit fireplace and turned on the TV. As he let the bright light and busy noise drown out his thoughts, he dozed off into a deep and dreamless sleep. Hoping that the answers he had been seeking would finally reveal themselves in the morning. Little did he know, the answer had been with him the entire day.

The days that Arthur had spent with Celine had been some of the best of his life. His eyes couldn’t see past the darkness that engulfed his life before she came into his world. The problems that once weighed so heavily on him seemed to relinquish their grip on his heart. Paving the way for new feelings to sprout. He and Marlow hadn’t spoken since that night. Only a few words in passing, saying goodnight to each other, saying good morning. Unless it had to do with news from a doctor they didn’t speak at all, let alone spend time together. It was fortunate that the firm gave Arthur time off while he and Marlow were going through this ‘difficult time’. That freed him up to spend all of his free time with the woman encased in mystery.

It had only been a week but the two of them had become very close. Arthur had told her all about his struggles at home and in his marriage. He spoke about how he wasn’t happy and

how he suspected Marlow wasn't as well. But neither knew how to tell the other. They loved each other but the rift caused from their pregnancy troubles seemed to be too much to overcome. What if love just wasn't enough anymore?

"I just.. don't know what to do anymore" He spoke quietly. The couple were in a gorgeous room. Surrounded by velvet walls and expensive furniture. They sat on a rather comfortable couch, right in front of a window that overlooked the heart of the city. They were just a few blocks away from central park and they could see the beautiful green setting poking its head over the peaking skyline. "Any advice?"

"Well, do you want my honest opinion?" She placed her soft hand on Arthur's knee and gazed into his eyes with a quiet intensity. Her beautiful black mane fell over her left eye like a curtain. Leaving only one amber eye visible. But Arthur could feel the warmth of her heart flowing through the single look that she gave him.

"In the short time that i've known you, you've only given your honest opinion"

"There is truth to that. But here is what I think. I think that you're trying desperately to hold onto a memory. A fleeting one at that. You both want so badly for each other to be who you once were. To feel the love that once wrapped around you both so tightly. You want to stop the struggle of having a child because you no longer want to see Marlow in pain. She wants to continue the struggle because she believes that it is her destiny to be a mother, but life has a funny way of showing you that it has other things planned. You cannot talk to each other because you lack the ability to do so anymore, too much has happened. It is difficult to connect to a stranger"

“And? I know you have more. Tell me everything that you want to say, don’t hold back Celine” She could hear the curiosity and longing in Arthur’s voice now. Her heart was now pulling her different directions. She needed to choose her next words very carefully.

“Complete honesty?”

“Complete honesty”

“I think that you should move on and try to find happiness elsewhere. There is no sense in staying in a hollow marriage. Even if you really do care for each other. Pain is pain and you cannot take it back or hide it away. But what you can do is allow each other to heal from it. And I think that would be best done if you were apart from each other”

“I agree”

“You do?”

Arthur took Celine’s hand in his. Feeling the warmth of her body course through his skin and into his bloodstream. he was afraid of the words he was about to speak next but he knew that he had to release them, this was his only chance to rid himself of the shackles that bound him. “Since you walked into my life a week ago, something has changed within me. I smile more, I see the world in the bright and vibrant colors that I once saw them in before the darkness swallowed them whole. At the end of the day it’s not going back home that I dread, it’s leaving your side. I understand if you feel that’s it’s too soon but there is no one else that I want to be with right now. It’s only you” He placed his hand on her cheek, she placed her hand atop his. “I want to start over, with you”

“Took you long enough” She spoke quickly through an angelic smile before she pressed her lips to his. It was like electricity and fire rushing through their bodies. The passion had

blurred everything else out. “I think the purpose of my journey was to find you... I have waited a thousand years to finally meet you” She pulled away from Arthur, gazing at him in silence.

“What’s wrong Celine?”

A wave of thoughts and emotion flooded her mind. She knew that there were still things that she needed to tell Arthur. Important things about herself and her past. But what does he think of her? Would he believe her if she spoke her truth? Or would he run away and claim that she was crazy? She would have to put her faith in him to find the answers that she sought, something that she had not with anyone for a very long time. “Before we proceed, I think there are some things that you should know. About me and where I come from. About my past” For the first time Celine seemed to be lacking confidence. She broke away from Arthur’s eyes as she fiddled with her soft hair. She felt his endearing touch on her skin, a smile stretched across his face.

“So tell me everything. Be honest with me” He spoke sweetly.

She hesitated at first but she felt in her heart that she could trust this man. The man that she was about to bare all too, give her heart to. “What if I told you that I really have been alive for a thousand years... would you think of me as crazy?”

“What? What do you mean?” He asked nervously as he watched Celine pick herself from the couch and make her way to the bag that sat on the table in the center of the spacious room. She reached into the bag and pulled out a rather old and beaten looking book. She held it tightly to her chest as she sat back down next to Arthur. “What is that?”

“This is a book that has been passed down to the women in my family for centuries. It was my mothers’, then my eldest sisters’, my second eldest and then finally to me... It’s our family history”

“Centuries? Are you really telling me that you and your family have been alive for centuries?” The confusion was clear as day in his voice. In his mind he didn’t think it was crazy that Celine was saying all of this. What he thought was crazy was that he was actually believing it.

“You think I am crazy”

“No, no not at all! I’m just shocked that I’m actually believing it. I mean I don’t know how to explain it. But something is telling me that what you’re saying is 100% truth and that I should listen to you. So that’s what i’m going to do” The look on Celine’s face radiated with surprise and happiness. She had expected more of a struggle from him. She never thought that he would give her a chance to explain. Perhaps Arthur truly was the one that she had been searching for all of this time. “Go ahead, tell me everything”

Celine swiftly opened the book on her lap. Guiding Arthur through the pages of her family history. She explained how her sisters were immortal, ancient beings hailing from Greek legends and folklore. Their names were Stheno who was the eldest, Euryale the second eldest and Celine whose real name was Medusa. She was mortal but possessed powers similar to her sisters. Her life span far exceeded that of a normal mortal, but she would still perish one day. They were called the *Gorgons*, according to ancient lore. Labeled as vicious and venomous monsters in the legends of their homeland. They held dominion over reptiles and other creatures and also possessed power over life and death.

“My sisters are the cause of the fear people feel when we are mentioned. Their actions reflected upon our entire family and thus we were all labeled as monsters. Back when I was young I too followed in their footsteps and committed unspeakable crimes” Her voice trembled as she showed Arthur the pictures of carnage and destruction brought upon by her family.

“Have you killed before?” Arthur stared at the photos shown on the faded page. He saw Celine and her sisters laughing and celebrating over dozens of corpses. “Tell me the truth”

“Yes.. But I broke away from my family over 500 years ago. They have always looked down on me for my ties to mortality but after I left, they cut me off from everything in my former life. I haven’t spoken to them since”

“What made you decide to change?”

“The killing.. The constant blood and destruction became too much for me. I was mortal and could easily be killed if the gods so wished it. My sisters on the other hand had nothing to worry about. So I decided that I wanted more, that I had to change before something that couldn’t be undone happened. I knew that it would take a lifetime to atone for my past sins but I wanted to try. I left my family and decided to live as a true mortal. That journey led me here, to you. To this city” She could feel Arthur’s endearing gaze on her mythical skin.

“Normally after hearing a story like this, one that could pulled right out of a fairy tale, I’d think it was nothing but fiction”

“I understand if you do not believe me, or if you think that I am crazy bu-”

“I believe you. Something inside of me is telling me to trust that what you’re saying is the truth. I can’t explain it” He carefully moved closer to Celine until the bodies were connected.

“No matter who or what you are, or what you’ve done, I won’t stop feeling the way that I do about you. Monsters don’t scare me”

“You are not afraid of me?” She gently closed the book on her lap as she cupped Arthur’s face in her delicate hands.

“Not one bit”

Tears began to stream down her cheek as her heart burst through the impenetrable wall she had built over all of those years. Defenses she spent her entire extended life maintaining. Never thinking that she'd find something that would be strong enough to melt them away. "How can you care for a monster like me?"

"When I look at you I don't see a monster. I see a woman who has spent her entire existence fighting to become something greater, something worthy of the gifts given to her. A monster wouldn't choose to become better, it wouldn't choose to stop the cycle of constant violence and pain. Your family may be evil, but your mortality is what sets you apart. You have the choice to be something different, to embrace your humanity. That's something your sisters could never do. I have read about the fearsome Medusa in the history books before but you are not that person anymore. You're something better. Be proud of that" He spoke with such passion and heart as he wiped the running stream from Celine's cheeks.

Her amber eye seemed to glow in dying sunlight, they could have been mistaken for the sun itself. She had never looked so beautiful in Arthur's eyes. He noticed the freckles atop her nose begin to pop, the softness of her skin and lips enticed him deeply. The wavy sundress that she wore only added to her enchanting beauty. As she blinked Arthur caught a glimpse of her pupils. They were slit like a reptile's.

"I am not afraid to show you my true self anymore" Celine smiled. She silently stood up in front of arthur. Slowly she removed the clothing that covered her body, revealing her naked skin. As the sun drenched itself over her she began to change. What was once smooth and colored had become scaly and filled with warm color. Her dark hair began to take a life of its own as well. Twisting and moving in the shifting light until their shape became clear. Soft hissing filled the room as the snakes on Celine's head slithered down her back, wrapping

themselves gently around her body. As he watched her transformation Arthur was enamoured, speechless. His heart was beating out of his chest not because he was afraid. It was racing because he was in the presence of the most beautiful creature he had ever seen. “Do you still think that I am beautiful?”

Arthur lifted himself from the comfort of the couch. His eyes met Celine’s. The snake’s curiously slithered over to Arthur, who had his hand outstretched to them. As they wrapped themselves around him he suddenly came down with an intense feeling of comfort. The predators weren’t attacking him, they were accepting him. He carefully walked to the shy creature in front of him. Examining her body, seeing how much she had changed. Admiring what she had been hiding for all of these centuries.

“You are the most alluring and hauntingly beautiful woman I have ever met”

“They seem to have taken a liking to you” Her voice hid behind a coy smile. “No one has seen my true self in over a thousand years”

“I’m honored that you think I’m worthy enough to see it”

“You see past the monster that I was and only focus on the human that I am trying to be. After such a short time together, you have my heart Arthur Godfrey. Please... do not harm it” She felt his hands on the small of her back, pulling her to his chest. Her eyes glanced up at him. They were loving and accepting, they offered everything that she had been searching so desperately for.

“I promise to love you for as long as you let me” He pressed his lips to hers as they locked into a tender embrace. It was like the world had stopped turning and everything was frozen in place. All except for the two of them. This was their moment and they wanted to make it last for as long as they could. As the sun finally set on the buzzing city, the moon lit the room

like a bright candle. As they made love into the early hours of the morning they had no idea of the story they had begun to write. Nor did they have any idea of how it would end for them. But in that one moment, all they cared about was each other and that was enough.

The days turned to weeks and the weeks into months. As the bond between Marlow and Arthur faded, the stronger it became with Celine. He had felt bad for living this double life, lying to his wife every day that he left the house. But until he was sure that she could handle the news of him and Celine, it had to be done. The alluring woman of the hour understood what her lover had to do and never held it against him. She loved him too much to let him go.

Fall had begun to show its colors in the city. Brisk and gentle winds dancing between the streets and alleyways. Jackets and cozy hats guarded the fragile bodies of clueless citizens. After finishing his work earlier than scheduled; Arthur made his way to Celine's apartment. She had rooted herself in the city permanently, to be closer to the man that she loved. As he said his goodbyes to his fellow lawyers his phone began to ring. He quickly reached into his jacket pocket and glanced at the screen. *Celine* was plastered on the ringing device.

"Hey, I'm on my way to the apartment now" He spoke in a chipper tone. "I finished work early and a few cases won't need my attention for a few more days. So I am all yours"

"There's something that we need to discuss when you arrive, my love" Arthur could feel a nervous sensation coming from her voice.

"Is everything alright Celine? You sound unusually nervous"

"I will explain everything when you come home. See you soon, I love you"

"Love you too" With a sharp beep the screen of his phone went dark and the voice on the other end faded with the wind. Rarely did Celine allow an emotion of doubt and insecurity to

show. Let alone slip through into conversation. Whatever it was that she was waiting to tell Arthur, it had to be of great importance. “I better hurry”

Celine’s apartment was very cozy. It was dipped in the sweet smell of cherries and worn out books that seemed to be falling apart at the very seams that held them together. But everything was tucked neatly in its designated space. The kitchen was decorated in a breathtaking teal color, not a dish could be seen in the sink. But there was a rather delicious looking lasagna cooking in the oven . The wood floor that covered the apartment sparkled as the sunlight bounced off of it. Her home wasn’t small but it wasn’t large either. It was the perfect balance between the two. 80’s pop music played on the record player by the window as Celine paced back and forth in the living room. She could have burned holes into the ground if she continued.

“Where are you Arthur..” She murmured to herself. Just as she spoke those words she heard the sound of a key turning in the lock. The door gently opened to reveal a rather sweaty Arthur. “Why are you so sweaty Darling?”

“You sounded worried on the phone. I heard the nervous tone in your voice and you never let your nervousness show. So I rushed right over, what’s going on?” He threw his bag and damp suit jacket on the comfortable looking chair next to Celine and took her hands in his.

“I hate how you know me so well.. Ok well, maybe you should sit for this.”

“Ok?”

“Oh how to begin?” She tucked her flowing black hair behind her ears as she pondered the right words to convey this news. Her hands subtly drifted down to her stomach as she took a deep breath.

“Honey come on, you’re kind of freaking me out now. Tell me what’s wrong” He stared directly into Celine’s amber eyes. She suddenly began to smile, biting the corner of her lip. Her eyes guided his down to the hands atop her stomach. Arthur could feel his heartbeat quicken. Thumping against the walls of his chest. Sweat gently rolled down his cheek, dripping in constant drops from his chin. “Are you- are *WE*?”

“We are pregnant..” She let out a girlish laugh while fighting back her tears. “We are going to have a baby.”

“We’re gonna have a baby?” Arthur’s voice was silent. He slowly picked himself up from the couch Celine had guided him to moments before. “We’re gonna have a baby!” His voice erupted into a joyous crescendo as he swept his love up in his arms, twirling her around the room as she laughed and cried.

“I did not expect you to be this happy”

“Of course I am, I’m going to be a dad! It’s finally happening. And the fact that it’s happening with you is the icing on the delicious looking cake”

“Did you bring cake?”

“No, the cake isn’t real. It’s an expression, I’m just really happy!”

“I am so relieved to hear that Arthur.. But there is something else that we need to talk about. The baby’s future and what we will be bringing into this world”

“Yeah, I always wondered what would happen if we were to have a kid. But now that it’s actually happening I want to know everything”

“Well you are 100% mortal. I am half mortal, half demon essentially. My family's Gorgon blood will run through our child’s veins. When it comes of age it will begin to change, develop abilities and maybe even thirst for blood. It all really depends on how deep my bloodline

runs within the child. We will have to wait and see. But at the end of the day, our child will be loved and will have the ability to choose who they want to be. A choice that I never had”

“I figured as much. I knew that our baby would be special. That just confirms it. You sound like you’ve been through this before though, the birth of a child like ours?” Arthur’s assumptions had an unusual way of always being spot on, no matter what the subject was. Celine smiled. But the shadow of sadness was tugging at its strings.

“Hundreds of years ago, I met a man. He was from my world. You could call him a god. We engaged in a relationship and I became pregnant with a baby boy. His name was Vincent. A pure blood. The blood of the gods ran through his veins. A lethal combination if left in the wrong hands.. My sisters discovered the secret of my son and did everything in their power to take him from me. They murdered his father and threatened to kill him too if I did not surrender him to them. So, to protect the life of my baby I left him to be raised by the Gorgons, alone... That is part of the reason why I left my family behind. What I told you about wanting to change was true, but I was also running away from the guilt of leaving him behind and never looking back” She could barely look at Arthur as she told her story. “I do not want history to repeat itself with our baby”

“Hey, hey it won’t, okay? I can’t imagine how hard it must have been to go through losing a child like that. Do you ever wonder what Vincent is like now?”

“Everyday. I can feel him in my bones. The connection may be weak, but I can feel my son, I know he thinks of me... I just hope that I can see him again one day” Celine’s mind seemed to have drifted off to a nostalgic prison. A cell that held the dearest memory of her lost son.

“Well hey, I can tell you one thing, I am nothing like your sisters. I will never let anything to you or to our baby. I promise.” He bestowed a gentle kiss on her forehead and held her in his arms.

“You have to promise me something else as well... If my sisters ever catch wind of this child and I have to return back to my home to keep them away, promise me that you and Marlow will take care of the baby. No matter how estranged you two may become, just promise me that you will take care of her” Celine’s eyes gleamed with an intensity that Arthur had never seen before. It was like they were gazing into some kind of distant future that he couldn’t see for himself. And that future scared him enough to produce a backup plan. “Do you promise?”

“Of course. I’ll do whatever it takes to keep our little one safe. You have my word.” He paused for a moment, an invisible thread tugged at the edge of his eyebrow. “You think we’re having a girl?”

“Thank you..” She buried her face deep into his chest, wrapping her arms around him like a blanket. “I can feel. A different feeling than when I was pregnant with Vincent. She is in there”

“Well, if i’m going to keep my promise then we have to tell Marlow everything..”

“This will not end well” Celine sighed.

“It definitely won’t”

The months went by and the seasons changed. Snow covered the city and melted away into the concrete and dirt. The air was cool and breezy as the month of May had kicked off. Celine and Arthur had both told Marlow everything that she needed to know. The affair, the pregnancy and even Celine’s heritage. The distraught woman took it as well as to be expected. It wasn’t the affair that she had been angry about, no. She knew that their marriage had been over

for a while but neither one of them knew how to end things. So they tiptoed around each other, around the pain and loss that carved an unrepairable hole in their life. What broke her fragile heart was the revelation that Arthur had been able to obtain the one thing that she wanted most. A child, a family.

Arthur found his true home with another woman. A woman who was able to give him something that she was never able to. And to make matters worse she was some sort of ancient being that had been alive for thousands of years? It was all too much for Marlow to swallow at once, it took awhile to come to terms with what she had been told. But seeing Celine in her true form was enough to put her doubts and reservations to bed. Arthur had also relayed the promise that he made. That they would take care of the child if Celine ever had any reason to go back to her homeland. Marlow loathed Celine. She envied her beauty, her strength and the child growing within her. She wanted what she had. So she wished every single day that something would give her a reason to leave and never return. Marlow cried herself to sleep every night, hoping that agonizing pain in her chest would release her. Praying that the god's would allow her to be the one to raise the baby that would be born in just a few days' time.

She held onto that diabolical secret until the evening of May 15th, 1998. Celine had just gone into labor when Arthur had called her. She could hear the soon to be mother's cries of pain in the background.

"You probably don't care but Celine just went into labor. The baby is about to be born... I just thought you should know" She could hear the excitement rising in his voice but he was clearly holding back for her sake.

"Congratulations, looks like you just got everything you've ever wanted"

“You can come see the baby, if you’d like. It might be good to spend some time together, in case the worst happens?”

“There will be plenty of time for that.. Look, I have to go Arthur. I’ll talk to you some other time. Goodbye” She quickly ended the call before turning back to the guest sitting in her living room. “She’s giving birth now” She spoke to the young man gazing at her.

He had slick but soft blonde hair. His skin was perfect, unblemished. As if he were carved directly out of clay by the god’s himself. His eyes mirrored the same amber glow that Marlow saw in Celine’s as they peered through the frames of his glasses. He wore a fitting black dress shirt, with dim white strips faintly running up and down the seams. Matching pants and impressive shoes completed his regal outfit. He pressed his gloved covered fingers to his slanted glasses, pushing them back up to his nose.

“Excellent. In a few days time you will have everything that you have ever wanted as well” His voice was as smooth as honey dripping down the bark of a tree. He looked Marlow directly in the eyes as he spoke, unblinking and strangely focused. “Say nothing to anyone. In fact, stay right here in this apartment until you receive word from me to progress in our plan” He gently brushed a strand of hair away from Marlow’s face. He stood up and pressed the wrinkles out of his ensemble before heading to the door. As he turned the knob to exit, the faint shadow of a sinister smirk could be seen awakening on his face. “Soon mother”

It had been a few days since Celine gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. She sat on the couch in her beautiful apartment, holding the child in her arms. Never wanting to let her miracle go. She sang to her and smiled as the baby girl giggled. Arthur watched his family from the

kitchen. His heart was on the verge of overflowing like a river dam as he listened to the cries of happiness spilling from her infant daughter.

“She’s a happy one” Arthur spoke as he took a seat next to Celine. “She hasn’t stopped smiling and laughing since we brought her home”

“She is truly special, aren’t you Lilith?” Celine took her mouth and blew on the tiny girl’s stomach. Lilith let out a heart warming laugh as she reached out for her mother’s face. Her tiny hands locked onto Celine’s pointed finger. As she watched her daughter play, tears began to drip from her amber eyes.

“What’s wrong honey?” Arthur asked as he wrapped his arms around her.

“She is just so perfect”

“She got your good looks, thank god”

“That is true. But she has got your nose”

“Hmm, you think so? I’d like to be represented somewhere on our kid. I guess the nose will do” He joked.

Suddenly there was a loud knock on the door as a pale envelope slid into the apartment. The seal holding it together was distinguished, almost mesmerizing to the look at. Arthur quickly went to pick up before opening the door. But when he poked his head into the echoing hallway, no one was there. Just the rays from the sun cutting into the shadows of the walls occupied the silent space.

“Who is it?” Celine asked. But as she spoke she never took her eyes off of Lilith.

“Strange, no one was there. Just this letter” Arthur said as he closed the door and held up the letter for Lilith to see. As she lifted her head to see what her love had been holding, her blood

quickly went cold in her veins. The sound of her heart beating grew louder in her ears, like a child bagging on a drum with all of their strength. “Celine? What’s wrong?”

“That seal... It is my family seal” She cradled Lilith in her arms as she slowly walked towards Arthur. She traded the baby for the envelope, tearing it open to reveal the letter inside. She placed her hand on her heart as she read the well inked words on the page between her delicate fingers.

“What does it say?” Arthur asked. Celine could smell the fear floating off of his voice.

“It’s my son... He is here and he wishes to see me” She could barely fight through her tears as she spoke the words. “Vincent is here, Arthur”

“He’s here? Why after over a century does he want to see you now? Do you think that they know about Lilith?” He piled the questions atop his lover’s smooth but strong shoulders, hoping that all of them would end in the answer that he sought out.

“It just says that he wants to meet. Tonight” She turned to Arthur who held a now fast asleep Lilith in his arms. “I have to go. I need to go see my son, Arthur” Her amber eyes burned with a raging wonder as she looked at the father of her baby girl. Arthur struggled with the idea of letting her go alone. What if it was a trap? What if she went and never returned. He had no idea how things like this worked in the Gorgon world, but he did know that he had to protect the mother of his child. Lilith needed her as much as he did.

“What if it’s a trap Celine?”

“What if it’s not?” She placed her hand on his cheek. Hoping to quell his doubts and worries. “What if this a chance for me to finally atone for what I did to him. A chance to get to know my son? I need to find out, I owe him that”

“Just, come back to us. Ok?”

Celine watched her daughter sleep in Arthur's arms. Unaware of the pain and doubt that her mother had about leaving. She leaned in and gently kissed Lilith on the forehead. Guiding his lips to hers she kissed Arthur, savoring the taste of him in her throat. Hoping that this wouldn't be the last time she did so. "Nothing could keep me away."

As she ascended to the spot stated in the letter from her son, Celine couldn't help but think back to the family she left waiting at home. Fear crept into the tightest corners of her heart as thought back to the first time she was put into this situation. Remembering how it felt to leave her infant son behind, to be raised by her demon sisters. She remembered how it stung to even feel anything for her son after she left, knowing that if she did she would instantly go back to life she ran so desperately from. Then her mind shifted to Lilith, to her sleeping face. Her baby, not yet knowing what she was or how cruel the world could be if not prepared for it. In that moment she made a promise to herself and to her newborn child. A promise that she would always guide and protect her daughter, even if she was on the other side of the galaxy.

The cool spring air of the night brushed through her midnight hair, tickling her face. It had been awhile since she used her abilities for anything. But climbing the tallest building in the city sent a rush of excitement and nostalgia through her veins. The city looked so peaceful from this high up. Everything seemed to run in slow motion as she dangled her legs from the ledge she was sitting on. The faint echoes of beeping cars horns and police sirens mixed with the flowing breeze. Creating a melody that rang into Celine's ear like a lullaby. She had grown so attached to this city and to the people that inhabited it as well. She didn't want to leave. But this encounter tonight would determine whether she had to or not.

“You can stop creeping. Come out, my son” She spoke in a calming voice. She could feel Vincent’s presence as he emerged from the shadows of the night. She turned her head to gaze upon her now fully grown son. “You have grown so much, Vincent”

“I am surprised that you remember my name mother. After all it has been over a century since you last saw me” Vincent spoke in a regal, distinguished tone. Almost as if he were looking down upon his mother, considering himself her better. “I did not think that you would show. But here you are”

“I will not run from you Vincent, not again. Your aunt’s are not here to stand in the way” She pursed her lips. Finding the right words to speak to him proved more difficult than she imagined. “It seems like they have taken good care of you. You even talk like them, stately and superior. Come, sit with me” She beckoned her son to move closer to her. She could see the disdain and hesitation painted on his handsome face. His blonde hair swung in the wind in graceful strands. His attire befitted that of a prince. The clothes matched the attitude.

“I did not come here to bond, mother”

“So why are you here then?”

“Your newborn. My sister. The Gorgon’s know”

“They can feel her, can’t they?”

“A gorgon decedent that is more mortal than she is monster. The child holds great potential. But I assume you know that already?”

“And they want that power for themselves, right?”

“You definitely are not naive as you look mother. Yes, they wish for me to bring the child back with me. And I have no choice but to obey them. You know as well as I how determined they can be”

Celine quickly lifted herself from the ledge she was sitting on. In a brief gust of wind she was face to face with her son. She peered into his eyes, searching for something familiar.

Vincent stood there, unmoving, breath steady.

“What are you hoping to find? Any shred of humanity I had at my birth has been eradicated by your sisters. You will not find your abandoned child in my eyes” His words cut through Celine, opening a wound too deep to be sewn back up.

“What have they done to you, Vincent?” She reached out to touch her son’s face but her hands caught nothing but air as he swiftly turned away.

“My past and upbringing are no concern of yours. I told you, I am not here to reunite with you Celine. I am here to offer you a solution to your dilemma”

“And what solution is that?” The annoyance in her head formed the words in her mouth as she spoke. Although he was her son, she wasn’t entirely sure of Vincent’s true intentions.

“Simple. Your sisters want you to come home. It seems that they have some unfinished business with you, as do I. If you leave your life here, then they give you their word to not come after the child. You have to abandon your baby, never to see her once again” Vincent kneeled down over the ledge, looking down at the bright lights of the city. The cool breeze reminded him of home.

“And if I refuse?” The anger swelled up within Celine as she clenched her fists tightly. So tightly that blood began to drip onto the footing beneath them.

“Simple. They eliminate you, finally. And take the child for themselves. Baby Lilith would make a fine Gorgon princess, would she not? Besides, I have grown quite attached to the power that radiates from my dear sister. When she comes of age she will make a fine partner for

me” A haunting grin stretched across his face as he turned to face Celine. It froze the blood in her veins as it pierced her amber eyes.

“So this is what they have turned you into? A mirror image of the gods that created us? Merciless, without compassion or empathy. Just a vessel for hate and destruction”

“I could not care less what you think of me. You have a decision to make. I will stop by your home in the morning to hear what you have chosen. Do give my best to Arthur and my sister for me, will you?” As he spoke his final words he calmly leaned backwards, falling from through the new york skyline with a joyless expression. In the blink of an eye, he was gone.

Celine was left alone and conflicted as she stood atop the building. What was she going to do? She knew that her past mistakes would catch up to her someday, but not in the wake of her daughter's birth. She had barely spent anytime with her small miracle and now she would have to give up what she loved most; again. The weight of all of it became too much for her to hold alone anymore. Her legs gave out underneath as she toppled to the ground. The sadness wouldn't stop flowing in. It had broken through the gates of her heart, smashing the locks and taking up residence in her bones. She wondered what Arthur would say to all of this, how he would react. Would he fight to keep their family together, would he fight the Gorgon's himself? No, that would certainly lead to his death and Celine could not allow that. Whatever she was going to do, she needed to decide fast, or else she would lose another child to demonic Gorgon sisters. She knew all too well that making them wait would only spell disaster for those around her.

The night seemed to linger longer than it usually did. Celine prayed for the sun to rise and make what happened seem like a dream. But it seemed that the gods were intent on making her

suffer. She returned home to her family, barely able to think straight. Arthur spoke to her but the words swam around in her ears in a muffled tone. Lilith lay sleeping in her crib as her mother silently kneeled down next to her. She watched the tiny angel rest peacefully, unaware of the journey she would embark on as she grew older. A steady stream of tears began to fall from Celine's eyes as she softly ran her fingers over Lilith's skin. It pained her to speak the words that came out of her mouth next.

"I love you so much, Lilith.. More than I have ever loved anything in my entire extended life. I have done things in my past that I am not proud and now they have finally caught up with me. I am sorry that I won't be here for your first words, the first steps that you take" Her voice cracked as she forced the words from her throat. Arthur kneeled beside the love of his life, cuffing her and a warm embrace as she cried. No formation of words could keep Celine from making this choice and he knew that. He had always known it would come to this. "It is going to be hard for you, growing up. You might think that you are different and that something is wrong with you.. But I need you to know that nothing is wrong with you. You are perfect just the way that you are. I will guide you as much as can from afar and although you may not see me, I will *always* be with you. You are loved not just by me but by your father as well. He will be here to guide you, take care of you and teach you when the time comes. I will not be gone forever, I promise that if you should ever need me, I will come running back to you my love. I promise that I will"

Arthur choked on the words that he wished to speak to Celine. But no matter how much force that he put behind them, they just wouldn't come out. All that he could do was hold her until it was time for her departure. "I will protect her. I promise you."

“I know you will, my love... I wish it could be different but it’s the only way to ensure her safety. I need to return home with my son” She turned to face the grieving man, lifting his chin with her hand. “We will see each other again. I promise. Take care of our light and take care of Marlow as well. Ok?”

“I will. I will” He felt her gently guide him into her lips. It was as if she had put all of her love into this one embrace. Her lips tasted of salt and strawberries, he savored them, savored the seconds ticking by. The thought of her leaving was beating at the back door of his mind, but he refused to let ruin this moment. As their lips parted they heard a soft knock on the door. Sunlight began to stream through the parting clouds above the city. Filtering into the room in orange shards. The night had quickly faded and gave birth to a new day. Vincent was true to his word and had arrived at the break of dawn, awaiting Celine’s answer. She looked into Arthur’s eyes, hoping he’d tell her to stay. “It’s okay, go.. We’ll be waiting for you.” He smiled painfully.

She leaned over the still sleeping baby girl, kissing her forehead softly. “I will forever be in your heart, my darling girl” With one last embrace from Arthur she opened the front door, revealing a patiently waiting Vincent. He stood there with his hands tucked neatly behind his back. An ominous smile stretched across his perfectly crafted face. “Lead the way” Celine spoke in a defeated tone.

“I knew that there was a brain living in that pretty head of yours. The gorgon’s will be quite pleased to see you” He still had that elitist tone strapped to his vocal chords. Hearing him speak made Arthur’s blood boil. “Best that you watch your temper human, let us not make this goodbye any more painful than it already is” His eyes pierced Arthur’s heart. A glare filled with so much malice and evil that it sent him down to his knees. Celine looked back at her love as she

slowly closed the door. The look on Arthur's face would be one that would be engraved in her mind and heart, until the day that she died.

Chapter 6

The harbor was dimly lit, save for the lone street lamp flickering on and off. Quickly illuminating the ground and disappearing simultaneously. The ground glistened like crystals in the faint rays of moonlight reaching out through the clouded night sky. The ice from one of the

coldest winter nights in the city cracked under the pressure of Lilith's boots. She wore a black jacket, its collar rose up just below her chin and circled around her neck. Its hem fell just inches above her knees. Tight, dark blue jeans covered her slim legs and were swallowed by black boots at the ends. Her hand, covered in white bandages poked out from the end of the arm holes of her jacket. Her black hair was like a flag blowing in the night.

Everything around her was quiet. Not the cry of the forever awake city, the washing of the waves or even the gust of the wind made a sound at this dock. It was as if everything had been muted completely. This strange phenomenon sent a chill down Lilith's spine as her eyes darted around, searching for any sign of Vincent.

"Looking for me?" the snake spoke as he placed his hand on Lilith's shoulder.

She instantly jumped back to face the devil but nothing but empty space occupied the location. She turned in every direction, trying to pinpoint where he was hiding.

"Over here"

Lilith spun around quickly to face the voice. There he was, in his customary black suit. His blonde hair dripping over his forehead. No longer in its neat, slicked back position. He wore a sinister grin on his face as he walked toward Lilith.

"You came"

"You got what you wanted. I'm here. Now let them go" her words spit at Vincent like knives.

He stood there in front of her. Slowly inhaling her scent, Lilith could only imagine what was going through his head. He reached out to touch her face but his hand was met by a forceful slap from Lilith's. His face contorted in a way that Lilith had never seen on anyone before as he burst out in maniacal laughter.

“Now is that anyway to treat your *lover*?” he shouted through laughter.

“What you call love, I simply call brutally raping your sister, you sick fuck” Lilith spat.

“Oh no no no, dear sister. To my understanding, you wanted every second of it” his eyes narrowed as he spoke these words. “The first and second time, your eyes begged for it, in fact”.

Lilith felt her body crumbling from sickness. He was more far gone than she had originally thought. His eyes watched her, unwavering. She gritted her teeth before speaking.

“What did you think you were doing when you slammed me through that table and forced yourself into me?” She slowly walked toward Vincent. “Did you do it because you loved me? Did you think it would make me love you back? You deranged demon, you don’t know a damn thing about love or what it means to be human” She was face to face with Vincent now, close enough to feel his breath on her skin.

She took her hand and closed it around his throat. Suddenly his body collided with the ice covered ground, sending the sound of broken glass throughout the area. He smiled as Lilith pinned him down with incredible strength.

“You took everything from me. My life, my love... My humanity. I don’t feel a damn thing anymore, all I feel is anger, pain and hatred and it’s all pointed towards you” she spoke through icy breath. The ground underneath began to crack even further as the conversation continued.

“All I did was make into what you were destined to be; dear sister. When you came to me that night I felt what you wanted, what the devil inside of you wanted. I knew my love for you could set you free. It is my job as your elder brother to give you a push in the right direction, of course” As he spoke Lilith’s grip around his throat tightened. “Everything I did was to set you

free, so you can own your pain. Bathe in it. Now, test your abilities. Shall we see if this new and improved you is capable of fighting back this time?”

In an instant Lilith felt the pressure of his fist hit her stomach as she flew backwards and onto the ground. Vincent slowly picked himself up as he brushed the rubble off of his suit.

“You did all of this... Just so I could be like you? So that I can wallow in pain and self hatred with you?” she sat up, feeling the flow of blood on her cheek she wiped her hand over it.

“No, not just for myself... For mother too, of course”

“Mother?” she inquired quietly.

“Yes, did you not think about where we came from, you and I? Surely it crossed your mind. Especially from all of the details I gave you the other night. You must have put two and two together by now”

“What are you talking about?”

“Oh dear sister I’ve told you this before. The human trash that raised you are not your true family. Your trainwreck of a mother prayed so dearly for a child. Your father turned to my mother for comfort, excuse me *our* mother. The product of a human and a devil is what you are, what WE are. The deal was that they could keep you until you were old enough to return back to her.”

“Return to her?” she asked through gritted teeth.

“When someone with ties to both the mortal and immortal world comes of age, the monster inside of them begins to awaken. Some can control it, others need a little extra push, most eventually implode and just die off. I was that push for you. Sent by mother to guide you back home. Although I admit that I did have my own motives behind all of this. You see, I simply hate our mother. I want her to feel every inch of pain and torture that I endured for the

last century. She abandoned me and gave birth to you, her precious Lilith. I knew from the moment that I saw you as an innocent infant, you were meant to be used by me. Celine mourned for you endlessly, it made me sick. So in order for my desire to see mother suffer, I needed to strike at the most vulnerable part of her”

“Me?” Lilith shouted.

Suddenly, that familiar, cold grin swiped across Vincent’s face as he clapped his hands like a circus clown entertaining a child. His sudden change in behavior threw Lilith off guard for a moment. Until she figured out what his manic eyes were guiding her to. Soft footsteps broke through the chill of night, creeping closer and closer to the siblings. Confusion washed over the young girl as she turned to see a familiar face descend from the looming shadows and lightly falling snow.

“The woman of the hour has finally arrived to answer all of your questions, darling little sister” Vincent motioned manically towards the gorgeous woman in the same circus clown manner he displayed before. Lilith instantly recognized the woman. They had met just days ago in the park. She had a long, elegant, dark brown coat that dropped down just below her knees. Her legs covered by black pants, a soft and perfectly knit sweater covered her torso. Her beauty and presence made Lilith’s bones quake within her. “Welcome, Celine”

So it was true. Lilith’s mind was heavy and dazed as she put the puzzle pieces together. This woman that she had met days before, was her mother. The feeling of longing and jealousy had found their justification. Her heart was reaching out to its other half that day, to her mother’s. Celine wore an intense look on her face as she stared at her unstable son. Her eyes overflowing with sadness and disappointment. Her attention quickly turned to Lilith, her expression unchanging.

“M-mom?” Lilith whispered in disbelief.

“It’s good to see you, my love” Celine spoke cleanly as she held out her hand to Lilith, lifting her up. “Are you alright?” She spoke her words carefully, as if every last letter had been rehearsed dozens of times beforehand. As she found her footing Lilith instantly pulled away. Building her defenses against the stranger beside her. Celine’s lips pursed as she backed away slowly.

“You’ve had twenty two years to ask that question. You don’t get to come to my rescue now and try to make everything alright” The anger in Lilith’s voice had risen up again. “I’ve got this covered. You clearly can’t handle your own shit. He made all of this happen just to get to you. Mother of the year”

Celine stood there in silence as she watched the rage slowly build within her wounded daughter. Her hand began to reach out on its own but she reeled it back in. This is the closest she had been to her daughter since giving birth to her. But it felt like Lilith was galaxies away. Her attention swiftly returned to Vincent, who was covering his mouth to mask his laughter. The sound of her heels clashing against the ice filled the air as she began to speak.

“Have you lost your mind? Look what you've done to her” Her voice was determined and powerful as she closed the gap between the two of them.

“Oh please, had I simply *guided* her she would end up just like you. Boring and always playing by the rules! It’s more fun this way, mother, believe me.” He glared at Lilith. “We just have to get rid of that pesky humanity of her’s and then the real fun can begin. I have just the thing for that! Shall we begin?” As he spoke he snapped his fingers. It was like a mirror had been shattered, erasing their current picture to reveal one that was completely identical. Except for one tiny detail. Lilith’s family floated motionless over the freezing river. Chains dressed their bodies

like robes, their bodies seemingly lifeless. The horrifying sight sent a chill down Lilith's spine. As she began to move towards them Vincent's stone words stopped her. "Now now, do not be hasty. Lose focus on the task at hand and they all die very painful deaths"

Lilith couldn't move. As much as she begged her limbs to rush towards her family with every ounce of speed that she had, her brain kept her prisoner. Begged her to listen to reason and analyze a way out of this mess. She reeled back and relaxed her body, giving a sharp look to her mother in the process. Rage was painted across Lilith's face, disappointment reflected from Celine's. The trio floated there, unflinching and unaware of what was happening in front of them. As Lilith strained her eyes she could make out faint, purple lines running underneath their skin.

"What did you do to them?" the words lashed out at Vincent like a barrage of a thousand small knives.

"He poisoned them. They are on a timer" Celine added. Her voice remained steady and composed. "From the color of their skin I can tell that they do not have much time left. A technique he must have learned from his aunt's. If you wish to save them then you must channel your anger and your power. My presence should help you with that now" Lilith flinched at the thought of accepting the stranger's help. But as she looked at Ella's fading body, the remaining sparks of her humanity seemed to ignite and she remembered why she came here in the first place. "I know you do not trust me but please, let me help you. This is my mess after all, like you stated before" Lilith let out a calming sigh before speaking.

"Do you have a plan?"

Vincent's curiosity rose as he watched his family converse. Eagerly awaiting their next move. "I wonder what the game has in store next." he whispered to himself. "You know, if

you're planning to put me down mother, do hurry it up please. Delay it however long you would like. You will feel the full extent of my hatred"

"There is no plan, darling. Follow my lead and trust your instincts. It will all come naturally to you. I will take care of your brother, focus on freeing your family" Celine softly placed her hand on Lilith's chin. "You will have time to hate me after all of this is over" Her smile was soft and kind. The kind of smile that Lilith's adoptive mother, Marlow, would flash at her. In the midst of all of her hate and suffering, it provided a strange comfort in Lilith's heart. A soft smirk tugged at the edge of her mouth but quickly turned back into a frown as she brushed her mother's hand aside.

"Once my family is safe, I'll rip his heart out myself" Lilith spoke.

Vincent licked his lips as if savoring the taste of an enjoyable meal as he watched the two women charge at him. Quickly he pulled several small daggers out of his pockets, twirling them accurately in his hands. The speed at which they were moving shocked Lilith at first, but she was quickly getting the hang of it. Perfectly in sync next to her mother she suddenly broke off towards her sleeping family as Celine engaged her deviant son. The woman moved with so much grace as she attacked Vincent. He launched his fist towards her and she quickly blocked the attack with her forearm. On impact the dagger in his hand dropped down, freeing his hand for a follow up attack.

As the hilt of the dagger plunged down to the ground, he swiftly kicked it back with his foot. The blade was sent flying upwards, on course to collide with Celine's face. As if she sensed the incoming danger she quickly moved backwards, creating space between their bodies. He grabbed the flying dagger with his empty hand while lunging at his mother as she fell back, undefended. His amber eyes were wide as he went in for the kill, his smile stretching from ear to

ear. Seeing her son, as he was now, sent a sharp pain into Celine's heart. As she extended her arm outwards toward her son, a faint hissing sound could be heard coming from her jacket sleeve. Suddenly a barrage of black snakes, with piercing red eyes emerged as if flowing from Celine's hand.

A pair of them attached themselves to Vincent's arm, while the others quickly wrapped themselves around his body. Practically restrained, his body fell straight down onto the freezing, ice covered concrete. Celine quickly regained her balance once again as she swiped her snake covered hand across the air. A cloud of dark green formed in front of her. Just as quickly as it appeared it had already formed into something solid. The blade glistened in the moonlight as the falling snow fell on it's venom covered body. Creating streams of steam. The hilt of the blade was covered in beautiful, blinding jewels, carefully surrounded by a black wrapping that had seemed to be attached to the weapon for centuries. She abducted the blade from it's cloudy prison, pointing the tip towards her son.

"Don't make me do this. Stand down son" For the first time, her voice had depleted in confidence. It was vulnerable and torn. She watched as Vincent freed himself from his reptile prison. He still wore his permanent grin, small holes could be seen on his hands and neck.

"Stealing tricks from your sisters? You forget that I have been trained by them for all of those years. Beaten and tortured at the smallest mistake. All while you ran away, living your disgusting human life. Those soulless demons stripped every part of me that was human away. Eradicating my bond to you until all that I knew was my dedication to serving them and only them. You will certainly have to do better than that mother." He looked down at his expensive coat. It was now drenched in snow and filled with holes, so he quickly casted it away and rolled

up the sleeves of his dress shirt. “I suggest you come back and join the fun, sister. I have not forgotten about you.”

Lilith, who had brought her family back to land in blinding speed, was quietly watching over them. Hoping that they still had enough time to reverse this curse placed upon them. As she listened to Vincent taunt her she began to see the purple veins on her parents and Ella pulsate uncontrollably. Panic washed over her face as they all started to shake.

“No no no no” She placed her hand on Ella to try and ease her suffering but it didn’t seem to have any effect. “Stop! please stop hurting them” Tears began to fall down her pale, rosy cheeks as she watched her family’s lives diminish by the second.

“You did not listen, so I just accelerated the poison in their bodies” The amusement in his voice indicated that he was having the time of his life with this game. “I would say you have, roughly, ten minutes to save them. Do you think that you two have the strength to kill me by then?”

In the blink of an eye she was standing in front of Vincent. Eyes overflowing, heart aching and rage burning. Her sudden appearance startled Vincent a bit as he took a few steps backwards. Lilith could feel her mother standing next to her now. In the same manner as before, Celine created a large, green cloud of venom. It quickly took solid form and she quickly placed it in her daughter’s hand. The weight of the weapon took Lilith by surprise at first, but her body quickly adjusted to it. She held its long handle in both her hands, perfectly. It was decorated with beautiful jewels, the same as the blade on her mother’s weapon. The curved blade was a blinding gold color, she could see a clean reflection of herself in it. This weapon was familiar to her, despite her never wielding anything like it her entire life. It just felt natural to have it in her hands.

“This weapon, this *scythe*, was made just for you. I have held on to it for all of these years, hoping that one day I would have the chance to present it to you. This will help you channel your power. It will help you end this nightmare” Celine spoke softly as she kept her eyes on the demon in front of them. His intense amber eyes shining with a hint of jealousy.

“Can it kill him?” Lilith spoke bluntly.

“It can” Celine responded. “Only weapons such as ours, can put down a corrupted soul such as his” She had accepted that her son had to be put down. But her voice gave away that she was sad for him.

“Then that’s all that I care about. Help me end this, mother.” The sound of their blades colliding with the ice filled the air as the pair rushed towards Vincent. This time they were moving more in sync than before. Their breathing was steady, perfectly in line with each other. Their unspoken communication was unmatched. It was as if they were the same person, fighting a single enemy. Vincent was enjoying every moment of the battle between his mother and sister. His bone rattling laughter could be heard in the midst of the sharp metal colliding.

Celine was right, despite Lilith never wielding a weapon of this caliber in her entire life, it didn’t matter. It was like the ability had been lying dormant in her mind since birth, sleeping. Waiting for something to wake it up. It was as if the scythe sensed her pain and rage and channeled it effortlessly. Allowing her to focus on the battle with a clear goal in mind. Kill her corrupted brother and save her family. She gripped the hilt on the weapon tightly as she gritted her teeth. They had already lost a little over two minutes, they couldn’t afford to lose anymore. The clock meticulously ticked in her head. Tapping at the far edges of her mind, a constant reminder of what was on the line.

Vincent let out a demonic screech as he took the dagger in his right hand and sliced at Lilith. In a split second Celine's blade made an ear piercing sound as it collided with her son's weapon. Sparks of light radiated from the heavy impact like fireworks. Ice shattered into diamond dust around them under the immense pressure. Celine quickly grabbed her daughter and pulled her back. "Focus Lilith! We've still got a ways to go" Her voice was reassuring and powerful in Lilith's ears. As much as she hated her mother right now, her spirit and strength pushed her to move forward. Lilith nodded as she twirled the scythe effortlessly in her hands. Strong gusts of wind were born as she continued to spin the blade round and round.

"Quiet the show!" Vincent spoke in amazement as he clapped his hands together. "Let us see what more you have to offer" He savagely sprinted towards his sister, she raised her blade to prepare for the barrage incoming. As they battled it was almost as if they were dancing. Each move that Lilith made next to her mother complimented perfectly. Every deflection, spin, jump and flip flowed from her body as if she had performed such maneuvers her entire life. She never had to think about what to do next, her body seemed to move on its own.

Celine fought with such grace and intelligence. Every strike was precise and calculated. Her swings struck true as they painted Vincent's body with cuts and blood. Her raven colored hair mixed with her daughter's created a cloud of black as they fought off the raging demon. Suddenly, Lilith could sense an opening in between one of Celine's many strikes. Her eyes locked on her brother's arm as he deflected the sword strike, it left him wide open. Lilith shot a quick glance at her mother and she nodded in response. Suddenly Lilith erupted in a gorgeous flurry of strikes. Gracefully dancing around Vincent as his eyes struggled to keep up. Unfamiliar panic washed over him. The clock began to tick louder in Lilith's head. Two minutes remained.

She quickly forced the curved blade down, meeting the edge of Vincent's uniquely sturdy daggers.

"That was quite the show, dear sister. If only you were not so predictable" his words leaked out through gritted teeth. A rough smile forming at the edges of his mouth. "You nearly made it"

For the first time in what felt like forever, Lilith felt herself smile. But not out of happiness. No, this smile was born from the thought of knowing that the nightmare was finally about to end. Seeing her smile made Vincent's eyes open as wide as the muscles beneath his skin would allow. "Nah, we made it just in time" The blade princess quickly rescinded the pressure of her sharp companion as she slightly faded sideways.

The sound of flesh meeting the deadliest of metal filled the air. The dripping, velvet liquid collided with ground as Vincent slowly brought his hand towards his chest. He could feel the tip of Celine's blade with his fingers. A warm steam flowed upwards to his nose. The empress released her blade from his chest in a blinding flash, sending her son spiralling down to his knees. As Vincent coughed, blood sprinkled from his mouth. There was nothing that he could do to hide his pain any longer as he held his stained hand over the gaping wound inflicted by his mother. His breathing became short, each one that he took decreased his life little by little.

"That should have done it. Go and check on your family, Lilith." As Celine spoke Lilith seemed to hesitate. Her limbs wouldn't move in the direction she wanted them to. They stood firm in the direction of Vincent. Though she was in control of her rage for the time being, it still burned within her as she watched her brother in his sorry state. "Go now" Her mother's sorrowful voice snapped Lilith back to reality.

“He needs to die. Do not hesitate” Lilith slowly walked towards her dying family. She launched the curved blade in her hand down to the ground. It pierced the ice and dug into the concrete. The snow began to fall heavier from the sky, staining the ground around them in red and white. “When the last breath crawls out of his mouth, when the last thing he feels is just a fraction of the pain that he made me feel... when my hand digs into his chest and rips his heart out, I’ll know that this nightmare is over and that my family is safe” Celine closed her eyes as she looked away for a moment. The blade in her hand evaporated like water on the street during a New York summer.

“It does not matter what you do to me now...” Vincent whispered in a calculating tone. The words he spoke next sent made Lilith’s heart stop. “Your family is already dead. The moment I injected the poison in them, it took only seconds to claim their lives... Well, the red head may still be alive, she is a persistent one. But she likely has only seconds before she fades as well” Lilith’s body went numb as she turned to look at her family, as they laid lifeless on the ground, covered in a blanket of snow. This entire time they had been playing his twisted game. Letting him control them like puppets on a string. Pulling them into a fight that would produce only a single victor. Him. Before Celine could move towards Lilith, the demon princess had broken out of her stasis and held Vincent a knife point on the ground. Tears flowing from her eyes.

“Lilith wait” Celine spoke sharply, her voice shaking.

“No more waiting” As Lilith spoke, you could hear the sound of her mother’s heart breaking. Hitting the ground like tiny glass shards. “He took *everything* from me! My life, my freedom, my comfort, my love.... my humanity. It was all just a game to him! All to turn me into a monster like him. Just to hurt you! I never asked for any of this” It was like the weight of the

world came crashing down on Lilith's shoulders. The entire weight of her world. As she looked at the dying demon her stomach ached.

"It does not matter what you do. Kill me, erase me... You will *always* belong to me, Lilith. You will carry me with you for as long as you live" Lilith shook as those words entered her ears and engraved themselves in her mind. Celine could not bare the pain that the air now carried around them. She could not stand to see her daughter in so much agony, nor her son in such a sorry, fallen state. In the freezing winter breeze a tear streamed down her beautiful, rose colored cheek. She knew what had to be done, though she wasn't sure that she had the will to do it.

She steeled her heart and summoned her strength once more. As Vincent watched his mother prepare, he smiled and let his body rest. In the blink of an eye Celine was next to Lilith, but she wasn't there to comfort her. The life slowly faded from Vincent's eyes as he leaned on his mother's chest. Lilith could only sit there, frozen in place, unable to move. The empress's hand sprouted from her son's back like roots under a tree. In her palm sat his still beating heart, but it quickly succumbed to the winter's crystalizing bite. That haunting, devilish smile was now permanently engraved on Vincent's cold, lifeless face. A quiet whimper could be heard escaping from Celine's mouth as she held her dead son. His heart dropped down into the fresh snow in a puddle of velvet as she pulled her arm back.

Seeing the light fade from his eyes Lilith's mind rushed back to her family. She sprinted over to their bodies. Slipping on the snow and ice in the process. She hastily brushed the settled snow from atop their bodies, placing her ear on her father's chest, then her mother's and finally Ella's. Panic struck her brain but she refused to allow it to set in. Lilith held back tears as she pumped her father's chest in a rhythmic manner. Hoping to be blessed with the sound of even the

faintest heartbeat. But nothing could be heard. White powder began to stick to her as she worked. Forming a comforter of ice around her body. No matter how many times she tried, they wouldn't wake up. Not even Ella. Her breathing became short, pumping out of her mouth heavily and quickly.

"Come on... *Wake up!*" the girl begged as she continued her efforts to revive her loved ones. "Please!". As she pleaded her muscles grew weaker, until she was unable to act any longer. The cold night air provided little comfort as she released all of the anger and sadness inside of her. It was like a leavy had broken inside of her. The thickest of glues nor the passage of time could heal the wounds engraved on her heart now. What was it all for? Accepting her darkness, embracing it. Clashing with her brother, putting her life on the line to save the people that she loves. It had all been for nothing if this was to be the end.

Celine held her son's body tightly, one last time before setting him down to rest on an ice covered battlefield. The sky infinitely rained down snow. Tiny, soft white clouds danced with wind in a slow waltz as the empress walked towards her grieving daughter. Her eyes gleamed with a warm intensity. They could practically melt the cold away. She gently placed a hand on Lilith's shaking shoulder, while placing the other on Arthur's corpse. This was the first time she had seen her long lost love in ages. His body was still, drifting away into the snow. The poison was thorough, displaying its unrelenting seal across every inch of his body. Celine gently caressed his face as tears began to turn to ice. Lilith cradled Ella in her arms, swaying back and forth. Hoping that the warmth of her touch would be enough to save her. But it was not.

Her sorrow shifted to anger as she turned to face her mourning mother, her amber eyes glowing with hatred as she forced the words to leave her dry mouth.

“How can you sit there and mourn? This happened because of you” Lilith screamed through her pain. “It all started with you! Why couldn’t you just leave my father alone? Why did you have to drag him into your life? Your selfishness, your need for redemption led to this! You have no right to mourn, for any of them”

Her daughter’s devastating words wounded Celine more than anything ever had, but she was right. All of this, everything started with her. The day that she ran away from her life, from her son, was the day she set off on a journey that would only end in ruin and despair. Now her estranged son was dead, her love was dead and her daughter hated her more than anything in the world. She deserved it all. Lilith lashed out at her mother as she sat in silence, taking the hits as they came. The sorrowful princess swung until her limbs could no longer swing and her hits became empty and filled with tears.

“I never asked for any of this, I never wanted it.” Her voice was beginning to fade. “And now they’re gone, everyone i’ve ever loved” She buried her face into her mother’s chest as she cried. The new continued to fall around them, marching to the beat of their sorrow. Celine hesitantly placed her hand atop Lilith’s head.

“I never wanted this for you. For your brother, your father and mother... I have made mistakes. Costly mistakes. I ran from my old life because I simply was not strong enough to fight and stand on my own. In turn that set a course for the ruin and pain that I would soon project onto everyone I came into contact with. Understand that when you were born I had never been happier in my entire life. You were my light, a second chance for both your father and I. You were my strength. I should have been there for you. To help guide you through your pain and confusion. I should have known that as much as I wanted to, I could not trust your brother. He housed an insatiable hunger for revenge inside of him, one that I could not quell no matter how

much love I projected onto him. He was too far gone and had seen that in time, perhaps things would be different for us now.... There is only one thing left for me to do now. As a gorgon I hold power over life and death. By giving up a portion of my own life, I can restore the heart, mind and body of anyone. Giving them a second chance”

Celine pulled her daughter from her chest, looking directly into her eyes.

“It is too late for your mother and father... But Ella clings to life still. If it is your wish, I can save her” She spoke gently. Lilith’s amber eyes were locked onto her mother. Swimming with desperation.

“You can bring her back? How?” Lilith knew that she should know better than to trust words by now. But every inch of body was in pain. If Ella were to stay dead then; she would never live through it. She would blame herself as much as she would her mother. The guilt of everything that she had done up until this point would rot her from the inside out, until she took her own life to release herself from the misery residing inside of her. So she put her remaining faith in the glimmer of hope provided by Celine. Setting aside her hatred for the time being.

“Her soul is still tied to her body but I can feel that connection breaking. If it is your wish, I can save her” Her tone was steady and strong as she spoke to her daughter. Lilith could sense her strength but she could also feel the pain that her mother was trying to bury. It didn’t matter how corrupt he was, Vincent was her son and she had to take his life, she loved Arthur with every fiber of her being. Feeling the internal struggle within Celine made Lilith believe that perhaps the woman was more human than just the woman that destroyed her life, the woman who made her who she was. “Your answer?”

“Bring her back to me... please, mother” Lilith could feel a stinging sensation within her heart as she spoke the word. A fleeting moment of happiness washed over both of them. But it evaporated into the freezing air as quickly as it came.

“When she wakes, she will have no memory of the events that transpired. She will come back to you in good health, excited for your graduation and your future together. And do not worry, I will resurrect your other friends. They were not tainted by this ancient poison, I should be able to restore their hearts as well” With a nod from Lilith, Celine proceeded with the resurrection. The world around them seemed to slow down. The falling snow stopped, the chilling wind was held back by an unseeable force. Not a single noise barked from the restless city behind them. Everything was just utterly silent. A bright yellow light began to shine around the corpse of Ella. As she lay there, basking in the warm light, the poison that once plagued her body and mind began to fade. Blood began to pump through her veins and into her heart again, sending life through her body. Pale, cold skin became colored and warm once again. Her chest slowly rose up and back down again. Celine had come through.

“It is done, darling” Celine carefully rubbed the palm of her hand across Lilith’s back. Fatigue had withered away at her muscles and bones as she let out a soft sigh. The snow began to fall once again, the wind carrying it along. Time had resumed its natural flow. The sight of her love, alive and well once again, broke Lilith’s heart in the best of ways. She tried to speak but the words wouldn’t form. Celine felt her daughter’s hand in her own. A rush of blazing warmth coursed through their veins, igniting a dying fire within them both. With a single touch Celine felt a wave of emotion from her daughter. Crushing guilt, undying love, deadly rage and everything else that she had been feeling. She sent it all to Celine as she sat there in silence, looking down at her sleeping family.

Celine gently lifted Arthur into her nimble arms, running her fingers across his lifeless skin. She pressed her lips against his. The taste of salt and melting ice filled her mouth. Lilith placed her hand into her deceased mother's as well. Gripping tightly, refusing to let her go.

"I am sorry, my love. I never meant for you to pay for my mistakes. You were the best part of me and now that you are gone I do not know what my future holds anymore. But I promise you this; I will protect our daughter, our treasure, until my final breath. Just like you had done since the day she was born" She turned her attention to the sleeping Marlow. "Marlow, you did not deserve any of this.. Lilith is your daughter, much more than she has been mine and I thank you for shaping her into the beautiful, strong young woman before me. I owe an unpayable debt to you. My only regret is that I could not save you both from this fate and I will have to live with that guilt for the rest of my days. Find peace" Lilith felt the weight of each painstaking word the Celine recited. As she spoke about her father and mother an unavoidable wave of sadness and anger washed over her once again. Reminding her of the crushing weight on her chest.

She swiftly rushed over to Ella, picking her up in arms. The revived red head let out a sigh of pain and confusion as she was lifted from the cracked ground beneath her. She buried her face into Lilith's ripped clothes, clawing for a sliver of warmth.

"Thank you for saving her... But you need to know, this doesn't change anything. I still have this looming hatred and sadness when it comes to you. I don't even know who you are, you're a stranger to me. All that I know is that all of the pain I have endured in this life stemmed from you. Questioning why I was so different, why I felt sad and empty when my life was filled with so much love. I am who I am because of the piece of you that lives inside of me. A piece of myself that I can't control and that scares me to death. I'm grateful to you for saving the one

thing that keeps me human but I need you to stay away from me. I'm not ready to know you. Not yet"

"I understand.. I just hope that one day, when you are ready, we can talk"

"One day" Lilith replied shortly and quietly. As the wind picked up speed she disappeared with Ella into the blazing snow. Leaving behind only faint footprints for Celine to gaze at.

Epilogue

The aftermath of devastation is always difficult to move past. The pain and the scars left in its wake, the losses suffered melting away the walls around the hearts of those affected. Lilith found it hard to focus her mind on mundane affairs. Knowing everything that she did now made her life seem meaningless. Small in the broader scope of things. For the past few weeks she had been solely focused on the health of Ella. Despite everyone being revived and returned to their normal states, as promised by her mother, she couldn't help but feel like her happiness was invalid. Like she wasn't allowed to feel relief after being the cause of the suffering endured by those closest to her. Having to revisit the pain she felt on the battlefield, she gathered her remaining strength and buried her parents, saying goodbye to them for the final time.

In the time after walking away from her, Lilith had not spoken to or seen her mother Celine. It had seemed that she was staying away, just as Lilith had asked of her that night. But as she sat next to a sleeping Ella, her mind just couldn't help but wonder about her and how she was doing. Despite the hatred that stoked the flame inside of her, she still had some sort of love for the woman of ruin. Would she ever see her again? Would she get the chance to know the woman he gave her life? Those thoughts quickly faded as the sun began to shine through the silk curtains dressing the onlooking window.

It was the morning of graduation, just a few days after Christmas. Lilith lay silently next to her sleeping girlfriend. The couple had reconciled after Ella had awakened a few days after being brought back to life. She had no memory of what happened after she and Lilith had broken up. It was as if the horrors to follow had been plucked from everyone's mind, sparing them the trauma and questions that Lilith wasn't prepared to answer. The redhead's chest moved slowly

and steadily, like a metronome. Up and down, up and down. Her blazing hair was tied in a messy bun, her freckles popped in the dim sunlight illuminating the bedroom. As she slept Lilith twirled the engagement ring she had planned to give Ella around her finger. Her eyes fixated on it so deeply. She wondered to herself if marriage was even possible for her at this point. Could she lie to Ella for the rest of their lives? Pretending that she didn't die, erasing the fact that Lilith had killed their two best friends because of her demon nature? Keep the truth about her parents death and her family a secret? Could she really hide who she was from the person she loved most in the world? Those questions floated around in the orbit of her mind, weighing against her desires to just explain everything to Ella. But certainly that kind of knowledge would only bring more pain than happiness, right? Confusion and worry seemed to be the only emotions that Lilith came packaged with recently.

The ring was attached to a beautiful, silver chain that dangled between her bandaged fingers. The raven haired girl turned her attention to her sleeping lover. Running her hand, ever so gently, through a beautiful sea of velvet threads. Her heart aching, bleeding through her bones, right into the veil on her chest. Lilith leaned in and kissed Ella on the forehead, watching as a dizzy, daydreaming smile came across her sleeping face. The world welcomed Ella as she opened her sleepy eyelids slowly.

“Morning” Ella spoke sweetly to a watching Lilith. “Watching me sleep again?”

“Just want to make sure that you’re doing alright. That’s all, can’t be too sure” Lilith trailed off. Ella sat up as a soft yawn blew from her mouth. Her arms stretched upward towards the ceiling.

“I’m fine. Just like I was yesterday and the day before that. I promise” she paused as she looked into Lilith’s amber eyes. “What about you? Up all night again, thinking about your parents?”

“I just can’t seem to sleep since it happened, you know?”

“It wasn’t your fault Lilith. No one could’ve stopped what happened in that fire...” Ella inched closer to Lilith, wrapping herself around the raven haired beauty. She had been told that Lilith’s family had burned in a tragic house fire at their estate, the home Lilith grew up in. “You even rushed in to try and save them, knowing that you could hurt in the process. There was nothing more that you could have done” She gently placed her palm on Lilith’s bandaged hand. Interlocking their fingers together. Lilith let out a deep sigh as she leaned into Ella’s soft cheek.

“I still feel guilty. I just wish I could have helped them, before it was too late” The words stung like acid as she spoke them. The truth was that after their deaths, Lilith wanted to erase all the pain caused by the loss of her parents. So she destroyed every last memory of them, it was all kept in that home. She burned it all down to the ground. “I know there was nothing more that I could have done but it still haunts me. Every day that they aren’t here. Does it ever get easier?”

“I don’t know Lilly.. But I do know that you have people who are still here. People that love you and care about you. They’ll always be here for you when you need them most. There is so much more life to live, so much more to see beyond the pain and the sadness that you’re feeling now. No one can ever fill the hole left from losing someone that you love. But what can do is try your best to keep living for them and I know that Arthur and Marlow would want you to live on and do extraordinary things with your life. So you should do everything you can to honor them” Ella could feel Lilith’s bandaged grip tighten softly around her hands. A warm and comforting feeling that she would never grow tired of.

“NYU’s number one student until the very end. That must be practice for your Valedictorian speech today?” Lilith teased, her mood a bit brightened by Ella’s words.

“Maybe a little. But it still holds truth and relevance to the topic at hand. I mean it Lilith. You’re going to be alright. We’ll be here to make sure that you get through this”

“I know you guys will and you’re right. Thank you... There’s something that I want you to have, Ella” Lilith quickly reached over to the sleeping ring next to her, scooping it up within her damaged hand. “I know that we just got back together but after everything that we have been through recently, everything that I’ve been through... I want to be with you for the rest of my life, I never want to go another day without you by my side” Her heart was beating through the bones in her chest as she held up the ring in front of Ella’s face. “Marry me, please?”

The room fell silent as the city began to awaken. Car horns and sirens could be heard faintly in the distance. Frost began melting in the rays of the sun against the glassed windows. Ella, with shaky hands, took the ring in her grip.

“You want me to marry you? Me?” She asked in disbelief. “Me?”

“Who else would be asking right now? The ghost in the corner of the bedroom? Yes you! They might want to rethink their choice of the student they're giving honors to today” Ella’s swift fist collided with Lilith’s shoulder.

“Shut up! Yes i’ll marry you” Ella screamed as she placed the ring on her finger. She yanked Lilith’s face into hers as their lips collided. As they kissed faint giggles and joyful smiles sneaked their way out from their embrace. Lilith’s heart felt like it was alive once again. This is the path that she had chosen, the path that she felt was right for her. In time she knew that she would need to come clean about everything and she was prepared for that. But for now, this was all that she needed in this life. After graduation she would explain to Ella and her friends that she

needed some time away, a reprieve from the city and the lingering memory of parents that haunted its streets, before planning of the wedding would begin. She would use that time to travel with her mother and learn everything that she could about herself, her heritage and prepare herself for the daunting task that was being honest with the people she cared about most.

But for now she would cherish this time with her fiancé and her friends, closing out another chapter of their lives together before starting a new one.

“It’s about time that you asked” Ella laughed.

“Sorry it took me so long, Mrs. Godfrey”

“Say that again, I didn’t quite catch that”

“Mrs. Godfrey” Lilith laughed softly.

“Just rolls right off the tongue doesn’t it?”

The lights were bright inside of the packed out building, home to New York University’s 2018 graduating class. Young adults dressed in purple and white formed lines and tiny crowds here and there, surrounded by doting parents and loved ones. In the front of the sea of hopeful graduates stood Ella. Atop the stage, settling in behind the podium and microphone, preparing to address her peers. Her sparkling red hair could be seen flowing from underneath her black cap. Her freckles popped in the rays of the bright light shining over her. Her purple gown draped over her body, adorned with all of the honors earned by the top student at the university. She was distinguished among her fellow students. Standing out like a rare red rose in a field of sunflowers. She twirled her hair nervously around her finger, showing off the ring sleeping on its partner.

As recited the words to her speech in her mind Lilith, Darren, Anya and Luke came crashing through her concentration like a freight car spiraling off the rails.

“Looking good” Darren yelled as he held up the ‘ok’ signal with his fingers.

“Knock em dead Ella-chan” Anya chimed in as she jumped on Darren’s back.

“Good luck” Luke smiled as Lilith applied slight pressure to his back. “Patience Lilith, geez”. He smiled back at her as she winked at him.

“You two have been getting along nicely lately. It’s nice to see” Ella spoke in a nervous tone that hid behind her smile.

“He’s not too bad I guess. Anyway, how are you feeling? Nervous?” Lilith asked as Ella kneeled down to speak to her. “You smell good” Lilith gently kissed her on her freckled cheek, leaving the taste of apples and strawberry on her lips.

“I didn’t put on too much did I? DO I look alright? Is my hair good?” The questions came buzzing from Ella’s frantic mouth at a mile a minute. It was tough for Lilith to keep up with them. She quickly pressed her lips into Ella’s, silencing the ginger to enjoy a much needed breather.

“You look as radiant as ever, perfect even. Relax El, you’ve got this in the bag. Remember, be confident and be strong. When you feel yourself getting nervous just look right over to us” Lilith guided Ella’s eyes over to the section she and their friends were sitting. In unison they all gave a thumbs up, flashing smiles back at them. It was as if they rehearsed it before coming into the building. “We’ve got you red” Lilith flashed a charm filled wink.

“You guys practiced that didn’t you?” Ella sighed.

“It’s like training monkeys” Lilith laughed.

“Thank you, Lilith. I hope you make me this happy when we’re married” Ella teased.

“Well the goal is to make you happier! But you can count on me and them. Knock ‘em dead firecracker”

This year I’ve learned how to love more than I ever have before.

I’ve learned how to forgive and allow my heart to heal.

We have all been through so much together these past 4 years,

But now it’s time to start a new adventure.

One with new goals and new horizons to see.

I am going to miss each and every one you.

I will never forget you.

NYU is forever.

And so are the friendships we’ve made along the way.

So here’s to growing up!

As she wrapped up her speech the space erupted with applause and cheers. Students through their caps into the air, celebrating their accomplishments together. Soaking up the last moments they would all spend together in the same space, as the class of 2018. Each and every student in that building would be embarking on their own journey after today. Some traveling together and some traveling alone. Lilith sat there in thought, her legs crossed. A wide smile was uncharacteristically painted on her face, showcasing her sparkling teeth for the first time in what felt like forever. Her friends danced around her like children on the playground. As she looked up her eyes locked in with Ella’s. A smile matched with her’s. An unspoken promise of forever boiled between them. A future so bright that it could outshine the deepest darkness.

Lilith turned her head to soak in all of the celebration and happiness emitting from all of the bodies around her. There she was, placed comfortably by the exit, watching as it all happened. Her amber eyes called to Lilith, whispering to her heart. It was her mother, Celine. How long had she been there watching? Lilith wondered if she saw her walk up to the stage as her name was called. Did she harbor the same admiration and pride that Ella had as she did something that she never thought she would be alive to accomplish? Lilith wished deeply that she did. And as those thoughts rushed through her body like a shot of adrenaline, she couldn't keep her heart from calling out to Celine. Her hand reached out to her cheek as the tears began to fall from her glowing eyes. There weren't any words that needed to be spoken between this mother and her daughter in this moment. They both knew what the other was feeling. As Celine turned to exit the building Lilith quickly called out to her.

"Please don't go mom" She shouted. Her cry caught the attention of her shouting friends, even Ella; who was still atop the stage overlooking everything as it happened. Lilith couldn't find a way to hold back the river of regret and sorrow that poured from her eyes as her friends closed in around her. The levee had broken. As they asked what was wrong all she could think of was how much she needed her mother, after all this time, through all of the hate. It finally broke through the impenetrable steel wall she had built around her heart, protecting her from this very feeling. She needed to know Celine, she wanted to know her. But first she had to have a conversation with her family before that could happen.

"Wait a second, you're telling us that you were adopted?" Darren asked as he scratched his messy head. They had moved to the student union for now. The celebration was too loud for them to hold a conversation such as this.

“Not adopted. But Marlow wasn’t my birth mother. My dad had an affair and got my birth mother, Celine, pregnant. Something happened between them and she left my dad to raise me with Marlow” Lilith did her best to water the explanation down. Leaving out the bits best left unknown.

“When did you find out?” Ella asked as she rested her chin on Lilith’s shoulder. “Why didn’t you say something to us sooner?”

“I just recently found out, after the funeral” Lilith averted her eyes to the ground after telling that lie.

“Must have been a lot to handle at once, I bet” Anya spoke, in a normal voice surprisingly.

“It’s fine. I think that I’m dealing with all of this a lot better than I would have in the past. I can’t change the circumstances of my birth and who raised me. But I can take the time I was gifted by my parents and at least give Celine a chance. She was here earlier”

“Is that why you were crying?” Luke asked.

“Yeah, I heard you say something about your mom? I just assumed you were missing Mrs. G in the moment” Darren chimed in.

“I’m sorry that I didn’t clue you guys in when I found out but I was just trying to process through my feelings on my own. I didn’t know if I wanted to pursue a relationship with Celine at first. In fact I hated her for keeping this a secret for so long, my parents too. But when everyone was celebrating earlier, I looked around. I realised that I was never going to share that kind of pride of happiness with my parents ever again and it broke my heart all over again. That’s when I saw Celine. Something inside of me just called out to my mother and as she leaving I realised that I didn’t want her to go”

“You don’t want to waste an opportunity to get to know the one sliver of family that you have left” Ella finished Lilith’s train of thought as she ran her fingers through the black threads atop her head.

“Yeah... Dad would have wanted me to have a relationship with Celine. That’s what I want too”

“So what are you going to do Lil?” Anya asked patiently.

“We’ll support you no matter what you choose to do” Darren spoke.

“We’ve got you” Luke partnered.

“I’m with you. Forever. Whatever you decide.” Ella wrapped her arms around Lilith as she kissed her cheek. The warmth of her touch was something that always made Lilith feel like she was walking on clouds.

“You guys are fucking amazing. Thank you”

“Are you sure that you want to pursue this path?” Celine spoke. Her legs were dangling from a beautiful rooftop view. Overlooking the sunset orange city, a frozen kingdom preparing for slumber. “We’ll be away for quite some time.”

Lilith stood next to her mother. Her black mane blowing gently in the wind. She opened the palm of her hand to reveal a half heart necklace. A smile briefly washed across her face as the two women looked down at the bustling city street. It was graduation day. College students and their families flooded the streets of the borough in celebration of a great accomplishment.

Ella, Darren, Anya and Luke could be celebrating. Ella proudly held up her diploma as a classmate snapped a picture of her and Luke together. Darren and Anya seemed to be in good spirits as well as they danced up and down the street together. Only stopping to kiss each other and pull Ella into group hugs. That sight made Lilith's heart ache and sing at the same time. This was the future that they had all been working towards. A day they had talked about and planned for since they were children, growing up in the greatest city on earth.

"If I want to be a part of their lives again, then I need to learn more about myself. I need to learn about what I am and how to control these abilities, this hunger. Before it consumes me" Her words were sharp and confident. "I want the power to protect, not destroy. I guess I need my mom to teach me"

"Of course I will" Celine picked herself up from the edge of the roof. Surely it was dangerous to wear heels on the edge of a towering rooftop but for a demon empress, the rules must have been different. "I won't lose another child to corruption... I'm just sorry that your pain went as far as it did. Had I known what he would do you I would have came for you sooner"

"I don't need an apology mom. Yes, what he did to me will always be ingrained into my mind and my body... But he's dead now. What I do from this point forward is my choice, not his. I refuse to let him control me any longer" Lilith's eyes averted back to the singing graduates down below. "I want to know what that feels like again. Happiness"

"As do I, darling. As do I." Celine turned away from the edge and slowly made her way across the snow covered roof. Her heels kicked against the concrete like the hooves of a race horse.

"How was it? Seeing dad again?" Lilith asked as her mother suddenly halted beside her. For the first time Lilith blinding white teeth could be seen as she smiled a most sincere smile.

Seeing her daughter like that, in that moment, made Celine feel like the last twenty odd years had been washed away.

“Seeing your father again gave me that intense, overwhelming feeling of peace and love that I had treasured so much for so many years... But it was never safe for us to be together. One day, I hope that things can be different. For you and your fiance” Celine closed her eyes as the gentle, brisk breeze tickled her skin. “Come now, it is a long journey home. Once we arrive you will begin your studies. The family, my sisters, will want most likely demand an audience with you as well”

“Stheno and Euryale right? When Vincent said one of their names during our fight it piqued my curiosity but when you said you were a Gorgon it rang a bell. So I did a little research while recovering. The Gorgon’s, hailing from ancient Greek mythology. That would make you Medusa, the youngest sister, the mortal right?” Lilith quickly caught up to her mother and interlocked arms with her.

“You’ve gotten your ich for history from your father it would seem. But yes, that is my birth name. Your aunt’s, my sisters, have done everything in their power to get you back home. When you were a child I offered myself up to them, in your stead. My head was of greater value than a half breed child to them... Before I escaped to New York, I had a lover and he had blessed me with a son. My sisters become so overwhelmed with jealousy that they killed him and took my son as their own, raising him into the man that became Vincent” Lilith could feel the muscles in Celine’s body tense up as she spoke about her horrid past.

“They sound like regular high school, city bitches if you ask me” Lilith chimed in sarcastically. “So they’re the reason why Vincent was the way that he was? And now they want to meet me? Great, can’t wait”

“Do not worry my love. They fear you, for you have something that none of us will ever have” Celine leaned her head into the Lilith’s.

“What’s that?” She asked.

“The choice to be who you want to be. We were stripped of our choice by the god’s a long time ago and my sisters have been bitter about that ever since. I was able to keep my mortality. I could come and go as I pleased. But my sisters are trapped in an endless cycle of pain and anger for all of eternity. Never being allowed the reprieve of death”

“I guess being a god has its drawbacks”

“Indeed. But you will learn about all of that once we return home”

As the two walked side by side it was difficult to tell them apart. Lilith was the mirror image of her mother. From their hair, their beautiful amber eyes, down to the way that they walked. To someone with no prior knowledge of their history, the two women could be sisters.

“Ah, congratulations on graduating college darling!” Celine chimed in through the silence.

“Thanks mom.. I had almost forgotten that I was graduating too. Just seems so small in the broader scope of things now”

“Do not belittle your achievements Lilith. You have accomplished what few your age could. Perfect grades and a glowing recommendation that could get you a job with any music institution of your choosing. That’s something to be proud of!”

“How did you know all of that?” Lilith’s curiosity had peaked.

“I may have listened in to a conversation or two between your friends while you were recovering. They told me about all that you have accomplished. I just regret not being here to

celebrate them with you. Hence why I crashed your graduation ceremony. I had to be there for you at least once”

“Well, you’re here now and you’ve done nothing but try to help me since you came. Despite me yelling at you to go away or leave me alone, you never did. No matter what’s happened up until now, I’m just glad to have the opportunity to finally learn the truth about who I am and where I come from. With my mom by my side” Lilith buried her face into Celine’s soft hair. Taking in a scent that she would cherish from this moment forward. Her mother was here, with her.

“I am just as happy to have my daughter back as well. I have missed you so much all of these years. Remembering you as a child who would cry when I lifted you from your fathers arms, to seeing you now as a beautiful young woman ,who has done so well for herself despite the hardships that you have faced. Well, it is enough to make any mother breakdown in tears” Celine could feel Lilith’s arms wrap around her stomach. Her face still buried in her hair.

“Don’t cry too much mother. Like you said, it’s a long road back home and we still have a lot to catch up on” Lilith spoke through a mouthful of hair.

“Yes, you have a point there.” Celine laughed as she tightened the grip around her precious daughter.

The setting sun began its sleepy descent as faint drops of snow fell from the sky. All of Lilith’s family gathered within their usual coffee shop, seeking refuge from the incoming snow fall. Laughter and tears could be heard through the glass as Ella showed them the engagement ring given to her by Lilith. They all sat together and talked about how much they were going to miss the ‘raven haired badass’ while she was away. Anya was boiling over with excitement

about planning the wedding with Ella. Even going as far as offering to push their move to London back.

To them New York seemed empty without Lilith prancing around through it with them. But as much as they were going to miss her, they knew that they too had a promise to keep. Everyone was meant to continue to thrive and live out their lives. Become better and happier. Reach new heights and achieve all of their dreams. So on that snowy, freezing night, a night full of celebration, love and loss, they all made a promise. A promise to live extraordinary lives, have adventures that you only read about in novels. A promise to soak up every inch of love and happiness that the world had to offer. So that on the day of Lilith's return, she could hear about the legend that she set in motion.

Fighting off the cold building outside, Ella took a sip from her steam filled mug. Letting the warm liquid race through her veins and cover her like a warm blanket. She watched silently and peacefully with her family as the sun fell asleep, giving birth to a beautifully lit winter paradise. She pressed the ring against her heart and closed her eyes.

“We'll all be here when you come back, Lilith. I promise.”

Somewhere in the distance a smile spread across Lilith's face as she and her mother faded into the ocean that was New York City. A place that held a piece of Lilith's heart, a place that she would always call home. No matter how many miles she put between them. She would always find her way back. No matter how dark the path got. As long as that light was there to show her the way she would always find the hearts connected to hers.

End

