

Death's Undoing

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, locales, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

To the couples who keep it clean on the streets and toxic in the sheets.

Playlist of Songs Featured in Book:

Lonely Day by System of a Down
Hello, I Love You by The Doors
Mrs. Robinson by Simon and Garfunkel
Smoke on the Water by Deep Purple
Witchcraft by Frank Sinatra
Rosas by Oreja de Van Gogh
Never Going Back Again by Fleetwood Mac
In The Air Tonight by Phil Collins
The Movement by Matroda
Falling by Madeaux
Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This) by Rezz, fknsyd
Unhinged by Larcenia Roe
You're the Devil in Disguise by Elvis
In Dreams by Roy Orbison
Black Hole Sun by Soundgarden
Like a Stone by Audioslave
Enjoy the Silence by Depeche Mode
Closer by Nine Inch Nails
Twist and Shout by The Beatles
Stairway to Heaven by Led Zeppelin
Walkin' After Midnight by Patsy Cline
Let's Stay Together by Al Green
Time in a Bottle by Jim Croce
A Silent Practice by 9 Dead
Moonlight Sonata (1st Movement) by Beethoven

Trigger Warnings:

Drug use
Alcohol use
Drowning
Depiction of Death
Mention of overdose (non-fatal)
Forced Proximity
Suicidal ideation (past)
Choking
Knife play
Potential SA
Possession
Mention of Rape (not detailed)
Bondage
Praise Kink
Animal mutilation
Ritualistic practice

Prologue

The funeral home looms before me, it's a Victorian-era home set apart from the rest of the town. The house is tall with round ash gray shingling, the windows are long with white trimming, and the front has a wraparound porch already lined with guests donned in all black talking in small groups, some taking slow drags of their cigarettes. The front is enveloped in a garden of flowers, giving an inviting aroma to the otherwise comforting home. Despite this, I'm filled with unease and anxiety. I take a hard swallow as I make my way up the wide porch stairs. World crushing reality awaits me past the ornate wooden oak doors. How am I supposed to face everyone after what I've done? I could never look my Tia Imelda in the face ever again, after all, I'm the reason, her son, my cousin, drowned. My mom comes up behind me, softly resting her hand on my shoulder,

"Enrique, I know you don't want to do this, but you will never forgive yourself if you don't give yourself this closure". I take a deep stammering breath. Every fiber in my body is telling me to run as fast and far as I can. It feels like the weight of the world is crushing me into mush, and for the first time ever I don't have the one person I could rely on most to help me carry this burden. My mom gives me another gentle nudge. Slowly my feet start moving forward, feeling like they weigh 1000 pounds each.

Finally, after what feels like an eternity but couldn't have been more than 20 paces, we reach the white aged doors. My mom turns the knob and pushes the door open; a gentle creaking greets us and we step through. We find ourselves in the parlor room, surrounded by an assortment of couches and coffee tables, each with an arrangement of flowers from the garden. My eyes scan around nervously, but thankfully other than a few of my smaller cousins taking up a few of the couches burying their noses in their phones and tablets, there's not anyone else in the room. Just past them, I see the double door entrance to the main reception area, a picture of my cousin with a wide grin set up outside.

I step in slowly, taking in the room before me. There are rows of chairs set up leading to the front of the room where I can see a shiny white casket partially open. Different flower arrangements stand on either side. A lump forms in my throat as I quickly look away. Set up along the walls are a few flat-screen TVs scrolling through a slideshow of some of my cousin's most memorable moments. I hear a soft tune in the background, which I quickly recognize as one of my cousin's favorite songs, "Lonely Day", by *System of a Down*. Fitting, as I wish I was in a casket next to him since I lost him. My mom turns to me and gives me a small smile and tells me she's going to go greet my Tia's and Tio's. She gives my hand a squeeze and she walks towards my aunts and uncles, some I haven't seen since I was a kid. In a moment of panic, I sit in a chair in the back row far enough from everyone else.

I keep replaying the events that led up to this nightmare. Juan and I had a secret spot we would always escape to, an abandoned two-story house just off the river, overgrown with weeds and wildflowers, it was hidden away and nicely set away from all the other surrounding houses. It had sat abandoned since before we were born, but when we discovered it, it was the most beautiful thing two mischievous kids could have ever come across. Over the years it went from our childhood clubhouse to our sanctuary of illicit drug depravity, our little escape from the real world when all we needed to forget our troubles was a couple joints and a bottle of Jack. We would fill our heads with childlike dreams of one day buying the place and fixing it up for ourselves, maybe even make it cozy enough to move our families in. It even came with a house pet, a large white cat with gray spots that would always come greet us when we hung out, nuzzling itself to our legs as we sat and talked our problems away. We later named her, Cleo. In our delusional naïve minds, nothing could ever touch us in that house. It was our own little slice of the pie that so many people wish they had. We could not have been more wrong.

We always made sure to take all the precautions when going to our sanctuary. Wearing dark clothes to blend in better with the shadows to not draw unwanted attention, restricting the use of flashlights to not give a beacon to the cops, even going as far as only sparking up in the back porch to try to reduce the wafting smells from reaching any passerby. We had done this so long I guess we grew careless, having never had any issues before. Crazy how it only took one moment to change our lives.

“Have you ever looked up at the stars and wondered if there’s anyone looking back at us?” I look over at Juan, he’s looking up at the light polluted sky with a wonder that only a joint and a couple heavy swigs could give you.

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Yeah, like there’s trillions of stars up there, each one with their own planets. One of them is bound to have intelligent life.”

“What if they’re looking up wondering the same thing?” I sigh, thinking whether I should indulge him in his deep thoughts.

“Absolutely, I’m sure they tune in every Tuesday night to catch up on the daily shit show that is our planet. We make for great entertainment at least.”

Juan gives a little chuckle, causing him to cough harshly since he was mid-drag of his joint, “Oh yeah, but I’m sure we’re getting to the seasons where the writers are just dragging on and throwing random bullshit to try and keep it goi- “,

“Shhh!” I hear a faint creaking noise coming from the front of the house, resonating from the bottom floor.

“What? Are you getting paranoid again?” Juan gives me a smirk and a slight nudge, but I shoot him a look to get him to shut up.

“I heard something, and it wasn’t an old house type of noise, it sounded like someone walking in the front door.”

We both are aware of the sounds of faint creaking footsteps coming up the stairs. Without saying a word, we both make for the branches of the old oak tree that have grown over the ledge of the balcony. We quickly begin our descent to the overgrown lawn, giving little thought to the integrity of the branches that bore our full swinging weight. Just as we reach the last of the branches, I hear a loud crack as the limb I’m hanging onto snaps. I hit the ground hard, feeling my ankle roll under my body. A sharp pain shoots up my leg but I have no time to recover from the nasty fall.

My cousin is quickly by my side hooking his arm around me, “Come on Ricky! It’s the cops, I can see their car on the side of the house!” My face twists into a grimace as we start making our way to the edge of the wooded area, every limping step I take sending shooting pains up my body. Soon we are making our way along the shore of the river, moving as quickly as my pained body can muster. We try our best not to get too close to the edge of the shore, the heavy rains have made the river a roaring beast ready to swallow anything whole that’s foolish enough to get too close.

“There's nowhere else to go but up.” Juan nods over to the bridge that leads into town, an old rusted service ladder rising up one of its concrete pillars.

Unfortunately for us, it's at least 10 feet into the raised river. “You go first, gotta make sure your handicapped ass doesn't slip and get dragged away” I elbow him in the ribs, but I shakily start making my way into the freezing water. Every step is uncertain, the stones are caked in a slippery film that would've been hard to traverse even without a twisted ankle. “One step at a time,” I keep repeating this little mantra in my head, my cousin helping as best he could holding on to the back of my soaked shirt.

Just as we make it to the bottom of the pillar, we hear a shout behind us, “Hey! Stop right there!” The cop's flashlight lands on us, bathing us in blinding light.

Juan shove's me onto the first rung, the rust biting into my hands painfully, “Move your ass! He's right behind us!”

Every rung I climb brings new levels of pain I'd never felt, sharp gnarled metal digging into my bare hands and my twisted ankle having to push up the full weight of my body every other step. Despite every nerve in my body yelling at me for mercy I keep climbing, slipping a few times almost losing my footing. Finally, I reach the last rung and push up on the heavy cover, giving way after a few solid shoves.

I force my body up onto the cement sidewalk, the last rung giving slightly under my weight as I give myself a final push. quickly looking back down to see how far behind me Juan is. To my relief, he only has a few rungs to go.

“Come on! You're right there! Let's GO!”

Juan gives me a shit-eating grin as he reaches the last rung, knowing that somehow, we just evaded the cop, “you move good for a cri...” the last rung in his hand comes straight off the concrete pillar, his face going from a grin to a soundless scream as he stumbles backwards. All noise around me fades, time slows to a sickening halt. He falls for what feels like an hour but can't be more than a few seconds. Before I can utter any word or noise, I see his flailing body get swallowed up by the ravaging river.

“JUAN!!!”

“What the fuck are you doing here?”

I look up from my horror induced daydream, everyone in the funeral home is exchanging looks between me and my Tia. Her face is one of pure hatred and loss.

She repeats herself again, her voice breaking, “What the fuck are you doing here?” It comes out as a statement rather than a question.

Any response I can think of is caught in my throat.

“It should’ve been you, Ricky. IT SHOULD’VE BEEN YOU!!!”

Cara's Perspective

The aroma of decades past fills the walls of Attic's Revenge. Today is somewhat of a slow day, Mondays usually are.

"Man Cara, this day is a bit of a downer," my boss, Sid, says from beside me.

Sid himself always looks like he time traveled from the late 60s and landed here. His gray hair is in a pony, he has a close shaven beard, he wears circular Elton John-esque glasses, his light blue eyes stand out against tan skin, and today he is wearing his favorite purple and blue tie-dye Grateful Dead t-shirt.

I laugh, "Mondays usually are Sid."

He shakes his head tsks and says, "This just won't do. When all else fails some good tunes can lighten the mood."

Ever since I introduced Spotify to him, he has been in heaven. Hello, I Love You by *The Doors* plays overhead.

A shiver runs up my spine and a voice says, "I loveee Jim Morrison. It's a shame how he died. 27 years old and heart failure Jesus."

Sid is bobbing his head feeling the music.

A small female voice pipes in from behind me, "But I guess mixing drugs and alcohol tends to do that to you."

I slightly turn in her direction not that she's too far away. She obnoxiously sits on the display cabinet directly behind me swinging her white Go-Go Boots forward and backward. She twists a strand of her long light brown hair in her finger and blows bubble gum bubbles from her mouth. Judith is a spirit who recently joined the Attic's Revenge family. And yes, you read that right, spirit. I can see and hear dead people. Lucky me. About a month ago, a woman brought in a round worn suitcase full of old magazines and some records. The item the seller was trying to get money for was an autographed photo of Elizabeth Taylor. Sid is always one to call me in for my abilities. Sid explained the situation to me and handed me the photo of Elizabeth Taylor. Elizabeth's seductive blue eyes look directly into the camera, her makeup done to perfection. The bottom corner reads: "To: Judith. With love, Elizabeth Taylor."

Upon reading that I am transported back in time. *I am sitting inside a beautiful restaurant with white clothed tables full of guests, crystal chandeliers hang above me dimly, light piano plays, and the smell of high-quality food and cigarette smoke fills the air. I sit at a table with a family I have never seen before.*

The voice of the eyes I see out of says, "It's so beautiful here. I can't believe the number of celebrities I've seen here."

The woman at the table quietly says, "Hush up and eat your food. It's not polite to gawk."

They roll their eyes and continue to sweep the room. Immediately I find her as she's being sat at a table, Elizabeth Taylor. One of the most famous and most beautiful women in the world. I work hard to hide my excitement. I wrap my bag around my shoulder.

"Excuse me, I have to go to the restroom." I walk with purpose and without hesitation straight for her. Just as I get there, she lights a fresh cigarette.

"Ms. Taylor", I squeak.

Her blue hooded eyes meet mine with a bored expression.

Words start flooding, "My name is Judith and I am a really big fan. I have been watching your movies all of my life and I just can't believe you are really here right now and..."

She laughs and says, "Woah woah kid slow down. What, are you looking for an autograph or...?"

Judith pulls the photo from her bag and squeaks, "Please."

Elizabeth takes the photo, her fingernails impeccably painted a shiny red. There's silence and she looks up amused. "A pen or a marker might be nice?"

"Oh yes yes," Judith goes searching through her bag to finally find a black marker. Elizabeth takes it, smashing her cigarette into her ashtray.

"To: Judith. With Love, Elizabeth Taylor. How's that sound?"

"Oh, just perfect Ms. Taylor, thank you so much!"

Elizabeth Taylor laughs and I am brought back to reality.

"Yep, it's real all right," I say the smell of cigarette smoke still in my nose.

I also have psychometry abilities. I can usually see an object's past. When it was over, I nodded to Sid to confirm it was authentic. He is aware of my abilities but never wants to know more than needed. A few days later, when Sid was playing one of his records she appeared. Music is usually what draws her to expose herself.

Judith continues flipping through an old magazine. Mrs. Robinson by Simon and Garfunkel plays overhead as I start the mundane task of inputting sales receipts into our spreadsheet and straightening up our inventory tracker. As I am working the sound of the bell over the entrance rings.

“Hello, welcome in,” I say as cheerfully as I can muster. No response, which is not that uncommon. The sound of a somewhat heavy box is set down with a humph on the glass display case to the left of me. I stop what I am doing and look over and cannot help but be in awe. A man about my age, 22, stands before me, he has to be at least 5’10 with a wide chest, and broad shoulders, silhouetted by a worn Lamb of God band tee, his muscular tan arms are sleeved with tattoos, he has a short beard, mustache and a patch under his bottom lip, medium length wavy jet-black hair, thick black eyebrows over round dark brown eyes, and a nose that seems a little too big for his face.

“Golly, golly, look at this hunk of a man. They didn’t make ‘em like this in my day,” a seductive voice says. In the left upper corner of my eye, I see Evelyn casually lying across her red art deco couch we’ve been trying to sell for months. She wears a black flapper dress and headpiece and smokes a cigarette through a long stick.

I stutter, “C-c-can I help you with something?”

He looks torn and says, “I am looking to sell these.”

Inside the box, there looks to be hundreds of old comic books. I start taking them out of the box one by one, some of the characters looking familiar. I land on a copy of Blue Beetle and am transported back in time.

I am sitting inside what looks to be an abandoned house, the smell of marijuana heavy in the air.

A boy sits across from me strumming his guitar and says, “Oh man, I almost forgot I wanted to give you something.”

He rifles through his backpack pulls out the comic and comes closer to me. I take the comic book in my hands turning the pages.

“Blue Beetle?” The voice of the body I am inhabiting says. I look closer and see it is the same guy currently in the store, just younger.

He does a soft laugh and says, “Yeah, I know you’ve been having a tough time lately thinking about your future. Your mom has been on your ass and wants you to do what SHE wants. It’s your life. Blue Beetle is a badass Mexican that gets shit done. You need the inspiration.”

The memory ends and I am in the current. The seller is looking at me with a quizzical face.

I shake my head and say, "I'm sure we can take them but I just need to confirm with my boss how much he would want to buy them for."

"How long do you think that would take?" He asks, looking at his digital watch.

"Not long I just have to call him to come down here and then we'll talk it over. If you just want to take a look around the store. What name should I put on the box to know who I may be returning this to?"

"Enrique or Ricky."

"It should be no more than 30 minutes."

He gets her earbuds geared up, "Okay, I'll come back in 30."

I call Sid from my cell phone and explain the situation and he says he will be right down. I hear pages being turned and look to see a young man probably about eighteen.

"I always loved these comics. I never realized how many we accumulated over the years." He's talking to himself and like all newcomers is not aware that I can hear him. I try my best to avoid looking toward him or getting close. I try to keep myself looking busy and I go back to the computer.

Finally, Sid comes down and says, "Whatcha got for me?"

I walk over to the box and accidentally bump into the spirit and mutter, "Sorry". Oh no!

"Wait, you can see me? Can you hear me?" he says.

I continue trying to explain the situation to Sid and keep stumbling on my words. It's kind of hard to talk when someone is in your ear going, "Hello, Hello Can you hear me?" Sid is looking through the comics spewing out prices.

"HELL-OOOO can you see me?" I am furiously writing down the prices.

"I know you see me!" He says like a child taunting another. I am tallying up the prices and he only gets closer.

"Miss? Ma'am?" He continues.

I snort, "Really? Ma'am, what am I somebody's grandma?"

"Ah-huh so you can hear AND see me?" He says proudly.

I roll my eyes and huff in exasperation, "Yes."

He sighs in relief, "Thank God! My name is Juan and I really need to get a message to my cousin he...."

Before we can continue Ricky comes back and says, "How's it going?"

I smile and say, “My boss is willing to offer you \$50.”

There’s a pause and he seems to be at war within himself,

“That’s at least 100 bucks right there”. Sid looks at him with sympathetic eyes, “Look man, I have to make some kind of profit, comics just don’t sell like they used to. How about I meet you halfway, \$75?”

Ricky thinks it over for a second, before shrugging “I’ll take it,” he decides.

“Awesome! Let me just get you your money and you can be on your way!” I say in my best customer service voice.

Sid goes for his obligatory business handshake before going back upstairs.

Juan steps closer and says, “That’s him! That’s my cousin Ricky! I need to get a message to him he’s in danger.” I go into the register and start counting out the money.

Smoke on the Water by *Deep Purple* plays overhead and Ricky does a small laugh, “This was the first song that I ever learned on guitar. Just like every other guitarist.”

Juan groans, “Yeah and he played this song over and over and over for two days straight.”

“It’s a good song,” I say out loud.

A smile forms on Ricky’s lips, “you think so? Man, if my cousin Juan was here, he definitely wouldn’t agree with you. I kind of killed the song for him.”

Juan snorts, “he killed it for me.”

I laugh, “Well, practice makes perfect right?”

I can tell this sort of puts him into a sad headspace. I hand him the money and he says, “Yeah. Well, thank you!”

Juan panics, “Wait, you can’t just let him go! You have to tell him he’s in danger! He has no clue and this is life or death.”

I try to form the words in my head before I say them. He leaves quickly and Juan yells, “You just let him leave! Now he’ll never know. And now....”

Before he can keep going, I turn to him and snap, “What did you want me to say? ‘Oh, hey you don’t know me or anything but your dead cousin keeps shouting in my ear and wants me to warn you about danger coming your way.’ Yeah, that would go over well. I don’t get into these things anyway. Once I start doing one favor then all the spirits come out of the woodwork needing me to give messages or take care of things they couldn’t when they were alive. Uh-uh no thank you!” He rolls his eyes, “it’s just a message just letting him know what is coming for him. He should know. Like I said, it is life or death.”

Now I roll my eyes, “I’m sure it is.”

He scoffs, “You don’t believe me? Why would I make this up?”

I snort, “Why wouldn’t you make this up? You want my help and you want me to do this and I’m not willing.”

Juan walks directly up to me and stands too close for comfort. He then puts both of his hands on either side of my face.

Darkness surrounds me and I feel like I am being swallowed up whole. I can suddenly hear what sounds like a diabolical symphony of anguished souls screaming out all at once. I start running trying to find light and see a little flicker at the end of what feels like a long hallway. I get to the end and there is another hallway illuminated by lit torches on the wall. I grab one off the cave-like wall and walk slowly. The hall ends with an arch made of human skulls, some still in various states of decomposition, flesh slipping from the last remaining tendrils holding them in place. Reluctantly, I walk through. I walk into what looks like a cavernous throne room, in the center are long wide ancient stone stairs going up. Skulls are lined up along the stairs and two big torches sit on either side lit with flames. There is a throne at the top of the stairs and sitting in it is a creature. The imposing figure has rotting bits of flesh hanging from its bones, and two human eyes bore into me, staring out from its blackened skull. On his head is a headdress full of feathers, around his neck, he wears a necklace of lifeless cloudy eyes. A loincloth is between his legs hitting the ground, and thick, ornate sandals are on his feet. I feel frozen in place and a small scream is building in my throat. The figure stands and raises his arms in an aggressive fashion. Above head, the sound of fluttering and squealing comes closer and closer. A swarm of bats surround me and I scream. I am patting myself and spinning around attempting to free myself from the horde of bats and find myself in the present.

“Believe me now?” Juan asks.

“Fuck.” I say out loud.

Enrique's Perspective

I pocket the measly \$75 in my wallet as I walk out of the store. Yeah, Juan and I really loved those comics, but I at least made sure to keep the ones we loved most in a shoebox hidden safely away under my bed. Besides, the cost-of-living ain't cheap. Juan would've understood. I stroll over to my old Indian Scout 86. I got her cheap for a reason, but after a summer's worth of putting all my mechanic skills to the test, she purrs like a mildly annoyed cat and starts up right away almost every time. I start making my way home, a snug rundown two-story house with a nice spacious attic I call my bedroom. It also doubles as our practice studio due to the said spaciousness. It's located in the not-so-great part of town, but the druggies in the area make sure to keep the rent cheap. After my 15-minute commute, I arrive home, making sure to swerve around the beer bottles and a few bottles of whiskey strewn up our driveway left after our last drinking binge. I unlock the paint chipped door, swinging it open, and immediately being met with the mixed smell of cigarette smoke and an odor only 5 guys living under one roof can produce. You get used to it eventually, but sometimes it takes longer than I'd like.

"Yo Ricky! How'd that pawn store run go? You bring back a fortune?" Liam, our drummer, is sitting on the couch in our dingy living room, cigarette hanging from his mouth and Miller Light in hand.

I roll my eyes at him, "Oh yeah, \$75 should be enough to cover rent, right? Anyways, I'm gonna head up to my room and start getting ready for practice. Make sure the rest of you assholes get up there on time, we got that show Saturday to get ready for."

I start making my way up the old creaky stairs, careful not to put too much weight on the cracked wooden handrail that looks like it couldn't handle a toddler using it. I open the door leading into my room, home sweet home. I'm greeted by my collection of posters hanging all along the walls doing their best to cover the imperfections behind them. I pick up my black 7-string Ibanez guitar from its stand and plug it into my amp to start fiddling with the settings.

After a good 10 minutes, I start going through my warm-up exercises, scales and trying to nail different parts of our new song which has proven to be a tad tricky. Usually, I find it pretty easy to lose myself in the notes, mindlessly letting my fingers go from fret to fret, but today I keep going back to the pawn shop. More specifically, the girl who was there at the front.

I rack my head trying to remember her name. her body and features coming to mind much easier. The first of which I couldn't help but notice was her cherry red hair and how it perfectly framed her freckled face. Her eyes were the most beautiful shade of green I'd ever seen; it was hard for me not to get lost in the different hues of gold and gray that layered the green. Just between them sat her cute slim nose with a dash of freckles and on either side slightly rosy cheeks. As if it couldn't get any better, she had the most kissable lips I'd ever seen, plump enough to tempt a soft bite. Her body was of equal beauty, she had curves that flowed just as nicely as the guitar I held in my hands. The top of her perky large breast had been poking over the top of the fitted V-neck shirt she wore. Despite her wearing a bra I could still make out the shape of her nipples pushing through the fabric. The couple of times she turned to talk to her boss I couldn't help but steal a look at her ass, the fact that I could see its curve from the front I just had to know what it looked like from the back. There was no disappointment there. It filled in her bell-bottom jeans to the max. Without realizing it I can feel my blood flowing and starting to make me well up, my body feeling warmer than usual. Suddenly her name pops in my head like the answer to a question I've been pondering for a long time, it's as clear as if she had whispered it in my ear herself, "Cara."

My thoughts are abruptly interrupted by my room door creaking open as my bandmates spill into the room. Shawn, our lead singer, looks me up and down, "Looking a little flustered there Ricky, that new song kicking your ass or something?" he smirks at me through his long beard.

"Something" I reply, still trying to recover from my daydream.

"Well, you better have it down by Saturday. That solo is your baby after all" Henry, our bassist, chimes in.

I try to get up using the guitar to cover up my groin area, "yeah guys, no pressure, right? Well, shall we get started?"

After a grueling 3 hours of practice, we were all plenty exhausted. My fingers were already calloused up, but despite this, they were still sore and starting to turn various shades of red. We had made progress though, only making a few mistakes here and there that we masterfully covered up with showmanship.

Shawn gives us all a look of approval, “sounds fucking sick, this is gearing up to be one of our best shows yet. I say we wrap it up here before Ricky’s fingers fall off.”

Liam, our drummer, slaps my back, “Make sure you give your fingers and wrist enough rest. No jerking off until after our show.” I give him a sly look, “Yeah, same goes for you, no more crusty socks in the laundry baskets” We all get a good laugh as we start packing it up for the night.

Saturday finally rolls around; we all indulge in the calm before the storm. Shawn passes me the joint and I take a couple hits holding the smoke in my lungs.

“You ready to kill it tonight?” Shawn asks.

A cascade of smoke leaves my lips and nose, “as ready as I’ll ever be.”

Shawn slaps my shoulder, “Alright, guys let’s pack up the van.”

Something in my gut tells me that tonight is going to be different for us. It almost has me feeling giddy, the excitement bubbling within me. Usually, I’d blame it on the weed but today is different. This feeling was within me even before the lightheadedness that weed brings.

Cara's Perspective

Saturday nights are always my favorite because they are MY time. Whether it be attending events for friends, or checking out different events in the city it's time to focus on me. Tonight, my best friend, Hunter, and I are going to go bar hopping. We decided we are going to try a bar in our town's strip or what locals like to call Downtown Chapel. I sit at my small white vanity putting my rose red lipstick on. I stand up, the sound of my heels clicking as I go to view my full look in my stand-up mirror. I am wearing a black short sleeve lace top with a scalloped neckline exposing my pushed-up boobs, dark blue skinny jeans, and pointed lace heels. My red hair is in finger waves cascading down my shoulder and my sea-green eyes pop from the smokey cat eye look I've done.

Knocking sounds on my door, "Bitch, are you ready?" Hunter pauses and clicks his tongue "damn bitch you're really feelin' yourself tonight, huh? You must be looking to get laid."

I roll my eyes, "I wouldn't say all that. I guess we will see what happens though. You don't look so bad yourself!"

Hunter is tall and muscular, he has smooth pale skin, his hair is coal black and slicked up with gel, and his eyebrows are freshly done and accentuate his hazel eyes.

He laughs, "Thanks and I AM trying to get lucky tonight."

Downtown Chapel town has different blocks full of businesses. A mixture of clothing boutiques, different workout places, restaurants, and bars. Then of course there is the town hall which is the center of a lot of the events in town. We walk around nothing catching our eye, my feet already crying from the unforgiving heels I decided to wear.

"Well, this seems like a bust," I say annoyed.

We round the corner and notice a red light shining down on the concrete. We look up to see a sign in red letters, "Hidden Gem". The sign is angled facing the corner right above the doorway which has a little slope up. The store-style windows are blacked out on each side so there are no hints as to what we will be walking into.

I look at Hunter, "want to try it?"

He shrugs, "fuck it!"

I am the first one to the big deep Mahogany door, a black and white sign is taped across the top "21 years and older", and the black handle is big. Nervousness twists in my stomach and the smell of cigarette smoke and strong liquor hits my nose.

A tall, heavysset bald guy with crystal blue eyes stands at the side of the entrance. He wears a black shirt with the word security printed on the upper left corner. "IDs," he says, looking us up and down like we are trouble. I pull both of our IDs out of a small pocket in my silver, glittery, clutch purse. He uses a flashlight and scans them for a little bit.

"I'm also going to have to pat you down. We do it to everyone." The security guard starts with me but is surprisingly very distant and avoids my breasts, ass, and thighs. When he gets to my best friend, he is a little too thorough.

"I usually get dinner before I'm fondled," he says annoyed.

The security guard ignores his comment and says, "Have a good time."

"Yeah, what a great entrance," Hunter mutters.

There is a small hallway that opens up to a wide room. Along the back wall is a big u shaped bar, the wall is a big mirror with Hidden Gem written in red letters, there is a picture of a full martini glass holding an eighth note inside, various liquors are on shelves that are on both sides of a large rectangular mirror, most of the bar stools filled with patrons, there is a gap in the room full of other people socializing, each side of the room has a row of high top tables, the front of the room has a small stage that has a couple of stairs angled up to get onto it, and on the wall behind the stage there is a banner hung that depicts a dark gray skull with 9 white overlapping circles in the center of its head.

Hunter grabs my arm and says, "We better get seats before they're all gone." There are two stools open at the end towards the doorway. Thankfully, I get the seat at the very end! The bartender is slammed but is keeping up like nobody's business. She sees us and says, "What can I get cha?"

"I'll have a Gin and Tonic and she will have a margarita on the rocks."

"You got it!", she says back after just completing four drinks at once. You can tell she's in her element you can't help but watch. She is short and curvy, her black hair has light brown highlights which are emphasized in her French braid pigtails, she has thickly painted on eyebrows over her winged brown eyes, there is a little piercing by her left eye, she also has a shiny stud in her nose, a Monroe piercing above her shiny pink lips, and she has tattoos on her neck and from her shoulders down to her fingertips which can be seen from underneath her black tank top. She brings our drinks and I see that she has a name tag that says, Kat.

"Thank you," I say.

"Anytime! I'm Kat. I haven't seen you two in here before."

"Yeah, we've never been. We decided to try something new," I say.

"You're in for a real treat. A local band named 9 Circles is playing. They are really good! Give me a holler if you need anything!" She says.

I smile and say, "Thanks!"

I feel a presence to my right, "Did you miss me?" Juan is standing leaning his back against the bar.

I pretend not to hear him.

He turns towards me, "Oh we're doing this again?"

Still, I don't answer sucking down my drink quickly.

"Kat, can I get another when you have time?" I say loudly.

"Sure thing!" She says.

Kat hands me another and I take a big gulp. Juan gets closer.

"Maybe I need to show you again what we're up against."

I jump up out of my seat get close to Hunter and let him know I'm running to the bathroom. There's a little bit of a line to get in. Of fucking course! I get on my phone trying to distract myself.

"You could find him online. I know he has Facebook and Snapchat. It's probably under Ricky Sandoval." Juan says standing in front of me looking down at my screen.

"Would you quit it? I told you I'll figure it out! I'll figure it out but today I'm going to focus on me." I storm off before he can continue and go back to the bar to down my drink, realizing I don't need to use the bathroom that much.

Hunter scoffs, "Damn, are you going for the record?"

I laugh and say, "I just want to get this party going."

He looks at me impressed, "In that case! Kat, we will have four shots of Patron and we will take another round of our drinks. You can put that on my tab!"

He smiles, impressed with his handy work. While Kat makes our drinks, I see him scouring the bar with his eyes. "Anybody catching your eye?" I ask.

He turns towards me and rolls his eyes, "This bar seems pretty straight."

Kat sets our drinks down in front of us and laughs. "I guess you haven't noticed the guy on the right side of the bar checking you out?" Our eyes slowly scan the right side of the bar and there is a guy in the center whose dark eyes are looking right at Hunter. He is not Hunter's typical type. This guy has medium-length brown hair that is pushed back, he is average height and build, and he is wearing a plain black shirt with a leather vest over it.

Hunter smiles at the guy. "A biker at that? I've never tried a biker before but I'm willing to try it."

Kat laughs and says, "his name is Trevor and this round is on him." She walks away laughing.

"I like her, can we keep her?" He says sipping his drink.

"If she'll have us," I laugh.

I look between Hunter and his new boy toy. I hit his arm, "go over there. Why have sex with your eyes when you can have sex for real?"

He turns to me, "I'm not gonna do that to you. And besides he wants all this he better come to me." He grabs his drink in a sassy way and drinks. I laugh and grab our shots.

"To having men come to us. No more being the first one to make the move," I say holding up my shot. "To being badasses!" We take the lime at the top of our shot suck on it then down the shot. And then we do the other. The fuzzy buzzed feeling fills my body.

The sound of guitars being tuned turns our attention to the stage. The lead singer goes up to the mic, "Hello Everyone, we are 9 Circles. Just wanted to give everyone a heads up that the show is about to begin and want to remind everybody we are a deathcore band. That may not be everyone's jam but that's who we are so if it's not your thing keep it to yourself or our set will be done by midnight so if you want to skirt now would be the time." He pauses and says, "nobody. Okayyyy, then here goes nothing. Our first song is called, 'Screaming Eyes.'"

The song starts off with fast guitar and the drums and vocals follow. The music gets heavy and fast and some people are nodding their heads. Every single one of the band members are attractive in their own way but my eyes are drawn to the lead guitarist. There's something familiar about him... I take a big swig of my drink.

"Come on, I want to go closer," I almost yell, taking Hunter by the arm. We push our way through the crowd and get as close as we can to the front. Bodies are smashed together hands up in the air making horns symbols. As we get closer, I watch the guitarist who caught my eye. He is looking intensely at his hands playing his guitar, his fingers bent, he wears a short-sleeved black shirt that shows off his full-sleeved tattooed arms, he wears loose dark jeans, and black combat boots. Wonder how those fingers would feel on me? I can't stop from biting my bottom lip taking him all in.

Hunter swats my arm, "Damn Bitch, I can see you drooling from here."

A blush rises on my cheeks, "Shut up." The guitarist looks out into the crowd and my stomach flips.

"I guess fate was on my side Guerita," Juan's voice says in my ear, his laughter fading.

Enrique's Perspective

Our set is kicking off like a dream. The butterflies in my stomach burst out through my fingertips as I glide over the fretboard of my guitar. My right hand picks the strings unleashing a primal sound. It combines with the rest of the band and the diabolical cacophony. My eyes do a quick gaze to gauge the energy of the room. The crowd before us is an ocean of headbanging and raised devil horns. I catch a glimpse of wavy red hair in the crowd. That's when her ocean-green eyes lock onto mine. Her eyes are full of surprise and lust. It takes all of me not to miss my next note. I start to feel myself go weak. Despite the room being full of people she is all I can see. My eyes trace the curves of her body, her breasts are pushed up and exposed. They look delicious. My mouth grows wet with want; I want to take a bite. Thank God my guitar is shielding my erection or this would be a different type of show. Unfortunately, it's a double-edged blade as it puts pressure on my cock and it shoots pleasure up my body. Henry shoots me a quizzical look. I take one last hungry look and force myself to look away from her and focus on getting through our first half of the set. We play our next songs and the crowd is eating it up.

Shawn announces to the audience that there will be a brief intermission. I unsling my guitar and put it on its stand. I start making my way to the bar thirsty for a cheap beer. My eyes search the crowd seeing if I can find her in the sea of people. As I approach the bar, I see her, back towards me, sitting at the end of the bar. She stands on the barstool and leans forward, her tight ass pushed out. I suck in a sharp breath of air and picture what she would look like without those jeans.

"Kattt, we will take another round," she slightly slurs.

A man standing next to her puts his arm around her. A fire flares up in my chest. That's ridiculous I barely know her, I think. She looks at the male's face laughing and it feels like a knife turning.

There is an opening at her end of the bar and I take it. Kat spots me pretty quickly.

"Kat, can I get a Miller light?"

"Bottle or draft?"

I think it over, "Draft."

I cross my arms on the bar drumming my fingers on the cool bar top.

“Wow, I never expected you to play like that,” an undertone of flirtation comes through. Her cheeks glow a rose red, presumably from the alcohol she’s been drinking.

Kat sets my drink in front of me. I lock eyes with her and say, “Yeah, hope you and your boyfriend are having a good time.”

She snorts, “boyfriend?”

The guy puts his arm around her playfully and makes kissy noises, “Come here, girlfriend.”

She pushes his puckered lips away and rolls her eyes, “Hunter and I have a lot of things in common, especially our taste in men.”

My eyebrow shoots up in surprise, “Oh!”

Hunter eyes me suggestively and wiggles his eyebrows comically.

Cara swats him again, “he’s teasing.”

Hunter laughs, “Besides she’s been eye fucking you the whole night anyways.”

Her cheeks turn crimson and she takes a big swig of her drink.

A small smile forms on my lips and I say, “How about we do a round of shots? Kat?” I put my finger up trying to get her attention. Kat comes over and before I can say anything Cara says, “A round of shots of Patron.”

Kat smiles and grabs three shot glasses. She pours the liquor in and says, “Shit, I need to cut more limes.”

I shake my head and say, “Just pass us the salt and we will take it from there.”

She smiles and says, “You got it!”

We each lay a line of salt on the top of our hands. Cara eyes me as she licks the salt slowly from her hand and takes the shot with ease. My cock immediately begins to fill with blood and twitches in response.

“I should get going, we are about to do the second part of our set,” I say as I grab my beer.

She grabs my forearm and says, “You should take one for the road. What are ya drinkin’?”

“Hopefully you later on,” I say confidently.

Hunter lets out a laugh. Cara bites her lip and says, “I guess we will see.”

I look over to Kat who is watching our exchange with amusement and she says, “Another?” I nod and she gets to work, her smile not leaving her lips.

Cara comes up to my ear and whispers, “Come find me after the show.” I take my beer and say, “I guess we will see.”

I make my way through the crowd back to the stage feeling like I’m walking on a cloud. I go to my guitar and Henry comes by me and says, “I see why you were distracted now.” I smirk and say, “Tonight I plan to make her mine.” We turn and look out and she is watching me. “If you nail this next solo that’ll definitely make her panties wet,” he says.

We start our set with blasting beats. We sail through our songs on this set and save our newest song for last. The song starts with a harmony from the guitars and the drum comes in heavy. Shawn starts with beast-like growls. The song ups in pace and the crowd is in good form as my solo approaches. My nerves are high, a mixture from getting the notes right and anticipating my next interaction with her.

My finger starts running along the neck of my guitar. I can’t help but think of how my fingers would run along her body, exploring every curve and crevice. I play a mixture of minor scales with a touch of jazz grooviness. All eyes are on me but the only ones who matter to me are hers. The crowd erupts in a roar in response to my solo. Our song comes to an end and the crowd claps and woos in response.

Shawn announces his thanks and reminds them that we will be having another show for Chapel Town’s Oktoberfest. He also points out the band merchandise table that is off to the side and gives a special thanks to all of us bandmates. We all walk off stage and a group meets us patting us all on the back giving us praise. I beeline for the bar.

Cara's Perspective

I've never been one to go headfirst into a situation, but here I am going head first acclimating to a bar I've never been to and flirting with a man I've only met once. My cheeks are fully aflame and my drink goes down easy. I'm drunk. "I've never seen you like this... I like it" Hunter comments.

I laugh a little, "You do? You don't think I'm doing too much?"

He scoffs "Not at all! Really? When's the last time you had sex?"

I giggle, pointing my finger at him, "No comment." The truth is it's been over a year since I spooked the last guy. He freaked the fuck out when I relayed a message from his dad who passed away a couple of years prior. He got mad and stormed out and never talked to me again. That's when I vowed to stop being a messenger for the dead.

The smell of a musky cologne pulls me from my thoughts, "Hey Guerrita, miss me?"

I respond curtly as I turn around, "I told you not tonight!"

Ricky stares at me, a look of surprise plastered on his face.

"Oh, I just thought... Oh, God! I'm so sorry! I thought you were someone else!" Embarrassment floods my features.

Ricky steps closer, "As long as that sass isn't for me" "Act up and it will be" I respond with a playful smile.

Hunter interrupts, "Cara, I'm gonna let you do your thing. There's a leather-clad biker with my name on it. But you better text me and let me know you're safe, I'll do the same." He hugs me and steps out of the embrace dramatically and turns to Ricky, "As for you, any harm done to my best friend and it's your ass." He gives me air kisses and saunters off before Ricky can respond. I laugh, "Please excuse my best friend, he can be overprotective."

Ricky takes Hunter's empty seat. He orders himself a Jack and Coke turns to me and says, "Must be nice to be so loved." It can be," I say as I put my hand on his leg. He puts his hand on mine and looks into my eyes. My stomach does flips.

"Do you remember me?", he asks. I laugh, "Well not that many guys bring comics into the store. So yes, I remember you. And it wasn't that long ago," I respond teasingly.

I look intensely into his brown eyes. A lot of people do not see the beauty in brown eyes but I always have. There's a lot you can tell about a person by their eyes. I can see that Ricky is guarded but is also intrigued. I put my free hand on the side of his face. His beard feels soft and I work my fingers through it, a smile playing on my lips. I can't help myself from looking at his lips wanting to get closer but also feeling shy. I stand up and bring myself closer to him standing between his legs. I put my arms around his neck and say, "I'm being a little too forward, aren't I? This isn't something I normally do. I know I've said that but I mean it. I'm not trying to be cutesy. I usually like to know more about a guy before I throw myself at them." I reach down the bar, grab my drink taking another long swig, and continue, "And I haven't had this much to drink in a long time either. Kat, baby I'll take another when you have time! No rush!"

When I look up, he is just watching my face. No judgment there, just curiosity and hunger. I blush and say, "What?"

He laughs and moves my hair behind my ear, "Well, what do you want to know?"

I snort, "That's what you got from all of that?"

He smiles, "Well that and that you're 'throwing yourself' at me in your words so that must mean I have a chance?" I can't hide the amusement on my face, "Well I think it's important to at least know something about you. I don't know maybe your middle name or your favorite color..." "Red," he says lowly and gets closer. His head is lowering to mine. "Red?" I smile. I can feel his breath on my lips. "Mine's orange."

His lips are on mine. His lips are soft and I can taste the beer on his breath. Before I know it, he stands up and pushes my back to the bar moving our bodies closer. I put my arms around his neck leaning in and moaning softly. My thighs clench as wetness forms between my legs. The kissing is hungry yet sweet. I am the one to break the kiss swallowing nervously.

"You're really something aren't you," I say softly. "I'm not anything special, I just know what I want," he says confidently. I bite my lip and with liquid courage, I go to his ear and whisper, "So do I." I nip his earlobe and move to look at his face. A dark look flashes in his eyes and he says, "My place or yours?" I finish off my drink and say, "Mine."

I lead Ricky inside and hold his hand. We get to the stairway leading upstairs to my room and our lips lock. I wrap my leg around his waist and pull him close to me. He moves back and plants kisses down my neck. His musky smell invades my nose and I run my fingers through his dark hair. With little to no effort he picks me up off the ground and wraps my legs around his waist. He goes up the stairs, his lips barely leaving mine and he bangs my back into the closest wall. I run my fingers through all of his hair moaning wanting more. Between kisses, he says, "Which door?" Between kisses, I respond, "Second door on the right."

He gets us there and opens the door. He sets me down and starts by taking my shirt off exposing my black lacy bra. I slip my hands under his black t-shirt and playfully pull it up over his head. I kick my heels off, slip my skinny jeans off, and go straight for his lips. He pulls off his pants and boxers and I do not stop myself from looking. His cock is hard and thick as I put my hand around him and start jerking him off. He groans and says, "Fuck" through gritted teeth. I love the power that comes with holding his cock in my hand and the pleasure that shows on his face.

Before things go too far, he takes my hand and spins me around to face the wall. He rubs my ass with his palms and says, "All of this for me." He runs his finger down the line of my thong and moves them to the side. He pushes my back down a little further and he pushes his fingers between my legs.

"Oh God," I say in a breathy voice. He pushes his fingers in and out of me slowly and then stays inside making circular motions building me up.

"So wet for me," he says in my ear.

His pace picks up and I feel the wetness building. "I've wanted you since I saw you on stage," I say through breaths. I feel myself getting close but before I can cum, he takes his fingers out of me.

I hear him suck on his fingers, "and now you'll have me." I feel him press the head of his cock between my pussy lips. His girthy head already makes me wonder how I'm going to survive this, but I'm eager to find out. I feel the tip ease in, my juices struggling to coat it properly. I can't help the moan that escapes my mouth, "Fuck... okay... I-I-I think I got this."

I feel Ricky stop his slow insertion, “Good. Then you’re ready for this.” He thrusts inside me holding onto my hips for support. My entire body goes weak and I struggle not to completely turn into mush. His cock keeps fighting to go deeper and deeper, my pussy working overtime to lube up his cock. Just as I feel myself about to cum, he pulls his cock out and slowly slaps it on my ass.

“Please,” I beg.

Then, he is pounding into me like there is no tomorrow. He digs his fingers into my hips pumping and I push myself back onto him. His cock fills me up and I feel as he stretches my walls. I don’t know if it’s the lack of sex from the past year but the sensation of being stretched is so intense and the best I’ve had from my past relationships.

“God you are so wet and tight,” he says darkly.

My moans grow louder and I feel my body start to give in. “Ricky,” I moan as I feel myself cum all over his cock.

He continues moving inside me pushing and pushing. And then he pulls harshly out and spins me around to face him. He kisses my mouth and kneads my breasts with his hands. I lead him to my bed and he spins me around and puts me on my back. He gets on top of me and spreads my legs, fitting himself inside. He holds my legs up and apart and he pounds into me. The sound of skin hitting skin fills the room. I am trying my best not to be loud as I don’t know if Hunter came home but I can’t help myself. I feel myself building up and I am clenching myself around his cock. With each thrust, I am closer and closer to the edge. I grip the sheets with my hands as I feel myself cum. This makes his thrusts harder and it feels like he is balls deep inside me. The tempo picks up and then Ricky’s body tenses and he groans releasing himself inside me. He puts his head down breathing heavily. Our breathing matches each other as we look into each other’s eyes.

Ricky comes down to my face and kisses me softly and surprisingly whispers, “Thank you.” I can’t help but laugh a little as I put my arms around his neck and kiss him back.

Ricky pulls himself out of me slowly and lays on the bed with a thump. I rest my head on my hand and my eyes go to the wide window beside my bed. Moonlight is shining in and the old oak tree outside has an owl perched on a branch. Its eyes pierce me and seem to glow and it stands unmoving. Why is that owl watching me? Before I can think too much on the subject Ricky follows my position and pecks my lips, “I need a cigarette after that one.”

Enrique's Perspective

The cool summer breeze hits my face and I look over to my cousin Juan. We are sitting on the back porch of the abandoned house and everything feels right again. Juan takes a long drag off our shared joint. He looks at me and says, "You gotta get out of here man." I look at him quizzically as I reach for the joint he has passed. The joint is wet in my hands and I drop it and say, "What the fuck man?"

Juan is standing closer to me his skin ashen and drenched in water, "you have to get the fuck out of here now!" Suddenly the darkness is cast away by the flashing of red and blue lights. I reach out to Juan and he is no longer there.

I hear the crunch of leaves and without thinking I jump over the railing of our back porch landing on my feet and when I look up, I suddenly find myself in the middle of a rainforest. Tall trees are on either side of me looking like they are never-ending and I yell out, "Juan?" I swivel around as I hear the rustling in the leaves behind me. I see a tall, dark, skeletal figure coming towards me, its glowing yellow eyes piercing me. I turn and bolt through the tears sharp branches cutting at my skin.

Adrenaline is pumping through my veins and my legs are moving like they never have before. But it feels like I am moving through quicksand. I hear thumping footsteps getting closer and closer and the sound of chittering bats surrounding me. Tears start to well up in my eyes but finally, my momentum matches my legs and I start tearing through the rainforest. I risk looking behind me when suddenly the ground beneath my feet disappears.

My body starts flailing as I start falling through an empty void. The thought of my skull crushing on rocks below fills my head when I crash through the surface of the water. I start to tread the oily black water looking for a way out. I start swimming toward a low-hanging vine and reach for it when a strong bony hand wraps around my ankle. My legs flail and kick, unable to get it off. Before I know it hundreds of skeletal arms with rotting flesh reach up for me. My body is completely enveloped as I desperately look for another way out. I catch a glimpse of a jutting rock and see the same skeletal figure glaring down at me, his yellow eyes are glowing. As I am being pulled down to my watery grave I wake sitting up, drenched in sweat.

Cara sits up and touches my face and says, "You're okay. You're here, it was only a nightmare." Embarrassment floods my senses as I stand up and grab my clothes.

I head over to the adjoining bathroom calming my breathing. I stand in front of the sink and splash my face with water. "It was just a dream," I tell myself as I grip the sink and see in the reflection a purple handprint on my upper arm. "What the fuck?" I say backing away slowly from the sink. My adrenaline pumping again I storm out of the bathroom and say, "I gotta go. I'll text you."

Cara's green eyes search my face as she stands from the bed. "Are you okay?" She asks timidly. "I'm fine," sounding harsher than I intended to. I can see the hurt flash in her eyes as quickly as the words came out. She sits on the bed defeated, "Sorry I was just trying to help."

Regret rips through me as I throw my stuff together and hastily make my way to her bedroom door. I run down the stairs almost tripping over myself to get to the front door. Hunter walks out of the archway to the left and shakes his head at me disappointed. I rip open the door, speed to my motorcycle and hop on.

As I tear down the roads my head is filled with a mixture of thoughts of me and Cara and the nightmare. I fucked up this time. My thoughts feel like they are weighing me down. I look up just in time to see a black mass rushing at my face. A vicious-looking owl extends its claws to gouge my eyes out. I swerve just in time feeling a mess of feathers hit my face.

I scream out, "What the fuck?!" I glance at my side mirror closest to me and catch a glimpse of a horrifyingly familiar figure standing in the woods behind me. I risk turning my body completely around to get a better view of the figure and there's nothing there. I look in the side mirror again and all I see is the empty woods behind me.

When I finally see my house, I feel myself relax. I sped home doing about 50 miles per hour on the residential streets. I park in the driveway and go into my house trying to be as quiet as possible. I turn the key in the door and silence greets me. I quietly walk to the kitchen which is off to the right to get myself a drink. The fridge is straight ahead and I go for it. I pull the long white handle and look inside. Takeout containers, a couple of sauces, bottles of beer, and expired milk greet me. Typical. I bend down to get a beer when I feel a hand on my shoulder. I jump back and say, "Jesus!"

Shawn is standing there with his hands up in defense. A concerned grin goes onto his face, “I thought you heard me, man. So jumpy.” I shake my head, “it’s just been a long night.”

He slaps my shoulder, “Yeah, we all saw you go home with that hot redhead. That had to be a good time.”

“Yeah, till I fucked it up,” I respond.

“Oh no! Did you get too freaky with her? Usually, you gotta wait for a couple of dates before you put two in the pink and one in the stink.” He laughs.

I shake my head, “forget it. I’m taking my ass to bed.”

“Aww come on, I bet she had great tits. I thought you would give some juicy details...” I cut him off, “Goodnight Shawn.” He makes girlish moaning noises saying, “Oh Ricky!” I roll my eyes, walk out of the kitchen, and trudge up to my room in the attic.

I get inside, take my jacket off, and set down my keys. I look at myself in the full-length mirror I have on my closet door. There are heavy bags under my eyes and they travel to my right forearm where the purple handprint still rests. There has to be some explanation for this. Maybe I grabbed myself in my sleep. I put my hand over the handprint and the fingers are longer than mine. A shiver runs down my spine. If it was not mine it definitely could not have been Cara’s. *Oh, fuck. Cara.*

Cara's Perspective

Today I am irritated beyond irritated. I'm trying not to think about him. As much as I try not to, I keep replaying the events of that night and I still come up empty. The night was great in my eyes, we vibed, the sex was amazing and then he runs out. Usually, it would be something I did in terms of my abilities. This time I did nothing wrong. Then, no text the next day or phone call. Maybe, I thought it was something more than it was. I do have a tendency to romanticize situations. I count the money in my drawer and get frustrated when I count it three different times and come up with three different totals.

"Motherfucker." I say under my breath.

Evelyn appears next to me sitting on the glass case containing different pieces of jewelry. "Man troubles?" she asks. I ignore her shaking my head. She laughs, "The best piece of advice I can give you is to make him come to you, honey. I don't know what it is about men but they respond more if you don't show any interest and act like it's not a bother even though you clearly are."

I roll my eyes, "how is he supposed to know it's not a bother if he doesn't come in contact with me? If he has not even texted me?" She gets down and stands next to me behind the counter. "Then, you make him see you. You want to catch his attention, do what any woman scorned does."

"Which is?" I say, annoyed.

She brings the small round mirror that is there for customers to use to see the jewelry on them and places it in front of me. "You use your assets and you make him jealous," she says as she touches the tips of my hair.

I look at myself in the mirror, my skin pale, there are bags under my eyes, and my hair is disheveled.

Cara this isn't you. You don't sit and sulk over a man...over a boy rather. I turn away, "your right Evelyn. I can show Ricky just what he's missing out on." She takes the mirror and ogles herself ohing and ah-ing while pushing up her waves.

Thankfully, it's a slow day at Attic's Revenge so I do a little social media digging and find that 9 Circles is playing at a smaller bar in the downtown area called Misfits Bar and Grill this Friday night. Misfits is known for being a biker bar and for having good tavern food. It's an anniversary party for the bar and it is masquerade-themed. The flier has two black masks with the bar's address, it says the start time is 9 pm, and that the band will be playing. At the very bottom, it says masks and sexy attire encouraged 21+ event. The question is do I bring a date or do I find a date at the bar? And what do I wear?

Tonight's the night and I am ready to go into the trenches so to speak. I am wearing a short black dress with ties up the side showing off the sides of my legs and matching ties starting at the top of my chest down between my breasts which are pushed up and exposed, a glittery choker is around my neck, knee high leather boots, my long red hair is curled, my smokey clad green eyes are hidden behind a velvet black eye mask, and I apply a small amount of lip gloss to my lips. Hunter is sitting on my bed and says, "Are you sure he's worth all this Cara?"

I turn to face him, "I feel I at least deserve an explanation if nothing else. And to feel better."

Hunter huffs, "Fine but I am going to be there with Trevor making sure nothing goes down. He also has decided to help and has a friend named Dean he is going to introduce you to." Trevor is the leather-clad guy who Hunter met at Hidden Gem and who also happens to be a regular at Misfits. I start to speak and he stops me before I get going. "I already made sure he showed a picture of you so he has an idea of what you look like and you are his type. I also made sure to tell him a good amount of details about you like where you work, what you like to do for fun, etc. He also knows that this is just for show. But who knows maybe you will go for Dean instead of douchebag?"

I grab a glittery purse to match my choker from my closet and walk and kiss him on the cheek, "You're the best! How do I look?" He looks me up and down, "ready for battle. And me?" He stands and he is black pants, with a gray button-up shirt that fits snugly, he is wearing a wide all-black mask that fits around the top half of his face.

"Perfect as always," I reply honestly.

We make it to the bar around 9:30 and Misfits is definitely what you would expect of a biker bar. The bar is not that big but also not tight where you are up against the person next to you. The bar is right when you walk through the door and I stand with Hunter looking around. There are pictures of different bikes on the wall behind the bar and a big logo for the local biker gang we have here in Chapelton. There is a corner for slot machines and next to that is a jukebox. There is an area that they have turned into a makeshift stage for the band towards the back of the bar. Everyone is dressed in their best with masks disguising who they are. Two men walk up to us before we can order any drinks. Hunter's jaw drops which is a first for him when Trevor and his friend Dean approach. Trevor is wearing all black and wearing a red mask. His friend Dean does catch my eye. He is tall with a wide chest, he has icy blue eyes which are accented by his black mask, his dark hair is slicked back, and he is clean-shaven.

"Cara, this is Dean. Dean Cara," Trevor says not looking our way. Dean reaches his hand out and takes mine rubbing his thumb over the back of my hand. "Pleasure to meet you," he says, his eyes raking over my appearance. "The pleasure is mine," I say flirtatiously. I have to admit to myself Dean is handsome. Maybe Hunter is right, maybe I should set my sights somewhere else.

Dean pushes out the closest seat for me and I sit down looking him over as he did me. He sits next to me close and the bartender heads over. The bartender is an older woman who is wearing a red and black mask, her hair is brown with really blonde highlights and it is big and teased.

"Dean, will you be having your usual?" She asks while opening beers for other patrons. "Yes, and whatever this lovely woman wants," he responds, motioning towards me. "Bacardi and coke, please," I say sweetly. "Coming right up," she responds swiftly. "Look I just want to make sure you know that my reason for coming here tonight is..." Dean cuts me off, "Is to make one of the band members jealous. I know." "It's not that I don't find you attractive, I do but I want a reaction more so to get answers. He sort of just left abruptly and then ghosted," I say embarrassingly.

He smiles at me, "So you find me attractive?" I can't help but smile to myself, "That's what you got from that." He puts his hand on mine and says, "I know what I signed up for and honestly I've been in your shoes."

This surprises me, "you have?" He takes a long swig of his Coors light bottle, "Yes. We had been together for three years and I decided to pop the question. I took her to a fancy Italian restaurant, got down on one knee and everything. She cried and said yes and everything seemed normal. We even had great sex that night. The next morning, she was gone and she left a note saying 'I'm sorry'." "What a bitch!" I say without thinking. "I'm sorry!" He laughs and says, "No your right she is a bitch."

"You deserved better than that, I'm so sorry," I say. He shrugs, "The past is the past."

The sound of a microphone being tapped brings my attention to where the band is. "Mic check 1 2 Mic check," the lead singer says. They are all setting up and getting into place.

"Showtime," Dean says.

I see Ricky and my heartbeat picks up. Even annoyed at him I can't deny how attracted I am to him. He is wearing black dress pants, a long-sleeved black button-up with a blood-red tie, he's wearing a mask where red ombre turns into black, and his hair is slicked back. His face is in deep concentration as he strums his guitar.

"Damn Guerrita, you know how to dress to impress," Juan says. I can't help but roll my eyes but I try to ignore him. I turn my attention back to Dean and put my hand on his chest, his blue eyes are striking.

"I know you're just using him to bait my cousin but I wouldn't trust him, Cara. There's something about him I can't put my finger on." I continue to ignore him but my stomach twists in knots.

Dean looks me up and down with hunger in his eyes. I can't help the blush that spreads across my cheeks. I put my arms around his shoulders, "see anything you like?" I wink. "Everything," he responds. I look away from him shyly and I see the band is getting ready to play.

"Come on, let's get a better view," I say, grabbing his arm and pulling him with me.

I push us into the small crowd that has formed towards the front of the "stage". "We are honored to be playing for Misfit's 20th anniversary! Thanks to the owners Terry and Cheryl for having us. We are ready to make this night one to remember! The question is are you all ready?" The lead singer says. The audience hoots and hollers in response. "We are going to start off with a crowd favorite Devil's Playground," he continues. The crowd responds with woos of approval.

A low drum beat begins and starts picking up and the rest of the instruments follow. My body moves to match the beat and I keep a little bit of distance between Dean and I. I look at Ricky and his eyes find mine, recognition flashing through. I do a little wave and turn and move my body closer to Dean's rubbing my body against his. Your move I think to myself.

Enrique's Perspective

Fire shoots through my veins. What the fuck does Cara think she's doing? I know I fucked up, but to bring another guy to my show? It's infuriating I want to wrap my hands around her throat and fuck every thought of him out of her mind. To mask his scent off her body with my own. I feel the fury boil in my stomach. I try my best to channel that into my playing. My fingers are manically dashing across the fretboard. Picking with the intention to snap the strings. I watch as he grabs her hand and spins her around to face him. She wraps her arms around his neck with a smile and he wraps his arms around her waist pulling her closer. Cara knows what she's doing. I just have to get through my set and not take the bait. There's no way of her knowing it but I had just started to be able to push the feelings of blame to the back of my head and that nightmare brought me back. He's gone because of me. I was going to call her, I was going to fix it, but fuck it. She can be a little slut all she wants.

Despite my enraged pep talk I can't help shooting daggers with my eyes in their direction. I see his hand traveling along her back, tracing every curve that belongs to me. Her hands travel up her chest. I know she's taking his scent right now. Involuntary flashes of them fucking invade my mind. Their naked flesh pounding against one another, his hands grabbing her plump breasts, and her mouth is open with moans. Even though everything inside me is telling me to take off my guitar and go to her I have to keep powering through.

Our set ends and I feel my anger rising from seeing them throughout the show. My boiling point is seeing Dean feel Cara up and they start making out. I walk right off the stage heading straight towards them and grab Cara by her arm. "What the fuck are you doing?" I growl. Anger plays in her eyes, "What, you mean being around someone who's actually into me?" She's pushing me. "We are leaving now," I snap.

The guy she's with walks up and wraps his arm around her waist. "Is there a problem, buddy?" He asks smugly. Everything snaps inside me and I shove him away from her. "Stay out of it, 'buddy'," I retort. He comes closer and we are toe to toe. People around us are starting to notice, one guy cracks his knuckles, and another cracks his neck. My bandmates notice, Liam shakes his head, and the rest of them are just shocked. I feel both of my hands ball into fists.

Cara pushes her way between us and pushes me back. There's panic in her eyes. "Just go outside I'm coming" I stand there, my eyes never leaving his. "Now," she says more urgently. Cara turns away from me and instead of listening I wait for her. She goes to him close, "I'm so sorry, Dean. I didn't mean for things to go this far. Thank you for everything." She kisses him lightly on the cheek and he gives me a smug smile.

Cara walks over and wraps her arm around mine, "Let's go, now!" I follow but I grab her arm and take control back. I pull her outside and pull her around the side of the building. I push her against the wall and slam my fist against the wall. "Fuck!" I yell holding my knuckle. "What is your problem, Ricky? You fucked me then ghosted me and now you're mad that I'm with another guy?" she pokes my chest.

I push her back towards the wall with my body. Our faces are inches apart, "I was going to call you I was going to it's just..."

She scoffs, "It's just what you got what you wanted and that was it? I wasn't what you thought? You aren't attracted to me?"

This enrages me and I push my hard cock up against her. "Does that feel like I'm not attracted to you? Even now when I want to throttle you, I want you."

She gasps and her eyes shift from my eyes to my mouth. "Then why did you leave and ghost me?" She says breathily making my cock twitch.

"I fucked up, I know I fucked up, okay? I'll explain it all later but right now I need to bury my cock in you and show you belong to me," I say before slamming my lips to hers.

She responds by running her fingers through my hair and pulling it here and there. She moans and wraps her leg around me pulling me to her. I bite her bottom lip and my hands roam across her body when my hands get to her ass I squeeze. She responds by biting my lip in return and pulling my hair harder. I pick her up and wrap her legs around my waist without our lips breaking.

I move away slightly, "your place or mine?"

She shakes her head, "I don't think you deserve it."

I push my cock deeper between her legs and smile. "Unless you want to give everyone around a great show, I suggest you decide," I say, lowly.

She moves her head back looking into my eyes almost searching for answers. Cara must find some answer there because she kisses me deeply and says, "yours."

We crash through my front door, a frenzy of limbs exploring every aspect of each other, lips greedily drinking each other in. We stumble up the stairs, eager to get to the bed. "I shouldn't give in to you this easily," Cara says, panting as my hand begins to venture under her dress, instantly I feel her warmth and wetness.

"No panties? Was that meant for me or him?" The taunt has more effect on me, a deep anger rises in the pit of my stomach, and without a second thought, I toss her on the bed. She gasps in surprise but I move on top of her before she can react. I start to push the dress up and out of the way, revealing her gleaming cunt, ready for its punishment. It's not enough though, I continue lifting, I need the full picture. As soon as I get the dress off, she knowingly undoes her bra like a pro, revealing her perfect plump tits for me to do with them as I please.

Without hesitation I lean down and cup both of them in my hands aggressively, they fit perfectly. My mouth sucks on her left nipple, it immediately hardens in my mouth and she moans in pleasure. My left hand goes for her other nipple pinching and squeezing, tender at first, but I start to abuse them more and more. I can feel my cock ready to burst through the teeth of my pants zipper. I lean back up, tear my shirt off, and work my pants off. Cara looks down to see my throbbing hard cock just inches away from her wet pussy.

"You really thought I wasn't into you? That I would be stupid enough to let all this go? I think you need a proper reminder as to why you shouldn't think so stupidly."

I begin to shove the head in, it slips past her lips and I can feel it start to enter her. I feel her begin to stretch around my cock, her wetness making it as easy as it can despite me pushing her limits. I lower myself slowly inside her, letting her feel every inch until I can feel myself hitting the back of her pussy.

"Oh my god!" she moans loudly, but her punishment has only started.

I begin to thrust into her relentlessly, I can feel my balls slapping against her ass. I grunt with the effort of me pouring all my anger and rage into her. I feel her body begin to tense about to orgasm. I keep up the same pace even as I feel an orgasm rip through her. I don't give her a moment to recover as I quicken my pace. Hushed out of breath moans emanate from her as I pound into her. Soon I feel yet another orgasm shake her body. I readjust, placing my hands in the crease of her knees, pushing down, and spreading her open to leave her fully vulnerable to my cock.

"Oh no," she moans, knowing she's about to be pounded into, mercilessly.

I thrust my cock into her over and over, she is somehow tighter in this position. I can feel every wall of pussy gripping my cock, her eyes rolling back in her head as she's hit by yet another shattering orgasm. Her cunt gets even wetter as she cums on my cock. I look down and see a mess of cream from her pussy coating my dick. "Fuck" I grunt under my breath, I can feel the pressure growing in my balls, but I'm not fully satisfied yet.

I quickly pull my cock out, the sudden absence of me inside her makes her body twitch.

"Why'd you stop?" she looks up at me, her green eyes begging me to pound my cock deep inside her.

"I'm not done with you yet" I growl in response, The look of surprise in her eyes puts a smug grin on my face.

I grab the base of my cock and start slapping it on her clit, her eyes roll back in her skull and she releases little moans with each slap. I begin to slide my cock up and down between pussy, pushing her lips apart and digging it in every time it reaches her clit.

She clutches the sheets as I feel yet another orgasm roll through her body, a moan on the verge of a scream escapes her mouth, "Stop teasing me and put it in already!"

My grin widens into a smile, "I'm not sure you think I'm that into you yet."

She reaches down and grabs my cock firmly and looks me in the eye, "Put it in. NOW."

With that I angle myself and bury my cock deep inside her in a single thrust, her walls moving and squeezing around my dick. We both moan in unison and I start the final assault on her pussy, putting my full weight into every thrust and burying myself balls deep with each one. I feel my cock hitting her cervix repeatedly, the sounds she makes are a mixture of pain and pleasure.

Once again, the pressure builds in my testicles, greater than the first time, “Oh fuck, fuck fuck fuck, I’m about to cum” I grunt in her ear. She wraps her legs around my waist, the soles of her boots acting like spurs digging into my back. We cum powerfully together, my hot cum fills her completely and begins to pump out of her as I get my final strokes in, the residual feeling of the orgasm tingling throughout my body. Her body goes completely limp and I collapse on top of her.

Still inside I ask, “Is this proof enough?”

She laughs, “Yes! Fuck, yes!” I laugh and go to pull myself out of her and she holds me to stay. “Wait, not yet. I know this is going to suck,” she says.

I give her a peck on her lips and say, “Your final punishment” and pull myself out of her quickly.

She hisses and swats me on the shoulder, “fucker.”

I clean myself off and she takes the opportunity to slip her dress on and run to the bathroom. I cannot help myself from watching her ass as she walks away from me. Next time, I tell myself.

Cara lays next to me resting her hand on her head and is looking into my eyes. I find myself looking back into hers deeply seeing the different shades of green swirling around her pupil. She has a smile on her lips and shakes her head, “So clearly I wasn’t the problem that night, so what was?”

I sit up with my back against my headboard and huff, “If I told you you’d probably think I’m crazy.” She looks skeptical, “You’d be surprised at the tolerance I have for the unexplainable”

“It’s stupid....” I say.

She rolls her eyes, “it can’t be that bad, Ricky. Trust me I have heard some crazy shit in my lifetime.”

“Trust me, I feel childish,” I respond, curtly.

There’s a challenge in her eyes, “try me.”

I sigh, “Fine, but I warned you it’s going to sound ridiculous. That night at your house I had a nightmare. Not just your average run of the mill nightmare with scary shit and me waking up and thinking what the fuck. The type of nightmare that felt like the fear was taking over my body and the adrenaline was still fresh. I had to run from your house because, in reality, I was still running from the creatures that wanted to take me. It sounds so childish saying it out loud...” she cuts me off. “Creatures? What kind of creatures?” She asks, showing no judgment and genuine curiosity. I do not hide my surprise, “You really want to know?”

“Yes, I want to know,” she says as if it’s obvious.

The images from my dream come flashing into my mind.

“There were these skeletons with rotting flesh trying to pull me down in this cenote. It was like they were being led by this creature I’ve never heard about or seen before. He was shaped like a man but nothing about his features was human. He was more like a skeleton wearing a feather headdress. He never spoke but it was clear his intentions were to get me. Not only did he seem to have skeletons at his disposal but animals as well.”

“Animals?” She asks.

“Yeah, I heard bats chittering. It was like they wanted to swarm me.”

“Did they?” She responds.

I shake my head, “No, but they felt close...”

“Sounds intense. I had no idea you weren’t tossing or turning or making noises in your sleep,” she says.

“When I went to the bathroom, I had this,” I show her the handprint on my arm that has somewhat faded since that night.

“Holy shit...” She touches my arm, rubbing her thumb across it. She even puts her hand up to it and it is smaller in comparison. She sucks in a breath, “Ricky, I don’t know, it seems like something was trying to harm you. Something otherworldly and dangerous. Maybe, you need a cleanse of some kind.”

I laugh a small laugh, “My mom said the same thing. So, she gave me an egg cleanse.”

She looks at me like she has no clue what I’m talking about. “It’s a Mexican thing. My mom uses an egg and puts it around my body saying prayers. It’s believed that any negative energy will go into the egg. Then she cracks the egg and there are different meanings to how the egg looks in the water. Some people have claimed to have their egg yolk come out all black. Nobody in my family has had that happen, thankfully. When she did the cleanse the last time she was freaking out because she believes she saw the shape of an eye in it. I didn’t see it but I’ve always been kind of iffy about the egg cleanse. I don’t want you to think we are weird or anything, it’s just a Mexican thing like I said,” I tell her.

Cara puts her hand on mine and says, “To be honest with you I believe in the supernatural, witches, spiritual healing, things of that nature so this sounds interesting to me. I actually would like an egg cleanse myself if I get the opportunity to meet your mom. What did she say you should do since she saw that?”

I feel myself getting sort of embarrassed because I didn't think we would spend so much time talking about this and I just want to move past it. "She believes the eye is the evil eye so someone has bad intentions for me or has bad feelings about me. Which it's pretty easy to guess who that is," I say.

"Who?" She asks.

"My Tia," I respond, nonchalantly. This intrigues her, "Why would your aunt have bad feelings towards you?" I do not make eye contact with her and mutter, "Because she blames me for her son's death. No more than I blame myself though."

Cara straddles my lap and looks at my face. She pets my hair and asks, "What happened?"

She has a way of making me feel so comfortable and at ease. This is probably the calmest I've been since that night. Between constantly looking over my shoulders and not knowing what to do about Cara I've been on edge. But the way she's rubbing my hair and how her body is on mine is almost hypnotizing. Cara rubs the side of my face. Her pale skin in comparison to my dark brown makes my cock start to harden. It's the first time in a long time someone hasn't looked at me with accusations or pity.

"My cousin Juan was my best friend. We found this abandoned house when we were kids and when we were teenagers, we would use it as our hangout to drink and smoke pot. One night when we were there the cops came. Being dumb kids, we ran and the river was right next to the house through the woods. There is a bridge above the river and we tried climbing up the ladder to escape. A rung broke and he fell in. The current was high and he was taken under and drowned." Tears well up in my eyes but I keep them downcast. Cara wraps her arms around me in a hug, "I'm so sorry."

"She blames me and I blame myself. She hates me, despises me if I'm being honest. There's nothing I can say or do that can ever make her forgive me. And I don't think he will ever forgive me either," I say. There's quiet for a moment while I feel my mind spiraling.

Cara uses her index finger and lifts my chin, "He does forgive you. You guys were kids, how were you supposed to know that was going to happen?"

"I was supposed to protect him." I almost whisper.

She doesn't leave me, "and sometimes fate has other plans. It's not your fault, Enrique."

I look into her green eyes and they look genuine. Cara is the first person who is not treating me like a criminal. Even my mother looks at me differently. Without thinking I kiss her deeply and passionately. She matches my energy and rubs herself along my cock.

I pull her dress over her head and flip her onto her back onto the bed. She pulls down my boxers, my erect cock bounces once it clears the band, I kick them off the rest of the way. I get on top of her and I kiss her lips before pushing myself inside of her, the familiar resistance of her tight pussy enveloping my dick immediately removes any heavy thoughts from my mind. She is soaked and ready for me moaning as she takes every single inch. Her tits bounce up and down with each thrust and it only makes me quicken my speed. Her moans buildup and I hear her scream out as she releases onto my cock.

"I need more," I say, getting up off the bed and pulling her body towards me. I flip her onto her stomach and pull her hips up into the doggy-style position, squeezing her ass when I have her in the perfect position. I grab her and push myself deep inside her wet pussy. Pounding away my frustrations, my guilt, my fear. She wraps her feet around the back of my legs to bring me in closer and pushes herself back onto me.

"Oh my god, fuck!" She moans.

I feel her body slow as she cums all over me. I adjust my angle and feel my member slide along her g spot, I attack it repeatedly, pounding and pounding until I feel my balls ready to erupt. I erupt deep inside her, releasing a primal growl of pleasure as I fill her up completely. I move my cock around inside making sure every wall is full of my cum.

"Thank you," I say. She laughs, "Anytime!"

"No, I mean it, Cara. Thank you for being understanding and for not judging me," I say seriously.

"I'll never judge you, Enrique," she says.

Cara's Perspective

Things have been great since that night at Misfits. Ricky and I agreed to what he calls a do-over but is just picking up where we left off and leaving out the part where he ghosted me and I acted out.

Overhead Witchcraft by *Frank Sinatra* is playing and I lip sing and move my body with the music comedically. Today is stock day at Attic's Revenge and stock is one of my biggest struggles. The spirits I see are attached to the items we sell here so it can be a constant flooding of flashbacks or can be spirits talking at me. This is their first interaction with me, so talking at me consists of recognizing I can see them and either wanting me to answer questions about why they have not passed on or wanting some sort of favor. Thankfully, today it looks like it'll be six items that I need to find homes for.

The store is one floor but to anyone who does not work here, it can be a maze with endless items. Technically, the size would be two stores because it is two store areas. Originally, when Sid bought the place there was a small boutique next door. The owner ended up retiring and Sid bought it, tore down the shared wall, and made it one big store. There are six rooms in total and they all have a different flare to them.

The first item I get a hold of is a painting which is covered by white cloth. I remove the cloth and gasp. Underneath, is a painting of a white owl with gray wings that is sitting on top of a fence post, behind it is a tree with light brown leaves, and the background is a darker gray. Its dark eyes feel like they are watching me.

"Creepy," I whisper.

I look on the back and in the bottom corner it says, Perched Owl 1990, Clarence Crawford \$50.

"Cara, I need you to come to the front please," Sid's voice sounds overhead. I roll my eyes. For someone who says he was not interested in dealing with technology because he believes it 'melts the mind,' he sure does love using it when he can.

I set the painting down on top of the box and take the short walk to the front. I lean on the counter, "Really dude, I am right next door."

He shrugs, "I spent a pretty penny to have this installed, might as well use it."

I roll my eyes, “Uh-huh so what did you need, boss man?”

“Someone has a special delivery!” He wiggles his eyebrows.

Behind him is a bouquet of red roses in an ornate vase. I walk over and rub the petals with my thumb and index finger. Grams always told me to stop and smell the flowers so I also grab the nearest one and bring it to my nose. There is a green ribbon tied around the middle holding a small envelope in place.

“Ooooo, does someone have a secret admirer?” Sid teases.

I smile, “he’s not so secret you’ve met him. It’s the guy who brought in all those comic books.”

He laughs, “Oh canoodling with the customers now?” I swat his arm, “Not customers, just one customer.”

I open the envelope and inside it says, *Ms. Cara Cagney, your presence is requested for a special evening out full of Argentinian delicacies and smooth drinks with Mr. Enrique Sandoval at Cariño Comida. Formal dress is requested. Mr. Sandoval will arrive to the Cagney residence at 7 o’clock.*

A small smile plays on my lips and I pull out my phone.

Me: You could’ve just asked me to dinner I would’ve said yes!

Ricky: Well, I told you I wanted to make it up to you and start fresh. So, I’m starting with what I’m good at, which is gifting.

Me: Well, thank you. I’ll be honored to accompany you to tonight’s dinner.

Ricky: See ya then hot stuff!

Sid comes to stand next to me. “Well, I’m happy for you kid, finally getting out there!” He says playfully.

I blush, “Yeah let’s see if this lasts.”

He elbows me, “No being a negative Nancy. Just be yourself and if he’s the one he will accept and understand you. Trust me it’s an amazing feeling to have that one person in your life who loves you above all else.” I can see the sadness in his eyes and I know he’s referring to his wife Holly. Before things get too heavy, he says,

“Alright, back to work sister.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, I’m going,” I say feigning annoyance.

On the wall behind the register is a picture of them in their hippie glory days. They are sitting under a tree and he is holding his acoustic guitar. He is wearing a vest with no shirt underneath and bell-bottom jeans. Sid looks the same, just less wrinkles. Holly was stunning. She has long dark hair that is pushed back by a headband with fabric, her eyes are big and light, freckles spread across her nose and cheeks, and a smile plays on her lips. Sid says Holly was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer. She was only 35 years old. The doctors gave her a year to live and luckily, she lived four extra years and they made each and every single one of them count. They traveled to all the places on their bucket list, they tried all the drugs they wanted to try, and they did as much adventuring as possible. In the past, he has shown me various photo albums from that time.

Surprisingly, in all the time I have worked here, I have never seen her and Sid has never asked me to contact her.

I head back to the box and the painting I was looking at is placed back in the box with the cloth over it. Weird, I could have sworn I left it out. I shrug, probably just one of the spirits here thinking they are helping me out. I feel a presence behind me and I spin around.

A man is standing behind me wearing a long black suit coat, with black pants, a white powder shirt, a red bowtie, he has a thin black mustache, his wavy hair sticks out, and his dark eyes look bloodshot. "You're in danger, Miss. Anyone who comes into contact with that painting becomes cursed," he says.

I shake my head, "Ooooo. I've heard that one before. Scaring me is sort of useless when I can see ghosts."

I go about what I'm doing bending down to grab the painting. "Cursed? Really?" I scoff.

When I stand up the spirit is gone. A shiver goes up my spine but I ignore it. What is it with owls? I uncover the painting and have a bad feeling in the pit of my stomach.

I shake it off, "Really Cara you've been doing this for how long. He's just trying to scare you." I mean I'm not wrong, there have been spirits not too happy with my presence. Some have done far more to scare me. One went as far as to try and get me fired from the store by finding every way he could to mess up the work I would do at the store. From putting things out of order to moving money from the drawer and putting it in odd spots. We finally made a truce when I took his pistol off the sales floor. It was his most prized possession and he did not want it going to an unworthy patron.

I push it from my mind and try to focus on tonight. “Fuck, what am I going to wear?”

It’s 6:50 and I’m behind on getting ready. I spent 30 minutes after my shift walking around the store praying, that I can find something fancy and affordable. As if I conjured her up, Addison Rae came to my rescue.

Addison Rae was a pin-up girl and we have an area that has clothes, jewelry, and headpieces all from photos she posed for. She was a little smaller than me but I was able to squeeze into a sophisticated dark red pencil dress. The top part goes off of the shoulder and the dress is so tight it pushes up my boobs but I will just blame it on being naturally blessed. She showed me the picture she took and it was paired with lacy black gloves and heels so I do exactly that. I just have to make sure not to eat big portions or I will for sure pop out of this dress.

I’m rushing through my hair making sure it’s evenly waved. A knock sounds on the door and I panic. “Hunter, will you please get that for me?” I yell.

He groans, ‘Fine! But I’m not being nice.’

“Great,” I groan but respond fake sweet, “Thanks I appreciate it so much, honey!”

I have to do this quickly. I do a nude look on my eyes and add a thick liner of liquid eyeliner on my lash line, then I add a hint of mascara at the end of my lashes, and a dark red to match the dress on my lips and head out the door.

“You already have one strike against you Ricky so you better make tonight special for her. Ghosting her was a real dick move, Cara deserves the world so I hope you are as special as she thinks you are,” I hear Hunter say.

Before Ricky can answer I interject, “Now Hunter let’s play nice. We all make mistakes and Ricky is trying so let’s see what happens.”

They both turn their heads to me as I make my way down the stairs feeling like one of the female villains seductively walking down the stairs to steal someone’s man. Ricky looks me up and down slowly taking in all the details of me. Hunter gives me a head-tilted look like ‘Really’.

Before any more tension could get going, I speak up and say, “We really should be going, we don’t want to be late for our reservation.”

“Mhm, well make sure to have her home at a good time and that she comes home satisfied,” Hunter demands.

I put my hand in Ricky’s, “Mm he definitely won’t have trouble bringing me home satisfied.” Behind Ricky’s back, Hunter puts a finger to his mouth like he wants to throw up. I laugh and we walk out.

“You think he will ever forgive me?” Ricky asks.

I nod, “Yes he just has to be a bitch about it first.”

Ricky looks skeptical but says, “Guess we will see.”

This time to my surprise he has a black 1970 Dodge Challenger and he opens the passenger door for me.

“A car?” I ask.

He smiles, “Yes, I have a car for wintertime and occasions like this.”

“Interesting,” I say.

“Your chariot awaits,” he says, mocking sophistication.

“Why thank you!” I respond sweetly.

As Ricky drives, I notice he is driving out of Chapeltown. “Out of town, huh?” I say curiously.

He smiles mischievously, “Yeah I’m kidnapping you and bringing you to my hood.”

I laugh, “Oh wow, your hood?”

He nods, “Well, my ‘hood’ is technically Chapeltown but we spent a lot of time with family who lived in the town over called Huntsville. Carino Comida came up when I did my research of places to eat near the area and it is 4 stars.”

“Wow, look at you Mr. Fancy,” I tease.

Ricky puts his hand on my knee and looks at me with a glint in his eyes, “Only the best for you.”

I roll my eyes, “Mhmm, I’m sure that’s what you tell all the girls.”

“Only the ones I like,” he teases.

I laugh and say, “Is that so? Aren’t I a lucky gal?”

He pushes his hand up my thigh bringing my skirt with it, “more like a bratty girl.” His fingers move to my inner thigh as he pushes my dress up exposing my bare pussy.

He looks up at me with a sly smirk, “Maybe I’ll try some dessert before dinner.”

He pushes his middle finger inside me. I spread my legs wider to give him more access. Ricky moves his finger in and out slowly and I become soaked.

"Ricky," I moan.

He stops, bringing his finger to his lips and sucking it. Then, he sticks his finger back in and moves it around in circles. I move my body closer pushing myself onto his finger. I can feel my body building up with tension becoming wetter and wetter. I lean my head against the headrest scrunching my eyes closed.

"I'm going to cum," I say breathy.

He quickens his pace and I'm panting. "Good girl," he growls.

Then, I'm cumming my whole body letting go and soaking his finger. Ricky wears a satisfied grin as he tastes his finger again.

I fix myself, pushing my dress back down.

"My turn," I say seductively.

Confusion morphs his face, "your turn?"

I answer him by rubbing my hand on his crotch. I knead his balls feeling his cock harden. I unzip his pants and run my fingers against his length. He adjusts himself and takes his cock out of his boxers. I take off my seatbelt and lean over the seat. I take his cock in my mouth and push my throat down to the base. I move my head up and down. I suck my cheeks in like I am sucking on a popsicle. His cock is soaked in my saliva. I rub his balls lightly.

"Jesus Cara," he groans.

The only sound in the car is the sound of his cock hitting the back of my throat. He takes my hair in his hand and uses his grip to guide my mouth faster on his cock. My throat makes choking sounds and he pulls my head up and I spit on it. He pushes my head back down. His cock fills my mouth and feels like the tip is going down my throat. "I'm going to cum," he says, taking his hand out of my hair.

Then, his warm cum fills my throat and I swallow it all down and lick up the mess that is on his cock. I sit up smiling proudly.

"Cara Cagney you really are something," he says.

Soon enough we're driving through Huntsville and see the restaurant come into view. Carino Comida is the epitome of a romantic dinner.

The restaurant is lit by candlelight, there are candles on the tables and on the bar, the tables have white linen, and along with the candle, salt and pepper shakers and a single flower in a slim vase. The sound of an acoustic guitar can be heard.

Ricky pulls my seat out for me and I hold my skirt under me as I sit down slowly. He sits down across from me and hands me a menu.

Being on a date at a romantic restaurant can be intimidating because it's just you and your date and you are seeing the person in front of you. If I'm being honest, I've never had Argentinian food in my life. At least the menu is only two-sided, the drink menu is separate. I see a dish that has skirt steak with potatoes and I'm sold.

He sets down his menu, "So I was thinking we could get a bottle of red wine, beef empanadas for an appetizer, I'm going to get Bife Ancho, and they also have chocolate cake figured we'd each get a slice."

I've always struggled with being assertive when it comes to someone doing something for me. But, with a face like mine, I would never win a game of poker. "What?" he asks.

I bite my bottom lip, "everything sounds good but I want to be honest I don't like wine. I know a lot of people rave about it but I've never been a fan of wine specifically."

He puts his hand on mine, "Don't be nervous to tell me things, Cara. I'd rather know and not make you do things or have things you don't like. So, no red wine. And did you find anything on the menu that you want for an entrée?"

I smile at him, turn my hand over, and hold his in mine. "I am going to have the skirt steak and potatoes and I'll have a margarita."

The server is an older Hispanic man with glasses and his name is Jesus. Enrique takes over and orders for me which usually would annoy the shit out of me but this is new territory for me so I appreciate it. He even gives the server my entrée order under the actual name on the menu. Jesus takes our menus and says, "I'll get that all going for you."

I hear a male laugh close to me, "Who does Ricky think he is? Rico Suave?" Oh no, not now I think to myself. I quickly move the conversation to small talk to try and drown out Juan. "How long have you been a musician?"

Ricky seems to mull over his response, "Well I've played the guitar since I was 12, but I didn't start playing seriously until after high school. I'm pretty much self-taught, you can learn almost anything on YouTube. In college I met Shawn, he was one of the few people I met who liked deathcore, and we pretty much built our friendship around that. Pretty soon he introduced me to the rest of the future bandmates. We ended up forming 9 Circles and the rest is history."

I come to the realization I never knew the reason behind their band name, "So why 9 Circles?"

Ricky smiles and looks down, "That was Liam's idea, our drummer. He had just finished studying Dante's Inferno in one of his classes. He threw out 9 circles, as in the nine circles of hell, and it took off."

"Wow! That's creative! It has a dark theme without sounding dark upfront."

Ricky's face lights up, "Do you play any instruments?"

I smile, "I attempted a few. I tried my hand at the guitar and ukulele, but both crashed and burned. I also briefly tried piano and stayed at it a little longer but never had the patience. I have never been good with patience. I gave up quickly."

"I can't tell you the number of times I lost my patience while playing guitar and working on cars. It's always the easiest sounding jobs that become the hardest."

We never really talked about work so I am surprised to hear that he works on cars. It shouldn't surprise me because of the calluses on his hands. "A mechanic, huh?"

He smiles, "Yes, my Tio Sergio is a mechanic and as a kid, I would be at his shop a lot. I would follow him around acting like his assistant. I can't tell you how many times he yelled at me for not holding the flashlight right."

I laugh and I can picture it so clearly in my mind. Little Ricky trailing behind his uncle taking in everything. A smile forms on my face.

"I wish I could have met little Ricky," I say.

"I wish I could've met little Cara. What about you? Do you have any career goals?" He asks.

My stomach drops. This is a question that I hate because I never really decided. I always had so many interests growing up but never found anything I loved. It's hard because a lot of jobs require a certain amount of being social and with my ability, I am always worried I will be bombarded by spirits.

"To be honest, I don't know what I want to do. I haven't found anything that I'm passionate about."

"That's okay, some people spend their whole lives finding something they love. I'm sure you will find something unexpected and be amazing at it." Ricky always has a way of making me feel good about myself.

The whole future talk makes me uncomfortable So, I try to swiftly change the subject.

"So, Argentinian food. What made you choose that?" I ask.

He looks around, "Well, I wanted it to be romantic and the reviews were really good. The word romantic was used a lot in them. I also enjoy eating Argentinian-style food the rare times I have it and this is a special occasion so I wanted it to be special."

"He chose it because it reminds him of family," Juan says.

"You mentioned this being your 'hood' Do you still have family living around here?" I ask.

His face looks sad, "some. Everyone kind of spread out once we lost my Abuelito and then...."

Juan interjects only heard by me, "I died."

"Juan," I say.

He nods, "We used to be so close. There would be so many family parties and every Sunday we would get together after church. We would always go somewhere to eat."

"Do you guys ever do that anymore?" I ask.

There's silence for a moment. I'm worried that I pried too much. "Not really. My mom and I do sometimes. She usually brings my Abuela and every now and then my Tio Armando and Tia Josie and their three kids come. But that's maybe once or twice a month." He speaks.

I smile a sad smile at him, "Well maybe one of these days I could be a part of one of those Sunday traditions?"

A snort sounds in my ear and Juan says, "Oh yeah, Tia Josie will get a kick out of you." I grit my teeth in irritation. Ricky smiles,

"I'd love that. What about your family? What are they like?"

"We've never had a Gringa in the family," Juan continues.

To me, there's nothing more irritating than having a conversation and someone keeps adding their comments.

I inwardly cringe. Family has always been a tough subject for me. He sees my reluctance and says, "If it's too soon to talk about it I understand."

I sigh, "My parents had me when they were young and to be honest, I was not a part of either one of their plans. They were never cruel parents; they just had their own things going on where I didn't fit. My father didn't want to grow up and my mother wanted to grow up quickly. Her dream was to be a CEO of her own company. She spent a lot of her time working and climbing up the ladder as much as she could. Dad was sort of around but he started using heavy drugs when I was young. My Dad's mom, my Grams, was always there for me and always offered to take me and raise me.

When I was eight years old my father overdosed for the first time and I was the only person with him in the house. I found him in the bathroom and he was convulsing. I didn't know exactly what was happening to him at the time but I called 911. They took him and he survived. My Grams convinced him to get the help he needed and convinced both of my parents to let me stay with her.

Once she took me in, they became less and less a part of my life. I consider her to be the one who raised me because she taught me so much. Grandma Maeve was a free spirit who was always making new friends and helped me see all the beauty there is in the world. She's a big reason I ended up working at Attic's Revenge. She loved taking me antiquing. As Grams got older her health became worse.

When I was 20 years old, she was diagnosed with breast cancer and doctors had determined that it spread to the bone. She was put on hospice care and hated it. We spent a lot of her last days watching old movies, playing Scrabble, listening to music, and reading books. She loved having me read to her. Family started trickling in to see her and spend time with her. It was the first time I saw my dad in a while and I haven't seen him since. It was clear by his demeanor and words he had relapsed. Grams was always a fighter and made it another six months."

My eyes start to well up with tears. "The worst thing is even though I knew it was coming it felt like my whole world fell apart the day she died. She passed in her sleep thankfully. Grams left everything she had to me which was her house and the \$1,000 left in her bank accounts. Hunter has been my best friend for years and he was there for it all. He was dying to leave his parent's house and asked if he could move in with me and I accepted." Slow tears spill down my face and I wipe them away quickly.

"I'm so sorry for your loss, Cara. She sounds like she was an amazing person."

I laugh, "She was! My world has been a little darker with her gone. But I know she's always with me." I say that because that is something that people say but the truth is she has never come to me not once. I thought for sure when she passed, she would at least pop in from time to time. I even begged for it a lot of times, especially in the beginning when I was struggling but she never came. I tell myself that means she's at peace but I don't know if that's true or not.

Ricky takes my hand in his, “I understand your pain, believe me. My cousin Juan was my best friend and there isn’t a single day that goes by that I don’t think of him. We did everything together. He was more like a brother to me than a cousin. He took a lot with him when he went.”

Annoyingly, I can feel Juan pacing next to me. “It still fucks me up how much he blames himself. It wasn’t his fault, shit just happens. I know he even thinks I’m mad at him and I never have been. It was an accident,” Juan says frustrated.

I touch Ricky’s hand and run my fingers on the lines of his palms, “I can promise you that he is always with you and he doesn’t blame you for what happened. It was an accident.” There’s tension in Ricky’s jaw but a softness in his eyes.

The waiter brings our empanadas and they look interesting. The smell embarrassingly makes my mouth water, I didn’t realize how hungry I was. “Perfect timing,” Juan says, actually saying what I am thinking. There are four on the plate with a small pair of tongs. The empanada looks like half a pie folded.

“May I?” He asks, holding up one of them.

I nod, “Sure, why not?”

I lean over and take a bite. The inside of the empanada is filled with ground beef that is perfectly seasoned with an undertone of sweetness.

“Mmmmm,” I say, licking my lips.

“Fuck,” Ricky whispers.

I laugh, “What?” “I never thought I’d be attracted to seeing a girl eat an empanada,” he responds seriously.

I roll my eyes, “Uh-huh.”

Ricky stands up and comes to my side. He uses his index finger under my chin and turns my head to face him. His brown eyes are serious and searching my face. “I can promise you Cara I mean what I say when I tell you I’m attracted to you,” he says, looking down at my lips.

Juan groans, “he’s got it bad.”

I keep my eyes locked on his searching for any signs of deceit or playfulness but just see passion there. I feel somewhat embarrassed because I know he is referencing the words I said to him at Misfits.

I put my hand to his face and rub his jawline, “I know you are and I am to you. I just struggle with compliments.”

Ricky looks me up and down, “Well, guess I’ll just have to give you a bunch until you’re comfortable.”

I laugh and shake my head. "Okay," I say softly. He places a slow peck on my lips and sits back down in his seat.

Juan gets closer leaning on the table in a squat position, "You need to tell him the truth, Cara. About your abilities, about me. He needs to know. Things are moving so fast and my cousin is not that type. He is always taking his time and hiding himself from others. Before he goes all in with you, he needs to know who you are."

I swat him away like he is an annoying fly. This enrages him as he shakes the table. Our drinks swish and dishes move. I don't stop myself from making a dirty look in his direction. Ricky looks between me and where Juan squats. Fuck!

Ricky looks like he is about to say something and I cut him off. "I need to run to the washroom," I say quickly, standing and heading toward a small hallway just behind me.

The bathroom has one sink and three stalls. The biggest stall also has a sink and a changing table. Juan follows me, he is standing in the ladies' room. I shut the door behind me and start running the sink. I spin on him and get in his face.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" I whisper-shout.

Like a scolded child Juan crosses his arms over his chest. "I know I came to you out of nowhere with this shit, okay? But he's my cousin and I don't want him getting hurt. I don't want you doing this to help me and to only help me."

If he were alive, I'd kill him myself.

"Listen, if you remember correctly, I didn't think I could help you because I had no way of contacting Ricky. We ended up seeing each other at a bar after the fact and made our own connection. I do care about your cousin but I'm also still getting to know him. It's MY business and I will tell him when I'm ready. I am open to helping you but we need to make boundaries."

"I can't wait to hear this," he mutters.

"You need to not add commentary to the conversations I'm having. It is distracting and annoying. It's fine here and there but not like you have been doing since this date started. I want to help you and will help you. You need to be patient. I have been giving your messages and I have not told you to go but my patience only goes so far. I can at any time kick you out of my mind. I can block you out by simply saying, 'Go away.' Do you understand me?" I say.

He laughs, "Your kind of hot when you're bitchy."

"Oh, Fuck off!" I say storming out of the stall and washing my hands.

He walks up slowly, “Fine, I’ll knock it off. But I’m serious Cara, you need to tell him the truth at some point. My cousin does not forgive easily, especially to people who lie to him.”

As annoying as Juan is, I know what he’s saying is true. I know I need to tell Ricky the truth but how? I’ve spent my whole life being ridiculed by others for my abilities. People telling me I was making up stories for attention, that I was crazy. It wasn’t until I lived with my Grams that I learned how everything worked. I got my abilities from her. She was the only person who understood me and helped me become more comfortable with myself.

I nod, “I will tell him when I’m ready.” Juan seems satisfied with that answer. “Now, I’m going to enjoy what’s left of this 1st date so pleaseeee be on good behavior.”

“Anything you say, boss,” he says sarcastically.

Enrique's Perspective

Cara goes off to the bathroom, leaving me to sit in my confusion. Her mind seems to be split, almost like she's had to pay attention to two people. Not only that but what was up with the table being shoved like that? I had my entire attention on her and not a single part of her moved to do that. The nearest person to the table other than us was Jesus, and he was three feet away taking an order at the table next to us. Nothing is adding up. And what was up with that look she shot into the space next to her? For a second, I could've sworn I caught a whiff of Juan's cologne.

Before I can get too lost in thought, I see Cara making her way back from the bathroom. The low lighting makes her fair skin glow, her silhouette perfectly framed against the darkness. Moments after she sits down Jesus brings our entrees, well served pieces of steak with a side of seasoned potato wedges and grilled vegetable medley.

Cara's eyes widen with excitement, "that might be the best-looking steak I've ever seen!"

I can't help but smile, "only the best meat for you." She shoots me a playful look as she points her steak knife at me, "You better watch yourself."

Not a single word is uttered between us as we dig into our steaks, I take in her faces and sounds of satisfaction. I tear through mine hungrily, feeling the satisfaction only a perfect steak can bring. Jesus comes by with a jug of water and refills our cups, "can I interest you two in some dessert? We have the best devil's food cake in town."

I look over at Cara who looks like she's struggling with her last third of steak, "what do you think? I can use something sweet to tie this all together."

"Okay, but only one slice, I'm going to need a box!"

Jesus takes my plate, "I'll get that going for you and box this up for you."

Cara takes the last drink from her margarita and gently holds up the glass, "and one more of these, please"

"Of course, right away."

Jesus comes back moments later, a margarita in one hand, a piece of chocolate cake straight out of that one scene in Matilda with two forks in the other. I take one of the forks and scoop a piece up with some of the velvety frosting. I bring it to Cara's lips; they part slowly and seductively and she takes it in. Some of the frosting catches the corner of her mouth, I gently wipe it away with my finger and hold it up for her.

Without missing a beat, she opens her mouth and wraps her lips around my finger, and sucks gently, the sensation immediately makes my cock twitch in my pants.

She takes her fork scoops up another piece and brings it to my lips, without breaking eye contact I take the bite and take in the rich flavor. The sexual tension between us reaches a critical level. I get Jesus' attention and wave him over for the check.

In what feels like a blur we're racing to her place. It takes everything in me not to pull over and bend her over the hood of my car, the thought of it makes me swerve once or twice. We finally make it to her place, the tires squeal as I hit the brakes a little too hard in the driveway.

We leave a trail of clothes behind us as we make our way to her room. We throw our last articles of clothing on the floor and I pick her up as she wraps her legs around me. Her wet pussy is pressed up against my hard cock. I walk towards her bed and drop her on the edge. I grab her ankles and bring her body closer to the edge, I spread her legs wide open, and her gleaming wet pussy is on full display. I slowly move my hips letting my dick move up and down her, the lips parting as my cock passes between them. I take my erection and push the head into her vagina. My cock is coated in her wetness and her walls squeeze my cock.

I plant my feet and start pumping into her passionately and deeply, each stroke making her moan louder and louder. Her hands fist the sheets and her eyes roll back in her skull, her body releasing an orgasm that makes her feel soaking wet.

I pull my cock out and get down on my knees while keeping her legs spread open. I take in the sight of her pink pussy, a small tuft of soft hair just above her clit.

"Oh no," she moans, "What are you doing?"

"Shhhh, just relax and let me finish dessert."

With that, I place my mouth on her clit and start sucking it into my mouth, letting it pass in between my teeth and I nibble it gently, then picking up the intensity. I feel her body twitch and convulse, seeing her like that is like a drug for me, I must have more. I start flicking her clit with my tongue and shove my nose into her pubic hair taking in her sweaty scent.

I raise my finger to her opening and start fingering her as I continue to flick her nub with my tongue, "Oh god! Oh fuck!" She moans loudly and I can feel her body builds tension like a metal coil. I quicken the flicking of my tongue and bury my finger deep in her and find her g spot and start rubbing it vigorously. Her fingers weave through my hair. It only takes a few seconds of this before she's cumming and convulsing on the bed, her legs wrapping around my head for a moment before she releases me. I come up for air and take in her heaving form.

I begin to move in to get back in position to continue pounding into her but she stops me, "Wait, go sit down on that chair."

I oblige her, curious to know what she has in store for me. The chair is a squat lounge chair straight from the 70's. I sit down. It is a surprisingly spacious and comfy chair.

Cara walks over to me; her pale skin catches the moonlight and I drink in her stunning beauty. As she reaches me, she does an alluring turn presenting me with her plump ass. She starts to lower herself on my cock and lets my erection rub between her legs. I grab my cock at the base and angle it for her, she slowly sits, my cock finding its home deep inside her. We both let out a moan in unison, she begins to bounce on my cock, I love seeing my cock disappear in her depths.

"Fuck, that's it, baby girl, just like that" I groan.

Her sloppy wet pussy feels like heaven on my cock. I fist her hair and pull hard; a gasp escapes her lips and her full weight falls on my cock. She grinds on my cock. I can feel it rubbing deep inside her. I feel my body start to tense up with pleasure. I wrap my arms around her stomach and begin to slam my cock in her. Both of our moans get louder and more intense, and the pressure in our bodies reaches its height. I feel my cum hot and thick explode from my cock and her cunt tightens even more around my cock as she orgasms.

We slump into the chair, our chests heaving from exertion and bliss. I close my eyes, I feel my cum dripping out of her and coating my balls, I'm sure it's a mess down there.

I hug her close, taking in the scent of her sweet perfume and vanilla conditioner in her hair.

“I can fall asleep here,” Cara says, gently caressing my face with her hand, “tonight has been perfect.”

I take her hand and kiss it, “I know, I don’t want it to end. I think we should at least clean up a little, you made a big mess.”

She rolls her eyes in feigned annoyance, “You played as big of a role in it as I did, sir.”

I laugh and gently slap her arm, “Just so you know I’m dripping all over your floor and upholstery, ma’am.”

“Fine!” she groans and gets up, tossing me a towel from the hamper, and heads to the bathroom.

I work up the strength to get out of the chair, already feeling myself nodding out. I clean myself off with the towel and throw it back in the hamper. I crawl into her bed; the cool sheets feel amazing on my sweaty damp skin. She emerges from the bathroom and joins me in bed curling up in my arms. We take each other’s presence in; she caresses my chest as I hold her hip with my free arm. Before I know it, she’s falling into the arms of Morpheus.

I feel myself following closely behind, my eyelids feeling like lead after the events of the night. Before my eyes completely shut, the sudden sound of an old Analog TV brings me out of my sleepy state. I look over at her dresser where she has the ancient thing set up. It’s that back-lit black for a second before turning to static.

As I get up to shut it off. The screen turns to a music video and music starts coming through the speaker. Rosas by *Oreja de Van Gogh* starts playing. How? I didn’t even know a TV station aired it, much less a station on this thing. I thought they stopped airing anything on these old TVs. But sure, enough Rosas is playing, the guilty pleasure song of my cousin and I. I sit on the bed in disbelief, too stunned to do anything else. My chest starts heaving as buried emotions start resurfacing. Memories flash in my mind of us singing along with the music.

We would always make fun of each other for liking the song but when it played nothing stopped us from singing along. The song ends and the TV shuts off right after. I shake my head. I have to be dreaming. There's no way that just happened.

I bring my knees to my chest as a way to comfort myself. I look around the room and, in the corner near Cara’s bookshelf, there is a shadow that is blacker than black. It’s big and intimidating but does not move. My blood freezes in my veins, but it doesn’t move or do anything. All of a sudden, a book falls to the floor. When I look up the shadow is gone.

Reluctantly, I hang my legs over the side of the bed. I look all around me as if the shadow will appear behind me. I creep over to the book and pick it up slowly. It's dark so I am unable to read the cover. I go to Cara to check on her and she is still sleeping soundly. Trying not to wake her I quietly head to the bathroom.

The outside of the book is brown and leather with intricate designs. I place the book on the sink and open it to the first page. It reads *Dark Entities Across Cultures Volume I*. I start flipping through the pages seeing words and drawn pictures, some grotesque and depicting what looks like scenes straight from hell. I continue skimming through the pages when suddenly a spider starts crawling up the page. I swat it away with my hand. I go back to looking in the book.

Movement just behind the book in the sink catches my eye. Suddenly there are hundreds of spiders crawling out of the sink. I jump back startled and bump into the shower liner and my skin starts to prickle. Thousands of spiders are falling on me and crawling all over my body. I madly swat at myself agitating the spiders. Thousands of pairs of fangs bite into my flesh releasing their toxins. As I wreath around in pain I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror and witness the horror of the spiders begin to crawl in my mouth as I open it to scream in terror and pain.

I sit up in Cara's bed pushing my hands down my body trying to push off spiders and there's none there. Cara is still asleep next to me looking peaceful. I look over on the nightstand and my phone screen reads 3:00 am. I sigh, running my fingers through my hair anxiously. My phone begins ringing. Who would be calling me at this hour? The screen reads Juan and a picture of him smiling pops up.

I swipe up to answer reluctantly, "Hello?"

"Ricky?" Juan says panicked.

"Juan?" I respond.

"Ricky, it wasn't your fault man, you gotta know it wasn't your fault..." the line starts breaking up.

"Juan! I can't hear you! Juan!" I am yelling into the phone and hear only static.

Then, there is the sound of a million people screaming in agony. It sounds like torture and gives me a deep sense it's what Hell sounds like.

I wake up and feel a pushing sensation on my arm. "Ricky! Ricky, you're having a nightmare! Ricky!" Cara says frantically.

I sit up and look at her, “Is this real?” I look around me, probably looking insane.

She comes close to me and puts my hands on each side of her face. “This is real, I’m real. You’re here now, you’re safe, you’re fine,” she says soothingly.

I swallow hard, “I’m here, I’m safe, I’m fine.”

“That’s right,” she moves her head up and down slowly. I calm down and look into her eyes.

“Cara, I think there’s something evil in your house. I don’t know what it is but every single time I spend the night I have nightmares, scary, realistic nightmares,” I admit.

Cara listens to me intently and moves one side of the right side of her head into my hand. “I’m sorry, Ricky. I don’t know what’s going on. If you want to and if you believe in it, I can burn sage. It’s been a little while since I burned some but I have some left over from the last time I did.” I nod at this point, happy to try anything.

She goes into the drawer of her nightstand and pulls out a Ziploc bag that holds a bundle of sage. She takes a portion out and grabs a red lighter. It’s not that I don’t believe in sage working, one of my Tias used to do it all the time but I just thought it was silly Bruja stuff. She stands and burns the top. Smoke streams from the top and the earthy smell fills my nostrils quickly.

Cara walks around and says, “I burn this sage to rid any negative energy in this space. We ask that any beings here with ill intent go away or be banished. Please protect this home and only allow peace and happiness.” I sit on the edge of the bed and watch her intently.

Once she circles the room she stands in front of me. She moves the sage up and down my body. “We ask that you protect Enrique Sandoval from any beings that have ill intent toward him. We ask that he be protected by the guardian angels in his life.” I didn’t realize how tense my shoulders were until they drop. My whole body seems to calm down and I feel at ease. It’s almost like a weight was completely lifted off of me. The whole vibe of the room feels different.

Cara has a little brown bowl and she sets the sage into the bowl to let it slowly die out. She comes up to me and searches my face. It’s clear she’s waiting for me to speak.

“I already feel a difference. Is that normal?” I ask.

She straddles me and rubs her hands in my hair affectionately.

“Yes. Especially, if you believe it can feel instant,” she states.

“Let’s just hope the nightmares stop,” I say honestly.

I flip us onto the bed and hold her close to me. She laughs and snuggles up to me. Before long I fall asleep holding her in my arms.

The next morning, I wake up and I feel well rested. I stretch and look over to Cara who is still sleeping. Seeing the shape of her under the thin sheet awakens my lustful hunger. My cock is hard and ready. I softly pet the side of her arm and she stirs a little. I move in closer and kiss her lips softly. Our bodies are close but not touching.

Cara moves to lay on her back and lazily kisses me back. She groans and moves her hand to the crotch of my boxers.

She gasps, "Guess someone is already ready for me?"

I slip my hand under the blanket and make my way down between her legs. My finger feels the wetness already pooled between her thighs. "Yeah, feels like it," I say in a cocky tone.

She laughs and pecks my lips, "You started it."

I finger her pussy slowly and she lays her head back, closing her eyes. I take my hand back and then position myself on top of her. My cock slips inside of her and we both let out low moans.

I start off slowly feeling her pussy clench around the base of my cock and the tip testing her limits. With every thrust in, she wraps herself around me tightly. My cock pushes in rougher and rougher.

Cara moans loudly, digging her nails in the sheets on the bed. The slapping of our skin to skin becomes louder in the room. Her eyes roll as I get deeper and deeper. I wrap my hand around her throat and squeeze. She becomes soaked, adding wetness between us. My hand goes tighter and tighter around her neck.

My ears start ringing and my body goes numb. It feels like something has taken over my body and mind. I do not notice right away that she is hitting my arm to signal me to stop. When I realize what she is doing I take my hand off of her neck. She moves her head to the side and inhales a deep breath. She starts coughing. I immediately get off of her and check on her.

"I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to be so rough," I say. She shakes her head, "I'm fine. I'm fine."

It felt like something took me over. I could have hurt her, even killed her. I run my hands through my hair nervously. She sits up and wraps her arms around me.

"I'm so sorry," I say.

She gets up and comes in front of me, "Ricky, I'm fine. I don't mind rough sex."

“It felt like I was losing control like something took me over. I could have hurt you. I didn’t mean to... I feel so crazy saying this out loud. But I swear to you Cara I didn’t mean to do that and I would never hurt you.” I say, panicked.

She hugs me bringing me close, “I’m fine Ricky. It’s going to be fine. I know you would never hurt me.”

Even though she's saying it, I feel horrible. I need to know what this is and what it wants with me. Before I hurt myself or worse hurt Cara.

Cara's Perspective

I've been missing my Grams a lot more than usual lately. I wish she were here to meet Ricky. So, I'm bringing him to her headstone. I'm nervous, my hands are shaking and I keep babbling about nothing. Ricky holds my hand and looks at me. "It's going to be okay Cara," he says warmly.

I feel kind of silly because I know he's not physically meeting her. I think more than anything I am nervous about how vulnerable I will be. Cemeteries are also a real struggle for me. As someone who sees spirits, going to a cemetery is like going to a crowded party. Before picking up Ricky I took a small part of an edible to help. I've learned over time that when I indulge in drinking and using marijuana it can dull the sight and sound of spirits. We pull up to the wrought iron fence with a sign above that reads Chapel Town Cemetery and a sign to the side that says, "Closes At Dusk."

As we enter the cemetery, I see the spirit of a young boy wearing an old-fashioned suit, he is pale with dark circles around his eyes, and his face is serious. He makes direct eye contact with me but does not move. I see spirits near different headstones throughout the cemetery.

Our town's cemetery is big and it takes a little bit before I find her headstone. The way I am able to find it is because next to it is a tree with a bench in front of it. I grab the bouquet of flowers I brought from the back seat. I walk slowly trying to give myself time to keep it together.

There are different spirits near her burial site. Grams taught me the best way to get through a spirit-saturated area is to not make it obvious that you can see them. If they try to approach me, I have to act as though I cannot hear or see them. I show him exactly where her headstone is. It's gray and reads Mauve Annette Cagney Beloved Mother and Grandmother May 13 1945 to December 10th, 2019. I set the flowers in front of the headstone.

"Hi Grams," I say softly. The tears are already welling in my eyes. "This is Ricky, we've been seeing each other."

He comes close and pulls me close to his side. "I'm her boyfriend," he says matter of fact.

I look at him shocked. We never really established our relationship status. Ricky sort of takes over.

"I'm Ricky and I have nothing but the best intentions with your granddaughter. She's the first person I've been able to be myself with in a while. I know that she makes you proud. I hope you find me worthy of her."

I smile at him, "I know she would like you. She'd probably tell me how handsome she thinks you are and like that you're a musician."

I kneel before her headstone brushing off the grass that has blown on top of it. Tears start to spill over and I whisper, "I miss you so much Grams. I wish you were here. You should be here."

I stand and go into Ricky's arms. I nuzzle close into his musky scent. "Thanks for coming with me Ricky. Besides Hunter, I've never brought anyone here." I say meekly.

He pets my hair, "Of course, anytime you need me to be here for you I will."

I move back and look up at him. Tears are still spilling down my face. I kiss him on the lips and pour all of my feelings into the kiss. All my sadness, fear, anger, and guilt flood out of me and he returns my intensity. I am the one to pull back slowly.

"Sorry Grams," I say with a little laugh.

I take him by the hand and lead him to my car. Ricky opens my car door for me. I wrap my arms around his neck and I kiss him passionately. We get into the backseat and he shuts the door. More tears spill out as my thoughts come out like rapid fire and as scared as I am I know that I am falling for Ricky.

I slip my black leggings off and Ricky gets into the car with his pants unbuttoned and unzipped. I lift my legs and he slips himself inside me. I wrap my legs around his waist. His thrusts are deep and I feel myself getting lost in the pleasure. I can feel that the edible I took hit because my body feels completely relaxed. My pussy is soaked and needy. His cock goes in and out with ease.

Ricky looks deep into my eyes. I pull him in to kiss his lips. His face is sweaty. Tears start to build in my eyes. I've never been this vulnerable with anyone. I lift my hips so he's deeper. It feels like he's hitting the deepest part of me.

"I.." I stop myself from saying the three words that can change everything. Instead, I say, "I'm going to cum." He pushes faster and faster. My fingers are digging into his back. I scream out pleasure ripping through me.

Ricky uses his hands and lifts my ass higher. "Fuck," he whispers.

I use my hands and spread myself wider. He takes his cock all the way out and then shoves it back in roughly. His cock hits every wall. I moan loudly. His hands are on my ass switching between cupping each cheek and digging his fingers in. "This tight ass," he says.

I smile, "Maybe one of these days you'll get inside."

"I'll keep you to it," he says close to my ear.

Ricky's thrusts become quicker and then he yells out and cum fills me up. He moves his cock around moving his cum around. Then he slumps on top of me.

Ricky moves his head back to look at me. "Thank you," I say, rubbing his hair.

He gives me a long passionate kiss. "No, thank you," he winks, giving a cheesy grin.

I shake my head, "No, I mean it. It's hard for me to be vulnerable to anybody and you have been so kind and understanding. I think that death makes everyone uncomfortable. So, thank you for just being here and just being by my side."

He rubs my hair, "I'm glad I can be here for you." He gives me a peck on the lips.

He gets out of the car to adjust his pants and I slip my leggings back on. Everything about today scares the living shit out of me. The longest relationship I have been in was a month and my feelings weren't anywhere near what I am starting to feel for Ricky. I had an attraction to my ex but everything was only surface level. It was also hard for me because I spent a lot of the time overthinking and hiding myself. Although Ricky doesn't know everything yet the things he does know about me doesn't deter him. I just hope I'm not moving too fast. I don't want to make a fool of myself and get my heart broken in the process.

Ricky opens the car door and puts his hand in to help me out.

I hand him my keys and say, "I think you better drive."

He laughs, "Yeah, that edible must have hit., huh?"

I smile a dopey smile, "Is it that obvious?"

"Yes, just a wee bit," he laughs.

We get into the car and start heading toward the exit. I no longer see spirits throughout the cemetery. I start laughing and cover my face. "We just had sex in a cemetery," I say through laughs.

"So much for hallowed grounds. At least the spirits got a show," he responds.

If he only knew.

Fall has always been my favorite season. The weather is perfect. It's not too hot like summer and not too cold like winter. It's also Halloween time, my favorite holiday! Today is the perfect example as there is a small breeze but it's a comfortable temperature.

It's been a week since we visited my Grams and everything has been so great. Ricky pulls into the lot with the sign that reads, "Murphy's Pumpkin Farm Est. 1990" with different-sized pumpkins painted underneath. The parking lot is pretty full but not completely packed. We had to park a little bit away from the entrance. I am excited like a little kid to be doing this. I am almost skipping through the parking lot.

"You are so cute when you're excited," Ricky says with humor in his voice.

I laugh, "I just haven't been to one of these since I was a kid. I can't wait to get inside. I hope it's everything I remember."

There is a large tent to get tickets and purchase pumpkins on the way out. The ticket attendant is a young guy wearing jeans and a long-sleeved black shirt with the farm's logo in the upper right corner and the other corner has a name tag that says Charlie. He also wears a beanie hat with the logo on the very front, his sandy hair sticks out underneath.

"Is this your first time at Murphy's?" He asks.

We both shake our heads yes.

He pulls out a map and opens the map for us. It's a cartoon version of what the park looks like. "There is a haunted hayride and then a tractor ride to take guests deeper into the patch itself. The haunted hayrides take you near the Cherry Oak Woods and last about 20 minutes. If you are looking to do that when it's darker, I would plan ahead and get in line, the sooner the better. This area is where all of our restaurant stands are. We just added a new doughnut stand and there is a stand that sells giant turkey legs. There are rides, a petting zoo, a photo booth, and a haunted house. Our souvenir store is in the shape of a barn and is located next to the haunted house. If you guys get lost or have any questions there are always staff members around. Have a great time."

I smile, "Thanks so much!"

We head inside and there are different areas of pumpkins.

There is a sign for the haunted house and Ricky says, "Come on!"

The haunted house is cheesy with animatronic monsters popping up, the walls glow with neon green writing saying “turn back” and “beware”. We are in and out within five minutes.

I laugh, “I hope the haunted hayride is scary.”

We ride all the rides we can screaming and laughing along the way. The food area is close by and he decides on having the popular turkey leg and I have a burger. Then, we each have a funnel cake. I am excited to get to the photo booth.

I am standing close in front of him taking in his handsome features. His hair is loose and wavy today, he trimmed up his beard for our date so it’s a little closer to his face, and his brown eyes look bright with excitement. He looks like a kid on Christmas. Seeing him like this makes me want to jump into his arms and kiss him furiously. But there are children present.

I wrap my arms around his neck, “Are you having fun?”

He smiles, “I am. I already know you are!”

I kiss his lips, “Hell yes!”

We get to the photo shoot area that's decked out for fall. We are next in line and we can see inside. There are two rows to sit on with pumpkins around and bales of hay. The family before us takes up both rows, the parents sit on top and their three kids sit in the front.

When you see a family like that it kind of makes you wonder if you will have something like that.

It’s our turn and we sit side by side. The photographer comes and moves a pumpkin to each side of us. Ricky has his arm around me. The photographer says, “Say cheese.” We smile and the camera clicks.

Ricky looks over to me and I look over to him. We are locked into each other’s eyes and the photographer snaps a photo and then he kisses me and the photographer snaps again.

“You are so beautiful,” he whispers.

“And you are so handsome! If there weren’t so many families around, I’d jump your bones. Pun intended.” I whisper back.

He wears a goofy grin, “you are such a dork.”

“Your photos will print out over there,” the photographer says pointing to the other side of the booth.

Our photos print and we take them outside of the booth to inspect them. We are picture-perfect. Without consulting with each other we both wore red and black flannels with black shirts, jeans, and black boots. The only difference is my top is low cut and revealing and my boots are knee-high.

“Aww aren’t we so cute,” I say.

“The perfect couple,” he says with a smile on his face.

I hold his hand and start to pull him with me to the next adventure but he pulls me back and wraps his arms around me, holding me close, “I don’t think that I have formally asked you but will you be my girlfriend? I said it by your grandma’s grave but realize I never really asked you.” He asks.

I smile a big toothy grin, “Mr. Sandoval, are you asking me to go steady?”

He laughs and says, “Well, I don’t have a special pin to give you or anything like they did in the 50s but yes I am asking you to go steady.”

I laugh and tsk him, “No pin? I guess we will see how the night goes before I give you that answer.”

“Are you sure about that?” He asks before giving me a long kiss. My body falls into his with ease and I have to stop myself from moaning.

I push him lightly away and roll my eyes, “Fine, you win, I’m yours.”

He smiles a cocky grin, “I knew I could convince you.”

“Yeah, flattery does get you far,” I mutter playfully defeated.

Before we know it, the sun starts going down so we quickly make our way to the hayride. The Haunted Hayride is a tractor pulling passenger trailers that have long benches to sit on. I see it straight ahead. We get there just in time to get on the next tractor.

“Come on,” I pull Ricky with me.

An older man holds the gate open for us. He is a cute little old man with a white comb over, square glasses, light brown eyes, the smile on his face enhances the wrinkles on his face, and his name tag says, Walter. He reminds me of a happier version of the old man from the movie *Up*.

“You made it just in time,” he says.

When we get to the stairs to the bed of the tractor Walter holds his hand out to help me with the little bit of height to get up and on the stairs.

There is a spot in the corner of the bed. We take it.

Walter closes the gate and says, “Have fun” to everyone.

There is a speaker in the car and a man's voice says, "Welcome to Murphy's, I hope you are all ready to be spooked. There are some rules I need to go over before we can get this show on the road. Number 1 all body parts must remain in the trailer at all times, so no trying to leave midway through when you're shaking in your boots. Number 2 there are going to be performers throughout the ride who are characters they are not allowed to touch you so you are not allowed to touch them. Number 3 try not to wet yourself with fear." The last one gets a few chuckles.

The tractor pulls off and the Michael Myers theme song plays. The tractor is slowly moving and once we get to the entrance of the woods where there are actors making ghost "OOOOOO" noises. We all look around waiting for something and then there are screams heard from different parts of the trailer where some of the actors dressed in tacky costumes have jumped on the side and shake the barrier. I sit there feeling like this would be terrifying if we were five years old. I decide it's time to be a brat. I start to pet his thigh, slowly making my way towards his crotch.

"What are you doing?" Ricky looks at me with a confused but playful look,

"Want to go have some real fun?" I ask.

He nods, "But, how?"

I move my head motioning him and show him the exit. We make sure no one is watching and we slip out of the back of the trailer where the opening is for people to get on and off. Luckily, nobody notices us including the actors who are all circling the trailers focusing on scaring the young kids.

I grab his hand laughing, "Come on hurry before they catch us." We run into the tall trees, deep enough that we can't see the lights of the attractions. We are a little out of breath and laughing.

Ricky starts kissing me pushing my back into the closest tree. I wrap my body around him, matching his energy. The smell of his musky cologne is intoxicating. I take the control back, wiggle away from him, and twist us around, pushing his back against the tree.

"Let's play a game," I say playfully.

He laughs, "Okay, what game do you want to play in the dark in the woods?"

I smile wickedly, "Well, it is Halloween time so why don't you play the killer coming after me and I play the horny teen you want to butcher?"

“So, basically you want me to chase you? What do I get if I catch you?” He asks.

I push my body on him, “Whatever you want. But if you don’t find me in less than 10 minutes you don’t get anything.”

There’s a look of challenge in his eyes, “You’re on.” He takes control again pushing me to the nearest tree and kissing my lips. He puts his body against mine and I can feel his hard thick cock. Ricky pulls his pocket knife out and flicks it open. He runs the sharp tip along the nape of my neck, not breaking any skin. I am wet from the thought of being chased and the danger that comes from feeling his knife so close to my skin.

“No being a sore loser when I catch you though,” he says playfully.

“Yeah, tell yourself that. Oh, and I get at least a two-minute head start which is fair I think,” I say rubbing my nose on his with Eskimo kisses.

He sighs, “Fine but the time starts now.” He turns away and I bolt like there’s a fire lit under my ass.

I have never been a runner and when I say that I’m not being coy or cutesy. Running has never been my strong suit nor do I want it to be my strong suit. Before long I hear, “Cara, I’m going to find you.” It’s in the distance but not too far off.

Fuck! I keep going, pushing my legs as far as they go. There are a lot of lifted branches that I have to avoid. There are so many trees I am praying that the sound of my feet crunching the leaves doesn’t give me away. My lungs are burning. After what feels like an eternity, I see a wide tree and hide behind it. I am out of breath

. I work to slow my breathing and my beating heart. As subtle as I can I peek over the side of the tree. Nothing. Oh, shit maybe I beat him!

Just then I feel arms wrap around my waist pulling me away.

“Damn it,” I whine. He pulls us to the ground and then rolls us over so I’m facedown. His body is so close to mine.

If this was a horror movie, I would be the first to die. The slutty girl always does first and I would constitute me wanting to fuck my boyfriend in the woods as slutty. I pretend like I am fighting him and then in feigned defeat say, “You have me. Now what are you going to do to me?”

He replies by moving his hand to my throat and moving my head up. He is kissing the side of my neck slowly. With his other hand, he is tracing my back with the tip of his knife. I shudder, a chill raking through me. My wetness between my thighs increases.

“Cara,” Ricky’s voice sing songs in the distance.

What the fuck? Before I can scream the hand tightens around my throat closing off my airways.

The stench of death and decay starts filling my nostrils. I try to move my body from side to side with no results. I can feel his erection against my lower back. I try to dig my fingernails into his arm. My eyes frantically look around me but the only things ahead are more trees. I try to scream and the only sound that comes out of my mouth is air. He drags his knife down my clavicle. I can feel it slice me.

The hand around my throat grows tighter and tighter. His breathing gets deeper from the exertion. It is so tight it is painful. I try bucking him off and it does absolutely nothing. I’m seeing spots in my vision. Tears start spilling from my eyes. This is how it ends all because I wanted to be kinky.

Before I completely go unconscious, the hand unwraps itself and the body gets off of me. I turn to the side gasping for air. My lungs and throat burn. Tears are still spilling from my eyes. I feel a hand on my shoulder and crawl away from it. I turn around.

“Cara, are you okay?” Ricky says concern laced in his voice. I move further away, “Don’t touch me!”

Ricky gets down to my level but keeps his distance. “What’s wrong? What happened?” He asks.

My whole body is shaking and I start crying. I can’t even get the words out.

Ricky tentatively comes to my side and pulls me close.

“You’re okay Cara. You’re safe. I won’t let any harm come to you,” he says soothingly. His familiar musky cologne envelopes me and reassures me that this is him. Ricky tries again to get an explanation out of me again, but all I want to do is run.

“Let’s just get the fuck out of here, I’ll tell you everything when we get in the car.”

Enrique's Perspective

The car ride home from Murphy's is long as Cara sits hugging her knees to her chest. I have no idea exactly what happened in the woods but whatever it was scared her. She has been distant ever since.

"Cara, what happened?" I ask tentatively.

She looks towards me, "To be honest Ricky I don't even know. I am still trying to piece everything together and understand."

I don't respond right away seeing if she will continue but she doesn't. "Maybe, I can help?" I ask.

She shakes her head, "you're going to think I'm crazy."

I raise an eyebrow at her, "Really? I told you about the crazy nightmares I've had. You never judged me and I will not judge you. I promise."

She contemplates my words and then huffs. "I hid behind a tree and I felt someone wrap their arms around my waist. Then, they pulled me to them and got on top of me. I thought it was you because they were kissing my neck and feeling me up. They had their hands around my throat. They put the tip of their knife along my clavicle. I thought you were just being kinky but then I heard you calling my name. I tried fighting with all of my might. Then, I smelled rotting flesh and it freaked me out even more. I thought I was going to die, the hand just got tighter and tighter around my neck. Then, they just let go and moved away. That's why when you came up, I panicked. I thought it was whoever did that to me." Cara is sobbing and I am not sure what to do.

"Did they say anything? Or was there anything besides the rotting flesh smell that was memorable?" I ask.

She shakes her head, "Like I said I had no idea. I thought it was you."

"I didn't see anyone when I got to you. Are you sure that as quickly as they got off of you, I went to touch you?" I ask.

"It was like a one-second difference. I'd stake my life on it," she says seriously.

Her crying becomes more intense and her breathing becomes labored. It's clear to me she's on the verge of a panic attack. I see an empty parking lot and turn into it. I pull in the closest spot and get out. She doesn't question it or even notice. I go to her side and open the car door. I put my hands on each side of her face.

“Cara, you have to breathe. Take deep breaths.” I say taking deep breaths myself to set the pace. Her eyes are frantic and looking everywhere around. “Cara, look at me.” She is still looking around.

“Look at me,” I say a little more forcefully. Her green eyes meet mine and her pupils are huge. “We are out of there, we are safe. I won’t let anything happen to you. Say it with me. I’m out of there, I’m safe, nothing will harm me.”

She hesitates but then in almost a whisper repeats the mantra. She’s almost there and almost calmed down. I bring my lips to hers and feel the tension leave her body. It takes about twenty minutes but she calms down completely. She still has tears streaming down her face but her breathing is normal. I go to move away and she pulls me back kissing my lips.

“Thank you, Ricky. This was honestly one of the scariest nights of my life and you have been so supportive. I don’t know how I would’ve gotten through it if I were with anyone else.”

I give her a peck on her lips, “That’s what I’m here for, to help and protect. I promise you that I will find out who did this and when I do, they won’t want to mess with girls in the woods ever again. I wish I had gotten to you sooner....” I start to say.

“Enrique you couldn’t have known. The sick fuck who did this saw their opportunity and took it. I am more freaked out than anything. I know it could’ve been a lot worse than it was. I’ve never felt like I was going to die,” she says a shiver wracking through her.

“I promise you that as long as you’re with me I’ll make sure you never go through that again,” I say. I wipe the tears from her eyes.

She smiles and kisses me, “Can we just go home so you can hold me for a little bit, fuck me, and then knock out and pretend this awful night never happened?”

I nod, “Whatever you want. I’ll even let you take control of the music on the way home.”

She smiles and says, “okay.”

I get into the car and she goes through her phone. She starts looking up music. She plays “Never Going Back Again” by *Fleetwood Mac*. I can see why she picked this song because the sound of the guitar is soothing.

I look over to Cara and she is doing an impression of an air guitar and both of her hands are facing upwards. Her fingers move wildly in the air. I can’t help but laugh.

She smiles, “What?”

I clear my throat not knowing if it was the right time. "I'm sorry but you're not even close to having the correct hand placement to play the guitar," I say laughing.

She laughs and rolls her eyes, "Don't be jealous of my super awesome air guitar."

I laugh, "Usually one hand is face up and one is face down."

"I didn't know that air guitaring was so technical," she teases.

"Oh yeah, air guitaring has its rules," I laugh.

She snorts, "If you are judging my air guitaring lord knows what you will think of my air drumming." She proceeds to cue up another song.

I laugh, "Oh no."

When the song ends the next song begins and instantly from the first few beats, I know. It's "In The Air Tonight" by *Phil Collins*.

I look at her and say, "More than anything this makes me want to smoke a joint."

She wiggles her eyebrows, "Maybe we should. Would take the edge off of tonight."

"What princess wants princess gets," I say showing her a stash I have in the middle compartment.

"Fuck yes," she says.

The build-up to the hardcore drumming approaches and comically Cara gets into position holding invisible drumsticks. Then, it happens and she is moving her hands around and whipping her head around. I start laughing. She's so cute when she's dorky.

She laughs and says, "Hey, my Grams taught me these techniques and she was the Queen of air drumming."

I laugh and look over and I can tell a little bit of tension has eased. I feel like there is a chance that maybe we can get past what happened tonight. Everything feels so normal and good.

We decide to go to her house because it's closer. On the way home we stopped for munchies and drinks. Cara strips all her clothes off and I notice she has a scratch across her clavicle.

"Oh shit, that looks pretty bad," I say.

"Really? Where?" She says, panicked. I come closer. The cut seems pretty deep but not enough to cause damage. I lightly touch it and she hisses in pain. "From here to here," I say, running my finger right next to it.

"Fuck," she says.

I go into the bathroom, wash my hands, and I find a triple antibiotic ointment. She sits on the bed and she is completely naked.

"I'm going to put some triple antibiotic ointment on it, it will help it," I say softly. She nods. I put a dot of it on my index finger and start putting it on the scratch. As I am moving down her clavicle, I notice something is inside the deeper part.

"Cara, I don't want to scare you but there's something inside of your cut. Would it be okay if I get it out?" I say slowly.

She panics, "What could it be?"

I shake my head, "We won't know until we get it out. Do you have tweezers?"

She nods, "In the medicine cabinet."

I go and grab them. I try to position myself in a way that does not put pressure on her. "Cara, can you lay on your back so you can be more comfortable?" I say.

She nods and lays on the bed. I turn on her bedside lamp to get better lighting. I still can't tell exactly what it is. I find the tip and with a little pulling, I am able to get it out. "I got it," I say. It's a small white and brown feather.

"What is it?" She asks sitting up. I don't answer her right away and she panics more.

"Ricky?" She says.

I stand in front of her and show her the feather. "What the fuck?" She almost shouts. I examine it closely, "It looks like an owl's feather to me, the pattern reminds me of the owl feathers I'd find around the ranch I'd visit in Mexico as a kid... but how?"

She takes it from my hand and turns it over. "Owls, what is the significance of owls?" She says thinking out loud. Then, she gets off her bed and heads over to her bookshelf. I follow her.

The bookshelf has four long shelves. She runs her fingers along the spines. Her finger lands on a leather spine. When she moves her finger, I take the book out and immediately drop it.

"There's no fucking way," I say.

"What's wrong?" Cara asks, coming to my side.

I pick up the book and rub the intricate details, just like I remember. I open to the cover page and sure enough Dark Entities Across Cultures Volume I. She reads the title over my shoulder.

"This is the book that was in my last nightmare," I say.

There's silence for a moment. But then she takes the book from my hands and sits on the bed. "Maybe there's something in here we need to see," she says. She flips slowly and there are different drawings throughout. One catches my eye, "wait."

Cara stops and pushes the pages flat. For a moment I see a flash of something in Cara's eyes. Recognition maybe? It's there for only a second, so I don't push it.

There it is drawn, the creature from my nightmares. "This creature was a part of my nightmares as well," I say honestly.

It's a skull head, with a feather headdress, and around its head are drawings of skeletons, owls, and bats.

"Mictlantecuhтли, Aztec Lord of the Land of the Dead. He and his wife Mictecacihuatl run the underworld together. He can take the shape of different animals such as owls, bats, and spiders. He is the ruler of the underworld and seeks order. Those who die from childbirth, war, sacrifice, lighting, and certain diseases had to go through the trials of the nine stages of hell. When they got to the final stage, they would either cease to exist or would find their home," She reads.

I shake my head taking in all of the information. "What does any of this have to do with me?" I say.

She looks over to me shyly, "I've seen him too. In my dreams. It felt so real. I keep seeing owls randomly. I saw one the first time you were at my house."

"Fuck," I say loudly.

Cara is confused and comes to me wrapping her arms around my shoulders, "What do you think this means?"

"It's not good Cara. I don't want you to think I'm being funny but it seems like someone put a hex on us," I say.

Cara's face turns confused, "A hex? How does that even work? And why us?"

I puzzle it over in my head for a moment, "I'm not sure. I don't think a god of death just pops up out of the blue and starts terrorizing people. I'm sure there's intent behind this. It just feels witchy."

We start to try and do a deep dive into the deity. We light a joint and pass it to each other between puffs to help us settle our nerves. For something so malevolent, it seems like there's little to no useful information online. All we come across are articles about the mythology, but nothing about any modern encounters or how it is worshiped or summoned. We're so desperate we end up on page 20 of a Google search.

"How the fuck does anyone even come across this deity? Much less how to summon it and get it to do their bidding."

Cara twirls in her desk chair slowly as she gathers her thoughts, “Well maybe we’re going about this the wrong way. He’s an Aztec god. I don’t think just any witch is going to know about him.”

“Brujas,” I say abruptly, “My family would talk about scary things late into the late hours of some of our get togethers, one of the things they’d talk about is stories of Brujas in their old town. People would go to them for a variety of reasons, medicine, help finding love, even curses. It was best not to get on their bad side as they could pray to the old gods. There’s even a myth of them turning into Lechuza’s, giant owls with a face resembling a human.”

I type in Mictlantecuhtli and Brujas in the search bar. At first, there are no promising links, but then I come across a link to a Brujas thread. I open it and am taken to a page that looks like it hasn’t been updated since the early 2000’s. Sure enough, the linked thread is about Mictlantecuhtli and how to summon him. The original poster goes on about how they want to get back at a family member for undisclosed reasons. A few replies in a poster tell her that he should only be summoned in the direst situations, as once summoned he requires a soul as payment.

“Oh, fuck Cara. This is serious. He requires a soul as payment once he’s summoned, whatever the fuck that means.”

Cara has moved over to the bed and lays next to me, “You think there’s someone in our lives that hates us that much to want to bring death itself to us?”

I stare at the ceiling thinking of all the people who I’ve wronged in the past.

Cara runs her hands through my hair, “I think we’ve done enough research for tonight. I think we need to relax our minds and start fresh tomorrow.”

I look at her realizing how tightly wound up I am, “Yeah, you’re probably right. Let’s just hold each other and clear our thoughts.”

She turns over and I scoot in close to her back wrapping my arms around her. I breathe in the sweet scent of her hair and feel an instant calm.

She begins to move her hips, pushing her ass up against my cock. Before I can say anything, I feel my cock harden and it pushes against her.

My hands move up to her neck squeezing slightly. She moans in response. I use my hand and move up the side of her nightgown. Her movement becomes more intense on my cock as I get closer to pushing it completely up. I move her hair and I kiss the side of her neck.

She flips onto her back and pushes her nightgown off over her head completely. I look at her hardened nipples and my mouth waters. She pulls me down by the collar of my shirt and kisses my lips.

When I am above her, she uses one hand and starts stroking my cock letting her fingers graze my balls. I take the opportunity and put my mouth around her right nipple. Sucking it and licking around the hardened pebble. Her breathing increases along with the pace she strokes my cock. I move to the other one looking into her green eyes as I do. Without breaking eye contact my mouth meets her other nipple. Enjoying the way her nipple feels between my teeth.

“Fuck me, please fuck me,” she moans.

I move myself kissing her breast and got off of the bed to remove my clothes. She stands with me and points to the edge of the bed.

“Sit,” she commands.

“Yes Ma’am,” I say, doing as she says.

She lifts my face with her finger and kisses my lips lightly bringing my hands to her ass to grab it. Then, she turns away from me and sits down slowly on my cock, taking every inch. She moans when she completely sits down. Then, she moves up and down quickly using my knees to help her stay balanced. My hands cup her breasts kneading them. My cock becomes slick with her wetness as she bounces up and down. Her skin is soft in my rough hands. I feel her tighten herself around me.

She turns to face me and says, “Get up on the bed.”

I push myself up towards the pillows and she straddles my waist. She slips onto my cock with ease and moves her hips around in a circle. She moves up and down taking her time. Then, I grab her hips and start pounding her onto my cock roughly. Her tits bounce up and down quickly.

“Ricky,” she moans.

She digs her nails into my shoulders. I feel her tighten around me and then she moans out with an orgasm. Wetness coats my cock. The more she slides up and down the closer I feel myself coming. “I’m going to cum,” I say. Then, I bust inside her holding her down to stop her from moving.

Cara smiles down at me shyly, “I’ve never been on top. Sorry if I...” I bring her down to kiss her to stop her from talking and say, “You were perfect.”

“Ricky?” She says, avoiding my eyes.

“Yes?” I ask.

“Promise me we are going to be, okay? Because all this stuff has me freaked out.” She says.

I kiss her deeply and say, “I’m not sure what the future holds, but I promise you I am going to do my best to get to the bottom of this and stop whatever this is that is happening.” She nods and gives me a deep kiss back.

Cara's Perspective

I've never been to an Oktoberfest celebration before. When Ricky invited me, he explained that he wanted me to formally meet his roommates/bandmates I acted like it was the greatest idea but inside I cringed. Their last encounter with me was them gearing up to defend themselves and Ricky against a biker gang. I'm hoping that if they see Ricky and I together they will at least see that I truly care for him. We have about thirty minutes until they start their set. I am third-wheeling it with Trevor and Hunter.

We walk in and there is a banner hanging from two trees that says, "Oktoberfest" and there are pumpkins painted all around it. Chapelton is considered a small town and it seems like every single person in town is in attendance tonight. To the left is a bunch of carnival games lined up in two rows across from each other. Behind that is a bunch of carnival rides in motion with lines in front of them. To the left are two rows filled with booths for merchandise, food, and different breweries. Behind them leads to the stage area where 9 Circles will be playing. There is already a large crowd there listening to another band play.

One of the first stands going in that direction is for Bratwurst. It is a white trailer with blue and white striped awnings, and on top is a lit-up sign that says Bratwurst and shows a picture of the sausage.

"Hey Babe, do you want a Bratwurst?" Trevor asks Hunter.

Hunter looks him up and down suggestively. "I want your Bratwurst," Hunter says.

I snort. Trevor laughs and shakes his head, "Well, I'm hungry for FOOD. Do you guys want anything?"

Hunter shrugs, "I guess I'll have one."

"Cara?"

I shake my head side to side, "No thanks."

Trevor walks to the line. Hunter wraps his arm in the nook of mine. "So, what do you think of him?" Hunter asks.

There is hope in his hazel eyes and he has a smile on his face. I think about it for a moment.

“He’s different from what you usually go for but I think that’s good for you. Trevor surprises me, especially coming from a biker gang. I thought he would be more rough and tough. Not that I thought he would be mean to you or something. He just seems so patient with you.”

We both look over to Trevor who is standing in line. He is wearing a black shirt with a leather vest and jeans, his hair is in a pony, and he is completely unaware that we are looking at him.

“I like him a lot. I don’t want to jinx anything but I am really happy so far. How’s it going with Mr. Thick Dick?”

I laugh, “Thick Dick? Maybe, I am a little too detailed with my stories.”

“Those are the best kind though... So, details, details.”

I hesitate, “I don’t want to freak you out or anything.” He groans, “Oh god, he has a criminal record? A crazy ex?”

“No. We both have been having nightmares, of the same things. We sort of kind of think that it has to do with the Aztec God of Death and a hex of some kind. We are still trying to figure it all out. Besides that, we are more than great. It’s weird to say it but this feels like the closest thing I have had to a relationship ever. It makes me nervous and excited.”

Hunter huffs, “A hex? Maybe you can talk to this girl Penelope I know. I mean I think it’s only rumors but people say she’s a witch. I mean I never really believed in mediums until I became friends with you.”

“We are going to hold off for a little bit. But I will keep that in mind.”

I’ve known Hunter since my freshman year of high school. At first, we had friends from a mutual friend circle. So, we would see each other at every social gathering. Hunter was the one to make the first move. We ended up getting drunk at a party and decided from that day on we would be best friends and became inseparable. I was there for him a lot with his breakups and he did his best to help me break out of my shell.

One day his dead Uncle came to me and told me that Hunter was looking for a medal that he would often show him. It was a military medal his uncle received after fighting in the Vietnam War. He would often show him the medal when he was a child. His Uncle Earl suffered from PTSD and dealt with a lot of hallucinations. Fourth of July was the hardest day for him with all the fireworks.

Before he died, he ended up storing items in the attic of Hunter's house. Hunter was hesitant but eventually looked and found the medal. From that day on he stopped having doubts about mediums.

We only walk a little bit ahead making sure not to get too far from Trevor. That's when I see it. There is a booth with a banner hung that depicts a dark gray skull with 9 white overlapping circles in the center of its head, this time 9 Circles is written in black with that logo in the center. There is different merchandise hung from shirts, to beanies, to sweaters. An idea comes to me.

"Come on," I say, pulling Hunter with me.

We go to the booth and a heavyset man with dark eyes, a long beard, and wavy hair is manning the booth. There is currently a customer ahead of us. "Thank you so much for your support," he says, handing them a bag. His face is stony but his words are happy.

"Can I help you?" He asks.

"Hi, I'll take two shirts, size large."

"You got it!"

He grabs the shirts, "That'll be \$40."

I go in my crossbody smiling pumpkin-shaped glittery purse and grab the cash. I hand it over to him. He takes it and hands me the black bag. He delivers the same line he delivered to the last customer. I smile at him, "Thank you."

Hunter and I walk away and I pull one of the shirts out. I take off my plaid, wool coat and hand it to him. I pull the shirt over my head. I stand back waiting for a response from Hunter. Instead, he looks at me as though he is the head of a prestigious fashion line and I am a model wearing one of his creations.

"What?" I ask.

"I have an idea."

With Hunter his ideas are either a disaster or amazing, there is no in-between. I, being his best friend, have been pulled into many situations that were his idea. He walks back over to the booth.

"Do you have scissors?" Hunter asks the man.

He looks at him skeptically. He goes through some things and pulls out a pair of black-handled scissors with long blades. "Yes." The worker hands them to Hunter, who takes them with a smile. "Thanks," he says.

Oh god, what is he going to do to me? He comes to me and cuts it into a crop top. Then, starts making cuts in the bottom of the shirt. I wonder where this is going to go. Snip, snip, snip. He then cuts around the sleeves of the shirt. I can't imagine how this is going to look. He stands back to admire his work. I run my fingers along the fringe that is now at the bottom of my shirt.

He grabs his phone and says, "Smile." I smile and wait. He comes over to me. The band's logo is directly in the center and the bottom is fringe and there are no sleeves. It is paired with my blue jeans and combat boots and my hair is in half pony pigtails. It is definitely out of my comfort zone but looks so cute.

"Oh, he's going to eat it up," Hunter says, proud of himself.

Trevor comes back with their food and we start heading towards the stage.

There is a large crowd. It seems as though the crowd is never-ending. Once they scarf down their sausages we stand there. Hunter loops his arm around each of us. "Come on, we are going to get in closer," he says. He acts like he is a football player who plows through other players. "Excuse us," Hunter says loudly. He stops when we are in the center of the crowd and towards the front. It's a perfect spot because it gives you a full view of the stage.

Ricky and his bandmates are on stage getting ready for their set. They stand in formation and the lead singer does a nod.

The lights come onto the stage. The lead singer Shawn's black wavy hair is down past his shoulders, he has dark eyes, and he has a short beard. He has a black shirt with a sexy she-devil on her knees, his tattoos peek out underneath, dark jeans, and combat boots.

"Hello Oktoberfest, we are 9 Circles! How's everyone doing out there tonight?" He says in the microphone.

The crowd hoots and hollers. "I said how is everyone doing out there tonight?" He tries again.

The crowd hoots and hollers louder. Henry the bassist holds up devil horns. He has long light brown hair and bushy eyebrows, he wears a black shirt, a black and gray flannel with jeans

. Liam hits his drumsticks together. He is in the back and his drum set has the band logo in the center. He is bald, with a long beard, he is slender, tall which is obvious by how much of him can be seen from the audience, he is wearing a black shirt and jeans.

Lastly, I look at Ricky who is towards the right of the stage. He has on a black cut-off shirt with a skull showing off his muscular tattooed arms, jeans, and combat boots. I'm soaked just looking at him.

"We are going to start with Mutilate the King," Shawn growls.

The music gets going and I can't keep my eyes off of Ricky. He is focused while also taking in the atmosphere. My eyes run up and down his body taking in every detail.

People in the crowd are headbanging. I follow suit and move my body to the music. I didn't wear any underwear in case there was an opportunity for us to be alone. I slowly regret that as my clit runs against the seam of my jeans. The wetness grows between my legs.

The song ends and I stop moving. "All right I'm going to need everyone to put their horns up," Shawn says. A lot of the audience members put their hands up and stick two fingers up in the air. "This one is Screaming Eyes," Shawn growls.

The music is heavy and Shawn screams into the mic. Everyone moves their arm up and down to the music. I follow suit, that sensation coming back of me rubbing against my jeans.

My eyes lock onto Ricky and my mind wanders. I picture myself moving on his cock like I am to the music. His eyes on my face and his hands cupping my breast. The set continues that way. Before I know it, it ends.

"Thanks so much for listening to us. We are on all social media platforms. Be sure to follow us."

My stomach twists into knots. It's time to meet the band.

Enrique's Perspective

As much as I tried to let my eyes wander through the crowd, they kept going back to her. She was really into the music surprisingly. We load our stuff into the van which is parked behind the stage and then we head over to the concessions.

Cara, Hunter, and Trevor are standing right at the edge waiting for us. When she sees me her eyes light up and she runs over to me. I stand and wait for her as she jumps into my arms and wraps her legs around my waist. She kisses me on the lips and I eagerly oblige.

Hunter clears his throat and she blushes as she moves her face back from mine. I give her one more peck and set her down with ease.

Cara looks down sheepishly. I hold her hand in mine.

"This is Shawn, that's Henry, and the baldie is Liam," I say.

"Hey, you guys said chicks dig the bald look," he responds.

"Not if they look like a scrotum," Henry retorts.

Liam punches him in the arm. "The best-looking scrotum you've ever laid eyes on," Liam says, batting his lashes. Everyone laughs.

The one thing I can appreciate about Cara is that most of the time I know what she's thinking. Her facial expressions and body language are easy to read. I know she is nervous. I lean down close to her, "Don't be nervous, the guys are nice. They have been wanting to meet you."

She nods and bites her bottom lip. I look around at the booths around us and I see an indoor stand for beer.

"Why don't we get a beer?" I say to everyone. Everyone agrees and we head over.

It's kind of packed but there's a large enough group of us where we can fight our way in. Everyone in the room is standing and there is one long makeshift bar with three different beer tap handles. We all order but I pay for everyone. The bartender sets down seven huge dimpled beer mugs with a little bit of foam at the top.

I hold up my glass. "Cheers to a great show," I say.

They all follow suit and we clink glasses. We take a drink and put it down on the counter. Everyone except Cara who is chugging her beer. We all watch her in fascination. She gets down to almost the bottom and slams it down. She's red from her neck up to her cheeks.

“Damn, looks like your girl can out drink you, Ricky,” Shawn teases.

Before I can respond she says, “Easily.”

I look at her surprised and laugh. “You think you can out drink me? And beer of all drinks?” I ask.

She gives a wicked smile, “Yes. I was chugging kegs in high school, baby.”

I laugh, “You’re on.”

“I don’t know Sandoval, I think she’s gonna beat you,” Liam says.

“How about we take bets?” Shawn asks.

“\$20 bucks on Cara,” Trevor says confidently.

“\$10 on Cara,” Henry chimes.

“\$20 on Cara,” Liam laughs.

“I guess I’ll do \$10 on Ricky,” Hunter says.

I laugh, “At least one person has faith in me.”

The bartender brings both glasses. Cara and I face each other like it’s a standoff. We both have our hands around the handle of the glass. Our group circles us with Shawn in the middle. He acts as the referee.

“On your marks, get set, chug,” Shawn shouts.

“Chug, chug, chug,” they all say in unison.

It makes me feel like I am in high school. I am determined to win, and my competitive side coming out. I look across from me and Cara is going hard. The beer I am drinking has a grainy taste mixed with a little bit of foam. I am almost there but from the looks of it, Cara is going to beat me.

Cara slams her glass down and goes, “Woo.”

They all high-five her and money is passed around. She puts her fists on her hips and smugly says, “I win.”

“I let you win,” I lie with a shrug.

“Damn, Ricky, I thought you had better throat game,” Hunter teases.

Cara stands chest to chest with me and shakes her head side to side. “Keep telling yourself that, buddy,” she teases.

I quirk an eyebrow at her, “Buddy?”

She sticks her tongue out at me.

The rest of the group finishes their drinks and then we go to walk around. We walk in rows and Shawn walks next to me. “So, Cara, what are your intentions with our boy Ricky?” He says, in a playful way.

She rubs her thumb and pointer finger along her chin like she is deep in thought. I laugh and roll my eyes. "I haven't had many long-term relationships so I'm looking to try it out, hopefully," she responds, honestly.

That piques Shawn's interest. "If you don't mind me asking, why haven't you been in a lot of long-term relationships?" he asks.

A nervous look is on her face as she tries to think of how to answer the question. Which brings up a lot of questions in my mind. But I wait patiently. "Honestly, I just haven't found anybody I had a really good connection with. I think with being so young I have met guys who were looking to just hook up which isn't me. I prefer to get to know somebody before I get to know them on that level. If that makes sense."

He nods, "I get that. Has our Ricky been respectful in that regard?"

A blush forms on her cheeks and she says, "For the most part."

"Oh, wow. You must be something because Ricky has never been one to be forward," he responds.

She looks at me with a surprised look on her face. He's right about that. I never really flirted with any girls after shows. When girls would flirt with me, I would flirt back but it wasn't an all the time thing. A lot of times they would just want to go to my place or theirs. It's just never been something I have been interested in. Not that I am entirely against it. I believe people should do what they are comfortable with. I just never was. Until that night with Cara of course. Something came over me and I just knew what I wanted and went for it.

"Really? He wasn't flirting with groupies or anything?" She asks.

He snorts, "Not that we have any groupies but no. I've never even seen him go home with a girl."

The look of surprise grows. Did she think I was that type? "What?" I ask.

She comes close to me and pecks me on the lips and says, "Glad I was your first in that regard then."

She saunters away like the sexy little minx that she is. She goes over to Hunter and locks her arm in his. Cara starts chatting away excitedly.

Shawn comes closer to me. "I think she's good for you, man." He says, slapping his arm around my shoulder.

Henry and Liam walk up. “Yeah man, I think she’s loosened you up,” Henry comments.

I look over to Liam. Out of all my friends he can sometimes be the brutally honest one. “Any girl who can drink you under the table is a winner in my book,” Liam says.

“So, you guys approve?” I ask, honestly.

“Hell yeah, man, you guys seem to vibe and it seems like you guys both are looking for the same thing. And now that you’re getting pussy you aren’t as much of a mope,” Liam responds.

I laugh, “Thanks for that.”

He slugs me in the arm, “You know I’m always going to be honest.”

“He is being honest,” Henry adds.

“I thought you might be gay or something. Shawn wasn’t just trying to sell Cara. We never have seen you chase tail,” he continues.

I shake my head, “Nah, I was just waiting for the right one.”

“Maybe, you found her,” Shawn says.

I look over to Cara who is laughing at Hunter. Her smile lights up her face. Cara has a natural beauty about her. It never seems like she’s trying hard. She also doesn’t know how beautiful she is. It’s something I hope to remind her of as much as possible. Her green eyes meet mine.

She goes from smiling to looking into my eyes seductively. She lets her eyes travel down my body and then back up to my face. It’s clear from the seductive look in her eyes and the red on her cheeks what she’s thinking.

“I think I have,” I say honestly.

Cara's Perspective

Things have been a little dark and dreary lately now that we know there is a dark spirit following us. Despite us trying to focus on each other, the deity still follows us and haunts our dreams. But Halloween is my favorite holiday and this year will be no different in how I celebrate. This year I just have a partner to dress up with.

It's the Saturday before the actual day of Halloween. Hidden Gem is having a guest DJ and they are hosting a costume party. The perfect distraction. Also, there's a chance for us to win \$200 which is cool. We stand in line to get in and even though my body is fully covered the skintight leather outfit I'm wearing does nothing to warm me up. After a lot of deliberation, we decided to dress up as *Batman* and *Catwoman*, comic book style. The security guard checks our IDs, looks us up and down, and says, "Have a good time."

We go inside and Hidden Gem has more of a club vibe than the last time I was here. There are moving lights going around the room and there is a little bit of smoke. There are four cages where dancers are moving to the beat of the music. There are two angels, one male, and one female on the right side. On the left side, there is one male devil and one female devil. The dance floor is filled. On stage is a DJ with a full set up, he's dressed like a ringmaster for a circus and the back of the stage has a graffiti-style poster that says DJ Sickn3ss. We pre-gamed before coming smoking a joint at my house but I want to get the drinks going. So, we head to the bar first.

The bar has a string light of pumpkins put across the top and there is a sign with "bloody" letters that say Happy Halloween. Of course, Kat is behind the bar and she is dressed as a sexy vampire. She wears fangs with blood on the tips and a little by her lip trailing down to her cleavage which is pushed up by a lacy black corset, she wears bright hazel contacts, and her hair is big and curled. Surprisingly, there are two seats open at the bar and we take them.

She comes to us smiling, showing off her fangs, "What can I get you two lovebirds tonight?"

"He'll take a Jack and Coke and I'll take a Bacardi and Coke," I say, beating him to the punch. He looks over at me and I stick my tongue out at him.

He laughs, "Brat."

I step closer to him getting close to his face, “Only because I want you to punish me.”

He looks at me a little shocked but doubtful, “Yeah? You think you're up for that?”

I run one of my claws along his jaw, “Try me.”

Kat brings our drinks and is gone in a flash.

Ricky gets close to me and whispers, “Be careful what you wish for.” I can't deny a chill runs down my spine and I can feel myself growing wet.

When he moves back, I look into his eyes searching for any playfulness but only find desire. I bite my bottom lip. “I guess we will see how you act,” I say defiantly.

He chuckles, “I guess we will see.” I laugh. I take a sip of my drink.

Hunter and Trevor come up to us and they are dressed as *Ash Ketchum* and *Pikachu* from *Pokémon*. “Hey Bitch,” Hunter says excitedly.

I stand up and hug both him and Trevor. “Hey! I'm so glad you guys came!” I say.

Hunter looks me up and down, “Damn bitch, pulling out all the leather huh?”

I laugh, “Whip and all.” I pull the whip that is attached to the belt that is around my waist.

Hunter grabs the whip and rolls his eyes, “A whip?”

I smile mischievously, “Yeah for later.”

I turn to look at Ricky who is blushing. Hunter makes a gagging noise. I roll my eyes and suck down the little bit that is left of my drink. Ricky orders me another. The shot queen Hunter, as I call him, decides to order us a round of Patron shots. I guess he wants to get the party going. I take the shot and wash it down with my drink. Not a good mix.

Trevor and Ricky start talking cars with Hunter shaking his head up and down at certain parts as if he knows what they are talking about. I see another bartender at the other end of the bar. She has big 80s style bleach blonde hair with a hot pink sweatband, she has pink eyeshadow on to match, she wears a plain hot pink leotard, zebra print hot pink tights, pink leg warmers, and all-white gym shoes.

“Hey Kat,” I say, waving to her. She puts up a finger to tell me one moment. She comes over and starts setting up to make a row of drinks.

“What do you need, Hun?” She asks. I lean over the bar so she can hear me better.

“Who’s the other bartender? I love her costume!” I say, excitedly.

“Come again?” She says.

I laugh, “The other bartender.”

She raises an eyebrow, “Cara, I’m the only bartender on staff tonight. Maybe you saw my manager, Vera? But she isn’t in costume.”

I slowly sit back down, “Yeah, maybe that’s it.” Obviously, I am nowhere near where I need to be to not see spirits. “When you have time can I have another and can you make it a double and four Vegas Bombs?”

She smiles, “You got it.”

Hunter comes to be right next to me. “You good, bitch? You look like you just saw a ghost,” he says. Sucking on his drink which is now empty.

I clench my teeth together. “Ugh, not tonight,” he groans. “Don’t they like take a night off or something,” he continues.

“I wish,” I groan.

He groans, “Well, guess that just means we have to put a little more work into our drinking.”

As if she could sense our need for more alcohol, Kat sets down my fresh drink and the four shots I ordered. Hunter grabs one of the shots and downs it. He looks over at Trevor and Ricky who are still engrossed in conversation and takes what was supposed to be Trevor’s shot. I follow suit. I know Ricky won’t mind.

Ricky and Trevor come back over to us. Ricky puts his arm around me. I move my body closer to him. “Are you having fun?” I ask close in his ear.

He smiles down at me and my eyes move to his lips. “Yes, so far,” he responds.

“Good. Just make sure to save energy for later.”

Movement by *Matroda* plays and Hunter grabs my hands and says, “Since I’ve known you the longest, I get the first dance.” He blows a kiss at Ricky and doesn’t wait for a response as he pulls me onto the dancefloor.

Everything is starting to hit me and I feel tipsy from the alcohol and floaty from the weed. Hunter and I move to the music, losing ourselves. As we are dancing, I can’t shake the feeling that someone is watching me. I roll my eyes, duh; I’m sure Ricky is watching me while Trevor watches Hunter.

Then, I see him, if I can call it a him. He is tall and muscular. He wears a long loincloth and an intricate Aztec collar, metal cuffs are around his biceps and wrists, his face is painted to resemble a skull and he wears a headdress with feathers. Here at Hidden Gem? I can feel my heart race with fear and adrenaline. He stands at the other side of the room in a crowd of people who seem to not notice him at all. His eyes are on me and only me.

I shake my head and ignore it. There's no fucking way. I'm sure it's someone just wearing a costume and I'm just overthinking it. The music pulls me back in and I cannot help but laugh because I'm already having such a good time.

Ricky makes his approach and says, "My turn."

The song *Falling* by *Madeaux* begins to play. He doesn't look to Hunter for a response, just puts his body in front of mine. Ricky pulls me close and our bodies are meshed together. His eyes look darker under the *Batman* mask he wears and his stubble is more defined. More than anything I can't wait to get him home but for now I want to make the most of it.

I wrap my arms around his neck and rub my body against him following the beat of the music. "I like seeing this side of you," I say in his ear."

"I could say the same about you," he says, looking me up and down like he wants to devour me.

He leans his head down looking at my lips and I look at his. He kisses me keeping me close. I don't stop the moan that escapes my lips because I'm sure no one can hear me over the music. I am the one to break it because I know if I don't, I'll be asking him to take me somewhere where we can be alone and with how packed it is tonight there are no options.

I look into his eyes and give him a peck. I lick his closed lips bottom to top. Then, I turn around and put his hands on the sides of my body. I move my hips side to side, my ass grinding against his cock. His musky cologne invades my nose and I can feel his cock harden against me. His breath hits the exposed part of my neck and my nipples harden.

It's an amazing feeling to know when someone is attracted to you and knowing you are the one to cause their body to have an intense reaction. The sexual attraction we have to each other is palpable. I feel myself getting lost to the beat and just letting go.

Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This) by *Rezz, fksyd* begins to play overhead and my movements become slower. Sweat begins to build on my body. The lights move slowly across the crowd and passes over us. I feel it again. The feeling a prey gets when a predator is going to attack. I know I am being watched and at any moment there will be no more illusions. I see him again, the man dressed as the deity and he's closer in the crowd. The bodies around him move together so close but not touching him. His eyes pierce me. I can feel fear building inside me. I try to focus on the music but can't deny my racing heart, adrenaline starting to fill my veins.

The lights flash and move around. It seems like with each flash he gets closer and closer. The stench of death begins to fill my nose. There is a scream in the back of my throat but the alcohol and weed make everything feel like it's in slow motion. I close my eyes, trying once again to focus on the music. When I open them, he is almost standing right in front of me. I stumble back, my scream catches in my throat.

Just as I feel like I'm going to trip and fall I feel strong arms catch me and a solid frame press against my body. The smell of death that was getting stronger is replaced by Ricky's cologne.

He spins me around, "You okay baby? What happened?"

I stumble to find my words but he knows how to calm me down. Ricky tilts my face up to his and kisses my lips. I move my head back till my head hits his shoulder to give him more access. I forget the world around me and focus on the softness of his lips and the intensity of his kiss.

This time he breaks the kiss and whispers, "I'm going to get us another round." I nod and look for Hunter.

They are not far from us. Hunter and Trevor are in a hot and heavy make-out session. Their tongues are clearly in each other's mouths. I don't want to ruin the night. I have to make the most out of my favorite holiday.

I dance on my own and rub my hands up and down my own body. My eyes feel heavy as I look around the room. A dopey smile plays against my lips, the alcohol and weed finally doing their jobs again.

"You're running out of time," a deep voice says gently in my ear.

I can feel the words reverberate through my body and icy prickles form on the back of my neck. I turn around quickly and there is no one behind me. Paranoia begins to set in as I'm frozen in place, my eyes scanning the crowd for the source of the voice. "Run," the deep voice yells. I jump and look around me. Ricky appears holding a Rum and Coke for me and a bottle of Modelo for himself. I suck my drink down quickly.

"I want to go soon," I say to him.

"Do you want to wait for the results of the costume contest?"

He asks.

Dominare by *Gold Geisha* plays overhead and my heart begins to beat quickly. I shake my head; my tongue feels numb. I can't speak. "Okay, let me just finish my beer and we will go," he says, lifting his drink. He takes the empty drink from my hand and puts it on an empty table on the outskirts of the dancefloor that is filled with empty glasses. I take deep breaths in and out. I calm myself down. Ricky comes close to me looking into my eyes intensely.

"What?" I ask, feeling like he can see right through me.

He brings his mouth to my ear and nibbles my earlobe. "I just can't wait to have you to myself," he says.

I lick my lips and say, "Then take me home."

He looks into my eyes deeply and kisses me hungrily. Our tongues roll together as our bodies come close. "Let me just go pay the bill then we can head out," He responds. He gives me a parting kiss and heads to the bar.

I look for Hunter and Trevor in the crowd moving closer and closer to the stage hoping I find them. Before I can make it to the stage the same deep voice comes into my ear and yells, "Your soul will rot with his!!" I hold back the scream that is inside me and I run toward the bar.

Ricky is facing my direction and I wrap my arm around his.

"Get me the hell out of here," I say loud enough for him to hear.

"What's going on?" He asks, concerned.

I pull his arm closer to me, "We need to get out now, Ricky! I'll explain later or try to."

He nods quickly and we walk out of Hidden Gem. I pull my cell phone out of my bag and text Hunter.

Me: Sorry Bitch, had to dip! Love you, get some D!

Ricky takes his cape off and shoves it in one of his saddle bags on his bike. I get on the back of Ricky's motorcycle trying to stop myself from looking behind me. I take off my cat mask and put a helmet on my head. I put it in a saddle on the side of the bike. He starts his bike and whips off.

The alcohol plus weed plus wind is not a good combination. The world around me is unrecognizable. I put my head on Ricky's shoulder, closing my eyes. The man from the club appears clearly in my vision. I shake myself out of it and instead focus on Ricky's musky cologne which has the perfect ratio to his natural scent. My body is molded to his. He pulls up to his place and brings me inside.

We get to his attic and pulls me in close. Ricky intoxicates me like a drug. My mind turns to mush as he pushes me against the nearest wall. My back hits the wall hard but the feeling turns me on. Wetness pools between my legs as I push my body against his. His mouth is fierce like with every kiss he is eating me up.

Ricky begins stripping off his costume and I start to strip off mine. My costume feels skin-tight and feels attached to my skin as I take it off.

"No bra or panties, guess you wanted me to have easy access?" Ricky teases.

I roll my eyes, "Unfortunately for you, I didn't wear a bra or panties because the outline would've shown through the costume. Sorry to bruise your ego."

Ricky pushes me back against the wall holds my arms down by my wrists and darkly says, "Such a smart mouth. I think since you've been seeking punishment. It's time I give it to you."

He puts little bites down the side of my neck. I move my head to the side giving him more access. I try to move my body closer to his but he moves back.

Then, he grabs the back of my hair and pulls me down to my knees. My face is inches away from his fully erect penis.

"It's time to put that mouth to good use," he says. I look up innocently into his eyes and lick my lips. "Open your mouth," he demands. I comply slowly.

He massages his finger in the top of my hair and then uses it to guide my mouth around his cock. His cock hits the back of my throat. I push my tongue down to give his cock more room in my mouth. He moves in and out of my mouth hard and fast. Saliva is building up more and more with each thrust. I use my right hand and cup and rub his balls. The salty taste of precum goes down the back of my throat. I suck in my cheeks. Tears start to roll down my cheeks from the pressure. Ricky is getting closer and closer but before he cums he pulls his cock from my throat. He releases my hair.

I wrap my hand around the base of his cock and lick the tip. For good measure, I then put my mouth around his cock and shove my throat onto his cock and move it around in a circle to hit every crevice of my throat. I take my mouth off and stand up and stand toe to toe with him. I bat my lashes at him and say, "your move."

He grabs something from his side table and comes to stand behind me. He grabs my wrist and I feel them being placed into handcuffs. He puts the cuffs on tight.

My hands are behind my back. He guides me to the bed and pushes me down onto my stomach. Then, he grabs my hips and positions me so my head is on the bed and my hips are up. Ricky rubs his hand slowly across my ass cheek. My pussy clenches in anticipation.

He smacks it hard. He smacks it over and over then rubs it soothingly. It's a cycle over and over on each side. My moans and the sound of slapping fills the room. My pussy is soaked and ready. The sting sets in. He plants a small kiss where I'm sure there's redness from the impact.

Ricky positions himself and slowly pushes himself inside me. I clench my pussy around him. He does it again.

"So wet for me. I guess someone likes being punished," he says.

I shake my head defiantly, "fuck you."

His pumps grow more intense. As much as I try to stop myself, I release and cum. He spreads my cheeks and spits. He sucks his thumb into his mouth.

"What are you doing?" I say, sounding breathier than I intended to.

"Taking what's mine." He responds.

He teases my asshole with his thumb, moving it in a circular motion and letting the tip of his thumb slip in and out. The intensity of the motion on my virgin ass makes me shiver.

"Are you ready for your real punishment?" Before I can protest, he puts his thumb in my ass and two fingers in my pussy. It feels like his fingers circle inside me. At some points, it feels like he is trying to make his fingers touch inside of me.

I moan loudly. "I want your cock," I say.

"What's the magic word?" He says.

I groan, "I won't."

He moves his fingers faster. "P-p-p-p-p-please" I stutter.

Ricky takes his fingers away and shoves his cock in my throbbing pussy. He grabs my cuffed wrists and holds on as he pumps into me. This forces my chest to angle up. It feels like his cock goes deeper and deeper. He moans as he reaches a new depth with each thrust. Soon I can feel his whole body tense and heave. Then, he cums hard.

He releases the cuffs and my body hits the bed. We stay there a minute catching our breaths. Just to feel like I have a leg up I move around on his cock.

"You better stop or I will put my cock in your ass," he says.

I clench myself on him and then stop. He gives my ass a swat and whispers, "Brat."

He takes his cock out of me and I hiss. I straighten my body and lay flat on the bed. He unlocks the cuffs. I turn on my side and lean my head on my hand. He cleans himself off with a shirt from his hamper. I look at his chest and trail my eyes slowly down to his cock which is still hard.

"See anything you like?" He says playfully.

I laugh, "everything."

He smiles and then he motions side to side like he's getting in position to pounce. "Oh no," I say, trying to shield myself. He jumps onto the bed and puts a knee on each side. I squeal and he holds my wrists down. His dark eyes look into mine. There is so much emotion and intensity there. It intrigues me but also scares me. I have never been this close to another person. Ricky has seen so much of me. Love is something I have always wanted. But Ricky doesn't know all of me yet. What happens when he finds out? Does he accept me? Does he leave me? Is it something he can handle? Is this thing after us because of me? The anxiety must read in my eyes.

"What's wrong?" He asks, petting my hair.

"I am just thinking about what happened tonight. I kept seeing it everywhere in the club. It, him, whatever you want to label it. It was watching me and getting closer and closer. It even talked to me," My words rush out.

He lays on the bed beside me staring at the ceiling. I lay on his chest, "I'm sorry I'm freaking out."

He shakes his head, "It's okay I completely understand I'm just trying to find some way to stop this."

I think about it for a moment. I spot a big candle on my dresser that my Grams got me. It's white with lavender mixed. She told me it was to promote peace and to calm the spirits around me. Grams always went to a metaphysical shop right outside of town called Pentacles of the Moon. She got a lot of books from there about types of spirits, how to work with the spiritual world and things of that nature. She also would get herbs and different ingredients to make remedies at home. As she got older, she would get a lot of headaches so that's pretty much how it all started. She wanted to do more natural remedies. So, she found a book online and tried to see if she could find it in a store in the area that had it. She called around to different stores and this store was the one to have it.

"How comfortable are you with the supernatural?" I ask.

"What do you mean?" He asks.

I laugh, "Like witches, psychics, mediums..."

He shrugs, "I don't have much thought about it because it's not something I know much about, just the stuff I've heard from my family...and the shit we've been going through."

I get off the bed, grab the candle off my dresser, and bring it to him. The front says, Lavender Protection and the back says, Pentacles of the Moon. Images flash in my mind of my *Gram's smiling face, her smelling the scent of the candle, and her giving it to me.*

"My Grams was really into using herbs and learning about different things so she would go to this store a lot. Maybe we can find some books with more information or talk to the store owner. I'm sure they are experts on this stuff," I say.

"I'd be down to check it out. Maybe they have some information online," he says. He grabs his phone and looks it up. "There isn't any information about the owners or anything online. It's more like a website with quotes and witchy stuff than anything really about the store. Looks like it's only 30 minutes away."

"It's a date," I say sarcastically.

Enrique's Perspective

There's time for me to shower after work before I have to pick up Cara for our trip to Pentacles of the Moon. Today there seemed to be a lot more cars needing repair than usual and I am full of oil. I head straight for the shower. I start the water letting it warm up and take off my clothes.

I look in the mirror and for a moment it looks like Juan is standing behind me. His skin is pale and water is dripping from his hair. I blink and he's gone.

I shake my head, "I am just tired and seeing things."

I pull up the tee diverter and the water sputters out from the shower head. I step inside allowing the hot water to hit my face and chest. The sensation of the water causes my muscles to automatically calm.

I go through the steps making sure to lather in the shampoo and conditioner in my hair and beard. I grab my loofah and suds it up with my musky woodlands scented bar of soap. I scrub it along my arms where there is a lot of oil. I rub it along my chest. Then, I use it to clean my balls. I start at the base of my cock and rub the loofah up and down my shaft. I keep rubbing, coating my cock in suds. The motion of the loofah going up and down my cock reminds me of Cara's soft hand moving along my erection.

I close my eyes. I can see her deep green eyes looking up at me through her lashes. Her tongue licks her plump pink lips. She is in a kneeling position and her breasts are exposed. They are full and her nipples are hard. Her grip grows tighter and her movement becomes faster. I can feel the pressure building inside my cock. The tightness around my cock, making me picture the tightness between her legs as I thrust my cock in and out of her wetness. The strained look on her face as she takes all of my length. I cum hard. The cum goes down the drain with the water.

When I get out of the shower my phone screen reads 3:00 pm. I have about an hour before I need to be at Attic's Revenge. With my towel wrapped around my waist, I go to my closet to find what to wear today. I pull out a long-sleeved black shirt with three buttons towards the top. I grab boxers and jeans from my drawers. As I am getting dressed, I hear something hit the ground.

On the opposite end of the attic, there is a picture frame on the floor. I go to pick it up and it is a picture of Juan and me from when we were kids. The frame is broken where my face is.

“What the fuck? How did that even happen?” I half mumble to myself.

Juan’s smiling face is looking right at the camera. It still doesn’t feel real that he’s gone. It seems like just yesterday we were riding our bikes through town looking for our next adventure. Tears start building in my eyes but I shake it off. I put the frame down on top of my dresser. I will just have to get another frame when I have time.

My eyes go to the alarm clock on my bedside table that now reads 3:20 pm in red letters. “Fuck,” I whisper as I race around getting the rest of my stuff together. I rush out the door pushing the thoughts of ghosts and the broken picture frame from my mind.

I pull up to Attic’s Revenge at exactly 4:00 pm and head to the glass door. Cara is standing by the register talking with a disgruntled customer. I come in closer trying to go undetected. She is standing next to a chair that has a wide seat and back with a white fabric. It has flowers embroidered throughout, and the arms and legs are a dark smooth brown.

“This chair has been in my family for generations. It is a French Louis Chair back from the 1700s. There is no way you are telling me it’s only worth \$500. I could sell this online in the thousands range,” he’s almost shouting.

Cara keeps it calm and collected. “We had an expert come in to appraise it. We have him appraise all of the furniture that comes in here and that is what he quoted us. He based it on the wood used and the fabric. It doesn’t mean it is a fake; it is just not worth as much as it should be,” she smiles a small smile. She crouches down to the chair and touches the embroidery. “I know whoever made this chair put a lot of time and effort into the detail on this chair. It is beautiful and I know it will sell. What if I talked to my boss and see if we could give you \$600 but also include a 50% discount for any item of your choosing in the store,” she says.

The customer takes time to think this over. He is a short older man, with wrinkled skin, his white hair is combed over to the side, and he wears brown pants with a belt that goes over his belly with a white button-up shirt.

Cara goes closer to him, "I know you've been eyeing that 1927 Hamilton gold pocket watch we have in the timepiece display case. I could go get it for you and you would get it for half the price. I can wrap it up and you can add it to your collection."

The customer rubs his finger across his chin in deep thought. I look over to her and she is waiting patiently. She is so beautiful. Her long red hair goes down in waves, her green eyes are compassionate, and a smile plays on her lips.

I love seeing her in her element. It's clear that she loves her job. Her eyes meet mine in surprise and she gives me a little wave. I wave back but keep my distance.

"Fine it's a deal," the customer responds, sounding defeated.

"Oh, Carl, don't be that way. You know we will find it a good home and we would never cheat you," she says playfully.

He hmphs, "You better. I will take my money in cash and my gold watch wrapped up now."

She laughs, "Touche. Let me get that for you."

I make my approach. She comes up to me and plants a light kiss on my lips, "Hiya Handsome."

"Hi," I say looking into her eyes. Cara looks away from me shyly, her cheeks turning rosy. She always does that when I look into her eyes. I find it cute but it also makes me wonder why she does it.

"Get a room," Carl says, sounding grumpy.

"Let me just get Carl here set up and I am free to go," she says loud enough for him to hear.

The drive to Pentacles of the Moon is scenic. There are lots of fields of crops, hills that look like they go for miles, and the roads are winding. As we get closer, we pass a woodsy area that is a perfect representation of fall. The trees have leaves that are red, yellow, and orange. Some fall with the push of the wind and add to the piles on the ground. Cara sits in the front seat looking at ease taking in the beautiful scene.

We come up to a crossroads where a sign stands on the right-hand corner. Fields of crops surround us. It eerily reminds me of *Children of the Corn*. The left turn takes you to Henderson Manor, whatever that is. Right takes you to town in five miles. There's not a car in sight. I make a right and am happy to see the speed limit is 60. I try not to make it noticeable as I apply more pressure to the gas pedal.

My anxiety settles when we start seeing houses closer together.

We get to a stoplight, the first one for miles, and to our left is a cute town. Businesses are going up on an inclined street. To the right is a river with a bridge over it. Benches are placed in different areas so people can enjoy the view.

Cara sighs in relief. "Not going to lie, back there I was getting *Children of the Corn* vibes. I thought any second a group of kids would circle our car and attempt to take us," she says.

I laugh, "We are made for each other. I was thinking the same thing, that's why I was trying to go faster without you noticing."

She laughs a hard laugh, "I thought we picked up speed quickly but thought I was overthinking it."

I laugh, "Nope, just trying to get us to civilization quickly." She laughs harder.

There are all different types of businesses on the strip. Smoke shops, clothing, antiques, souvenirs, art restaurants, historical tours, ghost tours. We finally see it on the left corner. The wooden sign says Pentacles of the Moon in blue writing with a yellow crescent moon at the end. Different wind chimes are hanging outside on hooks.

Surprisingly, the street is packed and it's hard to find parking. We circle the block and luckily find a spot on the same street as the store but on the opposite side.

When we get out of the car a breeze hits. Cara pulls her "Penny Lane" jacket close to her. It's a light brown suede jacket with off-white faux fur on the end of the cuffs and the inside. She calls it that because it reminds her of a jacket Kate Hudson wore while playing Penny Lane in the movie *Almost Famous*. We look both ways and cars on each side let us cross. We race over and go to the open store doors.

The first thing that hits you is the smell of incense. The walls look sponge-painted ember orange. To the left of the entryway are boxes with different incense scents, next to that are incense holders with different designs. There is a doorway with a beaded curtain that leads to another room, after that is an area for different stones, next to it is a crystallized rock made of amethyst. The right side of the store has a tall wide bookshelf with books for sale, behind that are souvenirs including shirts with different sayings, there is an area with different herbs, in the middle of the room are racks with flowy skirts and shirts, and the back right corner is the register. We walk towards the register. As we get closer, we see there's a sign that says readings offered Psychic, Fortune, and Medium. The other side says spiritual cleansings are offered.

A person is standing at the register. When we get close, I see they have a gray beard and mustache that connect, round glasses sit on top of their wide big nose, their light brown eyes are hooded with layers of fake eyelashes and thick black eyeliner, gold shimmery eyeshadow on their lids and up to their thick eyebrows is a darker brown eyeshadow. On their head is a satin black turban, and they wear a long batwing dress that matches the yellow of the sunflower dangling earrings they wear.

"Can I help you?" A deep raspy voice says.

"We would like to see how much it would be for a psychic reading for us together," Cara asks. She goes closer to the register.

The shopkeeper squints to get a better look at Cara. They eye her looking her up and down. They clasp their hands around Caras.

"I think your abilities would give you more answers than I ever could but I can do my best. I'll also give you a discount because Mauve, your grandma, was one of my best customers. You truly were the apple of her eye. My name is Carey." they say.

I look at her face trying to gauge what her reaction is but her hair is covering her face. What are they talking about, abilities? She seems uneasy as well, what is she hiding from me?

"Thank you," she almost whispers.

"I'll charge you \$120 for a reading," they say.

They start walking toward the room with the brown beads coming down. Cara looks back at me and I look at her, confusion all over my face. She just shrugs and starts following Carey.

I come close to her side. "Right now, we are going to do this reading but I hope you know I am not dropping this," I say lowly, in Cara's ear. She blinks and looks at me. She doesn't respond to me.

Carey puts a low light on. There is an oval-shaped table with a gold tablecloth, there are a lot of chairs set up around it. At the head of the table away from the door is an all-black throne chair, there is a cliché crystal ball in the center of the table and there are different colored stones around it. There is a small cabinet to the side of them with different items.

Part of me feels skeptical looking around at the display around me. It seems like every movie involving a psychic but I guess I will try my best to not be cynical. But at this point what other options do we have?

They pull out white copy paper and a pen. Carey sits down.

“Everyone with psychic abilities does things differently. Some of us use tarot cards, some use crystals, some use a crystal ball, all different options. I choose to use what’s called automatic writing. This means I will open myself up to the spiritual world and get answers from beyond the veil. Whatever information I receive will be written down on paper. I will also speak the words out loud. Once all the information is given or all the answers you need are there the reading will stop. At the end, we can go over everything together as well. All my customers usually take the paper with them to keep for a later date. During this time, you two mustn’t have any side conversations. It can be distracting to the reading.”

We both nod in understanding. “It is easier for me to get a good reading if you have questions that need answers. Who will go first?” They continue.

“I will,” I say confidently. Cara holds my hand that is closest to her.

“Let’s begin,” they say.

I can’t stop myself from swallowing. “Does something want to harm us?” I ask.

Carey closes their eyes and takes a deep breath. Their eyebrows furrow, “Yes, it is a strong presence from the spiritual world.”

Before I can say anything, Cara asks, “Why?”

Carey scribbles on the paper, “As payment for a life that was stolen.”

“Juan?” I ask.

Carey scribbles and shakes their head, “They do not specify whose life. Just a life. They want an eye for an eye.”

I can feel my stomach churning with fear. “Who are they?” I ask.

Carey continues, “A strong force. Outside of time and reality. Not of this world. They were sent here by another.”

“Do they know who sent it?” Cara asks.

“No. Just someone closer than you think.” Carey says.

“Do they want one or both of us?” I ask. I already know the answer before I ask.

“Its sole intention is to take yours because they were summoned for you. They do however have an interest in Cara because of her bloodline and the power within it.”

I look at Cara a million questions running through my mind for her. Her eyes are wide in fear and she detaches her hand from mine. Her eyes are downcast away from me.

“What does it want with my bloodline?” She asks hesitantly.

Carey begins shaking their head back and forth furiously. Their body begins to shake. Their eyes shoot open, they appear milky and glossed over, “You will be mine. You and that druid whore,” a voice deeper than Carey’s says from their mouth.

“No!” I shout.

The voice laughs evilly, “Soon you will rot with your cousin.”

Carey shakes their head and gasps for air.

They blink as if coming to. They look back and forth between us, terror dominating their features, “You two are in deep trouble. A cleansing won’t even help you. The only thing I can recommend for you is putting things around to protect you. Put St. John’s Wort in all the doorways of your home. Have some in your car even. I have some here in the store you can buy for a small fee.

Also, any religious artifacts can be used to delay any evil spirits’ entry. I also have lavender. It is believed in some folklore that if you have a bonfire and use lavender in the fire it can give you all-around protection. I also recommend you get lavender oil or lotion if you can. Amethyst also can be worn or put in different areas for protection. It may not fully do the trick but can at least push this entity off for some time,” Carey says anxiously.

Cara holds Carey’s hand, “What is this that wants us?”

Carey’s eyes are wide in fear, “Something evil and powerful. I pray for your souls and hope your guardian angels protect you. I wish there was more I could do. The connection was broken once this spirit took over my body. Never in my 65 years on earth have I ever experienced anything even close to this.” It is clear that Carey is in shock and is as frightened as we are.

I go into my pocket and hand them the \$120 in cash. “Thank you, Carey, I’m sorry for any trouble we may have caused you,” I say solemnly.

Surprisingly, they grab my hand as they did Cara’s earlier, “Enrique, you have more protection than you know, you just need to find it. It is also good you have someone from the Cagney bloodline close to you. I believe this spirit wants you both because they feel threatened.

A bright spirit brought you two together and a dark spirit wants to tear you apart as a couple... literally. The best thing to do is keep each other close. Fight. If all else fails, spend the time you have together making happy memories and knowing you found something most people spend their whole lives searching for,” Carey says now grabbing Cara’s hand as well.

I try to hide the anger that I feel boiling inside me. There is so much she hasn’t told me and will probably still refuse to tell me. I have told her things that I have never talked to anybody else in my life about. The only emotions I feel are anger and betrayal. “And what is that?” I ask bitterly.

Carey puts our hands together, “Love. A deep soul-binding love. One that I know is just blossoming but can become so much more.” Cara looks at my face and I see the sadness there.

I scoff and Cara cringes, “Love, right? Something built from honesty, right?” I shake my head in frustration.

The one thing keeping me on this earth is the one thing that can break me. Before Carey can continue, I storm out of the shop. I go to my car, barely checking for oncoming traffic.

When I get inside my car I yell and begin hitting the wheel. I don’t know what upsets me more, Cara not telling me everything, the fact I don’t know the extent of what she is hiding, the feeling of hopelessness that comes with knowing you are up against something but not knowing exactly what it is, or the fact that someone hates me enough to want to turn my body and soul over to something so evil. Part of me wants to tear out of here. Leave this situation, leave her, forget it all happened.

Before I can make a decision, I see Cara walking across the crosswalk. She has bags in her hands. She doesn’t look in my direction. My blood is boiling. Part of me wants an explanation, another is so angry that I don’t know if I would believe any explanation she would give. I still don’t know the extent of what Carey was saying during that reading. All I know is that there is a big part of Cara that I know absolutely nothing about.

She slowly enters the car.

“I got all the stuff Carey recommended,” she says quietly.

I look over at her trying to find emotion there and am met with nothing. Cara has put on her mask and I am iced out. She doesn’t look in my direction, “You can take me home now.”

Guess I will be tearing down the street after all. I speed off. She has her body completely positioned away from me and even has her head turned to look out the window. She knows how to make every ounce of patience I have inside me snap.

I'm of course the one to budge because I know she won't in her stubbornness. "Are you going to tell me what that was all about?" I ask, sounding clipped.

She shakes her head, "Does it matter what I have to say? You are already upset. I don't want to cause more damage than has already been done."

My hands grip the steering wheel so tightly my knuckles turn white. "I deserve answers, Cara. If nothing else I deserve to know the truth," I spit.

She scoffs, "Well I'm sure by now you have made some deductions, have some answers. No point in me telling you what you already know."

"I want to hear it from your mouth. I want the truth," I retort.

She shakes her head and her leg bounces anxiously. "The truth is it is all over. The truth is there are parts of me that are not ready for you to know everything...." She starts.

I scoff, "That's it? We end the one thing that may be keeping us alive and I don't get answers. Any answers?"

She shakes her head, "I don't owe you shit. Carey puts a lot of faith in spirituality and the supernatural; doesn't mean they are always right. I'm not the key to this; I'm not some code that needs to be cracked. My safety is the most important thing to me."

"So now you're not safe with me?" I quip.

Now she's the one to scoff, "Clearly not."

"That's rich coming from you. According to the psychic you brought me to, YOU are the one who is supposed to save me and now you want out because you feel you need to protect yourself. What about protecting me? What about saving yourself and me in the process? And I am supposed to feel safe with someone who has spent months keeping things from me. Which I am sure is just scratching the surface. I'm sure there's more that I don't know," I am almost shouting.

She shakes her, "Pull over."

"What?!?" I yell.

"Pull the fuck over right now!" She yells in response. She is now looking at me and seriousness is written all over her face.

“Like hell, I’m pulling over! Not until I get fucking answers,” I respond.

We are on the road leading towards the crossroads that is full of crops. There is one streetlight on each side that does not do much to illuminate the area. “Fuck you,” she shouts.

Cara opens the door as I reach the stop sign and jumps out. I slam on the brakes. The car jolts to a full stop. I get out of the car and search for her.

I head straight for her, “Get in the car.”

“Get in the car yourself!” She says before walking across the road.

I go to her side. “You know you’re miles away from home. Come on, I will at least take you home. I’m pissed off but not heartless,” I say trying to calm myself down.

“No thanks, I’ll have Hunter come get me,” she says, pulling her phone out of her coat pocket. She is writing a text.

It’s taking everything out of me not to grab this woman and shake her. I have not and will not ever put my hands on a woman. But the anger and rage boiling inside me has her pushing me to my limits.

“Get in the car, Cara,” I say motioning for the car. I am close to her but not so close she can reach out and touch me.

She turns her whole body towards me and looks into my eyes, “Leave me the fuck alone. You made your point. You’re mad. There are things about me you don’t know. And now you’ll never have to know. I’ll save us both the pain and heartache and severe ties before it’s too late. Get the fuck out of my life.”

I clench my fists, “So that’s it you’re going to be a child about this. Instead of us sitting down and talking about the situation, you are going to throw it all away and have a tantrum like a child?”

“Guess so,” she responds coldly.

“Fine, you want me to leave you alone. Good luck getting home. I am fucking done,” I say storming off to my car.

I get inside slamming the door behind me. She wants to act childish, I can too. I peel off and turn away from her. I watch in my rearview mirror as she stands in the same spot keeping her eyes on her phone. I make the turn away from her and away from the fork in the road. I am so angry my body shakes in rage.

How does this happen? How did I let her get under my skin? Like an idiot I was vulnerable. She saw the weakest parts of me. The self-loathing, guilt, anger. I found myself falling in love with her. Which with as much anger and hate I have at myself is something I never thought was possible. I think of the times she and I have had together.

There were times she was vulnerable as well. I saw the pain she has over her Grams, the defenses she puts around to keep people out. If I am being honest with myself, I am in love with her. So much so that I'm willing to put my anger on the back burner.

As the love-struck fool I am, I make a U-turn and go back to the Ice Queen. She doesn't have to like me or talk to me. She may not want to keep me safe but I intend on keeping her safe at least for tonight. Cara never has to see me again but I refuse to be the reason something happens to her at this moment. With my rage propelling me I did make it a little way away from her. I speed back hoping that she hasn't done something as stupid as trying to hitchhike.

I see her standing in the same spot I left her. She pretends not to see me and I could give a fuck what she thinks. I storm over to her and she stands there crossing her arms in front of her chest. I can see the challenge in her eyes as if she believes I will do absolutely nothing. She even stands there unmoving. I pick her up and put her over my shoulder. She kicks and screams all the way there.

"This is kidnapping," she says.

"This is me not allowing myself to have a guilty conscience. Now if you don't stay put, I will tie you up with whatever I can find in my trunk," I say, setting her down in the passenger seat.

She laughs bitterly, "You wouldn't." I look her in the eyes darkly, "Try me." Her eyes widen. I strap her in and close the door. She resigns to pouting.

The rest of the ride is spent in painful silence. Part of me hopes she will say something, anything. But I know she won't. There won't be any getting through to her tonight. We pull up outside her house. She looks at me. I think I see tears in her eyes.

"Goodbye Enrique," she says.

As mad and hurt as I am, I want to reach for her.

"Goodbye Cara," I respond.

The truth is I don't even know her. I watch her go, a million what ifs going through my mind. She gets to the door and opens it. She turns around facing me. I drive off.

Cara's Perspective

It's been two days since Ricky and I broke up. I have been crying my eyes out ever since I watched his car speed off down my street. As much as I have tried to take my mind off of him, the pain is there. There have been a few times when I opened our old texts and I typed out different messages. But never hit send. I think the worst part of breaking up with someone is losing the potential of what could have been. I look at pictures of us on my phone and it's a version of me I don't recognize. A woman happy in love.

I park and head to Gram's headstone. I grab the straps of my backpack. Around me are families surrounding headstones with different foods. Different music is heard. Some have picnic blankets set out; some have lawn chairs. Unseen by them the spirits of their relatives join them. I have heard of Dia de los Muertos, Day of the Dead, but have never seen it in action.

I take my backpack off and sit crisscross applesauce style in front of it. I pull a bottle of Jameson out and two shot glasses.

"Lime margaritas with salt on the rim wouldn't fit so I'm going to go to our Irish roots with some Jameson," I say as I pour it in. Tears are already brimming, "bottoms up." I take the shot, scrunching my eyes. It burns in my throat and nose. "Grams if there was ever a time I needed you, this is it," I whisper. The tears spill over.

"Didn't know you celebrate the Day of the Dead, Guerrita," A familiar voice says.

I turn to see Juan sitting on the bench under the tree. "Where have you been?" I ask sniffing.

"I have been laying low. But it seems like things have been falling apart in my absence. And by things, I mean you, my cousin, and his safety," he says.

I laugh a humorless laugh, "Yeah well it was doomed from the start. How do I save someone when I can't even save myself?" Juan looks confused. "Oh, you didn't know? My bloodline along with my abilities is useful for whatever wants your cousin. The psychic we went to for help told us that and, in the process, outed that I have abilities. And of course, you know how that went," I continue.

"So, you told him everything?" Juan asks.

I shake my head, "nope."

"It's not too late."

"Yes, it is," I say.

I spent so much time hiding myself from Ricky and I know now that whatever I tell him will only make everything worse. I knew the risk and being scared of rejection I refused to tell him about a part of myself that I was never really happy about. Tears spill down my face more. I never asked for any of this and it upsets me how much I have gone through holding onto a "gift" I never asked for.

"Who are you talking to?" Ricky asks.

I turn around and face him. "Ricky, what are you doing here?" I ask.

"Answer my question and I'll answer yours," he says, not looking at me.

I stand up and I go to him standing in front of him. I put my hand on the side of his face, surprisingly he doesn't move away. I never really thought about what my thoughts and feelings would be if I saw Ricky again but I wasn't expecting this. It's like seeing him again for the first time. He stands at a distance like we are strangers. I feel like I am ready to tell him everything but I also feel like when I do, I will truly lose him.

Tears spill down my face, "Fine I will tell you everything. But I need you to know that things weren't supposed to happen this way. I never wanted any of this to happen." He looks at me and nods for me to continue. "I... I can talk to spirits. I have been talking to spirits for most of my life. The day you came and brought those comics to Attic's Revenge a spirit visited me...." I start.

"Juan?" He asks.

I nod, "He came to me and told me you were in danger. I brushed him off because I never thought I would see you again. I had no way to contact you or anything. Then, I saw you that night at Hidden Gem. I feel like fate is a cliché thing to say it was but there is no other way to describe it. I felt attracted to you and I went with it. Juan was always present and persistent.

We both started having the same things happen to us: the nightmares, seeing owls, seeing the creature. I planned on telling you I just wanted to see if we could find more answers before then.... and if I'm being honest, I was scared to tell you. Everyone in my life who found out about my abilities had really strong reactions. I thought you would leave."

There is silence and I can see he is taking in all of the information. “So, you thought you would lose me if I knew the truth and thought lying to me would be a better option? I opened up to you about Juan. You saw me tearing myself apart, blaming myself and you never thought it would be better for me to know?” He says his anger is rising.

“Tell him I made you swear not to tell him,” Juan says.

I completely forgot he was here. I look over to Juan. “I think that would just do more damage than good at this point,” I respond to him.

Ricky comes closer to where I am. “You’re talking to him right now, aren’t you?” Ricky asks.

I sigh, “Yes.”

He looks around as if Juan will come walking out. “What’s he saying?” He asks.

I refuse to look at him, “he wants to take the blame for me not telling you. But I won’t let him.”

“Typical Juan,” he says. “Don’t let her out of this Juan. You know me. You know how I feel about lying,” he continues.

Juan runs his fingers through his hair, “I told you Guerrita. I can’t even save you from this. All I know is that I know Ricky and he is in love with you. I have gotten to know you and I know you feel the same. Which can break you or bring you back together.”

“He doesn’t Juan. Especially now he doesn’t,” I snap.

Ricky comes close to me standing toe to toe. “What did he say?” He urges.

I rub my hand along my face in stress, “You don’t want to know.”

He grabs my wrist from my face, “Yes, I do.” His hand wraps around my wrist bringing back memories. *Our bodies, naked and tangled.*

There is fire burning in his eyes and not in the I want to bend you over and fuck you way, more of like I want to strangle you and discard your corpse type. My vagina misses the memo and I feel wetness pool between my thighs. Our bodies are close and neither one of us breaks eye contact.

I look at him doubtfully, “Juan says you love me and that I love you.”

His features soften just a smidge. My eyes fall to his lips and I try to ignore my feelings. When I look back up into his eyes, his eyes are on my lips. I lick them without thinking. Ricky backs me into the tree by the bench. I look to the bench and thankfully Juan is nowhere in sight.

“Do you?” he asks darkly.

My mind and body are at war with each other. I push myself closer to him so he can feel my body against him. My mind is screaming to run. I tilt my head trying to gauge his thought process. He leans his body closer and I can feel his hard cock against my thigh.

“Well?” he presses.

I swallow, “And if I do?”

Even in our close proximity, I can see the war he has within himself. I know he is mad at me; I know what I did was unforgivable, but I am starting to see that Juan’s words hold some truth. He must care about me because why else would he be here in the first place and how did he even find me?

I kiss him, wrapping my body around his. At first, I can feel the tension there and feel like I made a mistake. But then it’s gone and he is putting his hands all over me. We both are pawing at each other like we are trying to get to layers underneath. I can’t stop the moan that escapes my lips into his mouth. He hasn’t said he loves me but now part of me believes he could.

Our kiss holds so much meaning. Anger, want, love. I thought I was saving him, shielding him but I was only trying to save myself from him. A love like this can be all-consuming and life-changing. Giving myself over to someone completely is something I have always feared. There is a gamble with allowing someone into your soul. He pulls back and looks into my eyes. The attraction I have to this man is like nothing I have ever experienced before in my life.

All my thoughts and words get lost to me. Who was I kidding? I was doomed from the start?

“I love you,” he says.

“I love you too,” I whisper before kissing his lips.

We decide to drive our cars to my house as I was closer to the cemetery. Anticipation has anxiety flowing through me. Will this all wear off by the time we get to my house? Will he change his mind?

When we get to my house I park on the driveway and he parks in front. I stand at the door waiting for him. I see the devilish glint in his eyes and try to make a break for it. Before I can get anywhere, he grabs me and puts me over his shoulder.

“Ricky!” I yell. He swats my ass hard. Then, he is charging up the stairs to my room.

“I see you two made up,” Hunter teases.

“Yeah, thanks I owe you one,” Ricky responds.

“You?” I ask lifting my head to try and get a look at him.

Hunter gives a smile and a little wave, “Have fun!”

“Ugh!” I pound my fists on Ricky’s back, “put me down you savage.”

He throws me on the bed on my back. Quickly he strips his clothes completely off, articles of clothing flying all over the place, his shirt lands on my lounge chair, his pants land on the foot of my bed, and his boxers are the only thing he lets fall for dramatic effect. I watch in fascination and hunger taking in every detail of his body.

He prowls toward me and pulls my pants down and off of me. Ricky is between my legs which are bent and open for him. His musky scent draws me in. I can feel his breath on my neck and it sends shivers down my spine. He doesn't consider my well-being as he slips his cock in hard and fast. I wrap my legs around his waist urging him to come closer. He pushes roughly inside of me and it is a mixture of pain and pleasure. I feel myself holding onto him for support.

“I almost lost you,” he says.

“You will never lose me,” I say.

This makes him thrust harder and I am moaning loud. I clench myself around him with each painful thrust. It feels like he is pushing his cock deeper, breaking down my walls. It is all so intense. My body starts building up and building up and then I cum with a yell. My legs are shaking from the pleasure coursing through my body.

Ricky moves my legs up and pushes them back. He holds onto my ankles tightly. I am open and completely vulnerable to him. He pushes in and out deep, keeping a slower rhythm but each thrust is powerful. His cock gets completely coated in my juices.

“I own you. Say it,” he says.

I defiantly shake my head from side to side. He pushes in deeper and slowly. The intensity of him filling me up slowly sends waves of ecstasy through my body. It feels like he is pushing my legs as far back as they can go. “Say it,” he demands. He begins to hasten his thrusts, making his full length and girth penetrate me mercilessly. I can barely get the words out as I feel my body building up.

“Y-you own me,” I say before coming apart on him.

“Fuck,” he whispers.

He pounds and pounds and I can feel his cock twitch inside me with anticipation ready to erupt. He lets out a deep guttural groan and then he slows his cum spilling inside me.

He releases my ankles but stays inside me. I wrap my arms around his neck and bring him down to me. I kiss him. "I love you and I'm not just saying that because you have given me the best sex of my life," I say kissing him again before he can respond.

He looks at me, "I love you too, and not just because that's the best pussy I have ever had." Without warning he pulls out of me.

We lay in bed each positioned comfortably but facing each other. "So, tell me everything about your abilities or everything you think I should know," he says with curiosity in his eyes.

I look at him doubtfully, "you really want to know everything?"

He pets my hair affectionately, "Of course I do."

It's funny my whole life I have never told anyone everything about my abilities. It has me feeling shy.

"I have been seeing spirits since before I can remember. My parents realized it when I told them about my friend Sally. I was six years old and we would play together all the time. She wore a frilly white dress and she had burns up and down her body. It started innocent enough. My parents took it as me having an imaginary friend. Grams had her suspicions but was ignored by my parents. Sally had an obsession with matches. Me being six years old I didn't think much of it.

One weekend I was staying at my Grams and she told me if I ever had anyone around me that I didn't want there to be to tell them to go away and they would have to. That night Sally and I were playing and she came up with the idea to make a trail of matches and then showed me how to light the match and put it down to the trail. Luckily, my Grams was listening in and stopped anything bad from happening.

She revealed everything to me about my ability and the fact Sally was a spirit. I told Sally to go away and I never saw her again. Grams explained how the difference between communicating with a spirit is that spirits give you goosebumps and their skin is a shade paler than it should be. If I don't acknowledge them, they don't know I can see them.

Sometimes I am caught off guard and I notice them and they notice me. A lot of times that ends with me being asked to do favors. That being giving messages to people who are alive. Frequent headaches are common, especially in crowded places.

As I got older, I learned other things on my own. I stopped doing favors and giving messages after it became a never-ending job. If I spent my time giving messages to loved ones, I would never be able to maintain A full-time job, do things for myself, or have a relationship. It becomes life-consuming. I also learned that alcohol and drugs numb the spirits out completely. I also can see the memories of objects." I explain.

"Does anybody else know about your abilities?" He asks.

"My parents know which is part of the reason we don't have a relationship. My dad was always against the idea that his mom spoke to ghosts. He found it 'unnatural' and 'embarrassing'. So naturally when he found out I had the same gift our relationship went downhill. That mixed with his drug abuse turned our relationship to ash. My mom was indifferent but not around enough to care. My boss Sid also knows but that was my fault. Hunter, of course. And now you." I answer.

He takes everything in, "Why is it your fault Sid knows?"

A smile forms on my lips, "When I first started working at Attic's this shady guy would always come in selling random items and antiques. I would always be afraid to touch the items, scared of what I'd see so I wore thick gloves. A lot of times spirits come attached to certain items. In the beginning, I never saw any

. Until one day, he brought in a China set that did look antique. It was white with a pink flower in the center. When Sid was looking at it a woman who was probably in her early thirties came to me crying. The night before the man broke into her house raped her and then strangled her with electrical wire while her husband was away on a business trip.

I finally told Sid. He called the cops and sure enough, that's how they discovered her body. Sid never outed me. He lied and said the guy was bragging about it to him. The guy's name was Jack Jepsen. Ever since then he has me check items as they come in."

"Jesus," he says.

"Yep," I say.

He thinks for a moment. "Can you make spirits come to you? Like call to them or something?" He asks.

I think about it and think about all the times I called for Grams. "I don't think so. I have tried with my Grams and nothing."

Ricky pulls me close to him, laying me on his chest. "Maybe it means she's at peace," he says. I look up at him,

"I like to think so. I like to imagine her in heaven laying out, listening to Jimmy Buffet, drinking a lime margarita with a lime on the rim and salt."

"I wish I could've met her," he says.

I laugh, "Me too. "I think she would've liked you," I say softly.

He looks doubtful, "you think?"

"Definitely. You're handsome and smart. You also challenge me which is something she always said I would need. She was worried I would never find a guy who could handle my hard-headedness. Her words were, 'god bless the man who loves you and I pray he can tame you.'" I say rolling my eyes.

He laughs, "Oh yeah, we definitely would have agreed on that. I know how to tame you, even when I want to throttle you."

I sit up and face him. "Who says you tame me?" I say, sounding bratty.

He raises an eyebrow, "You don't think I tame you?"

I laugh, "Not even. You challenge me but I wouldn't say I am tamed. I pretty much run this relationship."

He laughs hard. I look at him making a pouty face. "You think so, huh?" he says.

I get on top of him straddling his hips and holding his wrists down. "I know so," I say confidently. With little to no effort at all, he flips me onto my back. He pins my wrists and puts his weight on my hips. His lips are inches from mine.

"You were saying," he says in a cocky tone.

I can't deny how my body responds to him. I arch my body up so I am closer to him. He sits up reaching over for his jeans, taking his belt out of the belt loops. The belt has prong holes going down the entire length of the strap. He grabs my wrists and loops his belt around them, sliding the end of the belt through the buckle and tightening it as much as he can before securing the prong in the tightest hole. He gets off of me to inspect his handy work. I move my wrists to test the waters and they are secured. He comes to me and I put my foot up to block his path.

"Guess you didn't think of everything," I say.

He moves my foot with ease and pounces between my legs. He pushes my legs back and goes right for my throbbing pussy, licking me from bottom to top. I gasp in shock.

Ricky looks deep into my eyes as he lowers his head down devouring me. He sucks my clit between his teeth. He sucks and sucks. My fists squeeze the sheets underneath me. He pulls his head back and starts licking me up and down. His tongue flat against me. I whine because more than anything I wish my hands were free so I could push his head closer to me. I angle my hips so my pussy has more pressure.

“So eager, aren’t we?” He teases.

He takes my clit into his mouth again. Then he laps furiously. He still has my legs pushed back and they begin to shake. I cum hard and he sucks it in, tasting me. He sets my legs down and nips my inner thigh.

He pulls me up by my tied-up wrists and stands me up. I try and think of something bratty to say but come up empty. He kisses me passionately to shut up any possible backtalk and pushes me down on my back on the bed.

He stays standing on the side of the bed. He grabs my legs and pulls me down towards the edge. My ass is off the side but he holds my legs up. He slowly slides his cock inside me, filling me up. His cock is thick and I feel myself stretch around every inch. I moan. Ricky looks into my eyes as he starts thrusting harder in and out of me. Pleasure and anxiety fill me as I realize he holds all the power. He is what is keeping me secured onto the bed. His hands are wrapped around my ankles and his grip tightens. I clench myself around him, trying to match his rhythm. He is balls deep inside me. His thrusts have pain and pleasure in them from the depth.

“Enrique,” I moan.

“I love it when you say my name,” he says.

I am getting higher and higher and then I cum all over him almost screaming at the release. “Such a good girl,” he says, smacking my ass hard. He pushes and pushes inside me and then I feel his cum spill out of me.

He releases my ankles and my legs fall to the side. I use them and wrap them around him keeping him close. I look into his eyes, seeing the beads of sweat coming from his brow.

“Please don’t leave me,” I say.

“I couldn’t if I tried. You already saw how that went,” he laughs.

“No, I mean it Ricky, please don’t ever leave me,” I say.

He smiles, “I promise you I won’t as long as you don’t leave me.”

I smile back at him, “Keep fucking me like this and I won’t be able to.”

Enrique's Perspective

It's another glorious day at the office. I stand at the register checking our list of what cars are on the lot. There are two cars, one for an oil change and brake replacement and the other car needs a new motor. As I am walking to the inside of the garage, I see a car pull up. I open the see-through garage doors. The customer is leaning on his 1966 blood-red Ford Mustang with its top down. He walks over and there's something familiar about him. He is a middle-aged man with slicked-back black hair, he is tan, with dark eyes, he is tall and thin, and he has a thin mustache.

"Can I help you?" I ask. Coming closer I know that I have never met this man in my life, but the feeling of familiarity lingers.

He sighs, "I'm not sure what's going on but my car is shaking when I drive and it's driving me nuts."

It dawns on me that he looks like he would be an actor in one of the old movies Cara has had me watch. That has to be what it is. I motion towards the inside, "Sure, just come on in I just need to get some information from you. We start with a diagnostic test which is a flat fee of \$100. Then, I'll give you a call and quote you a price for the job and you can tell me if you want me to continue or not."

"Okay, sounds reasonable," he says.

I get the standard paperwork out. "I just need your name and phone number," I say, clicking a pen.

He comes closer to the desk, "Angel Vitalico. My number is 7083456789. Here are my keys." I make sure it is all written down.

"I will be calling you soon Mr. Vitalico," I say.

He reads the name tag on my jumpsuit. "Thanks, Enrique," he responds.

"No problem, sir," I say.

I notice a keychain on his key ring with a gold medallion of a skeleton head. The eyes look like they stick out. My thumb runs over the textured medallion. I look up and the man gives me a mischievous smile and a wink, "Thank you, I'll be seeing you soon Ricky," he says.

He walks out and I'm left feeling sluggish for whatever reason. How did he know I go by Ricky? I guess that is common, right? My co-workers Dorian and Max are working on the other two cars.

"How's it going, kid?" Dorian asks cheerfully.

I put my hand up in a weak hello. They already have music going on the big Bluetooth speaker Dorian got for the shop. "You're the Devil in Disguise" by *Elvis* plays. I look at the man's car.

Max comes to my side, "damn she's a beaut. Bet the owner paid a pretty penny or sold his soul." Max laughs a wheezy laugh.

I laugh, "I think a little of both."

The car has a pungent smell, something borderline foul. It's strong like it's trapped within the seats. Bile builds in the back of my throat. I grab a pack of tree-shaped air fresheners and put them along the dashboard.

I pull it in and put the diagnostic tool into the OBD port. Sweat starts forming on the crown of my head. I wipe it with my sleeve. I don't feel hot. What I'm doing requires no effort. The test comes up with a code indicating the car needs an oil change. Which wouldn't explain the shaking

. I put the car on the car lift and look underneath the car. The sway bar is damaged which would explain the shaking. I check a few more things and deem that it's the only thing that needs replacing.

The feeling of fuzziness is all over my body. It feels like everything around me is in slow motion. I walk to the office and take a water bottle from the mini-fridge. I chug it down like I've been in the Sahara Desert for hours even though I don't feel thirsty. What is going on with me?

I call Mr. Vitalico and he answers in two rings. "Hello?" He says. I explain everything in detail and give a set amount.

"Okay go for it. I-" The phone starts cutting in and out. "I'm coming for you," a dark distorted voice says and the phone keeps cutting out.

"Hello?" I say.

The phone clears and he says, "Can you hear me?"

"Yeah, I can hear you better now," I respond.

"You can work on the car. When do you think it will be ready?" He asks.

I think about it for a second, "I could have it done by today."

"Okay, I probably won't be able to pick it up until tomorrow. But I can come as early as 9 am. Is that okay?" He says.

"Of course, no problem," I say.

"Thanks, Ricky. See you tomorrow," he says.

"See you," I respond.

The phone clicks. "What the fuck was that?" I whisper to myself. I look at the time on my phone and it says 10:00 am. Six hours to go on my shift. My lock screen is a selfie of Cara and I. She's smiling and I am looking at her with a smile on my face. I am supposed to see her tonight. I shoot her a text.

Me: Good morning, Beautiful, thinking of you. Can't wait to see you later.

I get back to the car and decide I will get the oil change out of the way. I put a container underneath the car to drain the old oil. I loosen the oil plug and the oil starts dripping out. When I completely remove the plug oil starts spilling out. It spills quickly. I look closely and it looks like thick blood is pouring out. I blink a couple of times thinking it's just a trick of the light. I put my fingers underneath and it's red like blood.

"Max? Max," I shout.

Max comes over quickly, "What's wrong?"

I hold my fingers up to him. "Ummm, so you got some oil on you?" He asks, confused.

I look at my fingers moving my hand around. It's black with oil. "Maybe wear gloves next time," he says.

I do a nervous laugh, "I thought I saw something" I shake it off.

I get the oil changed and now I have to change the sway bar. I get the car on the lift and get it up to a comfortable height. I move under the car and begin to loosen the various bolts holding the old sway bar in place. I'm focused on my task when I suddenly hear the car stereo switch on. The song playing is *In Dreams* by *Roy Orbison*. The song plays and sounds like it's getting louder.

The lift groans and the car drops down. I drop to the ground putting my hands above me. It's an inch away from hitting me. Dorian and Max come running over.

"Jesus' kid, are you trying to get yourself killed?" Max yells.

"I-I ..." I stumble.

"Something is up with you today. Maybe you're sick or something but I can't risk you hurting yourself or one of us. I'm sending you home. Get some rest and keep me posted for tomorrow," he says frustrated.

Part of me wants to fight with him but I know he's right. "I'm sorry I probably just need some rest. All I need to finish is switching the sway bar out." I respond.

I walk to the office and punch out.

The sluggish feeling is more intense once I sit down in my car. I start the car and connect my phone to my Bluetooth. I grab my phone, my vision slightly blurring. I find Cara's name and call her.

"Hey baby, how's it going?" She answers.

"I'm not feeling too great. My boss sent me home early. I don't think I'm going to make it tonight," my voice sounds hoarse.

"Aww baby you don't sound good. Do you need me to bring you anything?" She says, sounding concerned.

I think about it and feel foggy. "It's okay I think more than anything I need to rest," I say.

"Okay, baby. Get home safe and text me later if you're up for it," she says.

"Okay, I will," I say.

"I love you," she says.

"I love you too," I respond.

We hang up and I get music going. I decide to add songs that will keep me awake, something I can sing along to. The first song to play is Black Hole Sun by *Soundgarden* and I get the car going.

Thankfully I live less than 30 minutes away from here. I also blare the air conditioning so it's blowing in my face. My hair blows back. It feels good on my skin which still feels sweaty. It feels like I am getting every red light and they are all long. I finally get to the woodsy part of the route. I am singing along to Like a Stone by *Audioslave*. When the music cuts out and goes to In Dreams by *Rob Orbison*.

Goosebumps spread throughout my skin. I'm distracted looking at my phone which still shows Like a Stone is playing. The radio doesn't show a station being played.

When I look up Mr. Vitalico is standing in the middle of the street, head leaned down and a big vicious smile that looks unnaturally wide is spread across his face. I swerve to miss him. I slam on the brakes. My tires screech. There is silence.

I get out of the car and there's no one and nothing around. Am I losing it that badly? Reality is starting to feel like a fever dream. I book it home not really focusing on anything but getting there.

I get home and feel like there are chains with cinder blocks on the end around my ankles. I am almost there. When I get to my room I crash on the bed face first. I close my eyes, the world around me blurring away.

A sweet flowery scent fills my nose. There is a soft cold cloth being moved across my forehead. I blink the blur from my eyes. Cara's concerned expression comes into view. She is leaning down and her pushed-up breasts are showing in the v of her top. I lick my lips from desire and dryness.

"Am I dreaming?" I ask hoarsely.

She looks at me catching me looking and shaking her head, "Easy Casanova you don't look up for any of that."

I smile deviously, "Maybe that'll make me better."

She rolls her eyes, "How about we try hydration and medication first and see how that goes?"

I move to sit up groaning. My whole body feels sore and my head throbs. There's a bowl of chicken noodle soup on the nightstand, A big yellow Gatorade, and a bottle of Tylenol with two pills on top.

She looks shy all of a sudden, "I wasn't sure what you would need so I brought basics. I hope you don't mind."

"Thank you, I appreciate all of this," I say. I take the pills and guzzle a bunch of Gatorade down. I grab the TV remote and motion for the bed, "Get in here."

She looks surprised, "are you sure? I don't want to bother you when you're sick. I just figured it would be nice to bring you stuff."

I look at her with a 'really' expression on my face. "Get in here," I say feigning exasperation.

Cara stands up straight and I can't help looking her up and down. She is wearing a white semi see through V-neck top, dark blue skinny jeans, and knee-high brown leather boots. She laughs and swats me, "knock it off."

She sits on the edge of my bed and unzips her boots and she slowly removes them from each foot. I feel my cock twitch. This might be more difficult than I thought.

She gets into bed next to me. I flip through and find *John Wick*.

"Is this, okay?" I ask.

She nods, "whatever you want."

The movie starts and I grab my bowl of soup. It is still steaming hot and the smell of various seasonings and chicken fills my nostrils. It is homemade chicken noodle soup. My mouth waters. Everything is cooked perfectly; the chicken is shredded and the vegetables and noodles are soft.

"How did you get in by the way?" I ask out of curiosity.

She shrugs, "I just showed up and Shawn let me in. He told me he was glad I was here to check if you were dead or not."

I shake my head, “Nice to know if they thought I was dead they would wait for someone to come to check on me.”

She laughs, “I guess it just means I have more balls than they do.”

I look down at my bowl and feel like I scarfed it down quickly.

“Do you want more?” She asks.

I look at her surprised, “There’s more?”

She laughs and stands motioning at the top of my dresser and there is a plastic container containing more soup. “God, I love you,” I say smiling.

She blushes and says, “I love you too.”

There’s silence as we both just look at each other. I take in the features of her beautiful face. The way her eyes swirl with greens and browns, the freckles going down the bridge of her nose and spreading out to her cheeks, the dimples shining through.

“So, did you want more?” She breaks the moment. I nod,

“Please,” I say.

She grabs my bowl and fills it. Then, she gets back into bed with me. It feels like as quickly as she gave me that bowl it’s gone but this time, I am full.

I lay down and she comes behind me and holds me. Her warmth envelopes me. My body completely relaxes and all the pain I was feeling subsides. She rubs her fingers slowly in my hair. Cara is my comfort. I know that no matter where life takes us or whatever situation we are in, my heart resides in hers and hers in mine. She is home.

The next day I crawl into work still not feeling the best but figure I don’t feel bad enough to not go in. Dorian and Max put me on register duty to try and give me an easier time. Dorian took over finishing up the Mustang while I was gone and had it ready to go. Just being around that car gives me goosebumps. Despite every warning light in my head going off I know I have to call Mr. Vitalico to pick up his car.

I hesitantly grab the phone and call his number. I know that we talked yesterday about him coming in about 9 but figure I should call just to confirm.

This time it rings almost till it goes to voicemail when he picks up, “Hello Ricky. Is my car ready to go?”

My mouth goes dry. I wasn’t expecting him to know it was me calling right away, “Um, yeah. Yes, she’s all ready. You can stop by whenever you want-”

Mr. Vitalico cuts me off, "Perfect, I'll be there in five minutes."

He hangs up leaving me disoriented. How is he even getting around without his car?

Before I can dwell any more on the strangeness of it all I hear the door open and the little greeting chime go off. I look up and feel my blood run cold as he walks towards me.

I clear my dry throat, "Good morning Mr. Vitalico. We'll just go over the paperwork and we'll be good to go"

Mr. Vitalico flashes a wide grin reminiscent of the one I saw on the road, "Perfect."

We go through everything and I can't help but notice the goosebumps I feel throughout my body. I hand him the keys and walk him over to his Mustang parked outside, "Here she is. Have a good rest of your day," I say, barely feigning a smile or any courtesy. I turn to walk away but feel a tight bonny grip on my arm.

I turn to look at Mr. Vitalico who is now grinning a grin that is too big for his face, "I'll be seeing you around Ricky."

I yank my arm away, my body going weak. Mr. Vitalico climbs into his car and tears off, leaving me to wonder what the fuck just happened.

Cara's Perspective

I rub the bottom of my soft sweater dress in between my thumb and index finger. My right leg is bouncing. The anxiety is radiating off of me and as much as I try to calm myself, nothing seems to help. I bite on my bottom lip to stop myself from spewing out all of my anxious thoughts. It feels like I am confined in the passenger seat of Ricky's car although I know I'm not. I feel his warm hand take mine.

"Cara, it's going to be fine. I know you're nervous but I have a good feeling about this," he says, rubbing his thumb in a circle on my hand.

I sigh, "I know I am probably overthinking everything. But I hope your mom likes me. I have never met the parents of anyone I have dated in the past. It never really got that far. So, I don't know how this will go. And then I'm panicked. I'm just hoping that no spirits come to me today."

In all of my anxiety, I don't notice that he has stopped and we are parked outside a house. He puts his hands on each side of my face, "Cara, look at me." It takes me a minute but I look into his eyes. There is such a softness and understanding there that I start to calm down a little bit.

"It's going to be okay. My mom has been wanting to meet you. I can tell you; that you have already won points with her because she's happy you take me out of my sulking. She told me that herself," he says.

"Really? She said that? Did she say anything else? Did you tell her anything else?" I ask frantically.

He kisses my lips softly. "She told me she already sees a change in me from the time I have been with you. She thinks I am the happiest I have been in a while. She just wants to put a face to the cause of my happiness. So just relax and be yourself. I fell in love with you for you. At the end of the day, she will have my back as long as she believes it is a good situation for me."

I touch his face, "You promise me, Ricky? You promise me you aren't just telling me this so I feel better?"

He looks at me seriously, "I promise you she said that, Cara. I wouldn't lie to you, especially not about something as important as this."

I take a deep breath and say, "Okay let's go. I can do this."

“Cara, it’s going to be okay. I’m right here beside you and if you need to step out or need anything just tell me.” He responds.

“Okay,” I say. He kisses me one more time a little longer and then steps out of the car.

We walk up the cement walkway which goes straight to the door. The brick house is long, the front has tall and wide windows that you could walk up to, and the front door is big and brown with a circular stained-glass window. Before we have a chance to ring the doorbell the door opens.

A beautiful woman opens the door, she has long black hair with a stripe of silver on the right side, her Sun Kissed skin does not have a single wrinkle, her smile reaches her dark eyes, she wears jeans, and she has a black shirt with bright flowers embroidered along the slight v of the top down to the middle of the shirt and on the bottom and sleeves that almost hit her wrists. Ricky goes to her and hugs her. She reaches his chest in height.

“Hi Ma,” he says affectionately.

She pats his cheek, “Hola Mijo.”

She turns to look at me and surprisingly pulls me into a hug. She stands back and looks at my face, “You must be Cara. My name is Antonia. I have been anxious to meet you.”

I feel myself relax a bit, “I have been anxious to meet you as well.”

Antonia leads us inside. There is a little entryway and to the right is the living room and the straight ahead leads to a part of a hallway. There is a painting of the Virgin Mary on the wall that you can see through the entryway to the hallway. We head that way and make a right. We enter a big beautiful kitchen that has a wide island counter in the middle that has the stove built into it. The smell of mixed spices and beef fills my nostrils. There are glass plates that almost look like a painting of a kaleidoscope with bright colors, silverware is laid out next to them. In a big bowl, there is what looks like a stew with steak, potatoes, onions, and bell peppers, there's another smaller bowl with orange rice, another with refried beans, and at the end are tortillas and a tube of sour cream.

"Tonight, I made Carne Guisada con Papas. One of Ricky's favorites. Help yourselves. We will sit in the kitchen tonight. Let me just go get my mother, we will be right over." she says.

"Do you need help?" He asks her.

She smiles, "Yeah, you know how stubborn your Abuela can be especially when she's in the middle of her novellas."

"I will just wait for you guys. Any way you can direct me to the living room?" I say making eye contact with him. He nods and walks me to the living room which is right off the kitchen.

There are shelves built into the wall with different trinkets and photos right when we walk in. When I walk in further there is a dark brick fireplace with more pictures on top of it, the rest of the living room has light blue walls. There is a round dark brown table, the couch is dark gray leather with reclining seats and wraps around the living room, there is one single gray fabric reclining chair, and there is a big TV on top of a TV stand with more trinkets and pictures on the shelf's underneath.

Ricky senses my panic and says, "We will be quick I promise. Nobody wants to admit it but I kind of have always been one of Abuela's favorites. So, it shouldn't take much to convince her." He smiles a devilish smile and gives me a peck.

He walks out of the room and I'm left standing there. I decide to go to the shelves when we walked in. The first thing I notice is a picture of Ricky wearing a football uniform holding his helmet under his arm. He still has the same face but there's a lightness there. His hair is parted in the center and waves out, definitely different than it is now. I wonder if we would have gotten along in high school.

There is a shelf full of tall religious candles with a silver standing cross and a statue of the Virgin Mary in the center. The statue itself is detailed and I find myself tracing the details around the edges. The feeling of my mind being shifted starts.

I'm standing in the same spot in the living room. On the couch is an older man with his feet reclined, he keeps rubbing his bald tan head in frustration, he has dark eyes, and a dark mustache rests under his nose which looks a little too big for his face. On the other end of the couch is Ricky's mom. By the fireplace, a woman is pacing back and forth. She has similar features to Ricky's mom but she is taller and a little bit bigger, she wears her hair shorter it is all black, and there is a scowl on her face.

"Every time Juan hangs out with Ricky there is some sort of trouble. Every single time. I'm done with this Antonia I really am. I think at this point it would be better if we didn't let them hang out together with us being present or at all," She shouts.

The man on the couch, who I assume is Ricky's grandfather responds. "Imelda, that is not the family way. It's important that we stay together and that we keep our bond strong. They are just kids doing kid stuff. Everything most of us did at that age. Don't break up this family due to pettiness," he says calmly.

Imelda scoffs, "Pettiness? My son coming home so stoned and drunk that he can barely make it through the door is not okay. What if he didn't wake up? What if the cops caught them?"

His grandpa swipes down his hand, "But it was all fine."

"This would ruin so much of what he has worked for. He WILL get good grades and he WILL go to college or trade school. He WILL make something of himself and I refuse to let anyone take that away from him. Including family." She continues.

"Imelda don't be so dramatic. It wasn't right and Ricky has been punished but to break apart the family over it? Come on. Let's just calm down. I agree there should be a time where they take a little break from each other. But we should keep the family together, keep our parties and holidays together."

Imelda shakes her head, "We're done. I'm done." She storms out of the room.

My vision swirls. "Cara? Cara?" I hear Ricky's voice. His hands squeeze my shoulders. I come to and I am still facing the shelves. I turn around and Ricky is there. I look around and thankfully we are alone. "Sorry, I just..." I start to say. Before I can continue on his mom speaks from the kitchen.

"Cara, what can I get you to drink? I have water bottles, sprite, orange juice, wine?"

I clear my throat, "I will have some wine, please. Whatever you have. Thank you so much."

I'm not a fan of wine but I'll take it if it means this will stop happening. He holds my hand, "We will talk about it later. For now, let's enjoy some dinner." I nod swallowing hard.

The kitchen table is rectangular and fits six people. Ricky and I sit on the side facing the kitchen window that looks into the yard. His mom and grandma sit on the other side facing us. At the head of the table, Juan sits.

"It's not too late to turn back, Guerrita" Juan says singsongy. I do my best to not look in his direction. Juan continues, "Tía Antonia has always been accepting of others. Abuela on the other hand is going to give you trouble. Just look at how she's looking at you already." I look over to Abuela whose eyebrows are knitted together and lips are tight. Not today, Juan. I take a deep breath and try to ignore Juan.

We spend the first part of dinner with his mom asking me questions about myself. Ricky listens because he picked up on the fact that drinking lightens my ability. He has made sure to pour me multiple glasses of wine. One of the worst things about me and drinking is that my cheeks become flushed. My anxiety has completely subsided and thankfully my shakiness with it.

"So, what was Ricky like as a kid?" I ask her.

She smiles, "He was always kind and thoughtful. Especially when it came to animals. I swear it was like injured animals would find him. He would bring them home to me to save them. Then, he would fight me when they would have to leave. He has always sort of been like that with people. Trying to help them and understand them. When he got to high school, he became a little more reserved when it came to relationships. He had a few friends in high school but they were great kids. He also was on the football team."

I smile and put my hand over his, "He still has kindness in there. He has been so great to me and nonjudgemental. I can say without a doubt I am lucky to have him. I know that he has been through so much and I appreciate that he has let me in."

Antonia's smile drops and there is sadness in her eyes. "He has. When he lost his cousin, it changed him. He became even sadder, more...."

Ricky cuts her off, "Mom don't go there."

She puts her hands up in defense, "Okay okay, I'll stop."

Ricky's grandma seems to sense the uneasiness in the rooms and begins speaking in Spanish. Unfortunately for me, I don't know any Spanish but I can see that it quickly relieved the tension.

I look at Ricky and watch his face. He is handsome and it's nice to see this side of him. Being around his family makes him happy. I have never felt this attracted to my past partners. It's like there is this invisible magnet drawing me to him. Ricky catches me staring and playfully wiggles his eyebrows at me. I stifle my laughter.

He turns back towards his family, "Excuse me, I have to go to the washroom." He gives me a sympathetic look before heading off. I do my best not to panic inside or out.

Looking back at the table two different expressions greet me. Ricky's mom has a soft expression with hints of curiosity in her eyes. His grandma looks hard and skeptical. It's almost like she is trying to dissect every part of me with her look. A shiver goes up my spine. I take a big swig of my wine.

Grandma begins speaking in Spanish. I don't know the language but I know that whatever she said wasn't good. Antonia swats Grandma's arm and responds to her. Part of me is bothered that his grandma already seems to have bad feelings about me. The other part of me understands being protective over someone you love.

"I know that this is our first time meeting and that you both don't know me. But I can tell you that I truly care for Ricky. I know that things have been rough for him....and your family. I know that we need to take our time and not rush anything. More than anything I feel grateful that I have met someone as great as Ricky."

Antonia puts her hand over mine, "Cara, my mom just worries especially since losing Juan. She feels like a part of Ricky went with Juan when he died. We as a family more than anything wants him to find himself again."

"I understand completely," I say.

Before the conversation can continue Ricky walks into the kitchen. Antonia stands up and starts to clean up the table. "How about we have some coffee and dessert?" Antonia says.

"I was wondering if I could give Cara a tour of the house before we do that."

She nods, "Of course."

Ricky takes me down the hallway. He points out whose bedroom is whose and takes me into the last bedroom on the left. The room has a twin-size bed with a flannel blanket, there are band posters all over the wall, there is a tall dresser, the floors are light hardwood, and there is a closet that has a door open with a few clothes hanging inside. He closes the door behind us making sure that it's quiet. He comes up to me and kisses me wrapping his arms around me.

"What did you hear?" I say between kisses.

He smiles, "Enough."

Ricky starts leading me to his old bed. "You don't know the number of times I fantasized about bringing a girl to my room," he says deeply.

I laugh, "You better calm down there, sir. We are in your family's house and we both know I'm loud."

He pushes me down on the bed and gets on top of me. I can feel his hard cock against my thigh. He pushes my sweater dress further up. As much as I am trying not to be turned on, I can't help but feel the wetness form between my legs. Especially, when he holds my wrists down.

"This is dangerous Enrique," I whisper.

He starts trailing nips down the right side of my neck. I arch my back so my body is closer to his. Ricky's musky scent fills my nose. He moves his hands and feels my hips, pushing my dress up.

"Ricky? Coffee's ready," Antonia says down the hallway.

"Be right there" Ricky responds.

He kisses me with hunger and I wrap my arms around his neck.

"Maybe, just to spite you I should get down on my knees right here and suck your cock," I say seductively.

"I will keep that in mind for later," he says, giving me one more long kiss before getting up.

I look at him miffed and readjust my dress. He leads me out of the room and back to the kitchen.

We have coffee and a delicious chocolate pie. The tension sort of dies down throughout. "Thanks for doing this Ma. We probably should get going. We both have work in the morning," Ricky says.

"Okay, thank you both for coming. Don't be strangers! I know there is time but I want to invite you ahead of time to Thanksgiving," she says looking at me.

I smile, "I would love that thank you so much. Everything was delicious and I can't wait to get to know everybody better and for you guys to get to know me."

I look over at Abuela who looks unimpressed. Antonia gives us each a hug. Ricky gives his Abuela a hug and a kiss on the top of her head.

We head out and he opens my car door for me. I get inside and my stomach sinks. I know he is going to ask me about what I saw. I wonder if he knows that his aunt felt so strongly. If he even knew this conversation took place. I know I need to be honest with him. Ricky gets in the car and starts driving. I start to fiddle with getting my phone connected to my Bluetooth.

"So, what did you see? Well, I guess who did you see?" He asks.

I hesitate, "It was your Grandpa, your Mom, and your Aunt."

His lips turn thin and his jaw grows tight. "Which Aunt?" He asks.

I swallow, "Imelda."

There is tense silence for a moment. "And?" He says clipped.

I put my hand over his, "Enrique, we don't have to do this. I know that you and your Aunt are at odds..."

"Cara, please just tell me," He says softer.

"Your Aunt was upset because Juan came home drunk and high. She was saying how she didn't want you guys hanging out alone. Your grandpa was trying to diffuse the situation. He wanted to keep his family together. Your mom was trying to find a compromise but your aunt was really upset so she left."

"My Aunt never liked me," He responds.

I squeeze his hand in mine, "I don't think she didn't like you it just sounds like she was overprotective of Juan. Which is understandable because he was her son. I'm sure she loves you, she is just stuck in her grief," I say.

He shakes his head, "No Cara, she hates me. She's been acting this way since I was little."

I don't know what to say because that's not something I have ever experienced. My mom was just absent and distant and my father was too focused on his drug use to have an opinion.

"Well, if that is the case then that sounds more like her problem than yours. It happens sometimes. It shouldn't but people have their own issues to deal with. At the end of the day, the only people we need in our lives are the ones who are there for us. But I want to believe a lot of her feelings stem from losing her son. I changed a lot after my Grams died. Some people can become consumed by their anger at the loss. Maybe at some point, you and your aunt can sit down and work on reconciling your relationship."

He laughs a humorless laugh, "That may work for some families but this isn't just a petty argument. Juan is dead and is never coming back. Nothing I can do can ever change that."

"Cara it's no use. Just drop it for now. Ricky will talk about it when he's ready," Juan says from the backseat of the car.

"It wasn't your fault, Enrique. Accidents happen. That's why they're called accidents," I say softly.

I can feel the anger radiating off of him. "Cara, I love you I do but can we please drop it," he says.

I'm silent because I'm having a battle within myself. On one hand, I want to help him and not let him continue to fall into this darkness. On the other hand, I know I can't push him too far or I will lose him.

"I love you too Ricky and I want to help. I know you aren't ready right now but at some point, I want to help you," I tell him honestly.

He nods which doesn't give me his thoughts but I'll take it.

Enrique's Perspective

Some of my favorite memories as a child were the vacations we would have as a family. It always felt like a new adventure. It's not that we vacationed often but when we did, we made it worthwhile. My dad was big on family vacations, even if they were little weekend getaways during hardship. Cara and I have had so much going on around us that I decided it was time to take a page out of my dad's book and get us away.

She has absolutely no idea but I covered all my bases. I already called her boss and asked if she could have Friday through Sunday off. I talked to my boss who was cool with it because I never take time off. I talked to Hunter who is going to have stuff packed for her. Now I just have to tell her. We already planned on hanging out today after work. I found a romantic cabin near beautiful hiking trails. Not that I think we will do much hiking. There are also other activities in the area if that's what we choose to do. But more than anything I just want to spend quality time, just the two of us. I pull up to her house.

Me: I'm here baby.

Cara: The front door is unlocked, just come in. I'm just finishing getting ready.

I walk in the door. Hunter comically goes down the hallway. Swiveling his head around like he is a spy on a mission. He comes right down the stairs. I laugh.

"Does she suspect anything?" I ask.

He shakes his head, "No, not a single clue."

He goes into a coat closet and pulls out a large suitcase and a smaller suitcase. I raise an eyebrow, "You know it's only for the weekend, right?"

He rolls his eyes, "Such a guy. I know it's just for the weekend and I also know Cara. With her anxiety, she's going to want to be prepared for everything. I'm sure you two will just be shacked up somewhere fucking like bunnies. But just in case there are options for her. The big suitcase has all her clothes, make-up, and hair products. The smaller bag is shoes. Got that?" He puts his hand on his hip with attitude.

I do the manliest thing I can think and I pat him on the shoulder. "Thanks again for doing this," I say.

Hunter has an appalled look on his face. "Of course, I would do anything for my best friend. ANYTHING," he enunciates his words.

I huff, "Yeah yeah yeah, I know that if anything happens to her something will happen to me. We've already had this conversation."

He smiles, "I know I just have to make sure to give reminders." He pats my shoulder roughly in return. As much as Hunter can be a pain in my ass, I have to respect how protective he is over Cara. I go upstairs to Cara's room.

I hesitate at the door, second thoughts starting to rear their ugly head. Will Cara like this? Is this too much? I turn the knob and go in. Cara is sitting at her vanity. She doesn't hear me over the music she is playing. She is applying a coat of lip gloss to her lips. I look at her through the mirror. She is stunning. Her green eyes always stun me. They change color and always look different especially today. Her eyes are darker and are accentuated by her gold-looking eyeshadow. I can't keep my eyes off of her. Her eyes finally catch mine. Her cheeks get red.

"Hi," she says lowly.

"Hi," I say.

She stands up and comes up to me. She wraps her arms around my neck. "How's it going handsome?" She says seductively.

My eyes roam down her figure and linger on the exposed top of her cleavage. The burnt orange shirt brings out her creamy skin. I stop myself from squeezing them.

"Eyes up here buddy," she laughs.

"But these are here," I say, putting my hands on her breasts.

She shakes her head, "You better stop that unless you are going to bend me over my bed and fuck me right now."

I look into her eyes and see that she wants me as much as I want her. My cock begins to harden in my pants. I fight my primal urges. "As much as I want to do that. I have something I need to talk to you about," I say. Her expression quickly changes to concern.

"Yes?" She says.

I wrap my arms around her waist keeping her close. "So, we have had a lot going on lately and not a lot of time to be together. I decided to take charge and I am taking us away for the weekend." She looks surprised and also panicked.

"Go away? But I have work and I haven't packed and..." she starts to panic. "I kiss her lips stopping her list from going on, which knowing Cara I know there's more. I feel her body relax. I move back and look into her eyes.

"I already talked to your boss and he was fine with you having the weekend off. As you have never taken time off in the 4 years you have been working there. Hunter already has your bags packed and ready to go. They are downstairs waiting by the front door. I was able to get off and I already have everything booked for us," I say.

She looks surprised and overjoyed. "Aww baby," she kisses my lips. "Thank you!" She continues.

"Of course, now come on let's get going," I say.

I start heading out her bedroom door. She bites her bottom lip,

"And we are going to..."

I shake my finger at her, "It's a surprise."

This sparks curiosity, "Can I have a hint?"

I shake my head, "You'll see soon enough." Like a toddler who hasn't gotten their way, she humphs but follows behind me.

We go down and Hunter is waiting by her bags. Cara goes to him and hugs him.

"Thanks for packing for me!" She says.

"No problem bitch, but you better come back in one piece," he says, giving me a side-eye look.

She swats his arm, "Knock it off. It will be fine. Just try not to burn the house down while I'm gone."

He laughs, "No promises."

The drive to our destination is almost three hours. We trade off songs making a sacred 4 song each rule. I nearly miss the low gas chime due to Unhinged by *Larcenia Roe* blaring through the speakers. We stop get gas and stock up on our favorite snacks and drinks. The last thirty minutes of the trip were the most scenic, with a lot of woods and hills with sharp turns. At one point we are above the little town and can see the lights from the businesses below.

"Stop the car," Cara says excitedly.

There is a little area to park. We get out and I bring my Polaroid Camera. When we walk a little further down there are benches in different areas and surprisingly a swing set.

"Come on," she grabs my arm pulling me along. It's cute to see her almost childlike when she is excited about something. She goes to the swing set. She sits down and I follow suit.

"It's so beautiful," she says.

Of course, she's looking down at the town and I'm looking at her. Cara is beautiful. I just wish she had more confidence. She looks over to me and a blush rises in her cheeks. "What?" She asks.

I smile, “Just looking at the beautiful scenery. Can I take a picture of you?” I ask.

She looks shy and she hesitates. “Only if I can take your picture,” she retorts.

I think in her mind she thought I would back out so she looks surprised when I tell her she can. I hold up my camera at her and I can tell she’s overthinking. So, I stand up, go over to her, and lean down to her level. I kiss her lips. A smile forms on Cara’s lips and before she realizes it, I take her picture. The picture prints out with a whirring noise and I shake it back and forth. The picture develops slowly. When it’s done it’s perfect. Her pink lips are up in a smile and it reaches her dark green eyes. She leans a little on the chain link of the swing.

“Wow, you’re good,” she says.

I smile a cocky smile, “I know.”

“Your turn,” she says, taking the camera from around my neck. I slip the Polaroid into my back pocket.

“Yes ma’am,” I say. I look at her and smile.

She hesitates and teases, “I need more. I thought you’d at least pose for me or something.”

I lay on the grass and prop up my head on my hand. I wiggle my eyebrows at her. “How’s this for ya, baby?” She laughs and pretends like she is taking a million snapshots. I do my best fake model faces.

“Alright alright, come on Casanova get up,” she laughs. She puts her hand out to help me up and I pull her down on top of me.

“Ricky!” she squeals.

Cara straddles me and sits up, placing the camera to the side. She pets the side of my face with her hand and looks into my eyes. I nuzzle her hand. Her touch makes me feel so comforted.

“Thank you so much for doing this. To be honest with you I have never been much of anywhere. Grams was really a homebody and my parents well... were my parents and we never really did anything like this. I have had so much fun with you and that was just the car ride I can’t imagine what else we can do. The fact that you planned all of this. It’s one of the nicest things anyone has ever done for me,” her voice starts to break.

I can tell she is getting emotional. So, I pull her down with my hands and bring her lips to mine. She moves her head back blinking.

“You deserve this, baby. And I hope that more than anything we can enjoy this time together. There has just been so much going and I hope this trip takes our mind off of everything,” I say.

“I hope so Ricky I do,” she says as she sits back up.

She gets off of me and grabs the camera. I lean on my hands looking at her body. When I look back up to look in her eyes, she has the camera ready and snaps a picture. “Gotcha,” she says. Following my lead, she shakes the picture back and forth.

Though she is wearing jeans, the pockets are the fake ones that are sewn shut. She puts the Polaroid in her bra. She sticks her tongue out at me.

I laugh, “If you want it to be safe that’s the worst place to put it.”

Cara comes to stand inches away from me. Getting in my face. “Who says you’re getting any?” She scoffs. I laugh. She gives a pout, “well?”

“You’re so cute when you’re being feisty,” I say, breaking the little space there was between us.

“I guess we will see when we get to wherever we are going,” she continues.

I know the game she’s playing so I give her what she wants. I lift her chin with my index finger and have her face lean up towards mine. I smash my lips onto hers. She moans. I let it go on for a little bit then I release her.

“Time to go,” she says.

I smile, “Let’s go.”

The cabin looks just like the pictures online. It looks like dark logs up and down the exterior, a few steps lead up to a porch covered by part of the roofing with two rocking chairs and a small table. There is a curved driveway in front. When we get to the door, I take the keys from the mailbox that is hanging on the side of the door. I put the key in the handle and then open the door. There is a trail of rose petals leading inside. I can see the shock and awe on her face. I take her moment of distraction and I pick her up bridal style. She laughs and looks up at me.

“Now I take what’s mine,” I say in a growl. The anticipation killed me for the rest of the car ride. My cock hardened as I imagined all the things I wanted to do to her in this cabin. I play it safe and carry her to the bedroom.

“Fine, take me,” she says, acting defeated.

I set her down on the bed gently. She looks up at me feigning innocence. As she slowly takes off her clothes. I take mine off. When they are all off, she stands up in front of me fully naked. My mouth waters at the sight of her tits, nipples hard and ready for my mouth. I go on instinct and put her right tit in my mouth. She throws her head back in satisfaction. Little moans escape her lips. I suck it deep into my mouth. Before moving on to the other one. She moans softly. I put my finger between her legs. Rubbing my finger up and down her clit. She is already soaked and ready for me. I rub it in a circle. My finger getting coated in her juices.

“Please fuck me,” she whines.

A little laugh comes out, “I thought I wasn’t getting any. Weren’t those your words?” I start moving my finger in a circle. Her body is so responsive to me more wetness pooling and she leans her head on my shoulder for support.

“I... I” She tries to get out. I quicken my pace knowing she’s close. Her moans are getting louder and louder. Cara digs her fingers into my shoulders.

“Ricky,” she moans.

“Time for your punishment,” I say.

She moves her head off my shoulder and she whispers, “Give me your worst.”

My girl has a smart mouth. I turn her to face the bed. I know she is turned on and it’s turning her on not knowing what’s coming next. She tries to read what I want and starts to get on her knees on the bed. I grab one leg planting it on the ground and let the other stay bent on the bed. I press my cock against her glistening cunt letting it get coated in natural lube. I can’t help the satisfied smile as her body tense up in anticipation.

Before she can say something smart or impatient I grab my cock and guide it in. I begin slamming into her hard and fast. I go in and out not giving her time to adjust to the size of my cock. I hold her hips tightly slamming her pussy hard onto my cock. She tightens herself around me with each thrust I give her. Her body rocks back and forth with the quick motions.

I smack her ass hard. She moans. I smack it over and over seeing redness start to form in the shape of my hand. I start hitting the other cheek to match. Cara moans and I can feel the buildup. Her wetness is making a mess on my cock.

“Don’t I take your punishment like a good girl?” She asks.

I laugh, “Baby that was just a warm-up.”

Her body tenses up but her arousal is high. I stop my movements and I use my hands to spread her ass. I spit onto her hole.

“Oh no,” she cries.

I put my thumb in my mouth before rubbing it around her tight asshole. Her body tenses up, but her sounds of surprise and pleasure egg me on. I decide to test the waters, putting the tip of my thumb in. It’s so tight. Her moans get louder, but she still doesn’t try to stop me. I commit to it and spit on her asshole again before sliding my thumb in smoothly. Watching my thumb sink to the knuckle makes my erection even harder.

“Oh yes baby,” I say, moving myself in and out of her while also moving my thumb inside her ass. My thumb can feel the impact of my cock hitting her pussy.

“Oh,” she cries.

The noises she’s making mixed with the tightness of her ass makes my cock want in more. She begins moving herself on my thumb. Then, I feel her cum. I keep going though as I search for my release.

“Take it,” she moans.

I stop what I’m doing and I spit some more making sure to add more lube for the grand finale. I move her hips lower and hover the head of my cock right by her ass. I hold the base and start pushing the head in.

There’s some resistance and for a moment I feel like it might be too much. I push in more, and my head starts to get enveloped by her ass hole. The initial feeling of her slowly stretching over and around my cock sends waves of pleasure cascading up my body. She groans and moans loudly, a mixture of pleasure and pain.

“So tight,” I say through gritted teeth.

I start slow trying to stop myself so I can give her time to adjust. Surprisingly, she begins bouncing herself up and down on my cock.

“That’s right,” I say, smacking her ass hard. She moans. It’s all so much and I have given restraint my best shot. I grab her hips and slide my cock into the base.

“That’s right baby, ruin me. Take what’s yours,” she moans. Cara knows how to stroke my ego.

“Who owns this?” I grit as I start the full assault on her tight asshole.

Her moans grow more intense. “You do,”

She cries. "All.... mine," I say with two slow hard pumps. I pick the pace back up.

"Shit shit shit," I say through gritted teeth.

Then, I spill my load filling her tight sweet ass. Her whole body collapses but I stay inside. I smack her ass one more time for good measure, "Good girl."

Cara's Perspective

Since Ricky planned this trip, it was only fair that I show my appreciation by making dinner. The cabin has a full kitchen stocked with all the essentials. The closest grocery store was 30 minutes away and thankfully we were able to get there just in the nick of time to get the stuff we needed for tonight's dinner and breakfast.

Tonight, I am making Ricky one of my favorite dishes: Beef Stroganoff. The cabin Ricky picked gives me so many good vibes. The noodles are ready. I am just finishing up the sauce when he approaches me.

"Hmmm, is this a glimpse into my future?" He asks.

I wrap my arms around his neck, "If you're lucky."

He laughs, "I am lucky. A beautiful woman who wants to cook for me. What more can I ask for?"

I kiss his lips, "So am I."

Ricky goes to sit in the living room waiting for me to finish dinner. Everything's coming together.

A little while later, I start to hear bubbling and I turn to stir the sauce. I add a dollop of sour cream and stir it into the sauce. I turn the flame off, "Dinner's ready!"

"Smells amazing," he says in appreciation.

He tries to grab plates and I bump his hip with my own. "Uh uh uh go sit I got it. You just get the drinks.," I demand.

He puts his hands up in defense, "Okay. Should we open the champagne we got or save it?"

I grab two big dark red bowls and start filling one. "I'll just have one of my Sprites for now," I respond.

"In that case, I'll just do one of my Dr. Pepper's then."

He grabs one of each from the fridge and goes to the dark brown dining room table. I set our bowls down on black-beaded placemats at our spots and sit down.

When my arms lean on the table a flash of images goes through my mind: *A family sitting at the dining room around the table all laughing and having a good time, a man proposing to a woman and sharing a passionate kiss, a group of women wearing sashes with one of them wearing a small veil with a banner hanging on the wall that says "Bachelorette Party" in pink glittery letters.*

There is so much warmth throughout the entire place. Most of the time I see visions from people who have passed and these are all happy people who are still living. Ricky puts his hand over mine. It brings me out of my trance.

“What’s wrong?” he asks, concerned.

I shake my head, “Nothing. This cabin just has a lot of positive energy.”

“I guess I have good taste,” he teases.

I watch him as he goes to take a bite. I hope he likes it.

He closes his eyes in satisfaction and says, “Mmmm, it’s so good.”

“You promise?” I ask, sounding hopeful.

He nods, taking another bite. I join in on eating and it’s exactly how I remember it. It reminds me of my Dad. During our short time together, it was my favorite dish he would make for me.

“My Dad always made it the best,” I say sadly. I can tell he wants to ask more but he hesitates due to my past reaction. I continue. “I know that I haven’t been open about my parents. It’s just sort of a tough topic for me. I haven’t seen either one of them in a long time,” I tell him.

“Do you think I will ever meet them?” He asks.

I laugh a bitter laugh, “I don’t think I would want you to. Not because I’m ashamed of you or anything but because I’m ashamed of them. I don’t know who they are and I never did... That’s something I appreciate about your family. You all are so close.

I have some memories with them. When I was smaller my dad would read to me every night before bed. He always had the best storytelling voice and would read it in the most dramatic way. I have seen a lot of pictures from my childhood. I think when I was a baby, they enjoyed being parents but they were so young. I think as time went on it became too much for them. They felt like they were missing out on so much. In all honesty, though I don’t know who I would have been if my Grams didn’t raise me,” I say.

“Do you have any extended family?” He asks.

“Not that I know of,” I respond.

“Well, I can be your family now,” he says smiling.

It makes me blush. My mind instantly goes to children. Do I want kids? Do I want there to be a chance that my child goes through the things I have gone through with spirits? Am I capable of taking care of someone other than myself?

“What?” He asks.

I hesitate, "Do you want kids?"

"Someday. Do you?"

"I don't know, part of me says yes and part of me says no. I just worry about having a child who shares my ability to see ghosts. I don't want them to go through what I've been through."

"That's understandable but you aren't sure that the gene would pass on?"

"No, I guess not. The only person I know of who had it in my family is my Grams. But then you heard Carey talking about my bloodline so I'm sure it's possible."

I let the subject linger in the air as there are so many questions and thoughts I have going through my head. There is time to dwell on this later. I also don't want to dampen the mood.

After dinner, I tell Ricky that I need to freshen up. He says he is going to get the fire going. Which is perfect because that gives me enough time for my plan.

When I went through my stuff there was a gift bag inside my suitcase. It was a dark red gift bag with black tissue paper. When I opened it there was a black chemise with lace detailing on the bust and black thigh highs to attach to the garters. There is also a note, "Have fun bitch! Love you!" He also made sure to pack me a pair of black stilettos along with my other shoes.

I try it on in the bathroom and it fits perfectly. I add a few spritz of my perfume. I walk out of the room and he is distracted by the fire. I go over to the dining room table and lean back. He turns to face me and his mouth opens then stops. Ricky looks slowly down my body. He takes his time.

"Time for dessert," I say seductively.

He licks his lips. I run my index finger up the side of my body. He saunters over to me, keeping eye contact with me. The air is charged and my thighs clench. He gets down on his knees. He kisses up my leg and anticipation builds inside me. I bite my lip. Then he sits me on the side of the table. I lean back on my hands and move myself closer to his face. He moves my chemise up and exposes my pussy. He begins licking up and down my clit. I lean further back to give him more space.

He pushes his tongue down as he keeps going. I become wetter and wetter. My nipples are exposed from how hard they are. I hold his head closer to me and start grinding myself onto his mouth.

"Do you like it, baby?" I ask.

"Mmmmm," he responds, and the vibration goes through me.

I grind more and more. I lean my head back with my eyes closed in satisfaction. It switches between pushing his tongue onto me as he licks me and sucking on my clit. I feel vulnerable with him being so close to my vagina. I tug lightly on his hair as I feel my body building up. I get higher and higher. Then, I cum my wetness coating his lips. He moves his face from me licking his lips, "So delicious."

Ricky takes his pants off and his hard cock springs out. I lick my lips in appreciation and get down on my knees. I look up into his eyes batting my lashes. He rubs the side of my face with his hand and I nuzzle it. I plant soft kisses from the base down to the tip of his cock kneading his balls in my hand. I lick around the tip in a circle. I do this multiple times.

I grab his thigh and bring his cock to the back of my throat. He groans. I move him back and forth allowing his cock to hit the back of my throat. I suck on his length while I knead his balls. Back and forth his cock roughly goes in, my jaw starts to become sore.

"Such a good girl," he says.

He puts his hand in my hair and then grabs it from the top forcing my throat on it harder. I keep my eyes focused on his and they start to water. Tears spill from the corners of my eyes. He leans his head back, his face showing his pleasure. His cock fills my mouth and I work hard to breathe through my nose. Before he can cum he steps away from me and helps me up from the ground.

He lifts me up and puts me back on the table. He pulls my legs up and I lay my back flat on the table. My legs are on his shoulder and he slowly enters me. My pussy stretches from the size of his cock. He pounds into me, each thrust testing my limits. I tighten myself around him. The only sound in the room is the slapping of skin on skin. I finger myself slowly circling my clit. My body begins building up and building up and then I cum all over him yelling out. His cock feels like it's hitting every wall. My legs are spread for him. My eyes meet his before they start to roll from the intensity of the friction.

Unexpectedly, his hands cup my ass and he lifts me off the table while he is still inside me. He bounces me up and down on his cock.

"You take it so good baby," he says.

His cock feels warm with my juices. The penetration feels deeper in this angle. It feels so intense and amazing. I hold onto him for support as I cum hard all over him again.

He carries me and goes by the fireplace while he's still deep inside me. He lifts me off his cock, I groan when I feel the absence.

The fireplace feels warm on my bare skin. He sets me down and I get down on my knees. I wiggle my ass for him in anticipation. He gets down behind me and rubs his hands along the cheeks of my ass. I put my legs together.

Ricky enters me quick and hard. My pussy feels even harder with my legs together. He holds onto my hips digging his nails in as he pumps in and out of me. His thrusts are aggressive and little cries come out. The pain and pleasure are so prominent.

“That’s right baby, own me,” I moan. I push back onto him, meeting his rhythm. His fingers dig deeper. His warm cum spills into me as he lets out a guttural grunt. He pumps a few more times then stops.

He holds me in place and his cock twitches inside me. The movements hit a deep part of me. I moan and he keeps doing it. Shockingly, I cum again.

“God, what do you do to me?” I whisper.

He laughs, “Dominate you.”

Enrique's Perspective

The path next to the cabin is supposed to be about a two-hour hike. According to what I read online the path is supposed to lead to a beautiful waterfall. Hikers can view it from above and below. I brought a backpack set for hiking with a small first aid kit, flashlights, water bottles, a compass, rope, and a pocket knife. Cara quirks a brow at me when she sees the backpack.

"You can never be too prepared," I shrug.

She rolls her eyes and laughs. "I guess so," she responds. She bends over to tie her shoe on the side of the table. I can't stop myself from looking at her round ass which is perfectly outlined in her black leggings. I can picture it bare and ready for me. She turns around and tightens her ponytail. "Enjoying the view?" She teases.

I go to her and squeeze a cheek in my hand. "Yes, but I'd prefer these to be off," I say.

She shakes her head, "You better stop or they will be."

We go down making sure that we have the keys and the door is locked. There is a black cement path going down into the woods. We walk side by side. It's a private path up to a certain point. Then, it is open to the public. So, there is no one else around. The trees are bare and the red, orange, and yellow leaves fill the ground. There are a lot of trees close together but not close enough that you can't see between them.

"Paths like this make you wonder. Who walked this before? Why this path?" Cara says.

"I never really thought about it that way," I say honestly. I try not to bring up her abilities but I can't help but be curious. "Have you picked up anything out here?" I hesitantly ask.

"Surprisingly, no but there's time," she says. I can tell she is having anxiety. It just dawns on me that the last time she was in the woods she was attacked by the creature.

"I'm sorry, Cara. I just realized that this might not have been the best idea," I say.

She looks at me with a small smile, "I'm okay. The best way to work through something sometimes is to face it head-on. Besides, maybe the good memories I make in the woods will push away the bad memories." Cara stops walking and stands in front of me. There's uncertainty in her eyes with a hint of lust. "Want to make a good memory?" She says laughing. "So cheesy," she continues laughing at herself.

I cheesily saunter towards her. "What did you have in mind?" I say.

She pretends like she is thinking hard about something. She taps her index finger against the side of her cheek. I have a few thoughts of my own. Cara runs her finger down my chest playfully. I grab her wrist hard and pull her by it.

I pull her down into the woods just in case other people end up on the trail I don't want them to get a little show. Once I feel we are a safe distance away. I push her back into a thick tree. My cock hardens. I put her hands above her head.

"Keep your hands there. If you don't there will be consequences," I say in a deep voice.

There's a look of lust and a little fear in her eyes. I take my backpack off and pull the rope out and my knife. Her eyes widen slightly. I pull her hands and bring them down in front of me. I wrap them around and then tie them together. Then, I tie that rope around the trunk with her arms positioned above her head.

I lift her loose-fitting tank top and put it behind her neck and I move her sports bra up to expose her breasts. Her nipples are hard and ready for me. I know that one of her kinks is fear. So, I grab my knife and run the tip between her breasts. Her breathing picks up and she shakes a little.

"I should mark my territory," I say darkly. I run the tip around her nipples and she whimpers.

She shakes her head, "Please." I take her shoes off and slide her leggings off.

She is completely exposed to anybody who may walk by. Her skin looks even paler with the sky being so white.

I hold the knife up to her neck and then put my mouth down. I bring her nipple into my mouth, sucking it between my teeth. She moans and wiggles a little. I do the same to the other side, building the need for her and myself. It feels more like I'm punishing myself than her.

My cock aches to be inside her already knowing how tight and wet she is. I move down her body running the tip of the knife along her body making sure not to put too much pressure to cut her, but just enough to leave slight scratches. Her body shakes.

I crouch down so that my face is level with her pussy. I turn the knife upside down so I'm holding the blade in my hand and spread her legs. I run the handle between her legs. She leans her head back in pleasure. The wetness builds between her legs and onto the handle. I hold the knife up to her and show her, her wetness coated on the handle. Her eyes widen, I'm sure from shock.

"I guess someone enjoys knife play," I say. I plunge the knife into the side of the tree and stand up.

I unbutton and unzip my cargo pants and pull them and my boxers down. My cock springs out and she looks down at it. I grab her legs, the tree doing the work of holding her up, and wrap them around my waist. I slowly enter her, the chilliness of the air on my cock slowly being warmed by her pussy as I bury it inside her. I hold her legs up and bounce her up and down on me. The friction of the pounding and her wetness combined are so intense. I feel her tighten around me with each thrust. Gravity aids in slamming her down on my cock to the base making her take my full length and girth with every thrust. She is trying to be soft with her moans but I can tell she is overwhelmed. She lets a long moan out as she cums on my cock. I feel the pressure building in my groin and Cara senses it.

"I'm not done with you yet," I say between gritted teeth.

I set her down letting her feet hit the ground. Then, I spin her around and bend her over. I rub the swell of her ass with my hand before I smack it before I slam my cock inside her roughly. She hisses. I grab her hips and pound into her tightness. Cream starts forming all over my cock.

"You like being dominated," I say.

She responds by cumming again, her body shaking from the orgasm. I work her harder and harder. This time I can't hold back and grant us both the immense pleasure of my release. I grab tight as I pump my cum inside her. I pull myself out of her and see my cum run down her thighs.

She stays in place for a moment before she stands up straight. I pull up my boxers and pants and button them. I grab my knife from the side of the tree and cut the rope between her wrists. She fixes her bra then shirt and then picks up her leggings to put them on. I start carving into the tree.

She ties her laces and asks, "What are you doing?"

"You'll see," I smile.

She comes right behind me to see. I carved a heart with our initials in the center of the tree.

"Aww, I've always seen that in the movies. Thanks, baby," she plants a peck on my lips.

"Just in case we ever come back we can find our tree," I say, admiring my handiwork.

When walking on the path we see that there is something deeper in the woods that is not on the path. Curiosity takes over and I grab Cara's arm, "Come on." She looks nervous but she follows me.

We go through the trees. An abandoned church comes into view. It is a small church worn down over time, it has a pointed top with a cross on top, between the base and cross is an old bell, and there are a set of wide doors.

"Ricky, I don't know about this," Cara says looking around like a monster is going to jump out at any moment.

"You wanted to get a better understanding of religion, now's your chance. I'll protect you, don't worry," I say. She looks hesitant but follows me staying close.

Because the door is worn it takes a moment for me to get it to budge. I have to push my entire body weight into it. It takes work and then it finally budes.

The church has an aisle and there are rows of pews that are falling apart on each side, there is a beautiful stained-glass window with some spots broken, there is a statue of Christ on the cross in the direct center, and underneath the statue is two rows of worn candles in a stand, to the left is a statue of the Virgin Mary, and on the other side is Patron St. Joseph. I have spent a lot of time in churches since I was a child. My Mom had us go to church every Sunday and we would attend different events the church held. I can sense the apprehension from Cara. The front left pew is still intact in front of the Virgin Mary statue.

I sit down and pat the seat next to me. "Come here," I say softly.

She sits down still looking all around her. "Are you sure we should be doing this?" She whispers.

I laugh, "Why are you whispering?"

She laughs, "Well, I don't know this is kind of spooky."

I scoot closer to her, “That’s because you are taking it for face value. Try to imagine this place in its heyday. Pews full of people from town, a priest giving an animated sermon, and the piano being played. She closes her eyes trying to visualize it all. Now, give me your hand.” She opens one eye partially. I laugh, “Just trust me.”

Cara takes my hand. I bring us to our knees. “You question what keeps people’s faith. I believe that part of what keeps the faith is the fact that people feel as though they have an avenue to ask for guidance when they are struggling. It makes them feel better when they are having hard times. I, for example, would pray for protection over you. It would make me feel better to know that I have faith that you can be protected by other forces that may or may not be out there.”

I can tell she is taking in my words. “Prayer also has that added effect on yourself. You pray with the feeling that by doing so you are giving an added protection to yourself.”

“I guess I never thought about it that way,” she says.

“We can pray,” I say, putting my hands together.

“I don’t know any prayers,” she responds.

“That’s fine, just repeat after me,” I say. She nods.

“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen,” we say one after another. After she repeats ‘Amen’ the bell starts tolling, and we both jump.

We both are frozen in place. Everything feels in slow motion. The bell continues.

“Ricky?” Cara cries.

I look over to her and she is pointing ahead. I look to where she points. It’s directed at the statue of the Virgin Mary. Black tears stream down the statue’s face. My eyes move to the other statues that have the same black streams. The fear and anxiety build up in me pushing pumping adrenaline through my veins. I grab her hand and we run like hell out of there.

We run through the trees, trying to avoid any that come in our path. The cold air whips our faces. The bell continues. It still sounds loud even with us distancing ourselves from it. We run back onto the path and further down. It stops. We stop running trying to catch our breaths.

“Six...” Cara whispers.

“What?” I ask.

“The bell rang 6 times. I wonder if it’s a sign?” she says.

“I don’t know,” I say honestly.

I can tell there is panic within her. So, I hold her in my arms and hug her close. “Let’s go back to the cabin. We will warm up and relax. Maybe it rings all the time but it just felt creepy?”

For a moment it seems like she’s relaxing, but her eyes look deep into mine, “But what about the black tears? How the fuck do you explain that?” This one stumps me. I try to come up with something but come up blank.

Cara sees this and grabs my hands, “Let’s just go back to the cabin, cuddle up under some soft blankets and drink something hot.”

“I’m sorry baby,” I say feeling disappointed.

She kisses my lips, “Baby it’s not your fault. We came to get our minds off stuff, let’s just focus on our time together.”

I am feeling a little defeated when we get back to the cabin. I am worried that this has ruined the whole trip. When we get inside Cara corners me. She kisses me straight on the lips and looks up into my eyes.

“I know you are overthinking right now. I can see it all over you. It’s going to be okay. I wanted some more time alone with you anyway. We will turn everything around. We can get the fire going, put on warm jammies, have some coffee, and snuggle. There’s a pretty big-sized TV so we can watch something. If you wanted to enjoy nature, we could also sit on the back porch and smoke a joint. Then, we can make love and restart tomorrow,” she says, rubbing her hands up and down my shoulders soothingly.

Her eyes look into mine so lovingly. Cara has such a patient and nurturing side to her.

“God, I love you and I think I will take you up on your offer of enjoying nature with nature,” I say.

She pecks my lips, “I love you too.”

We go into our room and change. I put on gray joggers with a black shirt. She puts on skinny pajama pants with skulls on them, a V-neck black shirt, and black fuzzy socks. This woman tempts me without even trying. I get the fire going while she makes the coffee. When she comes back over, she sets our coffee on the coffee table and sits back. I am bent over working on the fire.

“Mmmm.”

“Can I help you?” I ask teasingly.

She teases back, “I don’t know, can you?”

“You’ll find out later if you are a good girl,” I say.

“I’m always good,” she says.

“Mhmm,” I respond.

I hear movement behind me. “I have an idea,” she says.

I get the fire done and I watch as she walks around. She found paper for making lists, two pens, and a popcorn bowl.

“Why don’t we each put in two movies each and then one of us will pick from the bowl and that will be how we decide what to watch,” she says excitedly.

“Okay, I’m down,” I say, sitting down on the couch beside her.

I write down *Starship Troopers* and *As Above So Below*. They are all in the bowl. She flips the paper in the bowl and swirls it around with her hand.

“You pick but close your eyes,” she says.

I do as she says and hold a piece of paper up. When I open it, the paper says *Practical Magic* in swirly handwriting. “*Practical Magic*,” I read.

She jumps up and down excitedly. “I’ve never seen it,” I say honestly.

“Perfect,” she says, clapping her hands together.

When the movie is over, I am pleasantly surprised that I enjoyed it. It was a movie I heard about but never tried to watch worried that it would be overhyped. We decide we are going to order food and smoke a joint. There is an Italian Restaurant called Bella Amore that is in town but delivers and the prices are reasonable. We got Bruschetta, she got Angel Hair pasta with garlic and oil with cut-up grilled chicken and mushrooms, and I ordered Chicken Parmesan. She slips on her crocs and we go outside.

It’s dark outside but the moon is bright over the woods. The moonlight hits the tips of the trees, making some of the woods visible from our angle. Stars are scattered through the sky. It reminds you of how much you can miss when you live in a town full of lights. There are also lights along the walking path.

She is the first to take a hit. I watch as she brings the lighter to the joint. She takes a long drag, the tip of the joint turning bright orange and she coughs with a cloud of smoke that follows. I’m next and I do the same. My coughs are intense. She pats my back. We continue passing the joint back and forth.

My eyes stay on the stars in the sky. I read a theory somewhere that it’s believed that the stars in the sky represent loved ones that have passed. It makes me think of Juan.

“Man, I haven’t done this since Juan was alive. He had the plug to get the weed. I remember how nervous we were the first time we tried it. We were shaking when we picked it up from this guy’s brother we knew. I hid the baggie in my pocket. The way we got around was public transportation. So, we had to take the bus close to home. We both kept asking each other if we could smell it. When we got to our stop we ran like hell. It was the day we found the place that would become our hangout. It was an abandoned house by the river. We got high on the back porch and after we got high, we grew the balls to go inside. We fell in love instantly. It had been abandoned for years but still had character to it,” I say.

“Do you still go there?” She asks.

I think about it in my foggy state. “It’s been years. I sort of hung around a little bit after Juan died but it brought up too many memories,” I say.

She tilts her head, “Well, I guess you are going to have to take me there. If girls are allowed.” She sticks her tongue out at me.

We laugh a hard laugh. “We are stoned monkeys,” she laughs.

I look at her quizzically. “Stoned monkeys?” I ask. Cara looks so beautiful when she is so carefree.

“Hunter and I would always get high in high school. One night when we got done with a party we went to his house. We tried to be sneaky. But you can imagine two high teenagers going in trying to be undetected while also having a massive case of the munchies. Hunter had the bright idea to eat the leftover chocolate cake they had from his mom’s birthday which was the day prior. When we got in the kitchen, he got the cake and cut us each a piece. He even poured us each a glass of milk. Then, we heard laughter.

We were so high that his dad was sitting at the kitchen table and we never noticed him. ‘I guess I’d be hungry too if I smoked as much reefer as you two did,’ he said to us. The next day he kept calling us a pair of stoned monkeys. It mortified us in the beginning but it grew on me. It gave me a sense of normalcy. Hunter’s Dad was always like a dad to me and made me feel like one of his kids. It was nice to have but also heartbreaking. I wanted my father in my life but with his addiction, it just wasn’t possible.”

I can tell that she said more than she meant to. I don’t say anything as I don’t want to say the wrong thing and then she closes herself off.

“They’ve tried different rehabs for him but nothing has stuck. I know that I briefly talked about him but he’s a hard subject for me. He recently overdosed on drugs. I did go visit him in the hospital but only to make sure he was okay. He tried talking to me but I wouldn’t listen to him,” she says sniffing.

I can’t see her face in the dark but I guarantee she’s crying. I go to her and hold her from behind.

“Well, I’m in your life now and I know you have a lot of emotions when it comes to your dad but I can be there for you. I promise you I won’t judge. I don’t have experience with loving an addict but I will do my best to be there for you so you don’t have to go through this alone,” I say.

She turns around to face me. “Fine, I’ll make a deal with you. You take me to your and Juan’s hangout and I promise you I will contact you if there is a next time so I don’t go through it alone. Pinky swear?” she says, holding up her hand and sticking her pinky out.

I smile, “Pinky swear?” I am stoned.

I feel like I’m in a bubble and my mouth feels dry. My phone rings. I answer sounding dopey, “Hello?”

“This is your delivery driver from Bella Amore. I am here with your food,” a cheery feminine voice says.

“I’ll be right out,” I say.

We fly through dinner like we haven’t eaten in years. The munchies set in; we couldn’t have planned it better. The food was good for being so cheap. We ended up watching *As Above So Below* next. The movie is just about over as we snuggle, the fire still burning. We both have jumped at certain parts. When it ends Cara yawns loudly.

“Shit sorry,” she laughs.

I laugh, “No it’s okay, it just looks like it’s time to end the night.”

“Yeah, it is,” she says, putting her leg over the side of my leg and straddling me. I cup her ass with my hands. She kisses the side of my neck.

“Will you protect me, baby?” She asks.

“Always,” I say, my voice coming out louder than intended.

“Promise?” She says in a sexy voice.

“Promise,” I respond.

She holds my face in her hands and then kisses me. She grinds her hips up and down on my cock. My cock hardens. She starts kissing down my body and then gets down on her knees. She tugs at my joggers and I lift myself up so she can pull them down. She wraps her hand around my cock and moves it up and down.

“Should I?” She asks, looking coy.

I lean my head back, “Yes.”

She opens her mouth wide and puts her head down on my cock until it hits the back of her throat. She sucks her mouth in and my cock comes out with a popping noise. She keeps the motion up. Then, she keeps a steady pace up and down on my cock. I hold her hair back in my fist. Temptation takes over and I slam her head down forcefully on my cock. This doesn't deter her at all, she looks up at me with a smile in her eyes. She cups my balls with her hands kneading them. I can feel myself getting closer and closer.

Then, she stops. “I want your cum,” she purrs.

Cara wiggles out of her pajama pants. She gets up and straddles me. She sits down slowly on my cock allowing it to slide in. I take my hands and grab each ass cheek. I guide her with my hands up and down on my cock. Her tits are in my face and I put one of them in my mouth. Cara's pleasure takes over and she begins bouncing up and down on my cock quickly. Her moans are loud. Her pussy is soaked. She keeps bouncing rhythmically, I feel her walls straining with each thrust to take my cock. I look up at her in all her glory. Part of her hair falls across her face. Sweat glistens across her hairline from the work she is putting in.

I grab her around the waist and stand up with her still on my cock. The look of surprise in her eyes is amusing. I turn around so I'm facing the couch. I throw her on the couch and pounce on her as I flip her around and place her in a kneeling position on the couch. Her back arches in anticipation. The view is magnificent with her drenched pussy on full display. I push her legs together and her ass sticks up more. Her body trembles underneath me and I spank her as I grab my cock and guide it into her cunt. I love the feeling of pushing my cock in slowly, seeing her squirm as her body struggles to take me in fully.

“You take this dick so well, makes me want to fuck you like a cheap whore.”

She moans in response, “Maybe you should.”

I don't need any more of an invitation and begin to slam my cock into her relentlessly. She cums almost instantly, my aggression kicks in and I push her down into the couch muffling her squeaks and moans, and place my foot on the couch next to her and pile drive my throbbing cock deep inside her. I feel an overwhelming sensation in my cock that I'm about to cum. Her moans turn into almost screams of pleasure as I reach down grab a fistful of hair, and pull back. Increasing the depth that my dick is reaching.

The pressure reaches its max point, "Oh fuck I'm gonna cum"
"Cum deep inside me like the little whore I am!"

My cock releases, sending waves of pleasure through my body. I shove my cock as deep as it goes, my cum filling her up quickly. I lower my leg and stay inside her a little longer, my cock twitching involuntarily sending small yet prominent remnants of the orgasm to my groin.

Once we catch our breaths a bit, I pull out slowly knowing it's like torture for Cara, who hisses and moans in response. I get a good look at my handiwork, her pussy a mess with my cum spilling out of her. She tries to stand up but her legs shake and my cum begins to spill down her leg. She makes a run for the bathroom trying to keep it from dripping all over the floor.

Cara's Perspective

The morning light comes in through our bedroom window waking me up. I look over to Ricky who is fast asleep. He looks so handsome even in sleep. I lay there for a moment admiring him. The calmness on his face, the smoothness of his skin, his beard perfectly shaping his face. I pet his hair. Who knew that a customer who came into Attic's Revenge would become an important person in my life? He doesn't even stir. I feel tired but I know even if I tried, I wouldn't be able to fall asleep. I sit up and stretch the blanket slipping down my body and exposing my breasts. I uncover myself and get out of bed. The cold makes me shiver.

Our suitcases are side by side but I know he wouldn't mind if I threw on something of his. I peek inside his suitcase which is perfectly organized. On the top is the thick black and red flannel he wore on our date to Murphy's. When I take it out of the suitcase, memories flash in my mind of the happy parts of that night: *riding rides, eating funnel cake, the way we looked at each other before the photographer took our picture, and how he asked me to be his girlfriend.* I smile at the memories. I look through and find a pair of thick wool socks. I put them on me and both are oversized and comfy.

I go into the kitchen and decide that coffee would probably help warm me up. Thankfully they have a Keurig machine and underneath is a big metal drawer with a variety of K-cups. I look through the cabinets until I find a cabinet with coffee mugs varying in size. They surprisingly have a mug in the shape of a pumpkin so I decide to use that one. I get my coffee going.

I make my way to the sliding glass doors and feel the brisk air kiss my face as I open the door ajar. It's a foggy day outside and everything looks white. The cabin sits on a hill and looks over a path and into the woods. It would be nice to sit outside snuggled up in a blanket looking at the view. Or at least what I can see of it. When we went shopping, he got himself a pumpkin spice creamer and I got French vanilla. I grab mine out of the fridge and watch my coffee go from black to light brown. I do a taste test and it's perfect. There's a fleece rust-brown blanket folded on the top and middle of the couch. I grab it and go outside.

There is a small metal table set up for two with thick cushioning on the seats. I set my coffee down at the table and sit down. The chair is surprisingly comfortable. I go to my Kindle Unlimited app to see if anything good pops up. I look through the books I have in my saved list, a lot of them being spicy romance novels. I open one at random because I can't decide which one I want to read. I put the blanket around my legs, pushing it under my legs to hold it down close to me. It starts with a sex scene with bondage and I know I've made a good choice. I look to see exactly where my coffee cup is and notice motion in the distance.

I squint my eyes and out of the fog appears a woman. She is on the cement trail coming out of the woods. I lean up in my chair to try and get a better view. She looks frantic, looking side to side. She continues running.

"Are you okay?" I almost yell. She doesn't notice me. "Hey," I say louder.

I spring into action and throw the blanket off of me. I run through the house and out the front door. I go down to the path and she is still there running. Where I enter the path is the other end so she is coming towards me.

"I can help you!" I yell, waving my arms.

She is a short woman who has long coal-black hair with bits of gray that is put into a single braid, her face has freckles spread on her nose and cheeks, and her eyes are light brown and are a great contrast with her skin color which is tan but somewhat ashen. She wears a light blue workout outfit, leggings, and a sports bra. I immediately know she is a spirit. Judging by her ashen skin and the black circles that are around her eyes. She stops as she reaches me.

"Please help me," she says. I reach out to her.

Before I can say anything, skeletal arms burst from the earth underneath her, clawing and grabbing her legs, and she is pulled down into the earth. She screams a blood-curdling scream.

"No!" I yell.

My heart is pounding hard and tears spring to my eyes. I can't stop staring at the spot where she once stood.

"Cara?" Ricky yells.

I'm frozen in place. I hear him but I can't move, I can't speak. I'm in shock. "Cara?" He tries again. There's a little bit of time and then I hear footsteps behind me and he reaches me. "Baby, what's wrong?" He asks. He puts a hand on my shoulder and I don't even flinch. When he gets nothing, he stands in front of me.

My eyes are still downcast on the spot on the path where she was taken. Ricky wraps his arms around me and I feel my body relax. I didn't know this woman but I do wish I could have done more. I know that this darkness that follows us is to blame. And now I know that it has the ability to snatch souls.

Ricky leads me back to the house. I follow him feeling defeated. We left to get away and it's clear I'm never going to escape this force that is after me. Ricky has me sit on the couch and I won't look at him. The fact that a force that can rip the souls of the dead away wants me for my bloodline has me terrified. It not only wants me but wants Ricky. It's all so much to think about and I find myself shutting down. He kneels and moves my hair from my face.

"I think it's time to go," I say. I look up into his eyes. The numbness has taken over.

He nods, "Okay. You just relax, I will take care of everything." I nod.

He grabs my leggings from my suitcase and sets them on the couch next to me. Quickly, he gets the car packed up with our luggage and the little bit of groceries we bought. He cleans the cup I used in the morning and the coffee machine. It feels like he is a blur of motion around me.

"Let's go," he says.

I slip the leggings on that he set out for me and the Crocs I packed and we get in the car.

He drives and drives. The thing I can appreciate about Ricky is his patience. After what feels like an hour he finally cracks.

"Cara, what happened? I know whatever it is shook you up" He asks.

I hesitate. "I know I don't have any powers or anything but I will do anything I can to protect you," he continues.

I look at him and see the mixture of emotions he is going through. "I saw a woman running. She looked like she was Hispanic maybe in her 50s or 60s. I went down to try and help her and... it got her..." I ramble.

"What do you mean it 'got her'?" He asks.

I run fingers through my hair, "I mean I saw these skeletal creatures pull her down into the earth. She was there and then she was gone. Ripped away. We are fucked."

"Was she alive or dead?" He asks.

"She was dead and running. She knew what her fate was going to be," I say trying to bring down the panic in my voice.

Ricky puts his hand over mine. "She was dead, we are alive. Maybe he has more power over dead people?" He says.

I shake my head, "But, he wants me for whatever reason. He has some use for me."

Ricky pulls the car over. "What are you doing?" I ask.

He turns to look over at me. "Listen to me, Cara. We will figure this out. I can't imagine witnessing that but I also don't want us to give up. I don't want us to back off and not at least try and figure out what this is. Make a plan and attack. Everything has a weakness."

That's the part that worries me the most is that if we are being honest Enrique, is my weakness. He would be the leverage that would make me give up everything. I worry that I would be that for him and the loss would be his life. This deity sees some use for me whereas Enrique is a target.

"What about you?" I ask, tears falling down my face.

He kisses my lips, "We are stronger together. We can fight this together. If we fall apart, he wins. He wants you alone so he can have you to himself. One of the strongest feelings is fear and when people are afraid that is when they are the most vulnerable. He wants you to feel alone in this world but you aren't. I'm here and I plan to always be here." He wipes my tears with his thumb.

"You promise me you won't leave me?" I plead.

He shakes his head and smiles, "How could I leave the one person on earth who truly loves me and takes care of me? I need you and you need me. You know me to my core and you still love me."

"Of course I do. You're everything to me. That's why I hate this so much. I hate that we have to worry about this. That we both are in danger," I say. I nuzzle my face into his hand.

"We are going to figure out a way to stop this. Just give me time, please just give me that," he says.

I nod, "Okay. You're right we just need time. Everything has a weakness. It can be stopped; we just have to find out how."

"Exactly baby. When we get home, we will take time to figure it out. But during this, we need to take care of ourselves as well. We have gotten through unharmed this far. It's either gearing up or it can't hurt us at this moment for whatever reason," he says.

"Okay, a plan is good to have," I say nodding. Ricky kisses me again deeply.

He sits up and says, "Let's start with getting something to eat."

"Okay, but you get to pick," I say. "McDonald's breakfast it is," he says.

The fear I have is building up inside me. I hope that Ricky is right and this deity has a weakness. I just hope it doesn't know that Ricky is my weakness and I am his. I know that I will do whatever it takes to protect him. Even if it means my life.

Enrique's Perspective

I have been spending a lot of time with Cara and there haven't been any fights. The dreams have stopped along with paranormal activity as a whole. Part of me knows that it is going to be short lived but I'm doing my best to focus on the present. Today is Thanksgiving and true to her word Cara will be there. She even offered to make some side dishes which my mom was happy to accept. Cara asked me to come earlier so that I can see and maybe taste test what she's made.

I knock on the door and I hear Cara's voice say, "Come in." I turn the knob and walk in.

The sweet smell of cornbread fills the air. When I enter the kitchen, she is standing at the counter facing the doorway. She is cutting the tips of fresh green beans. She is wearing a long cheetah print apron and her hair is in a pony with the ends curled. Enjoy the Silence by *Depeche Mode* is playing and she is moving her body with the music. Her green eyes meet mine and she stops what she's doing.

She comes up to me and gives me a peck on the lips, "Hi baby, how was your day?"

"Better now that I'm with you," I say.

She turns around to walk away and I see that she is completely nude underneath her apron. Her back is smooth, her ass looks plump, her legs look long and lean, and she wears black pumps. Cara looks back at me with a seductive look in her eyes. My cock begins to harden in my jeans. The minx goes back to what she's doing.

I stand behind her, "Is there anything I can help you with?" I push my body close to hers pushing her against the side of the counter. She moans and lays her head on my shoulder. I rub my hands down the length of her body. The song changes to Closer by *Nine Inch Nails*. How fitting.

"Nothing you can help me with right now," she says breathily. She rubs her ass side to side on my cock. I move her cutting board and a bowl of already cut green beans so they are out of the way. I push her back down so her chest is on top of the counter.

I undo my pants and pull them down, "I think I can." I rub my hand over her ass.

She huffs, "Fine, but my timer for my casserole is going to go off in 30 minutes and I need to get going on the green beans soon or they won't be done in time."

"We will make it work," I say, running my middle finger up and down her.

She has her legs closed tightly together adding to the friction. She moans softly. Wetness coats my finger. I take my finger out of her and kneel on the floor.

"What are you doing?" She asks softly.

I answer her by putting my tongue between her legs and working my way up. "Oh," she responds, sounding surprised. I grab her hips and pull them towards me to give me better access. Her pussy gleams with a mixture of my saliva and her juices. I can see her clit barely peeking out from the crease of her legs. I hone in on it, pushing my face into her pussy, my nose buried between her lips. Her body shivers and shakes as she moans in response. She involuntarily sidesteps trying to keep her balance, I take full advantage and commit my whole mouth to her clit. My nose is right up against her opening, I put pressure on it and my nose gets drenched as she cums.

I stand up grabbing a kitchen towel to wipe my face, "My compliments to the chef," I say low into her ear as I press my body against hers. She wiggles a bit in my arms so I push her against the counter so her ass pushes out.

I angle my cock near her entrance and slowly rub it up and down the neediest part of her, she's completely soaked. I enter her and from this angle; it's a little more work to get in and I struggle to get inside but then I feel my cock go fully in. "Fuck," I say under my breath.

I start thrusting in and out of her taking my time. The feeling is intense because it feels like her body and her pussy are pushing back onto me. My rhythm picks up along with my need to fill her with my cum. I push myself deeper and deeper inside as I pound into her, the juices she's releasing coat my cock and make her extra slippery.

I pull her ponytail and wrap it around my knuckles, "You thought you were going to get away with it, didn't you?"

She moans, "I thought I could hold you off a little longer."

I laugh, "You couldn't if you tried. I own this. Say it."

"Yyyy-you own me," she says. I thrust hard and she yells out.

I pump harder and harder. Her moans fill the room along with my grunts.

"All. Fucking. Mine," I say with each thrust.

I know I'm pulling her hair tight using it to guide my rhythm and from how soaked she is I can tell she loves it. Her breathing picks up.

"Enrique," she cries. Then, she yells out cumming hard. I release her hair from my grasp and she lets her head rest on the counter.

My greed makes me start pounding deep and fast, assaulting her pussy with no remorse. Cara's legs go weak and I can feel them begin to give out but I grab her hips and hold her firmly against me and continue shoving my cock inside her. I feel the pressure building in my groin, she senses this and I can feel her own body start to contract building her orgasm. We both release at the same time, making her pussy a mess of cum and juices.

The timer goes off and she laughs, "Just in time."

Once she's all cleaned up, she has me help her with the green beans more so to test for the softness of the beans. The aroma of oil and garlic makes my mouth water. When the food cools down she takes a fork full and feeds me. She watches me nervously. The green beans are perfectly browned and the garlic is cooked to perfection.

"Mmm they are perfect, babe," I say honestly.

"Are you sure? I don't need to add any more salt or anything?" She says.

I laugh, "Baby, you overthink too much. They are good and I'm sure your casserole is as well. I know my mom is just over the moon you're coming tonight."

She smiles, "Well, hopefully, it goes better than the last dinner. Hopefully, your grandma warms up a little."

I shake my head, "It will just take time. Abuela can be stubborn. I think it will happen in time." I say it out loud and I am hoping it's true.

"I hope so," she says softly. I kiss her head and pat her ass which is still bare.

"Now you need to get ready or we are going to be late," I say. I look her up and down hungrily.

Cara pushes me away playfully, "Easy there. I'm going, I'm going." I swat her ass as she walks away. She yelps and hurries out of the kitchen.

I go to the fridge and get myself a water bottle. I chug it down quickly. An uneasy feeling hits me and I feel like someone is watching me.

I look around at the empty kitchen. The chairs sit empty around the kitchen table. There are decorative plaques and paintings like you get at Hobby Lobby.

There is a window by the sink looking into the backyard. It is not a big yard, it's small with a wooden fence around the border. There is one single big tree that I assume is the same tree that is in Cara's bedroom window. Nothing looks out of the ordinary. The sun is going down because the sky looks darker. I see movement from behind the tree. My eyes shift and a figure appears. It looks like the creature from my nightmares. Skeletal face and muscular build wearing a feather headdress. He stands in front of the tree and his empty eye sockets bore into me. My stomach twists with fear and anxiety.

I feel a hand on my shoulder and jump. I turn around quickly and Cara is standing there. "Jeez jumpy it's just me," she says playfully.

I sigh, "Sorry just freaking myself out."

She comes close to me and wraps her arms around my neck. "Maybe we are in the clear, Ricky. I don't want to jinx it but things have been pretty quiet. That could be a good sign," she says positively.

I nod in agreement even though inside I know this isn't over.

The drive to my mom's isn't long.

My mom has always been doing the "All-American Thanksgiving". She makes turkey, mashed potatoes, crescent rolls, and pumpkin pie. Cara's green beans and cornbread casserole fit in perfectly. There are more people here than usual which is surprising. My Tio Sergio and his wife Sandra and their three young kids, Javier, Gael, and Diego. My Godmother Lucia came with her husband, my godfather, Armando, and their grown son and daughter, Mateo and Xochitl. My Godmother and I have always been close. I would spend almost every summer with her in Mexico.

"It's almost like the good old days," she says in Spanish.

I look around and the house is full of family members, some sitting at the table and talking, my mom and Cara are working on clean-up duty, and the rest of us sit in the living room with music videos playing on YouTube. In the past, there would be more of us but this is pretty close. We would sometimes do karaoke or we would play a couple of games of Loteria.

"Yeah, it is," I respond.

She comes closer to me, "Enrique, I know you are still hurting but I think you should consider trying to make amends with your Tia Imelda. I think at this point it would just be a step in the right direction if you just texted or brought her something. Lord knows what she is doing today, seeing as though she refused to come here. Or maybe you could bring her a plate of food or something."

I shake my head," She is never going to forgive me, Madrina."

"Forgiveness is a big thing, maybe right now all there needs to be is effort. Maybe if she sees you trying it will spark something inside of her to at least try," she says.

I look at her skeptically, "I guess I could bring her a plate of food tonight. Every person deserves to have good eats on Thanksgiving. The worst she could do is say no and turn me away."

She smiles, "Your Tia always loved Thanksgiving so that could also be in your favor."

I roll my eyes but say, "Okay let me let my mom know ahead of time so she can have a plate ready for me to take to her." She hugs me and kisses my cheek.

Even though I suspect that my Tia may be involved with this deity and all of the paranormal shit that has been going on. I don't think it would hurt to at least make an effort to try to make amends. Maybe, she will even see it as a peace offering and end all of this if that's even possible.

I head over to my mom and Cara who are in conversation and both smiling.

"Mom?" I ask.

They both look at me and she says, "Yes."

I try and keep it down so none of the chismosos/as can hear me. "Can you make a plate to go?" I ask. Cara looks at me concerned.

My Mom smiles, "Sure. Is it for you or do you need some for your roommates or...?"

"It's for Tia Imelda," I say.

Both women look at me like I have eight heads. The silence is loud.

"My Madrina suggested it might be a good idea. It might show that I'm making some effort to make amends. There's no harm in trying I guess," I continue.

"Okay Mijo, I'll fix something up so you can take it to her," she responds.

Cara comes up close to me and whispers, "Are you sure? Are we going to go together?"

I nod, "Yes I'm sure and no I think this something I need to try on my own. If you don't mind. I figured maybe you could stay here while I go or I could drop you off at home and then come back after. I also don't want you involved in case things go south. I know we talked about the possibility of her being involved with summoning the deity, so if that's the case who knows how she will respond."

She hugs me, "Okay baby whatever you need to do, I support you."

My mind is racing with all the possibilities. She could answer the door and take it and tell me to fuck off, she could just throw the food at me, she could want to talk, and at this point, she might throw some Bruja magic at me. I just don't know what Tia Imelda's reaction will be. The last time I saw her was at Juan's funeral.

"I probably should just go now before I change my mind. Her house is just a couple of blocks away," I tell her.

"That's fine your mom promised to show me baby pictures of you anyway," she laughs.

I groan, "Of course she did."

I pull up to the familiar ranch-style house. I look it over, my mind going 100 miles an hour wrestling with all the different emotions I'm feeling. I notice just how run down it is. I focus on the windows to see if there are any signs of life and I catch a glimpse of a shadow by the window. It's hard to make out but the only thing that makes sense is that it's my Tia. At least I know she's home. As I try to focus on it, it steps away from the window and fades in with the rest of the shadows behind it.

I get out of the car despite every fiber of my being telling me to stay put. I walk up to the white door and feel my anxiety rising with each step. Behind the screen door, the front door is slightly ajar.

"Tia?" I yell out.

As I walk in, the smell of rotting flesh burns my nose. "Uogh," I sound in disgust. I look around for any signs of my Tia. I walk further into the house. I can't shake the feeling that I'm being watched, it's as if a jaguar is ready to pounce out of every shadow. From a little hallway, I walk into her living room. There is no one sitting on the couch and the TV is off. Ahead of me, I can see her fireplace which has pictures across the top that are all faced down.

Next to the fireplace, I see what looks like an altar. My eyes take a second to adjust to the low light of the candles sporadically placed around the altar, but I begin to make out the disturbing contents. In the center is a school picture of me from high school and there is an X smeared in red across my face. When I look closer it looks like the X was smeared with blood. The closer I come to the altar the stronger the rotting smell becomes. At the very top of the altar are different depictions of a familiar figure that's plagued my nightmares, Mictlantecuhli.

My blood runs cold and I can feel my legs go weak. That's when I see it. The corpse of a large cat with white fur and gray spots. There is a stab mark with dried blood in the middle of its body. It looks like Smokey; the cat Juan and I would often see walking around by the abandoned house we used to go to as kids. We both agreed that the gray spots looked like clouds of smoke. After Juan passed, I searched for that cat for hours. I looked through the woods and by the river and never found him. There's no way that was years ago now. It looks like she's breathing. I go over to her to get a closer look. As I lean down, it's clear that the movement is hundreds of maggots crawling under her skin and out of the wound.

Before I can stop it, I feel the build-up inside my throat and I start retching. My eyes go across the altar. There are figures of skulls with feather headpieces scattered throughout. My body breaks out in goosebumps. I get the strong sensation that someone is standing behind me and I feel frozen. There is a distinct sensation of someone's cold breath on my neck. The adrenaline kicks in and I turn around defensively and am met with an empty room. The heavy silence is interrupted by my shallow breathing and thumping heartbeat. There's a tension in the room that clings to every shadow.

Without a second thought I run like hell out there and I don't look back.

Cara's Perspective

Ricky's family taught me how to play Loteria. It is a game I have never played before. It reminds me of playing Bingo except it's in Spanish. The object of the game is to fill your card and be the first one to yell Loteria. We were able to pick our cards to fill. When Antonia was explaining how to play, she told me card 7 was Ricky's lucky card. We were all given a small pile of dry pinto beans to use for our card.

My first game I'm nervous. Who isn't nervous when trying something new for the first time? Ricky's Madrina agreed to read off the cards. There are some competitive people in his family. His Abuela has a stonier face than usual and she looks around suspiciously. His Tio Sergio rubs his chin while inspecting other players' cards.

His cousin Mateo asks, "So, what are we playing for?"

His other cousin Xochitl rolls her eyes, "Do you have to ask? You know we play for quarters and with Black Friday and Cyber Monday coming up we better keep it that way."

Everyone laughs. I look around nervously as some family members have brought plastic baggies full of quarters. Without saying anything Antonia pushes a pile of quarters in my direction. She gives me a wink.

"Thank you," I say.

"No problem at all," she says.

"La Luna" his Madrina announces.

Some of us put beans down, others don't. One by one she announces the different cards. My card starts to fill up and at the moment there is a three-way standoff between me, Ricky's Abuela, and his cousin Mateo. We each have one slot that needs to be covered.

"El Apache," his Madrina says.

As I set down my pinto bean I yell, "Loteria!"

There is mixed reaction as there is with any game. Some people groan in frustration, some are indifferent, and others clap.

"Look at you, your first game of Loteria and you win," his Madrina says.

"And you kept the luck going for card 7," Antonia says.

"Gotta make my man proud," I say laughing.

"Speak of the devil," his cousin Xochitl says. I turn around and Ricky is walking towards me.

"Everything okay, Mijo?" Antonia asks.

Ricky shakes his head, "I'm sorry Ma. We gotta go."

She looks at him concerned, "What's wrong?" Ricky hugs Antonia and kisses her on the head.

"I promise I will tell you all about it but right now Cara and I need to go," he says seriously.

She nods, "Fine but you both are taking leftovers. I already have it made up for you. I just need to go grab them.

"Ricky, what's going on?" I ask hesitantly.

Before he can answer, his Madrina comes to hug and kiss him. She comes to me next. She hugs me and gives me an understanding look. At this moment I am not sure what she is trying to convey to me. One by one we give hugs and say our goodbyes quickly.

Antonia walks us to the door, "Enrique, you better call me. If not, I will come find you."

He nods, "I promise." She hugs him tightly.

Then, she hugs me with the same intensity. "Be safe," she says to us both.

Ricky is practically dragging me to the car. I'm silent knowing that there is something serious going on or he wouldn't be acting this way. I get inside the passenger seat and he shuts the door behind me. I put my seatbelt on. He speeds across the front of the car and gets quickly inside putting on his seatbelt. Ricky turns the car on and then speeds down the street away from his mom's house. His car reaches what to me is a scary speed.

"Ricky slow down! You are scaring me," I yell.

His face is a mixture of emotions, the most prominent being fear. "I'll slow down when I know you're safe," he yells back.

"I'm sorry, Cara," Juan says ominously. This sets alarms off in my head. My mind is racing with the possibilities. Did he and his aunt fight? Is he worried about me being around his family? What did Juan say sorry for? With my anxiety bubbling inside me I snap.

"What the fuck is going on Ricky?" I yell.

He slows down a smidge, "I will tell you when I know we are safe."

"This isn't safe! Either tell me what the fuck is going on or..." I say.

"You'll what Cara? Don't test my patience right now. We're going to your house and when we get there, I will tell you what the fuck is going on. If you trust me, you will be quiet until we get there," he snaps.

There is a hard look on his face. Without looking at me he holds my hand. I try to pull my hand and he holds it tighter. Looking around I know we are close but still hate the anxiety of not knowing what's going on. I know that Ricky has a dark side to him that can swallow him whole. I'm not sure of the depth that it goes. I hope that, if need be, I can pull him out. Looking at him now I see that he is consumed. My leg bounces quickly in anxiety. My mind knows that I trust Ricky more than I have trusted anyone. My fear is telling me to run.

We finally make it to my house. He parks the car and gets out quickly, opening the door for me. Again, he drags me along by my arm as if I am a stubborn child.

"I'm going," I say irritated. I move my arm away from him. I walk ahead of him quickly.

When we get in the house he looks around outside before closing the door and locking it. I head upstairs to my room not turning to see if he is following me. When we get to my room, he shuts the door and turns on me.

"I know you're pissed at me but please let me explain. I know you have a million and one questions and I will answer them. Just give me the opportunity," he says slowly.

I nod and motion with my hand that the floor is his. Ricky starts to pace back and forth.

"When I went to my aunt's house her front door was partially open so I decided to go in. When I went in, I didn't find her. Instead, I found that she has an altar set up... there were skulls with feather headpieces, candles, and drawings. In the center, there was a picture of me with a red x on my face. In front of the altar was a dead cat. It was a cat that Ricky and I would always see at that abandoned house we would always hang out at as kids. I tried looking for it when I died but I could never find it. My aunt stabbed it and used its blood. Maggots are coming out of the wound. There's no longer any doubt in my head. My tia wants me dead." he goes quiet pondering this. I go to him and we sit on the bed. "I know that she blames me for Juan. I know that part of her hates me. I just didn't know that it was to the extent of wanting to hurt me or worse..." he continues.

I lean onto him and say, "Juan came to me in the car and all he said was 'sorry'."

He looks at me. "That's all he said?"

He asks. I nod, "I don't know what he means by it."

He shakes his head, "It can't be a coincidence, Cara. The drawings were all the same creature that has been haunting us. My Tia, she had to have done this. She had to have brought this evil to earth to take me down. To bring me to hell for what I've done."

I stand up in front of him and then drop down to his level. "Ricky, you think that she wants you to die?"

He looks at me seriously, "'An eye for an eye'. Think about it Cara, this creature, this being, is completely skeletal and has powers. He can come to us in our dreams. Shit, he's able to alter our reality. He has to be Death. In the dreams, it was like I was being pulled under. It all makes sense now."

I rub the side of his face affectionately. I think about it for a moment. "There has to be something we can do. She brought him here. There has to be a way we can send it back," I say confidently.

"We? No, I'm in danger and I don't need you to get caught in the crossfire. You have already experienced enough of this. It touched you and tried to kill you. It communicates with you like it does me. I don't want you getting hurt or worse..." he says deep in thought.

I shake my head, "Carey said he wants me because of my bloodline. Not because of you. You said we were stronger together, remember? You said that."

He stands and puts distance between us. "Cara, I think we both know that you started seeing this creature when you started being with me. It wants me and at this point, I accept that. But I refuse to have anything happen to you because of me. I already made that mistake once... if anything happened to you and it was because of me I would never be able to forgive myself."

I feel panic swell up inside myself. "Ricky, I will be fine. Maybe this is what your aunt wants, for you to give up. We both still don't have all the answers as to what this is or what abilities it has. You can't go through this alone and I doubt that the quick fix is for you and I to break up. I refuse to let you do this. We just need to take the time to find the answers and see what we can do to stop this. Your aunt brought it from somewhere and now we need to work together to send it back. Then things can be normal... well as normal as they can be," I say, bringing myself close to him.

His mind is racing with all of the information. He is feeling torn. I hold his face in both of my hands, "Ricky, I need you... I have never said that to anyone before and I mean it." I feel tears welling in my eyes.

Personally, I feel that it is harder to tell someone you need them than it is to tell them you love them. He looks at me and I can see the pain that lies in his eyes. One of the worst things about loving someone is that you wish there was so much more you could do for them, especially in times like this. I watch the battle raging within him. I kiss him with everything that I have and everything that I am. There is some hesitancy and then I feel him wrap his arms around my body. He pulls me close, deepening our kiss. He moves away and I see there are tears in his eyes.

"I need you too," he whispers.

Ricky kisses my lips furiously. My hands go underneath his shirt and I put it over his head with ease. Our lips crash together and our bodies mold together. He takes my shirt off of me looking into my eyes after it's off. I unhook my bra without breaking eye contact. His eyes meet my breast and I suddenly feel shy. I fight the urge to hide myself from him. He takes off his shoes and pants quickly.

He kisses me and then pushes me onto the bed. I lean back on the bed. His hands run up my legs slowly, pushing my skirt up my hips. He grabs my legs and slides me towards the corner of the bed. His cock is hard and ready to fill me up. He holds my legs in the air wrapping his hands around my calves. My pussy is soaked from anticipation and desire. He pushes his cock inside me. My tightness stretching from the size and length of his cock. A small moan escapes my lips. He moves in and out quickly. In between he pulls my legs up so my hips are off the bed and directly onto him. I wrap my legs around his hips and push myself closer to him. The rhythm is rough and pleasurable at the same time.

"Please don't leave me," I say in a rushed voice.

He pounds harder, "I won't."

"P-p-p-promise me!" I say, barely getting the words out.

He lays his chest onto mine and pushes in going deeper than before. "I promise," he says. I hold him close to me, his head to the side and on my shoulder as he pushes deeper and deeper inside me.

"Enrique," I whisper.

It feels like he is trying to go as deep as he can inside me. My legs shake as I feel myself release all over him. His cock gets coated with my wetness and it makes his cock glide smoothly in and out. He pushes so deep I can feel his balls hitting my ass. The feeling is so intense and overwhelming. The sound of him going in and out of me almost sounds like a popping sound. I run my fingers through his thick hair, tugging a little bit here and there. Taking in his tattooed arms and chest. The way his face is full of pleasure.

Unexpectedly, he moves back up grabs my legs, and puts them out butterfly style. My legs wrap around him and I push his back with my feet so he goes deeper inside me.

“Please Ricky, I need your cum,” I say in a pleading voice.

“I intend to give you every single drop,” he grunts and he pushes hard inside me.

I’m moaning so loud and my breathing is intense. He looks down at me moving from my waist up to my eyes. I don’t know if I will ever get used to the way he looks at me. He makes me feel like I am the sexiest woman he’s ever seen. Sweat coats both of our bodies. It feels like we are pouring all of ourselves into each other. His movement is rough but his eyes show the love he has for me. Everything is turned off and there are no more thoughts of deities, nightmares, or broken families. Right now, it’s just two people who are on the brink of losing it all, trying to do everything in their power to make it stay united. Ricky grabs my hips hard and is pushing me up and down onto his cock. His grip is so tight around my hips I wouldn’t be surprised to find bruising there tomorrow. I tighten myself around him with every pump of his cock.

“Such a good girl, see how good you take my cock,” he says darkly.

“Yes,” I moan. I feel the build-up within my body. I close my eyes tightly and yell out.

He continues pounding and pounding. Then, he yells out as his seed pours deep into me and begins seeping out. He crashes on top of me, his cock still inside me. We are soaked between us and I know when he pulls out it is going to hurt. The soreness is already beginning.

“I love you, Ricky. I know that we will figure this out together. I’m not exactly sure how but I know that you’re the person I want to go through the hard times with. You mean so much to me and if I lost you...” I say tears spilling down my face.

He leans up and kisses me, “I love you too. That’s why I was saying what I was saying. I don’t want you to lose your life because of me. I want you to have everything you want and need. I know you are the one for me and that I love you. I don’t know that I can stay away from you, even if I wanted to, to protect you.” He wipes the tears from my eyes.

“Then don’t. I need and want you. There has to be a solution and you and I need to work together and figure out what that is. I know my grandma has books around here that may have something that can help us. Or we could always go back to the Pentacles of the Moon. Carey seemed knowledgeable and like they wanted to help us. We also need to talk to Juan. He knows more than he has let on. He originally came to me with the warning. He just failed to mention his mom was the cause of the danger.” I say hope pouring out of my voice.

He nods, “Okay, we will figure it out. I’ll try to stop worrying about you. But Cara, if this creature puts us in actual danger, I will always make sure you are safe before I am. Even if it means I have to hurt you emotionally. I won’t have you risking your life for me.”

I nod, “I don’t think it will come to that Ricky. I think we are getting closer to getting the answers we need.”

I see the doubt that lies in his eyes at my words. I’m trying my best to stay positive because the more negativity that there is the more will make its way in. As much as I fear what’s coming, I fear losing Enrique more. From the moment I met him, I felt this instant connection. It’s almost like he was the calm in my usually noisy life. I believe more than anything his soul was meant to find mine. I also think that whatever this thing is we are the only two people who can stop it.

Enrique's Perspective

Cara and I brainstormed all morning trying to come up with any plan to get to the bottom of all this madness. It's hard trying to come up with any plan when you don't even know the rules or the grounds for which said problem is causing. Eventually, Cara and I decide it's time to call on the person who knows the most, Juan. I'm still trying to wrap my head around the fact that he knew his mom was behind it this whole time, but I also know at the end of the day, despite everything, he loved her deeply. Cara makes a good point about going to see Carey again before contacting Juan to see if they have any information that can help us or even have any kind of advice on protecting ourselves. We get ready and make the long drive to the Pentacles of the Moon.

There's a heaviness in the car, it feels like we're both lost in thought. I decide to break the silence, "So, have you ever encountered anything this dark from the other side?"

She comes out of her thousand-yard stare and looks at me, "Not even close. There are plenty of spiteful spirits out there, but it's usually petty grievances. Usually, I can talk to them and come to some sort of agreement with them and they'll calm down or go away. This thing is in a realm all of its own, literally." She resumes staring out the window, "I've never encountered anything this powerful and with the sole intent to cause fear and despair."

The thought of her never coming across something of this magnitude until we crossed paths makes a shot of pain shoot through me. She didn't say it in a spiteful way, but I can't help but feel like this is all my fault. Before I can say anything to aggravate the situation any further, I take a deep breath and remind myself that we are stronger together.

We finally see the small shop and pull right in front of it. We make our way to the familiar door and push it open. We are immediately met by the aromatic smell of incense.

A voice from the back chimes, "I'll be right with you!"

Cara and I stand there looking around trying to spot anything that can be of use. Before we can get ahead of ourselves Carey comes from the beaded doorway with a smile that completely falls away when they see it's us.

A look of fear and slight disdain comes over their face, "Oh no, I was praying to the gods that I wouldn't have to cross paths with the two of you again. No offense to you Cara, but I can't have such dark energy in my temple of light."

Cara crosses her arms defensively and shoots Carey a dark look, "Isn't that part of your job? To help people with dark energy get rid of it?"

Carey scoffs, "Dark energy? Baby, you two have a VOID hanging around you. Plus remember what happened to me last time?!"

I step in, "Look, we're not trying to put you in any danger. We are just looking for advice on how to get rid of this thing. Don't you have any protection trinkets or spells or something?"

Carey rolls their eyes and throws their hands up in frustration and defeat, "Fine, I'll give you some more pointers, but I don't know if I have anything of that caliber."

Carey leads us to a row of shelves with various herbs and mortars. "First things first. With an entity of pure darkness, you need to banish it with light. I have some protective candles that are infused with herbs and oils that help ward off evil spirits. Next, I recommend salt. Usually, sea salt would suffice for an evil spirit or negative energy, but for you two we're gonna have to pull out the big guns. I have some black salt mixed with dried rosemary. This should do the trick.

I also recommend obsidian. It works wonders at keeping negative spirits and energy at bay. I doubt I have enough in stock for what you're dealing with, but we'll see what we can do."

Cara and I exchange hesitant looks as they lead us to a wall of an assortment of crystals, rocks, and minerals. Amongst the collection of obsidian, we spot a finely polished sphere that appears to be six inches across. I pick it up to inspect it and am taken aback by how heavy it is. Despite its deep black color, when it catches the light just right it has a gold hue from within. I turn it over in my hands some more, admiring how smooth it is and its mirror finish when I come upon the price tag, \$400.

"Holy fuck, 400 bucks for a rock?" I say out loud.

Carey shoots me a sly smile, "Can't put a price on security, love"

"I guess... worst comes to worst I can throw it at the thing and hope for the best."

Carey taps me on the shoulder, "There you go, that's the right kind of attitude."

They begin to lead us back towards the register with our protective gear. Carey rings us up and begins to hand me an evil eye bracelet, "It's on the house, just an extra measure."

I take the red threaded bracelet in my hand and turn it over a few times when the crystal abruptly shatters in my hand. We all look at each other with a dumbfounded expression.

Carey quickly hands me another one, "maybe it was just defective. Maybe this one will do the trick." Cara and I grab all our stuff and head out to the car.

The sting of the cool autumn breeze hits my face and fills my nostrils with the fresh scent of fall. For a moment it feels like things might start looking up. As we begin to drive away Cara takes my hand in hers and looks at me with a slight smile on her face.

I break my focus on the road a few times to look at her, "What?" I say with a slight shyness to my tone, her eyes have a tendency to make me melt, "Nothing, just feeling hopeful. I think we should use this stuff tonight, set up a séance kind of thing."

I turn the idea over in my head a couple of times, "Well couldn't we just talk to him without this stuff?"

Cara examines some of the items we purchased, "We could, but I think it'd be a good idea to set up some kind of protective measures. I'm sure this deity is constantly listening in, it's kind of been making me lose my mind. Maybe if we set up a barrier we can speak to Juan in peace."

"Yeah, I suppose you're right. Plus, we just put out a pretty penny for all this stuff."

We get to her house. She was adamant about doing it at her house seeing as that it's a familiar place for her and there'd be fewer people around. I couldn't help but agree, as I'm sure if my bandmates caught wind of what we were doing they wouldn't resist the urge to act like asshats and scratch at the door and such.

As we make our way inside, we see Hunter lounging on the couch. He looks at the bags in our hands curiously, "Bitch you should've told me you were going out shopping, I've been itching for a little splurging."

Cara laughs and shrugs, "Not really a splurge type of trip. We had to pick some stuff up for the situation we've been dealing with." I shoot Cara a surprised look.

Hunter pipes in, "Yes, I know all about your skeleton man and all the creepy shit you guys have been dealing with. I've only been her best friend since high school. What are you guys up to now?"

Cara and I exchange glances before she answers, “Well remember how I was telling you about his cousin Juan? We’re going to try and contact him tonight for more answers.”

Hunter hops up from the couch, “Isn’t that a little risky? Big bad skeleton guy on your asses and all that?”

Cara holds up the bag with the protection candles, “Well that’s what all this stuff is for. We’re going to set up in the study and wait until the sun goes down to make sure we give ourselves enough time to prepare.”

Hunter rolls his eyes and throws his hands up, “Well I can’t believe I’m saying this, but there’s no way in hell I’m letting you deal with this on your own.”

Before I can let that comment get to me Hunter puts his hand up in defense, “Don’t get your panties in a bunch, I just know I can be there for her in ways you can’t the same way you can be there for her in ways I can’t. And I’m not trying to get involved in any witchy chanting or anything crazy, I’m just going to be there for emotional support.”

We begin setting up the study, clearing off the desk, and setting up our protective measures. We place the heavy obsidian orb in the center and surround it with candles. Hunter drags over two more chairs and I carefully pour the black salt around the perimeter of our set up encapsulating it completely. We take a moment to rest and gather our thoughts.

Hunter is looking deeply into the obsidian orb, “Are we even sure this stuff is gonna work? I mean we are dealing with an ancient deity who’s the literal god of death to the Aztecs.”

I look at him and shrug, “I’m kind of with you on that one.”

Cara looks up from the dresser drawer she was rummaging around in for a lighter, “Well nothing is one hundred percent certain, especially in the realm of the supernatural, but at least we’re trying. Better safe than sorry.”

Hunter and I share a look of acceptance and decide not to push any further. We make sure everything is in place and finally sit around the desk as dusk takes its hold on the evening sky.

Cara begins by calling out to Juan, “Juan Sandavol, we need to ask you a couple of questions.”

A couple of moments of silence pass. Cara closes her eyes in concentration before calling out again, “Come on Juan, I know you’re somewhere close. Half the time I can barely get you to shut up. This situation has gotten out of hand and we need answers. Ricky’s life is in danger and your mom has gone down a dark path she might not be able to come back from.”

Just as I begin to lose hope, the temperature between Cara and I feels like it drops twenty degrees and the air feels electrically charged.

Cara looks at the empty space between us and glances at me, “He’s here.” Hunter looks at Cara with some panic in his eyes, I assume despite being around Cara all these years he’s never been up close and personal with spirits.

Cara begins with her first question, “You know more than you’ve let on. How is it that your mom gained access to a deity so powerful? Do you know if there’s any way to ward it off or to stop it completely?”

She pauses for a few moments listening to Juan. “So, she fell into a deep rage after you died and didn’t consider blaming anyone else but Ricky... and then she started looking into black magic and ways to get revenge... that’s when she stumbled upon the deity... and conjured him up to drag Ricky to the underworld...”

Cara looks over at me and can see my anger brewing, “And why not tell us right away about her involvement?... so, you were trying to see if there was any way we could stop this without it escalating this much...”

Before Cara can continue, I spew out everything I’ve been holding in the last couple of years, “You’ve got to be fucking kidding me! She sends Aztec death itself to drag me down to hell as if I don’t already blame myself enough for your death! No one knows how many times I’ve almost tipped over the edge and just killed myself from all this guilt I carry. As if our family wasn’t broken enough. What a fucking joke. I get that’s your mom and you were trying to protect her, but she has always had it out for me!”

Just as I’m about to spew out even more hurtful vile words, the temperature in the room plummets. The sweet herbal scent of the candles gets replaced by the putrid stench of decaying flesh. The three of us exchange worried glances when without warning the candles go out. The room is plunged into complete darkness.

Hunter is the first to freak out, “What the fuck! I knew this shit was a bad idea!”

As abruptly as the candles went out, they reignite in raging pillars of what seems to be hellfire. Cara lets out a blood-curdling scream as she stares at where Juan was.

“Shit! It’s got him in the air by his neck! Let him go!”

An instant later the bookshelf across the room explodes and Cara screams again and we all see it. The deity is standing just outside the protective salt circle. The dancing flames light up its grotesque body, rotting flesh draped over blood-soaked bones. What I think are shadows dancing around its body are thousands of tiny maggots crawling in and out of the decaying skin and muscle. Hunter is ghostly pale and it looks like his fight or flight is about to kick in full force.

Before he can choose flight, Cara grabs his arm, “We have to stay inside the circle, That’s the only thing keeping it away!”

As if in response the deity gives a slight wave of its hand. The black salt completely burns away, filling our nostrils with a rancid scent of burnt chemicals. In an instant the deity is upon me, picking me up by my neck and crushing my windpipe. I look down into its eyes, its bare bloodshot eyeballs glare back at me with pure malice and hatred. My body goes weak and my eyes begin to roll back in my skull from lack of oxygen. Just before I pass out the large obsidian orb comes flying and hits the deity square in the temple knocking it back and making it release me.

I crumple to the ground gasping for air next to the shattered remains of the obsidian ball. The deity regains its footing and steps up to me. Just as it reaches down to grab me by my hair, I spot a shard of obsidian with a pointed edge and grab it quickly. I feel bony fingers grip my hair tightly and yank my head up. Before it can pull me to my feet, I grasp the shard in my right hand, feeling the sharp edges begin to cut into my hand, “Fuck you.” I manage to croak out before plunging the knife as hard as I can deep into the rib cage. The deity lets out an excruciating roar as it backs away from me.

I shakily get back to my feet, blood dripping from my cut-up hand. Just when I think it’s going to move towards me again, I hear Cara yell from behind me with conviction, “Go away! You are not welcome in this home!!”

Before any of us can do anything, the deity vanishes in an instant taking the putrid stench of rotting flesh with it.

Cara rushes to my side letting me lean on her as I finish catching my breath. I manage to stand on my own two feet when Hunter comes storming over and shoves me hard. I stumble back a few steps but stay on my feet.

“Hunter!” Cara yells, Hunter never taking his eyes off me steps up to me again, “You need to leave. We almost just died. This all ties back to you, and as far as I’m concerned Cara is safer when you’re not around.”

My features darken with rage, but deep down I know he’s right. I turn towards the door and storm out. I hear Cara following me and catches up to me as I reach the back door, “Ricky, wait!” She grabs my arm and I spin around pinning her to the wall, “He’s right. About all of it. I need some time to think. You need to give me some space to work this out. You’ll be safer without me around.”

With that, I open the door and walk out before she can get another word in and get in my car. I speed off into the night leaving Cara standing on her doorstep watching me go.

Cara's Perspective

I knew that tonight was going to be rough. I didn't realize that it would result in a fight between Hunter and Ricky. Watching Ricky drive off brings up so many emotions for me. There is a lot unknown at the moment and the confidence I had that we would stick through this together is wavering.

I walk back in the house and Hunter is waiting in the foyer at the stairs with his arms crossed. "Come on, say it," he says in a snarky tone.

I just look at him and shake my head. "What is there even to say, Hunter? I understand both sides of the situation. I know you're being protective because you are my best friend and you don't want anything to happen to me. I know that Ricky feels the same way you do about my safety. But no one wants to consider my feelings about the situation. Everyone wants to worry about me but I know what I want. No relationship is perfect and Ricky is someone I know I want to be with."

Hunter scoffs, "Cara, people have problems in their relationship like having petty disagreements or infidelity. This is a situation that is literally life or death. Did you not see the creature that went after your boyfriend ready to end his life? Do you not think that could be you if you got in the way or-"

I cut him off, "Hunter, I'm probably the only person on this planet who can help him because of my abilities. Why should he go through this alone when I can help him? I was given this 'gift' for a reason and why should I not use it to save someone's life? Especially if that person happens to be someone, I'm in love with."

He looks at me in shock, "Cara..."

I hold a hand up to him. "Forget it, Hunter. There's no point in talking about this because I'm pretty sure after tonight, I lost him," I say tears welling in my eyes.

Hunter sighs, "I'm worried about you Cara. I know you haven't had many relationships and this is all new to you but this is consuming you. You shouldn't have to give up your entire life because you love someone. You do have people in your life who truly care about you. And I wouldn't be a good friend if I didn't try and protect you and save you from yourself."

The tears start to fall down my face. "So, what if it was Trevor? You would just let him go?" I ask in anger.

There is a pregnant pause. The answer is all over his face. There is pain and sadness there and it is clear he is having a war within himself about how he should answer. I start heading up the stairs.

"Exactly what I thought," I say. Before he can respond I go into my room and slam the door behind me.

I honestly get why Hunter is being the way he is but I also know who I am. The tears are pouring down my face and I put my hands on my face to wipe my tears away. I sit on my bed and stare out the window without really looking at what's there.

Is everyone right? Am I being ridiculous for trying to hold onto a relationship that has had so many issues from the start? Do I believe that I can save Ricky?

I think the worst part of the situation is that there are so many questions and not enough answers. We know why this deity is after Ricky and we know where it stems from. But what about the deity and what it wants with me? What does my bloodline have to do with anything? How does my ability aid a literal God? Or does it seek to destroy me as well? Ricky and Hunter want to blame everything on the fact that I am dating Ricky but the truth of the matter is this deity has its own interest in me.

Not long after I hear the front door slam. Good, it's probably better that I'm alone. I don't need Hunter hovering and judging me. I grab my cell phone from my nightstand and sit on my bed holding my phone in my hand contemplating for a moment. Fuck, it. It doesn't hurt to try.

I call Ricky and it goes to his voicemail. "This is Ricky, leave a message at the beep," his deep voice says.

I hesitate, "Ricky it's me. I know you said that you needed time to think. But I need to talk to you. Please just call me... I love you." My voice breaks and I hang up the call. I throw my phone to the end of my bed in frustration.

My emotions haven't been this strong since losing Grams. I feel like my tears will never end and like I want to throw up. I try to calm my breathing. But it's no use. I'm a mess.

I feel like all of my defenses are down and like there are dozens of people talking at once. I feel the temperature in the room drop significantly and look up.

That's when I see a group of people surrounding me. They are all different ages, sizes, genders, race/ethnicity. Anxiety fills me and there's a scream lodged in my throat. All of their eyes with black rings stare at me blankly.

"What do you want?" I yell.

There is silence and none of them blink. "What the fuck do you want?!" I yell louder. Again, nothing. They move closer in unison. Their bodies are so close to mine that any one of them could reach out and touch me. Or worse, grab me. I move up onto my bed and hold my knees to my chest.

I squeeze my eyes closed tightly, "This is just a dream. A horrible fucking nightmare."

When I open my eyes, they are still there. Fear consumes me and I almost feel like a child again. I wish I could just make them go away by putting a blanket over my head or closing my eyes. They watch me wherever I move their eyes follow me. Then, they all scream together, a mixture of agony and rage. It fills my ears and I put my hands over my ears in protection.

"Go away, go away, GO AWAY!" I yell. The screaming stops and when I look again, they are all gone.

I cry and cry. Then, I go to my side table and take a baggie out that I have with rolled joints inside. I grab my tie-dye lighter.

"Fuck it," I say out loud.

I light up the joint and feel the burn in my throat as I inhale. Then, I release all of the smoke from my mouth. I repeat the motion a couple more times until I feel my body relax and my mind empty. The fuzzy feeling takes me over. I try Ricky again and get his voicemail. This time I feel a little braver.

"Baby, just come back. Let's just talk in person or not talk... Let me convince you to stay," I say in a low seductive voice. I giggle a little, "I'll make it worth it." There's a knock on my door and I say, "Maybe you didn't need convincing." I hang up the phone and hop off my bed.

I stride over to the door confidently. When I open the door Ricky stands there with his eyes down. I look from his combat boots up letting my eyes linger on the crotch of his pants to his arms to the stubble of his beard and then his eyes. My pussy clenches. I don't want him to know that so I act like the brat that I am.

"Yes?" I say with a pout.

His brown eyes meet mine and my stomach flutters. He steps closer to me and brings me close to him. His eyes go from sullen to hungry. I wrap my arms around his neck and kiss him deeply. I push my body close to his.

Warning bells are going off in my head. Something is wrong but everything feels right.

The warmth from his body engulfs me. My head is fuzzy but my pussy knows exactly what it wants. The wetness between my legs is prominent and my breathing picks up. We are kissing each other with so much fire and intensity. Then, I smell it, the rotting flesh smell and it burns my nose. I push him back using both of my hands on his chest and there is a smirk on his face. I gasp and back away. In front of me is Ricky but I know now it's not him. He laughs a dark deep villainous laugh.

"Who are you and what do you want?" I say trying to sound brave.

He sits down on my bed and puts his feet up as he leans back on my pillows. "I don't think we've had a proper introduction. My people know me as Mictlantecuhli. I am the Aztec God of Death. You can call me Mick." he looks me up and down slowly like he wants to take a bite out of me.

I cross my arms defiantly, "So, what do you want? My soul?"

"I want to make you a deal," he says.

Now it's my turn to laugh, "A deal with me?"

He stands up and walks towards me. I know it's coming but before I can escape him, he corners me into the wall. I can't stop the yelp that comes from my throat when my back makes contact with the wall. I try to look everywhere but at him.

"I want you to come... work for me," he says.

Now I look at him. "Work for you? What do you mean?"

He shakes his head, "You really don't know anything do you?"

He must read the confusion and shock on my face so he continues. "You're special, as I'm sure you've gathered. You're a medium, but not just any run-of-the-mill medium. Your kind have been helping Gods and Goddesses from different regions for centuries. You, in particular, come from a long line of powerful mediums. Besides having the ability to speak to the dead you also hold a lot more powers than you realize."

I let a sarcastic laugh out, "I must have smoked more than I thought."

When I look at his face it is serious. I shake my head, “My Grams would have told me. She is the one who taught me all about my abilities and how they work. I can only talk to the dead. It’s not like I can control them or like I can know when a person is going to die or something. I think you have me mixed up with someone else. I’m sure there are many people out there like me.”

“You don’t think I made this offer to Mauve,” he laughs.

Goosebumps spread on my arms. How does he know her name? So many questions pour out of me stemming from my anxiety. “How do I know you aren’t just saying that to manipulate me? What proof do you have about any of this? I have had these abilities for years wouldn’t I pick up on being able to do more overtime?” I start. My mind is racing. I go around him and sit on my bed looking down at my hands. “Grams would tell me; I know she would tell me...” I say tears welling in my eyes.

He sits next to me on the bed, “Your grandmother believed she was protecting you by not telling you. I can teach you more about your abilities and help. Which in turn helps me.”

I look at him skeptically. “Help you with what?” I ask.

“Cara, your ability is to talk to the dead. The thing you don’t know is that spirits have to listen to you. When you summon them, they don’t have a choice but to come to you when you have called upon them. The same goes for if you want them to leave, they have to leave you. Other mediums don’t share in this gift,” he says.

Now I laugh a humorless laugh, “If that was true then why hasn’t my Grams come to me? I have called on her more times than I can count. She’s been the one person I have needed to talk to.”

There’s a look on his face that I can’t read. It seems like a mixture of anger and appreciation but then it goes stony. “Mauve shared in your ability and knows how to hide herself from anyone who wants to call on her,” he says matter-of-factly.

A million thoughts are going through my mind: where is Grams? Why would she be hiding? Who is she hiding from? Him? “My proposition to you is if you come willingly to work for me, I will stop doing Imelda’s silly bidding. Which means that Enrique will go unharmed,” he says.

It could be an easy solution to our problem and it would keep Enrique safe. It would take the strain off our relationship. Is having a relationship even an option if I agree to this?

“If I work for you does that mean that I have to live in the underworld?” I ask hesitantly.

He laughs, “No, but you would have to work for me anytime I call on you. Which may be often. Many souls don’t want to go through the trials it takes to get to the underworld. So, they find ways to dodge it. They hide on earth until I or one of my minions finds them and drags them down to start their four-year journey. You can eliminate that process.”

Four years to get to the underworld? I’d probably run too. If I agree to this then Enrique is free. But then I work for the God of Death anytime he needs me. What happens to my life? Can you even have a life if you are on call for Death whenever he needs you?

“Are there limitations to my work? Am I allowed days off? Vacations?” I ask in a rush.

He thinks about it for a moment. “I can agree to let you have 11 days off a year. However, you want to use them. All the other days you must be available when I call you,” he says.

This is a lot for me to wrap my head around and it doesn’t help that at the moment I’m stoned. “Can I think about it?” I ask meekly.

“Yes, but patience is not a virtue I have. I will give you till the first snowfall to decide,” he responds.

The first snowfall can be anytime. It’s already the beginning of December. So far, it’s just been cold and windy. “Any idea when that would be?” I ask, annoyed.

He laughs, “I guess we’ll find out.”

I go to grab my phone to see if maybe checking the forecast can help. When I turn around, he’s gone.

The next day at work is a disaster. My mind is packed full of unanswered questions and picturing my fate. Then there is the sensory overload of not only hearing the customers in the stores but also the spirits who are nearby. I messed up inventory twice, I gave the customer the wrong change, and got so lost in my thoughts when a customer had to flag me down to get my attention. The final straw was Judith being behind the counter and twisting her body side to side to Twist and Shout by *The Beatles*. She bumps into me as I am trying to fix the inventory list for the third time.

“Judith, how many times have I told you, you can’t be back here while I’m working!” I yell. A few shoppers who are close by stare but I ignore them. I’m sure I look insane. To them, I’m yelling at the air.

Her eyes well with tears, “I’m sorry I’m just trying to have a little fun.”

Peter, who I suspect has a crush on Judith, walks up to her side. He puts his arm around her back and squeezes her arm. "Cara it wasn't that big of a deal."

They walk away. I huff, "Whatever."

Sid does that thing he does when he wants to be supportive without being pushy. He stands at the counter with me and just waits for a moment. He acts like he is checking the display chases. Then, just stands there and waits patiently. When I don't say anything, he decides to break the ice.

"What's going on with you today, kid?" He asks.

I contemplate telling him. I mean, on the one hand, he knows that I have abilities. On the other, we never talked out loud about the specifics of what I can do. I look at him and there is concern etched on his face. I turn back to the inventory sheets.

"Nothing," I mumble.

The only sound is the speakers playing *Stairway to Heaven* by *Led Zeppelin*. Which is somewhat calming but seems sort of ironic. I hold back a snort. After a little bit he pushes, "Is it about Ricky?" I run my fingers through my hair with anxiety. "Hunter, maybe?" He tries again.

I would consider Sid to be a father figure in my life. I want to tell him everything but will that put him at risk? Will it be too much for him to take in? Is it even worth telling him if I know he can't help me? It's better to feel like you have people on your side than to feel as alone as I feel right now.

I sigh, "It's a little bit of everything... if I tell you something, can you promise me you will try not to freak out?"

He leans on the counter and looks me in the eyes. There is curiosity and fear there. "I mean I can't promise you I won't freak out because I don't know what it is that you are going to tell me. All I can promise you is that I will try and be supportive," he responds.

One thing I can say about Sid is that even though he's my boss, he's been supportive like a father should. When I came to him four years ago looking for a job he hired me on the spot. As time went on, he took the time to get to know me. He always does his part to check on me and I have spent more than one holiday with him and his family.

“Ricky and I are sort of being stalked by death himself, who is working for Ricky’s Aunt who is the mom of his cousin who drowned when they were in high school and which he feels responsible for even though he’s not. Death comes into our dreams and fucks with our minds. Death came to me and wants me to work for him. Apparently, not only can I talk to spirits but I can control them by calling upon them. I have until the first snowfall, whenever the fuck that is, to decide if I want to take the deal. If I do take the deal Ricky and I both will be safe but that means I spend the rest of my life working for someone who I would categorize as the devil. Oh, and I can do more with spirits than I even know about. Yay me!” I pour out of my mouth barely taking a breath in between words.

Sid just blinks at me like I just explained everything to him in gibberish. Insanity must be setting in because in response I just laugh. And when I say I laugh it’s one of those laughs that sounds like a cheesy villain from an old superhero movie. His face morphs from confusion to concern. In a strange turn of events, Sid does the most surprising thing and pulls me into a hug.

When I feel his arms circle me my laughs turn to sobs and I break down in his arms. My body shakes up and down. He pats my back awkwardly.

“It sounds like you got yourself into a whole world of trouble. I don’t have any experience with spirits or the devil. The only thing that got me through tough times was leaning on the people closest to me and holding onto faith. I grew up Irish Catholic and though me and the man in the sky don’t see eye to eye on everything I can admit that there is a power in belief. There have been times when miracles have happened and when God guides you on a different path. It’s like when you’re driving down the road and going to a destination you have been to before. There are different routes to that destination and then something tells you to make a turn earlier than you’re supposed to. God is sending you that message that could possibly change your life. Maybe if I didn’t make that turn there could’ve been an accident. Which could have harmed me or worse killed me. If you think you are working with the devil himself, the only way to combat that would be with his opposite, God,” he tells me.

I move back and look at him, wiping the tears from my eyes. What he’s saying kind of makes sense. Mick can’t be unstoppable. There has to be something that can save us besides me selling my soul.

“So, where do I even begin? I don’t know anything about religion or God,” I say honestly.

He thinks about it for a moment. "I would start with the people who know God the best. I would go to a church," he says.

A feeling of discomfort flows through me. My stomach knots at the thought of going into a situation where I feel like an outsider.

"Any suggestions on churches?" I ask seriously.

Sid's eyes go to the picture of him and his wife Holly that hangs on the wall behind the counter. "St. Joseph's Parish, it's about five minutes from here. I'm sure you have passed it at some point. It's actually where the town got its name Chapeltown. It's an older church and there is a small graveyard next to it," he responds. I can see that talking about this has triggered emotions in him that he doesn't want to deal with.

"Thanks, I think that might help," I say. I mean it when I say it because it's not something I would have thought of on my own.

He nods, "Now get back to work. If you need to change the tunes to something livelier be my guest. You only have a couple more hours and then you can get to work on all your stuff."

"Thank you, Sid. For everything," I say honestly.

He smiles a little, "No problem, kid."

I look at the picture of him and Holly. I wonder what she would think of all this. Would she approve of me? I wish I could have met her. Then, it dawns on me. Mick said that when I call on spirits, they have to come to me. I bite my bottom lip. Would that be going too far? Sid has never asked me to try and contact her. He also never said not to contact her.

"I'm sorry," I whisper out loud. Then, I stare at Holly's face in the picture. "Holly O'Grady come to me," I say in a commanding tone. My eyes are still on the picture and I blink. I look around and nothing. I shake my head, "See, he has to have me mixed up with someone else."

I go back to my spot at the register and look down at the inventory list. The smell of marijuana fills my nostrils. I shake it off, there's no way Sid would smoke pot in his store.

The sound of coughing makes me jump. I turn around and Holly is there sitting in a light brown wicker chair that was sold to us today. Her platform brown shoes are together, she has on bell bottom jeans with different patches throughout the denim, she has a black tank top with a flowy almost see-through cardigan that almost looks like white and light brown tie dye, and her eyes are covered by round orange hippie glasses. She surprisingly has hair. When he told me she had cancer I assumed she would be bald.

“What’s the matter, kid? You look like you’ve seen a ghost,” she says laughing at her own joke.

Enrique's Perspective

The chilly December air nips at my face and hands as I work on my mom's car. Despite what most people think, I enjoy winter and the sting of the cold air. I find it easier to bundle up and stay warm than to try and keep cool during the summer. My mom's car needs new brakes and I told her I would take care of it for her. I've also been looking for everything and anything to occupy my days since I left Cara standing outside her house. This has been the most depressed I've felt since Juan died. The rush of emotions has been too much. Sleepless nights have become a norm mixed with constantly looking over my shoulder for any signs of the deity. Needless to say, I'm not doing okay.

I can feel my frustration growing as I try to remove the brake rotor. Of course, the last tire I did came off with no problem, but this one is rusted solidly into place. I grab my trusty 4 lb. handheld sledgehammer and start hitting the rotor to knock the rust loose. My frustration grows and rage takes over. I start swinging the sledgehammer with all my force. The impact of the metal head on the metal disc sends ear-piercing soundwaves through the air and it just makes me angrier. I go for one more swing and the rotor finally pops loose. The rest of the replacement goes without a hitch.

As I'm finishing up tightening up the last lug on the tire, I feel a hand grab my shoulder. I spin around defensively with the tire iron in my hand and see my mom step back with her arms up, "Oh fuck, I'm sorry Mom!"

"Mijo. What's wrong?" I look at my mom and see the worry all over her face,

"I'm sorry ma, it's nothing, just got focused on this." She gives me a look that tells me she's not buying it, "Well I have dinner ready and a plate set up for you. Looks like you're done. Come on, let's go eat."

I sit down at the table and my mom sits across from me and sets down a folded hand towel with hot tortillas in it. It's a simple dinner, Albondigas. It's essentially Mexican meatball soup, perfect for a cold day like this. The aroma fills my nostrils and I realize how hungry I am. I grab one of the steamy tortillas and add some cheese to it before I roll it up and dunk it in the hot broth.

The sensation I get from eating the familiar dish calms my mind slightly and I feel my shoulders loosen up a bit. This is the first decent meal I've had in I don't know how long. My mom smiles at me as I eat, even offering me seconds. I can't help but say yes.

After dinner, we have some coffee. She lets me have a couple sips in silence before she does her motherly duty, "Mijo, what's going on?" I can't even hide it from her, I know my face has been stuck in a slight scowl as I've milled over my thoughts. I look down at the creamy brown liquid in my mug trying to decide what to tell her, if I do tell her anything.

"Me and Cara are kind of in a weird spot. We've just been dealing with a lot and I guess in my twisted way of protecting her I left. It's one of the hardest things I've done. Until recently I thought that she was it, I found the girl that I'd spend the rest of my life with. I know that's scary to hear because we haven't been together as long as some couples but I just know with every fiber of my being she's made for me. She connects with me on every level and the only other person that has come close to that is Juan. Even so, it seems like we've been put to the test since the start of our relationship. It feels like for every moment we're happy we're fighting for our lives."

My mom looks at me with concern, "metaphorically..." I say, kicking myself for letting that slip.

It's my mom's turn to look down at her coffee. She looks up at me, "I see how happy she makes you. It's the happiest I've seen you in a long time. For that, I will always be grateful to her. If you truly feel like she's the one, you can't give up on that. Time doesn't define a relationship. Some people know what they want and go for it and other people are hesitant. It's about your feelings. If your relationship is as strong as you say, you'll fight to keep it. The best things in life are always the hardest to achieve and require the most fight. Good things don't come easy and I can tell she's good for you. Even if you're just waiting for whatever it is you two are dealing with to blow over, you should let her know that you'll be there for her in the end."

I take a sip of the sweet strong coffee taking in my mother's words. Despite all the bullshit Cara and I have dealt with, the thought of completely leaving her has never crossed my mind. I told her I needed space but I didn't for forever. She has been my anchor in all this madness. I look at my mom, "So, what do you suggest?"

She stirs her coffee a bit, "Well, back when I was young, your dad got me a promise ring. Every time I looked at it, I knew that I was his and he was mine."

I consider it for a moment, “So a proposal ring before the proposal ring?”

My mom laughs, “Yeah, something like that.”

We finish up our coffees and I go outside to clean up my tools. I kiss my mom on the cheek goodbye and start heading back home. I go straight to my room and start looking up promise rings and jewelry stores near me. It’s honestly a bit overwhelming, there’s so many options. Finally, I end up coming across a promising jewelry store called Star-Crossed Lovers. They have some traditional-looking rings, but they also have an interesting selection of intricate eccentric rings. While Cara can be traditional in some aspects, I know she needs a ring that would match her personality and views on the world. I look at the time and realize how late it’s gotten; it’ll have to wait until tomorrow.

I down a couple beers and practice some arpeggios on my guitar. I enter a daydreaming state as my left-hand fingers dance across the fretboard and my right-hand makes a sweeping motion across the strings. I get lost in my mind thinking of all the events that have transpired over the last months. It’s hard to wrap my head around how much my life has changed. On the one hand, Cara walked into my life and made me feel the most alive I’ve felt in a long time. On the other hand, we’ve been haunted by an entity that would like nothing more than to drag me down to hell. Before I know it, I can feel my eyelids getting heavy with exhaustion and contemplation and decide it’s time to lay down and hopefully get some sleep.

My night is filled with a mixture of nightmares and dreams of Cara. I wake up in a cold sweat and my sheets look like I’ve been rolling around all night. I make my way downstairs to the kitchen to make myself some coffee. Shawn is already up and sitting at the table having the breakfast of champions, a cigarette, and a mug of coffee. He looks over at me and nods towards the coffee machine, “Just made that pot not too long ago.”

I pour out a mug reach for the peppermint mocha creamer and pour until it reaches the right color to my taste. I sit across from Shawn and sip my coffee.

Shawn looks me over, “What’s going on Ricky? You look like shit. Everything okay with you and Cara?”

I take a sip of my coffee grab the pack of cigarettes and lighter sitting on the table and help myself to one. Shawn looks at me with an amused look since he knows I usually don't smoke cigarettes, "Not good then, huh?" I light the cigarette and inhale the menthol flavored smoke. I let it sit in my mouth for a few seconds before sucking in and letting it fill my lungs.

The head-high hits me a second later and I exhale the smoke through my nose, "I wouldn't even know where to begin. This whole relationship has been like nothing I've been in or heard of. She is everything I want. If it weren't for any external factors, it'd be perfect."

Shawn takes a drag from his cigarette, "External factors? We talking family problems? Or...?"

I sip my coffee, "No, nothing like that, she doesn't have that much family, to begin with. Well, there is her best friend Trevor whom you met the night of Oktoberfest. He can be annoyingly overprotective sometimes but I get it. They've been best friends since high school and he's been there for her through a lot of shit."

"Yeah, but you're just you. You wouldn't hurt a fly unless provoked," he teases.

I take another puff of my cigarette, "Yeah but I have fucked up a couple of times now. We are in this on again off again loop. Last time I saw her I told her I needed a break. I wouldn't exactly call it a break-up but who knows what she's thinking. We haven't talked since that night. I plan to make it right. I just really want her to know that no matter what bullshit might come our way, I intend to stay with her. I think I'm gonna lock it in with a ring. A promise ring..." I add, seeing Shawn's eyes widen.

Shawn laughs a little, "Damn, my boy is gonna become an honest man!"

I laugh in return, "Yeah, the only thing is I don't usually do romantic things, so I'm struggling with coming up with a way to give it to her."

Shawn gives me a sly look, "You can always assert your dominance and toss it to her and proclaim she's yours forever."

I laugh and shake my head in response, "Always the romantic. Besides, I'm kind of gonna be walking in a minefield when I approach her. The last time I saw her we didn't exactly leave on the best of terms."

Shawn shrugs, "I wouldn't exactly say I'm the epitome of romance. All I can say is that if your connection is as strong as you say, I'm sure she'll be happy to take you back with open arms. Even if there is some venom thrown in there at first. I know it's cliché, but you'll know the right time to give her the ring."

"Thanks, Man, I appreciate the support," I say, taking a longer swig of my coffee.

I look over at the time on the stove. "Well, wish me luck. I'm going to go get the ring and get my plan in motion. You'll know the verdict soon enough. If I come with a fresh bottle of Whiskey, you'll know it didn't go well."

He slugs my arm, "You got this man. Just don't puss out, okay?"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," I say, shooing him away as I walk out of the kitchen.

I get ready and make my way to Star-Crossed Lovers. It's a ten-minute drive but feels like an eternity with all the things racing through my mind. I finally make it to the store and park right up front. It's a typical shop with a big window. The words, "Star-Crossed Lovers Jewelry" are written in gold cursive and there are little stars around the edges.

I walk inside, and a bell hanging by the top of the door announces my arrival. It isn't a big shop. Display cases are going around the room filled with all different types of jewelry, there is a register in the center of display cases, the walls are white with black and white photos of certain pieces, and there is light brown carpeting.

A man dressed in a navy blue suit pops up from behind one of the display cases, "Oh, hello! Is there anything I can help you with?"

I walk over, seeing he's already behind the ring section, "Well, I was hoping to see if I could find a ring today, a promise ring." The man gives me an inquisitive smile, "Ah yes, a classic token of fealty. Right this way Sir."

I spot his name tag, "Thanks, Garret. I'm Ricky, by the way."

Garret smiles at me and pulls out a display tray with dozens of dazzling rings, "Well, Ricky, these are from our more classic line. The stones come in all shapes and sizes and the bands range from elegantly simple to stupendously intricate. I'm sure you'll find something here that will suit your better half nicely."

I look over the rings. A few catch my eye, but nothing is screaming Cara to me. Garret notices my hesitation, “Nothing in this one, eh? Well, we do have some more modern options.” He puts the display tray away and leads me a little way down the display case. Here the gems have more vibrant colors and the bands aren’t just gold and silver.

My eyes immediately go to a black banded ring with a floral design leading up to a bigger central flower and a gleaming black stone in the middle. Garret notices me staring at it and picks it up, “This is one of my personal favorites. It’s a black gold band with a beautiful floral design. The center flower has a fine obsidian stone, when you hold it up to the light, you can see hues of gold within it. Honestly, I love obsidian, you can get lost in its intricacies. It’s not one of our top sellers but perfect if you are looking for something unique” He hands it over to me so I can get a better look.

Just like he said, the obsidian stone gleams with an inner golden hue when it catches the light just right. It’s the perfect embodiment of Cara. Flowery yet dark in nature and stands out from the crowd in her own way.

I glance over at Garret, “Yeah, this is the one.” I hand the ring back to Garret, who carefully places it back in the display, “Perfect. I’m just going to need a ring size and cash or card?”

I rack my brain trying to come up with something. Garret, being ever so observant, says to me, “Don’t worry, you’re not the first and you won’t be the last. A great rule of thumb is to go based on shoe size. Would that be easier?” I try to think back and remember a conversation about how she always struggles to find her shoe size when it comes to shoes she wants, “seven, I’m fairly certain she’s a seven.”

Garret puts the display tray away and locks up the display case, “Excellent. I’ll just run to the back and get that for you. Feel free to look around.”

I don’t feel the need to, certain that I found the perfect ring. A moment later Garret comes back with a little black box, “Here we are. I can ring you up right over here.”

He leads me over to the register, “Alright, so we are running a Christmas special and we also offer a first-time customer sale as well. That brings your total down to \$384.57. Would that be cash or card?”

I pull out my wallet, a little defeated knowing I'll have to request more hours at work to make up for this, but this is for Cara, and making sure she knows I am fully devoted to her, it's worth it. I hand over my credit card and Garret takes it and swipes it in the card reader. The little screen facing me reads processing for a second before reading, approved.

Garret hands me back my card with the receipt and gives me a big smile, "All set! Now if for whatever reason you're not fully satisfied or it's not the right size, we do offer a 10-day return policy." I take my card and receipt as he puts the ring in a small brown paper bag. I thank him and walk out, my legs feeling weak now that having the ring makes everything that much more real.

I drive around aimlessly for a while, trying to ponder how and when I'm going to do this. Suddenly, I get an urge. For whatever reason I feel a calling to Juan and I's old hangout spot. There's a mixture of dread and nostalgia in my gut. I drive with purpose now, my memory leading me down roads I had tried to avoid as much as possible.

Eventually, I reach the overgrown path that leads to the old abandoned house. I turn the ignition off and reach for the small box with the ring in it. Slowly I get out of the car and let the brisk winter air fill my nostrils. The walk to the house is longer than I remember, or is it just that my legs feel like they are made of lead? Maybe it's how overgrown the path has gotten after even more years of neglect.

At last, I see the old house. It looks frozen in time. Some portions of the roof seem a bit more beat up, but other than that it's all the same. The front door doesn't even budge despite the knob fully turning, the wood must be warped from water damage. I make my way to the back of the house and see the all too familiar porch. The steps leading up to it are creaky and threaten to crumble under every cautious step but I make it up to the deck. I'm greeted by two old rocking chairs that Juan and I used to sit in. A rush of emotions hits me and I momentarily think this was a horrible idea.

I stand there contemplating, "I came all the way out here, I might as well make the most of it." I mumble to myself.

The chair creaks under my weight as I ease myself down, but holds steady as I let my full weight down. I risk some light rocking and soon enough I find myself relaxing just how I used to with Juan. I kick myself for not having a blunt, would've been perfect right about now. Instead, I sit there with a sober mind trying to control the flood of emotions.

I hone in on my current dilemma with Cara. I've never been this certain about my feelings for anyone else, but am I stupid for wanting to be with her even if I'm putting her in danger? To hell with it. Life is too short to live in fear. If I do die, I should die at least knowing that I did everything I wanted to do in the short amount of time I did have. Cara is also the most well-equipped person to handle herself in this situation. I'd be crazy to just let her go. She's helped me through so much and has even given me answers to some of this madness. She's been willing to do it all even after she was put in danger herself. That's not easy to come by in a greedy unforgiving world. I'm going to her tonight. I know I can't get help from Hunter this time. Knowing Cara, she's at her second home, Attic's Revenge. Above everything else I know I can't let her go.

Cara's Perspective

I sit on the floor next to the counter with different items surrounding me. My 1950's style dress circles around me. Each item needs to be priced, added to our inventory, and stocked. Walkin' After Midnight by *Patsy Cline* plays overhead. Tears well in my eyes and I try to hold them in. December is always the worst month for me. It brings up a lot of emotions surrounding my Grams and my lack of family. It also is the month Grams died. The only saving grace is that there is only an hour until closing.

Holly is like a local celebrity for the spirits within the store. Since I summoned her, many spirits have come to socialize with her. Right now, Judith and Peter sit with her. They are talking but I can't hear what they are saying nor do I care at the moment. I don't have to get all this done tonight, maybe I should just start moving some of the items to the back. Sid will understand.

A chill goes down my spine. "What's wrong with you?" Holly asks, making me jump.

I hold my chest, "Jesus, you scared me."

"Sorry, just thought I'd check on ya. I don't like seeing anyone down," she says. I roll my eyes. Any other time I would feel heart warmed that a spirit of all people was checking on me. But, lately, I've just been on edge. "So, spill. What's the deal with you?" She pushes. I see why she and Sid are such a match. They both know how to get a person to talk. It just sucks when you don't know exactly where to start.

I sigh, "There's just been a lot going on. I have a big decision I have to make and I don't have that much time. At this point, I don't know where my relationship lies. To top it off it's December and I hate December. If I could just sleep through this month I would." I start grabbing some of the items and head towards the back. It seems like Holly is trying to think of how to respond.

"Cara?" I hear a familiar voice say.

I almost drop the box but get my composure in check. The way I have always protected myself is by turning myself to ice when I feel hurt. I feel my body completely tense up and I bury all the emotions I'm having under my anger. It's been three days and Ricky and I haven't spoken once.

I'm tired of the back and forth. I know I want to be with him but I also can't handle being on again and off again. That on top of the fact that I haven't made a decision about working for Mick has my head in a tailspin.

"Oh, I see what the dilemma is," Holly says, looking Ricky up and down. She does a little clap, "Look at you go Cara." I ignore her.

"Is there something I can help you with, sir?" I say not looking at him. I can see him come closer from the corner of my vision.

"I'm here to see if I can save my relationship with my girlfriend. Do you think you can help me?" He says playing along.

I don't let up, "What did you do? Why does the relationship need to be saved?" I start walking to the other room with the box.

He follows me. "Because I'm an idiot who can't make up his mind. Because I think I'm protecting her by leaving her but I'm just hurting her and myself," he says.

There are a million things I want to say but I stay silent. I shake my head in annoyance, "Yeah, and?" There is an empty shelf on a bookshelf against the wall where I add some inventory from the box onto it. I refuse to look at him because I know the moment I do I will either cry or give in to him. My hands are shaking but from the position I'm in I know he can't see them.

"Can we please just talk?" He asks.

Warmth invades me as I feel his body come close to mine. He has me cornered. His body doesn't physically touch mine nor does he put his arms around me. I keep adding stuff to the shelves and pretend I don't notice. There's no choice but to face him. That doesn't mean I have to look at him. Slowly, I turn around and avert my eyes to a painting of a beach. Maybe the longer I look I can make myself disappear into the painting. He takes the box from my hand and grabs my chin forcefully. I grit my teeth.

"Look at me," he says.

Hesitantly, my eyes look into his dark eyes. They look so deeply into mine it's like he is trying to see into the deepest part of me. I can't deny the connection I have with him.

With the proximity between us, his musky cologne filling my nose I clench my thighs. My eyes move to his lips. I'm not sure who moves in closer first. Time seems to slow down. Then, it speeds up when his lips crash into mine. We kiss so deeply, so harshly it seems like we want to devour each other.

There is no distance between us. Our bodies are molded together and I can feel the length of his cock against my thigh. He runs his fingers through my hair. I run mine through his and slightly tug. He wraps his arms around me, keeping me close.

Ricky whispers, "I can't lose you."

My defenses are down and I know they have lost. My response is to kiss him. I wrap myself around him. I put everything I am feeling into the kiss. There is whooping and whistling from Holly, Peter, and Judith. I move back looking into his eyes.

"We have company," I laugh.

He groans, "Of course, we do."

I stifle a laugh, "We won't have much privacy here but there is one place we might have a chance. Come with me."

"Go get 'em, tiger," Holly yells.

The cool air hits us as we go outside the back door. Across the way from the back exit is a garage. Sid had a big garage built in the back to hold more stock. He is a big believer that some specialty items can be worth more if fixed. The best part about the garage is that it's heated.

"Come on," I say hurrying him along.

I use my key and unlock the side door. It's a big garage that could easily hold four cars and other items. At the moment we have two cars here and then miscellaneous items that still need to be fixed. I take him to one of my favorite purchases Sid has made. Sitting there is a 1968 Volkswagen Bus. The top of it is white and the windows down to the tires is worn light blue, the metal of the Volkswagen symbol is a bit rusted as well as the rims of the tires. It would be a dream for me to have it.

I slide the door open for him to go inside. "After you," I say motioning my arm for him to enter.

The seats towards the trunk are pushed down. He gets in and I follow behind, closing the door behind me.

He sits on the seat holding himself up by his arms. I get on my knees and unzip his pants. My eyes look up into his as I rub my hands along his thighs. His cock has been hard and just to tease him I rub my hand everywhere but the hard length between his legs. Ricky grabs my hand making me stop and takes off his boxers and pants. His cock springs out and I lick my lips in anticipation. I slowly remove my shoes, nylons, and panties.

"Come here," he says, making me blush.

"Okay," I respond breathily.

I lift my dress and put my legs on each side of his hips. To my surprise, he lays back and wraps his arms under my thighs pulling me upward. "What are you doing?" I ask.

"I'm apologizing," he responds, guiding my body up towards his face. Panic ensues and my inexperience shows because I have no idea where this is going and if I am even going to be able to do what he wants. He pushes my body up so I am using the back window to hold myself up. "Do you trust me?" He asks, sensing my panic.

"Is that even a question?" I ask, trying to sound tough but end up sounding shaky.

"Then, just follow my lead," he says, his head positioned directly underneath me.

I nod, really doubting myself but knowing whatever I'm about to do is going to bring me an immense amount of pleasure. I hold up my dress. He puts his hands around my hips and guides me to sit on his face. His tongue is right up against my clit. A blush rises to my cheeks, feeling so vulnerable.

My anxiety bubbles over. "I don't want to suffocate you," I say, pleasure already radiating in my voice. I try to lift myself. "Then, I'll die a man's death," he says before slamming me back down onto his face.

His tongue works furiously inside me. I give in and let go. Shamelessly, riding his face. He sucks my clit. It's overwhelming. He goes back to sticking his tongue in and out of me. "Oh my god," I moan. "Ricky I... I can't," I get out. He keeps going, still holding me down. It's everything I needed and didn't even know I wanted. I throw my head back and I cum hard all over his face. He laps up my juices and allows me to free him. I move away and he wipes his face with his hand.

"Now let me make it up to you," I say, straddling him.

I sit down on his cock. Moving my body up and down. Without warning he grabs my hips and slams me down on his cock. I moan and he groans. He grabs my hips and guides me up and down onto his cock hard. I start to become breathless as he keeps slamming me down. His cock fills me up and I can feel my wetness all over him.

"Such a good girl, you take every inch," he says. I start to tighten myself around him each time he enters me. I can feel my body build up with pleasure.

"You want to leave this," I say.

Ricky takes over and flips me onto my back. He holds my legs up in the air and pulls me towards him.

“Never,” he says.

He pounds into me like there is no tomorrow. I hold my legs back with my hands to give him more access. He keeps one arm wrapped around my leg and with the other hand, he reaches down to my clit. His thumb circles my clit as he enters in and out of me.

“Fuck,” I moan. The movements start slow and then go faster in a circle. “Ricky,” I say as I release onto him. I thought he would stop because I came but he keeps going. “I came,” I try to get out.

He smiles, “I know.”

He circles and circles. It feels amazing and tortuous all in one. He stops abruptly and grabs onto my hips. He slams into my throbbing pussy repeatedly. It’s like he is trying to break through every single layer I have paving the way for his hard thick cock. I’m panting, barely hanging on.

“Oh fuck, I’m going to cum,” he says.

“Give it to me baby,” I moan.

That does it for him and I feel his cum pour into me. He stays inside of me as he crashes down on top of me. I pet his hair as he lays his head on me.

“Just stay with me,” I almost whisper.

Ricky looks up at me and gives me a peck on my lips. He gets up wordlessly, grabbing his clothes. I sit up. My stomach twists and my heart sinks. I look out the window, feeling myself shield up. Ricky comes back and sits next to me fully clothed. He lays down and pulls me into his arms. I feel my body relax.

“There’s something I want to talk to you about,” he says, sounding serious.

Anxiety bubbles up inside me. “Yes?” I say meekly.

He hesitates and for once since we started dating, I sense that he is nervous. “Cara... I know that there has been a lot going on with us. I’m sorry that things have been so hard. My intentions have truly been to keep you safe. In our time apart a lot of things came to light for me...” he says.

My stomach twists in knots. This sort of sounds like a breakup. I brace myself for the crushing blow I fear is coming.

“I have been trying everything to protect you and in doing that all I’ve done is hurt you. For that, I apologize. I know now that we are stronger together. I know that I want to be with you, forever.”

A new type of anxiety is taking over. Is he proposing? I mean it wouldn't be the worst thing. I know that I love him but we haven't even been together a year. Ricky sits up bringing me with him. He pulls a small black box out of his pocket. My heart feels like it's going to beat out of my chest and fall onto his lap. He pops it open. Inside is a beautiful black ring with intricate details of flowers going up the side and a beautiful black gem in the center. I gasp.

"Don't freak out. This is not an engagement ring, though I intend to get you one of those one day," he says quickly.

My heart rate slows and I feel my shoulders relax. "This is a promise ring. A promise to stay with you. To fight through the hard times and love you harder in the best times. It's a promise that I am going to work harder on not pushing you away. I will work on not losing myself to the darkness that is so overwhelming sometimes." Tears are spilling out of my eyes at his words. "I know now that I need you. Which is a new feeling for me. I need you to push me to be the best version of myself. And to give me a reason to fight for my life." He takes the ring out of the box and hesitantly takes my hand. I can feel his shake as he slips the ring on my finger.

Everything I was stressing about seems to slip away. And in this moment, I'm here in the back of a vintage car with the man I love talking about our future.

I look at my hand wiggling my fingers to make sure this is real. He's patient with me. "Of course, I will be yours, Enrique. This is all I wanted," I say.

To my surprise when I look up there are tears in his eyes. Like a predator attacking its prey I pounce on him. I kiss his lips putting my legs on either side of his hips. I move back slowly and look into his eyes.

I run my fingers through the back of his hair. "I love you," I say in almost a whisper.

He smiles, "I love you, too."

He takes control putting me on my back. His face hovers inches from mine. Ricky kisses me and my body responds so easily to him. I nudge him, "As much as I want you to take me again, I also want to go celebrate and I know just the place." I bite my bottom lip worried I have wounded his ego.

"Where to milady?" He says sarcastically.

I laugh, "You'll see."

Banjaxed was one of my Gram's favorite places. It's an Irish Tavern with the best burgers in town. We would always come here for any big celebration: graduation, getting good grades, landing a new job, etc. When we walk through the small narrow hallway to the second entrance, I can feel the redness that has formed on my nose from the cold. I hold my jacket close to me. There is a sign that says, "Seat Yourself".

The walls are filled with decor representing Ireland and Irish culture. A lot of pictures of wide-open meadows. There is a family crest for the owner's family. The McCarthy Family. The room has a long straight bar against the wall, there are different tables spread out throughout the floor. There is a circular table right in front of the fireplace which is lit. I try to hold myself back from literally running to the table. It is a table more suited for a family of five. But I don't give a damn. I feel myself start to warm up quickly. There is a big window on the wall. Looking around I notice that the restaurant is unusually empty.

"I guess we came at the perfect time," I say.

The bartender is at the bar cleaning glasses. "I'll be right with you," he says.

The only sound in the room is the sound of the crackling of the fire. Another unusual thing as there is a jukebox in the corner of the room. In all the times I came here they always had a variety of songs playing. Maybe it's just been a slow night. The bartender comes to our table and sets down menus and silverware rolled up in napkins. He's a tall man with broad shoulders, he is wearing all black, his black hair is slicked back, he has stubble along his jaw, and his eyes look almost black. "My name is Damian and I will be taking care of you today. Can I get you started with something to drink?" He says.

"Do you have coffee?" Ricky asks.

"Sure do," Damian responds.

"I'll have coffee with Bailey's and Jameson in it."

"And for you?" Damian says. "I'll have a coffee," I say. He walks away.

"My Grams and I used to come here all the time. This was our go to place when we wanted to celebrate. I honestly haven't been here since she died," I say feeling a wave of emotion.

He smiles, "So we must be celebrating huh?"

"Yeah, I guess we are," I say.

We both look through the menu. "Can we split some potato skins?" I ask.

“Sure.” He says.

We order our appetizer and we each get a burger with fries. Dinner is nice and relaxing. No spirits make an appearance which is odd. I ask the bartender if we can play songs on the jukebox and he says yes and puts it on for us. No customers come in. Like a kid at a candy store, I excitedly go to the jukebox. I play Let’s Stay Together by *Al Green* and add one other song.

Then, I head back to our table. I move my body side to side with the beat and sing the words. Ricky laughs. I saunter up to him still dancing. He watches me looking me up and down with admiration in his eyes. He stands up and joins in.

I laugh, “Wow, I thought I was going to have to drag you over here.”

“No, I just wanted to enjoy a little bit of the show,” he says.

Our bodies move together with the beat of the music. We are close to each other but not touching. I love that he is always willing to dance with me. Our dancing feels so intimate even though we aren’t touching.

The song changes to Time in a Bottle by *Jim Croce*. The atmosphere suddenly feels different and I feel shy. It’s a song I would put in the slow-dancing category. Ricky puts his arms around my waist and I put my arms around his neck. We slow dance looking into each other’s eyes. It’s an intense feeling to love someone so wholeheartedly. It all feels so romantic, the fire burning, the closeness between us. His eyes convey so much love and I hope that this lasts.

I look at the ring on my finger and smile. “I still can’t believe you got me a promise ring. How did you know my ring size?”

“The shopkeeper taught me a trick. Apparently, your ring size correlates with your shoe size. Thankfully, I remembered you telling me your shoe size before.”

“It’s so perfect.”

Movement catches my eye and I see from the window that snow has started to fall outside. My stomach sinks and I try not to let the panic set in. I look back into his eyes and plant a kiss on his lips.

“I love you no matter what happens,” I say.

“I love you too,” he says.

The song changes and it’s In Dreams by *Roy Orbison*. His expression changes to fear,

“Did you play this?”

“No, I swear I didn’t play this. I wouldn’t. Let’s just go.”

Damian the bartender calls us over. “Would you like another round of drinks?” He asks.

“No thank you we would just like to close out our tab,” I say trying to sound calm.

I look around as if a monster might jump out at me. He returns with our tab.

“I just wanted to say you two make such a lovely couple. I wanted to get you some shots on the house,” he says. He grabs two shot glasses and a skull-shaped bottle full of dark liquor.

“Thanks,” Ricky says, a little suspicious.

Damian pours them and sets each glass in front of us. We each pick it up. The smell of rotting flesh hits my nose and I drop the glass. Damian laughs darkly, “Did you miss me?”

I immediately start backing up. “Ricky?!” I almost yell. We both try to make a break for it.

Damian appears in front of us, blocking the exit. “What the fuck do you want?” Ricky says, sounding brave. Damian also known as Mick also known as Mictlantecuhтли is here. I know that I am completely fucked. He completely ignores Ricky.

“Have you made a decision? You have to know by now I will always find you and I can appear to you any way I choose. Pretending to be Dean for example and watching you fawn all over yourself was priceless. I have visited you both as different faces. Though, taking the shape of an owl is my personal favorite. In life and in art,” Damian says. He stands inches from me.

Juan knew something was off about Dean and like a fool I ignored all the signs. I was too busy on a mission to know that I was allowing myself to be manipulated by evil. It all makes sense now the sightings of owls. The weird experiences we have had in the months leading up to this.

“Cara, what is he talking about ‘decision’?” Ricky asks.

Damian laughs, “Oh, so you didn’t tell him?” I cringe feeling myself become smaller. I look down at the floor ashamed. Ricky comes up to me not caring that Damian is there.

“Cara?” He pushes.

I look at him, tears welling up in my eyes. “He offered me to work for him in exchange for your life. If I work for him and bring forth spirits trying to evade him for the rest of my life. You will get to live out the rest of yours. I can still have some of my old life but I will be at his beck and call. If I don’t you die. He told me I had until the first snowfall to decide,” I say.

“Decisions decisions,” Damian says tscking.

“Cara, don't do it. He will be able to control you,” Ricky starts.

“Enrique, I'm so sorry I wanted to tell you. I just didn't know how. I knew you would want to save me and I didn't want you getting hurt,” I say tears rolling down my face.

“I won't let you do this,” Ricky says standing between Damian and I.

Damian laughs wickedly, “Oh, I see we have a hero in our midst. A human against a God and not only a God, the God of death.”

Ricky steps up to him and shoves him. Damian punches Ricky in the face. Knocking him out. “Enough,” Damian shouts.

“Ricky,” I shout.

Then, he pushes me against the wall, trapping me. There is no space between us.

“It's time to make your choice, Druid. Serve me and save Loverboy over here. Or watch him die. It's your choice,” he says.

Damian looks down deeply into my eyes. He towers over me. There is hunger in his eyes. To have me or to kill me I don't know. He moves my hair back and inhales. I can't stop my body from shaking. Damian puts his hand on my chest over my thumping heart. I can feel his cock harden between us. Which stirs more fear in me.

“My patience is wearing thin. Choose.” Damian says.

“I...I.” I start to say.

Damian roars in pain and spins around. There is a large gash going across his back. Ricky is standing there holding a bloody knife.

“Get the fuck away from her,” he growls.

Damian gets closer and Ricky drives the knife into Damian's side. Blood goes down the knife.

“An obsidian blade, I'd be lying if I didn't say I was impressed.” Damian says, almost impressed, “Obsidian won't kill me and neither of you can hide from me. The offer is off the table. You will rot away for all eternity in my domain and Cara will serve me as I see fit,” Damian says.

Ricky lunges for him and he disappears.

Enrique's Perspective

We race out of Banjaxed and run for my car. I open the car door and guide her in before slamming it shut and running to my side. In all my stress and anxiety, I fumble with the keys, nearly dropping them. I finally manage to get the keys in the ignition and start the car, the tires squeal on the pavement as I try to put as much distance between us and that monster.

A million questions are going through my head as I weave through traffic. When did he come to her and offer her a deal? Why didn't Cara tell me? What will he do now? Is there even a way to escape this now?

I decide to focus on the road and try to figure out where we're going. There's no way we can go to my place and get my bandmates involved; they have no clue what's going on. Hunter is the only other person I can trust right now. The snow is coming down but thankfully slowly. I'm going almost 80 in a 45-mph street as I realize I'm going in the complete opposite direction of where Cara lives. There's an intersection ahead and I know at this time there aren't many cars out in this sleepy old town. As I approach it, I turn my wheel to the right and quickly turn it to the left pulling up the safety brake and popping a quick U-turn back down the road we came. Cara looks terrified but barely reacts still in shock.

I put my hand on her thigh and glance over at her a few times trying not to take my eyes off the road too long, "I'm taking you to your place, that's the safest place I can think of for right now. I'm sure Hunter will help keep an eye on you and he's the only person who knows what's going on." Cara's eyes only register fear and shock. I reach down and grab her hand and bring it to my lips kissing her hand lightly trying to reassure her as best I can.

Cara's house finally comes into view and my tires screech as I pull into the driveway. I jump out of the car to help Cara out of her seat.

I grab her keys from her shaking hands and open the door, "Hunter! You here?"

Hunter comes walking from the living room looking pissed and confused, "What the fuck are you doing he--"

He spots Cara and runs over to her, "Holy shit Cara, you look like shit. Did he do something to you?"

I shoot daggers at him, “It’s Mick or whatever Cara called that fucker. He appeared to us after we made up and Cara turned down a deal he offered her. Now he’s gunning for the both of us and I need to end this tonight. Just keep an eye on her and let me know if any weird shit pops off. Promise me you won’t let her out of your sight.”

Hunter looks baffled and seems like he’s about to retort with something stupid, “Hunter, we don’t have time for your sass. Promise me.”

“Fuck! Okay! I promise she won’t blink without me knowing about it.”

I pull out the obsidian knife I used on Mick at Banjaxed. There is still some blood along the blade. “Take this, it’s obsidian and it will hurt him if he does decide to make an appearance,” I say to Hunter.

He looks at it with disgust but takes it dramatically, holding it at a distance. “I’ll do my best. You could’ve at least cleaned it off,” Hunter comments, sounding annoyed.

I kiss Cara and hug her tight, “Everything’s going to be okay.” She just looks numb. I put both of my hands on each side of her face. “I made you a promise that I would do whatever it takes to make sure you are safe. I don’t know exactly what is going to happen but I know that I need to go to the source of all of this. I love you so much. I refuse to lose you like I lost Juan.” It’s like something snaps in her.

She holds onto my shoulders.

“Enrique, please don’t do this. Stay with me. There has to be some way. Maybe, I just call on him and take the deal. No matter what we do I think the only answer to all of this is giving in. He can come to us disguised as anyone he wants to be, he has minions that pull people down into the earth, and he’s a god. I think the odds are against us,” she’s crying.

“Please just let me try this. Let me try to do something before we think the worst. I am the one who brought you into this and my family is the cause of Mick being here. Let me try and fix it before you try and sacrifice yourself. Tia Imelda brought him here; she should know how to make him go back. We talked about it before; he has to have a weakness.”

She holds onto me tighter and wraps herself around me.

“Please don’t leave me,” she says.

I kiss her lips deeply. I pull myself away from her. “I love you,” I say looking into her eyes.

“I love you, too,” she says through her tears.

Before I change my mind, I rush out the door and get in my car. I only have one mission in mind: Tia Imelda.

The drive is a blur and I barely realize A Silent Practice by 9 Dead is playing at my favorite part. It ends as I pull up to my Tia's house. I shut the car off and look at her house for any signs of life. All the lights are off and it looks dark and brooding. Fear makes my blood run cold as I remember what happened the last time I was there. The same feeling of being watched comes upon me and there's a heaviness in the air that feels like it's stifling the air around me. I do my best to push my fear aside and let fury fill my heart instead.

I step out of the car and make my way up the cracked concrete path. The door looms in front of me and I force my fist to bang on the door. I'm met by an empty silence.

I bang on the door again, harder this time, "Tia Imelda! I know what you've done! We need to end this shit right now!" Again, there's no response.

I bang one last time, "Imelda! Fuck!" My mind is racing and I can feel my body shaking.

I take a couple deep breaths trying to calm my mind. Where would she be? It's late at night, cold as hell, and she never had much of a relationship with anyone else except Juan. The bridge?

I get in my car and make my way to the damned bridge. The entire way there I battle between hoping my aunt is there and getting this over with to hoping she isn't and prolonging the inevitable. Sooner than I would like I see the bridge come into view. The area is empty as I approach. I park my car right off the woods beneath the bridge. My hand goes to my pocket and I feel the smooth handle of my pocket knife. The same pocket knife I used on Cara in the woods. It is my only form of protection.

I take a moment as I place my hand on the handle to let my mind fill with rage. I slam down on the steering wheel. She has to be here. My aunt has put me through hell for as long as I can remember. Even before Juan died, I could always feel the disdain she had for me. She has taken it too far now, not only putting me in danger but Cara as well. This needs to end tonight.

I step out of my car and slam the door. The snowfall adds a strange sense of serenity to an otherwise tense moment. The snow crunches under my boots as I walk up the bridge.

"Tia Imelda," I yell.

There is no response. The only sound is the water moving down the stream. I grip the cool metal on the side of the handrail.

“She has to be here,” I say out loud to myself.

I look down at the water and even though it should be freezing the water has not frozen over yet. It looks like there is something or someone in the water. “Enrique,” I hear and it sounds like Juan’s voice. I shake it off, Mick’s fucking with my head again. “Enrique!!” the yelling gets louder. It looks like there is someone in the water with their hand in the air reaching for help.

“It’s not real. It’s not real,” I whisper over and over to myself. I cover my ears and close my eyes. When I don’t hear anything for a moment. I open my eyes and take my hands down.

The vision is gone. I feel something push against my spine. A clicking sound follows. “Tia Imelda,” I say.

“Don’t move,” she responds.

I put my hands up “I didn’t come here to fight you. I just want this to end. This isn’t what Juan would have wanted-” I begin to say.

“Don’t speak for him. You don’t get to do that. You don’t get to take him from me and then act as though you knew him better than I did. He was my son!” she says.

I clench my jaw. It feels like my anger is going to boil over. I huff, “I’m not trying to speak for him. Those are his words. Cara, my girlfriend, has been talking to him and he’s been trying to help us. He wants this to end.”

She laughs, “Right, your girlfriend spoke to him. You always did have an answer for everything. But your words can’t save you this time. I have tried every way I could to end you without using my own hands but some things we have to do ourselves in order for them to be done properly. It seems fitting that it should happen here where he died.”

I refuse to beg for my life. She has every intention to kill me and nothing I say can change the situation. It’s life or death and more than anything I want to live. I know that Tia Imelda is shorter than me and older than me. Her head is probably level with the middle of my back. There is a little distance between us because of the gun in her hand. I jerk my body around and try to grip the wrist of her hand holding the gun. She holds on tightly and I push down on her arm so that it’s aimed at the ground. She uses her other hand to try and push her wrist up.

Wicked laughter fills the air as pain shoots through my body. Mick the son of a bitch. It feels like all of my veins are filled with fire. I yell out in pain and my grip loosens.

She points the gun up towards me. “Don’t do this,” I grunt. I look up into her eyes pleading with my own. Her eyes are emotionless.
Cara.
The gun fires.

Cara's Perspective

The winter breeze cascades through the room. My nipples are hard through my silk nightgown and a shiver runs up my spine. I roll onto my side and see that my phone screen reads 3:00 am. It's a weird feeling to wake up alone in bed when you start getting used to someone sleeping with you. I walk to my window and close it gently. I look outside and through the branches of the tree beside it, I can see that the moon is full. It's so big it looks like it fills most of the sky. The street is empty and there are a few dim streetlights. Another chill goes down my spine. I feel two hands on my hips. I jump and scream. I feel a hard body against my back.

"Baby, it's me," Ricky whispers.

The air from his breath causes goosebumps to break out on my skin. He moves my hair to the side and kisses my neck. I lean my head back on his shoulder. I spin around on him and swat his arm.

"You scared the fuck out of me," I snap.

He laughs, "I was just trying to be spontaneous. Let me show you how sorry I am."

He kisses my lips deeply and starts grabbing my tits in his hands. My already hard nipples feel more sensitive with his touch. I moan and grab his cock with my hand. He groans in my mouth. He follows my lead and puts his finger between my legs rubbing up and down on my clit. My mind and body become hazy with ecstasy. I feel a body press in behind me. Their hands rub along the curves of my body and I feel their cock harden. My hazy ecstasy turns to sheer fear and I try to look back but the figure behind me quickly wraps a hand around my throat tightly.

I feel cold lips press against my ear and a deep voice that sounds like silk speaks to me in a low voice, "Miss me?"

When I look up, I see Mick. He is in his Damian form. Dark hair, dark eyes, tall, and broad muscular shoulders. "Y-y-y you?" I manage to squeak out despite my throat being squeezed.

He tightens his grip around my neck, "Me."

I cum on Ricky's finger who hasn't stopped. My body cascades with adrenaline and serotonin.

I turn to face Mick, "Are you going to hurt me?"

Ricky comes close behind me unfazed and nips my ear.

"Only if you want me to," Mick responds.

I move away from both of them. There's a moment where I can tell they are concerned. Before I can turn to run Mick is on me and throws me on the bed like I'm a ragdoll. Ricky is on top of me right away pinning me down to the bed with his full bodyweight. I try to manage a scream but I once again feel dead, cold hands wrap around my hand.

I look up to see Mick standing at the edge of the bed, "Release her."

Ricky moves off me and Mick drags me to the edge of the bed with no effort. My head is hanging off the bed, my neck still held tightly. I try to wriggle away when I feel skeletal hands grab my ankles and wrists. I look around to see rotted skeletons standing around me. The scene is horrifying but before I can fully take it in, their skeletal hands pull my arms out tight and the hands at my ankles bring my legs up and out leaving my confused pussy fully exposed.

I feel Ricky's warm body kneel and press against me, followed by his hard cock plopping down on my pussy and lower belly. He starts to rub the length of his girthy cock along my clit sending waves of pleasure through my body.

Mick releases my throat and pulls my head up so he can look me in the eye, "I want to show you just how sweet the deal I'm offering you is." Before I can retort back, he grasps my throat again and I feel Ricky push his hard cock inside me.

As Mick pushes down on my throat my eyes meet his big erection. "Open," Mick commands me. I clench my jaw shut despite the moans trying to escape my throat. It's no use, bony fingers work their way in between my lips and pry my mouth open exposing my mouth and throat to their dead master. Mick works his cock inside my mouth filling it to max capacity. My eyes begin to water and just when I think he can't fit anymore in, he thrusts hard and reaches the back of my throat and breaking even that boundary as I feel his cock slip down my throat.

The sensation of being completely filled in my cunt and throat is overwhelming but the pleasure is like nothing I've ever felt before. Both of them begin to pound into me hard, skewering me like a pig for the spit. I lose count of how many times I cum as my body feels pure ecstasy coursing through it.

I begin to feel Mick's cock begin to pulse and I can feel Ricky's telling signs when he's about to cum. My eyes widen in anticipation and panic when they both groan as they cum. Mick's thick cum shoots straight into my throat as I feel Ricky's cum spill out of my overflowing pussy.

"Time to switch," Mick announces.

Panic and pleasure course through me. They switch and my eyes meet Mick's. He flips me onto my stomach and positions me on my knees. The skeletal hands still hold me in place. Ricky kneels on the bed, his erect cock coated in our mixed cum. I look up into his eyes as he shoves his cock in my mouth. At the same time, Mick enters my pussy. It's overwhelming to be filled with so much pleasure. Both of their rhythms pick up and my moans go along with it. Mick pulls my hair which keeps my head up giving Ricky more access.

"So creamy," Mick groans.

I can't deny the pleasure I'm getting from having two men at once. I hate Mick with a fiery burning passion but the way he is using my body makes me feel pleasure I'm almost ashamed of having. My body tenses up gearing up to have one of the strongest orgasms I have ever had. Mick pulls tighter on my hair and Ricky pushes roughly into my throat probably causing bruising. I can feel it coming closer little moans escape me. I'm right there.

The sound of an alarm plays painfully loud. It gets louder and louder. I swipe my phone to turn off the alarm. It was all just a dream. Sweat coats my body and wetness is evident between my legs.

"What the fuck?" I whisper to myself.

Hunter sits in a chair by the window reading a book. He comes over to me and looks me over. Oh god, I hope I didn't moan or give him any indication that I was having a sex dream.

"Are you okay?" He asks, concerned.

I sigh, "I'm fine, just had a nightmare." If he only knew how far from the truth that is. Cara Cagny having a dream about two men having her at once. And not only did they both have her but she came on herself in her sleep because of it. I blush at the thought. Then, reality sets back in.

Guilt rears its ugly head. Ricky is gone and I'm in my nice warm bed getting off. I rub my hands up and down my face, stressed out. I hate that I am just a sitting duck. I wish there was more I could do. The way Ricky looked at me. I have to give him this chance. I've never relied on anybody before. I just hope that I don't lose him in the process.

Hunter sits on the end of the bed, concern still etched on his face. "I'm just going to take a nice bath, maybe that will at least help me calm down," I say, moving the blanket off of me and getting out of bed.

"That might be good. I know you are putting so much pressure on yourself. Take a load off. I'll just be right out here," he says, trying to be encouraging.

There is a bathroom connected to my room and all of my essentials are in there. I move my tie-dye patterned shower curtain out of the way. There is a tub against the wall with a shower inside, a mirror is right across, the toilet is to the left of that, across from the toilet there is a linen closet, and there is one small window that I put privacy film over that blurs it. It is a decent-sized tub. The house is old so it sometimes takes a while for the water to get to the temperature you need it to be. I put the tub plugin and get everything else set up. I grab a big soft gray towel, tub pillow, candles, and lavender oil. There is a Bluetooth speaker that was designed to look retro that sits on the sink. I turn on the volume and connect my Bluetooth. Music definitely can set the mood. So, I queue up songs that I think will be relaxing. The tub pillow fits perfectly on the wall. Then, I add the lavender oil and a little bit of my coconut-scented body wash in the tub to make bubbles. I light some candles putting two on the sides of where my head will be in the tub and two on the sink. I turn the water off and the light.

My reflection in the mirror startles me. I don't even look like myself with dark circles around my eyes, my skin looks paler, and my hair looks disheveled. I sigh. What a mess.

I strip down and get in the tub. The change in temperature from cold to going into hot water feels amazing. My muscles instantly relax. I hit the play button and the beautiful chords of Moonlight Sonata (1st Movement) by *Ludwig Beethoven* plays. To me, the song is so beautiful with a hint of darkness. The lavender scent is strong in my nose. I run some of the bubbles through my fingers.

My mind starts to race with thoughts of deals, love, and death. I shake it off and do deep breathing. It takes a couple of tries but I feel my body calm down. I let myself get lost in the music. My eyes flutter and I close them.

Suddenly, the speaker distorts before completely going out. I look at the speaker but it still shows it's on. I lean in closer to try to inspect it better and the opening chords for In Dreams by *Roy Orbison* plays.

“Hunter,” I try to scream out. No sound comes out. “Hunter,” I try again and am met with nothing.

Maybe I’m dreaming, this has to be a dream. I pinch my arm trying to wake myself. Nothing.

The rotting flesh smell burns my nostrils. The water that was white with bubbles is now black with toxic bubbles foaming and popping. I feel skeletal hands wrap around my arms and legs and I am pulled down. I try to push myself up and nothing. I see the blurred world above me. With what little breath I have I try to scream and nothing comes out. I thrash and try to escape the grasps and they only tighten around my limbs.

My eyes blink. *Enrique!* I think. Before the world goes black.

Cara's Perspective

My vision is blurry as I open my eyes. I rub my fingers across my eyes to try and clear them up. The clouds above come into perfect view. I lean my body up with my hands. I move my head up and the world around me comes into view. The sky above me is a mixture of purple with lines of pink. Beautiful vervain flowers surround me. The only reason I recognize the flower is because of the gardening I would do with Grams. I touch the tips of the flowers with my hands.

"Hello?" I ask.

Am I dead? The empty meadow greets me. It dawns on me that the last thing I remember is being in the bathtub. I put my hands down my body, praying I'm not naked like I fear. Thankfully, I am wearing a long white flowy dress. I stand up and start walking. I'm dead, I have to be. Is this heaven?

The meadow seems never-ending. Trees come into view. I pick up my pace. I'm dead, I have to be.

"You are not dead," a familiar voice says.

My heart picks up and shock sets in. I turn around and standing in the middle of the vervain flowers is my Grams. She is exactly how I remember her short white hair, icy blue eyes, and a slender frame. She wears a white gown similar to mine.

"Grams?" I say running to her.

Tears start falling down my face before I even reach her. I wrap my arms around her and start sobbing. She rubs my back affectionately. I look up at her face still not believing she's here.

"Where have you been? I've tried and tried to contact you. I begged for you," I say, my voice cracking.

Grams holds me tighter, "I wanted to come to you but I think you now know why I couldn't." I meet her eyes. For the first time in my life, I can see fear in them. "Walk with me," she says, guiding me forward.

I go with her and wipe my face. She wraps her arm around mine, "I built this place before I died. I know that you have met Carey. I know that they portray themselves as a psychic. Carey is a witch. Like us, they come from a long line of witches. I worked with their grandma before them. When their grandma died, they took over. When I knew I was dying I went to them and together we conjured up this world for me to hide in."

“But why do you need to hide? Doesn’t Mick need someone who is living?” I ask, feeling genuinely confused.

She shakes her head, “Dead or alive. We are useful to him. He tried convincing me for years to work for him. Him among others. I used an amulet that protected me from them. Carey crafted it for me. I was hoping that Mick would never find you. I was hoping you would be spared from the many entities that try to use our power for evil. That’s why I didn’t tell you about any of it. In talking about them you can manifest them. I didn’t want to do that. That’s also why Carey only did the bare minimum. Only gave you some of the information.” I suddenly feel like I need to sit down. Grams knew. She knew everything and never told me, never taught me how to defend myself. “You knew... you knew and never thought how to teach me to defend myself. Didn’t even give me a warning?” The betrayal I feel is so deep. I move away from her and spin on her. “Now it’s over Grams. I’m here and the man I love is in danger,” I yell.

She smiles a sad smile, “You are here but it’s only temporary. One day when you do die you will join me here. Right now, you are in the in-between. I made sure you came here so I can give you the tools you need to beat this.” Grams pulls an amulet out of her pocket and hands it over to me. It has a long silver chain, there is a wide circular pendant on the bottom, there is a symbol that looks like a cross but is more spaced apart, there is red liquid inside, and when she turns it in her hand, I see the word *Praesidium* is engraved in the back. She turns me around and clasps the necklace onto my neck. I turn back to face her and she pets the pendant with a finger.

“This amulet needs to be worn by you. Nothing evil can touch you if you are wearing this. If they do, they will burn. That’s why if Mick gets close to you, you hold it up to his face and you say the words. *Remitte te unde venis. Custodi me et illos quos amo. Abstine te.* It’s a spell to banish him back from where he came and keep you protected. If done correctly the spell will work until you die.”

Wind starts to pick up around us. My hair whips around my face. The flowers look like they are going to be bent down to the ground from the force of the wind.

“Remember my words, Cara. Remember them. *Remitte te unde venis. Custodi me et illos quos amo. Abstine te,*” she says as I feel myself being pulled away.

“Grams!!” I yell. She is left standing there watching me as it feels like something is pulling me from behind by my dress. It’s all darkness and I can’t see anything. All I can feel is my body hitting the ground. I hear a humph and everything goes black.

When I open my eyes, water comes up through my throat, and out of my mouth. I cough feeling the intense burn of my choking. “Jesus Christ, Cara. What the fuck happened?” Hunter yells. I continue coughing as I sit up. I put my hand to my neck and the amulet is there. “Cara?” Hunter asks, shaking me.

I turn to look at him, “I have to go Hunter. I have to go see him. I saw my Grams; she gave me this.” In my fist is the amulet and I hold it up letting the pendant fall so he can see it. He touches it with his index finger and thumb. I put it in my other hand and stand up. He comes to my side with my towel in hand. I don’t even care that I’m naked or that I feel like my throat and chest are burning.

“Slow down,” Hunter says.

I shake my head, “I have to go Hunter. I have to get dressed. I can save him.”

I snatch the towel from him and walk past him. I put on panties and a bra. Hunter stands in front of me. “Cara, this is fucking crazy. Do you have a plan? Do you know what you are doing?” He asks. I rummage through my drawers trying to find what to wear. I get out a pair of black leggings and a long-sleeved black shirt. I put them on and I get black socks and my combat boots.

“You are crazy about my primo huh, Guerrita?” Juan says.

I spin around and he is standing leaning against the bathroom door frame. “You! You go missing and don’t tell anyone anything and now you come back like everything is good. If you weren’t dead, I’d kill you myself,” I say, storming toward him.

I can see Hunter’s confused expression and I ignore him. Juan puts his hands up in defense, “I know I know let me explain.”

“Explain?!? Explain how in our time of need you leave without a trace? Don’t give us a sign or anything? Explain how we are completely and utterly fucked? Save it. I already know that. But I don’t care about any of that. I am going to do everything in my power to save Enrique and no one and nothing is going to stop me,” I yell. Juan raises an eyebrow at me and crosses his arms. “Feel better now?” He asks.

“Ugh,” I groan.

He rolls his eyes, “Well, now that you got that out of the way. I have a plan. You aren’t exactly going to like it, but you have to trust me.”

My anxiety picks up. I can’t be fooled again. I start backing away from him, toward the bedroom door. Hunter follows suit, still not knowing what is going on. My body shakes but I do my best to be brave.

I roll my eyes, “Nice try, Mick. I’m not fucking falling for that again.”

Juan looks at me genuinely confused. “You think I’m Mick? You think I would give you plans to defeat myself?” He asks.

I shrug, “Maybe, you are going to tell me all the wrong things, and besides I already have tools to destroy you.”

Juan moves from his place and for the first time since meeting him I can tell he is getting annoyed. “We don’t have time for this, Cara. I’m not going to play these games. Either you believe me or you don’t, but I’m gonna do whatever I can to save my cousin. We don’t have much time, bad things will happen if we don’t get going,” he says.

I give him the once over and I believe him. I nod, “Okay, what’s our plan?”

I speed over to the Chapel Bridge as fast as my 2003 Volkswagen Beetle will take me. Juan sits in the passenger seat. Juan leads me to the abandoned house where he and Ricky used to hang out as kids. I took a page out of Ricky’s book and packed a bag full of things I would think are essentials. Hunter tried more than anything to be a part of this but I refuse to let another person risk their lives for me. He fought me but I think deep down he knew that this was a lot for him to handle. I made sure to call Trevor to let him know that Hunter would be needing him tonight. I want to have a positive mindset about Ricky and our odds. But we are going up against a God with multiple powers. Juan and I get out of the car and my stomach cramps with anxiety. I turn on my flashlight.

“Okay, I will go ahead and check the bridge and you check by the water. I just really hope this works Juan,” I say in a rush.

“It will, it has to,” He responds.

I run through the trees. There is a little path that leads up to the bridge. “Ricky?” I whisper shout. I get to the bridge and Ricky is lying face up on the ground. There is a pool of blood underneath him.

“Ricky!!” I scream. I try to run to him and an arm pulls me back by my neck and to them.

“Now you’re mine, Princesa” Mick says against my ear.

I struggle against his hold. He loosens his hold and laughs. I run down toward the water. I see nothing.

“No,” I say, sounding defeated.

I lean against a tree for support. The ground beneath me shakes and the sound of crunching surrounds me. Root comes from the ground and wraps around my wrists. I am pulled back forcefully to the tree. I scream.

Mick saunters towards me, “This game of cat and mouse has been a treat and now it ends. As always, I win.” He presses his body against mine and rubs the back of his hand on my cheek. I move my head away.

“So, you think,” I mutter.

He grabs my face forcefully, “You are mine.” He presses his lips against mine and I try with all my mite to move away. The smell of rotting flesh makes bile build in the back of my throat. He moves back, laughing menacingly.

“It’s time to go home. You and your lover will be joining us,” he says.

Four of his skeletal minions come up from the water and start walking from the middle of the stream up to land. They stand in front of Mick like soldiers waiting for orders.

“Mictēcacihuatl,” I whisper. Nothing happens and my heart drops. “Mitct...” I begin to say before vines circle my body and around my mouth.

“How dare you speak that name,” He spits. I scream with the vine between my lips.

Then I feel a burning in my throat. My body begins shaking. It feels like fire has moved to my lungs. I feel like I’m going to choke on my saliva. The minions disperse around the tree I’m strapped to.

“Get back here,” he commands.

Two stand at each side of me. My head fills with pressure. A voice almost like a whisper fills my head. Our thoughts mingle together and it’s overwhelming. It’s like being in a crowded room where everyone is talking at once while someone is trying to open your head with their hands to get inside. I scream out from the intensity.

Breathe. I am going to take over your body temporarily. You will be okay. You just have to stop fighting it. I bite down on the bitter-tasting vine and try to suck in a breath. I promise this will all be over soon. Just breathe. A woman's deep voice speaks in my head.

I clench my fists to aid me in relaxing. I bring down my defenses and release all my energy. The vines that tie me to the tree release and move away. There is strength within my body that isn't my own.

"Hello Oquichtli, did you really think that I wouldn't find out about your new plaything?" It's my voice talking but not my words. My mind is still mine but it feels like I am sharing the space.

Mick looks at me skeptically, "Mica?"

I walk seductively toward him and he takes me with open arms. He smiles, "It's just work. I was summoned here and we have an arrangement. You are overthinking it, my love." He wraps his arms around me.

I look up into his eyes. "That's right you were summoned here. Just like you were summoned to Mauve and Anne and every Cagney before her. Not to mention your hunger to gain the most souls of the gods," I say.

He smiles sheepishly, "I mean it this time. I was summoned by one with Aztec blood in her veins. The Cagney girl being involved was an added bonus." His eyes look towards the edge of the woods.

Imelda is standing behind a tree. I point towards her and summon her to me. "Imelda," I whisper.

As if she is tethered to an invisible rope, she walks straight down towards us. There is fear written all over her face but it's clear this is a battle she can't win. For once, I can see a hint of fear in Mick's eyes. He tries to act unfazed and keeps his attention on me.

When Imelda comes down to us, she falls to her knees in a bow. "Please, please don't hurt me. I just wanted revenge for my son," she pleads. She holds her hands together and tears stream down her face.

I look down at her with a mixture of anger and understanding, "Anger is such a strong emotion, my child. My good friend, Buddha, would say that anger is like a hot coal. You hold onto it with the intent to throw it at someone else but you end up just hurting yourself in the process."

I lean down and lift her chin so her eyes meet mine, “You have burned yourself on this one. Your anger has blinded you and you’ve meddled with forces beyond your comprehension. And to make matters worse you dragged my idiot husband into this who can’t resist interfering with mortal matters, especially when there’s a savory medium of Cara’s caliber involved.”

Imelda has tears streaming down her face, “Please, Enrique took my little boy away from me. Why does he get to keep living his life while my Juanito is dead?”

“That’s enough, Ma.” Juan steps out from some tall shrubs.

Imelda’s eyes fill with happiness and sorrow, “Mijo Precioso, how can this be? Have you come back to me?”

Juan shakes his head, “Listen to me ma, you need to forgive Enrique. It’s the only way to save your soul. You once lived your life based on God’s word. Wrath is one of the seven deadly sins. In order to save yourself you must forgive and find love.”

She shakes her head side to side, “I can’t. I can’t.”

I walk up to her and rub the side of her face like a mother does her child. “Your son’s soul belongs to Tlaloc. Because he drowned his soul is owed to the rain god. It is an honor in our culture to die by water. With him, his soul will be brought to a paradise of flowers. Because you have summoned my husband in the name of your son. Your son’s soul has been put in jeopardy. If you forgive and let go, he will go where he should have been long ago,” I say.

Juan is shocked by these words as I am myself. Imelda takes a deep breath and stands. Juan holds her hand.

“I forgive. I forgive Enrique Jose Sandavol,” she says looking up at the sky. She stands and holds her arms up as if she is in prayer.

A popping noise sounds and Imelda looks down at her chest. She puts her hand to her chest and her body begins to sway. Blood fills up her white jacket.

“Perdóname dios mío. Perdóname hijo,” she whispers. Juan reaches for her. She tries to grab his hand and she trips on a rock that is behind her.

“Mom!” Juan yells.

Her body hits the water and she is pulled into the current. Juan runs down the current chasing where it goes. She reaches a very choppy part of the river and she is completely sucked under. Juan keeps looking out to the water in hopes she’ll resurface, but it’s no use. He falls to the ground in defeat.

“Mom!” he yells.

Tears stream down his face. Ricky stands behind where Imelda stood with the gun held out in front of him and passes out.

I walk over to Juan and drop down to his level putting my arm around him. "You will be together again soon," I say.

"NO," Mick yells. He comes towards us. "You belong with me," he continues. Mick attempts to go for Juan. I snap my fingers and turn to face him. The minions are holding him back. *You know what to do Cara.* The voice says. I hold the amulet that I have hidden under my shirt up to his face.

"NO, no, don't do this," Mick shouts. He attempts to back away.

"Remitte te unde venis. Custodi me et illos quos amo. Abstine te," I recite.

The snow falls hard and the chill grows. The ground shakes and the minions disperse. In the spot where they stand, they each get sucked down into the earth one by one.

"No!" Mick shouts as his form begins to burn and he is pulled down into the earth.

The wind stops along with the snowfall. The burning feeling resumes and I scream out. It feels like my body is on fire and bile is building up in my throat. I begin to dry heave as nothing comes out. As quickly as it comes it's gone. I stand up straight and in front of me stands a beautiful statuesque woman. She has long black wavy hair, she wears a feather crown, her face is skeletal but soft, her tan body is toned, and has gold armor on different parts.

"You are free and repaid," Mica says.

I look around. Juan stands up watching us and Ricky lies on the ground. Before I can ask what, she means she disappears. I run to Ricky and drop down next to him. I feel for a pulse. He has one it's weak but there. Tears well in my eyes. I can't lose him after all of this.

Juan joins me at his side.

"He's going to be okay, he has to be," he says.

Anxiety floods me as it feels like seconds turn to minutes and they tick by. I am mentally praying to whoever can hear me. Please, please don't take him. The tears stream down my face, falling onto his face.

Ricky's eyes flutter open. "Cara?" He asks.

Ricky reaches for his wound. "It's gone," he says. He sits up. My hands go to his chest and I don't feel anything.

"She said, 'free and repaid'", I whisper.

"What?" he asks.

“Nothing,” I say.

He stands up and then offers me his hand. I take it and get up. He pulls me toward him. I look up into his eyes and then I kiss his lips. He wraps his arms around me.

Tears go down my face, “I love you.”

He rubs the side of my face with his hand. “I love you too,” he says.

He kisses my lips. I pull away and look for Juan. He is leaning against a tree looking out at the water. I go over to him.

“I’m so sorry, Juan,” I say.

“It’s not your fault Guerrita,” He says.

Juan looks different. Lighter almost. He turns around to face me. “It’s not your fault. My mom she...” he stops mid-sentence and his eyes are wide. Juan looks behind me. “Juan?” I ask.

I turn around. Standing near the water’s edge and by the bridge is Imelda. She looks confused.

“Mom?” He asks.

“Mijo,” she says.

He walks hesitantly toward her. “What if this is a trick?” He asks. I know it isn’t; I can tell she’s a spirit. It has to be her.

“It’s her,” I say, giving him an encouraging push.

Juan steps forward. Imelda holds his hand out to him and he takes it. A warm light spreads around them.

“Goodbye Guerrita, thank you for everything.”

“Bye,” I say, wiping the tears from my eyes.

“What’s going on?” Ricky asks.

I wrap my arms around his neck. “Juan and your Tia Imelda have finally moved on. And now we can be at peace,” I say.

I can see the disappointment on his face. “Baby, he knows you are sorry. He’s at peace now and I know more than anything he wants us to be as well,” I say. He nods.

“Let’s go home,” I say.

Enrique's Perspective

It's been a little over a month since everything went down with Juan and Imelda. For those first two weeks, Cara and I were constantly looking over our shoulders. Cara says she hasn't seen Juan or Imelda since. She reassures me that that is a good thing; it means they passed peacefully.

When we got home, she explained everything to me about Mick and his wife and Juan and Imelda's souls going to the right place. It still is a lot for me to wrap my mind around. The guilt has grown because this is the second time I feel that I have cheated death. Juan seems to always be the one to pay the price.

There were no lasting effects from the gunshot wound I sustained. I thought for sure that even though it was gone I would have pain of some kind. But it's as if nothing happened.

I closed the shop tonight and I am exhausted. I turn the key in the door to lock it. When I see headlights on the window and I hear honking. I turn around to let them know that we are closed. A light green Volkswagen Beetle sits in the lot.

A head pops out the window, "Hiya Handsome." Those green eyes meet mine and I can't help the smile that plays on my lips.

"Hi baby," I say.

I go up to the window and bend down slightly to plant a kiss on her lips. I notice there are balloons in the backseat. She notices the quizzical look on my face.

"So, I had an idea," she says, biting her bottom lip.

"Yes?" I ask looking into her eyes.

I can tell she is nervous. Something in my face deters her. Then, I see the doubt set in. "Never mind this is silly I..." she starts to say.

I open the door and I unbuckle her seatbelt. I take her hand and get her out of the car. Her eyes won't meet mine.

She laughs under her breath, "I was just trying to think of a way to move on and I thought that maybe we could let balloons off or something. Now that I'm here with you I feel stupid. I'm sorry I shouldn't have..." I kiss her lips.

Her body begins to relax. Her eyes look up into mine. I can see the bags under her eyes. I know there have been at least a handful of times she has had nightmares and I had to shake her awake and hold her. Those were times I was there. I'm sure there were plenty of times when I wasn't.

"Let's do it," I say.

She smiles, "Really? Are you sure? I don't want to upset you or anything."

My girl is always trying to take care of me. I give her another peck, "No, let's try, what can it hurt?"

She wraps her arms around my neck and kisses me back. "Are you sure baby?" I hope that if we have children in the future, they don't have her eyes or else I'm fucked. They will get away with murder.

I nod, "Yes, let's go, we can come back for my car later."

"Okay," she says.

We pull up to the abandoned house. Frost fills the ground. Cara grabs the balloons. "Ready?" She asks.

"Mhm," I say.

We get out and I put my hands in my pockets. It's a colder day. Cara fiddles with the amulet that she continues to wear since she knows it will protect her. Her gloved hand rubs the outline of the pendant. We go around to the side and we sit on the back porch. I give her time. I can tell she is nervous.

She clears her throat, "Maybe we should say a few words and then release them?" I nod giving her the floor.

"I didn't know Juan in life. I met him after his death. In the little time that I knew him I learned that he was funny and that he loved his family. Even though he couldn't be with them. He did everything in his power to protect them.

I talk to spirits who have many different emotions. I can say without a doubt Juan was still a happy person despite the circumstances of his death and being stuck in the middle for years. He also cared more about others than himself. He would do anything in his power to help them. I hope that Mica wasn't lying and that he is in a beautiful paradise with flowers. Though Imelda caused a lot of problems I'm also grateful to her in a strange way because without her I might've never met Enrique." She releases a heart-shaped balloon.

I huff. Cara looks at me encouraging me. “Juan was like a brother to me. Much of my childhood and high school days were filled with our shenanigans. Whether it was smoking pot and jamming out to tunes or daring each other to do the dumbest shit. He always had my back and I always had his. I wish more than anything that we could have had more time. I think that’s the worst part about all of this. He’s gone and I have to live the rest of my life without him. I know he would have been a part of all the big parts of life that have yet to come and no one can fill that place. I hope that wherever he is, he is happy. I hope that he can finally worry about himself and what he wants.” I take a heart-shaped balloon from her and let it go.

Cara hugs me tight and cries. Having her so close to me brings me more comfort than she knows. It feels like a weight is lifted and a part of me feels like he is with us at this moment. I hope he is and I hope he heard my words.

It feels like there is hope. We have spent so much time worrying about the dead, grieving, having regrets, the fate of our own lives, and deities. Now we can just try and go on with our lives. Cara and I bonded over loss and now it’s time to start living.

Epilogue

Cara

2 Years Later

Events like weddings remind you of just how broken your family truly is. I have two living parents but I didn't invite either one because I knew where that would lead. It would head straight to disappointment. I guess that the one upside of seeing ghosts is that they become your family. From an outsider looking in they would see a woman sitting alone at a vanity getting ready for her wedding day. If they could see through my eyes, they would see a small group of people dressed in apparel from different decades doing different things. Two people work on my hair, another does my makeup, and two others make sure my dress is ready to go. I am appreciative of their support. There's just one person I wish was here that I know can't be.

Grams. I thought after Mick disappeared, she would just know and come back. I even tried calling to her. Nothing.

"I think we are done," Addison says.

Everyone moves away and I look in the mirror. My hair is down in retro waves with a side part in my hair, my green eyes are enhanced by the gold and brown hues used on my eyes, and my lips are painted a deep red.

"Thank you, guys, so much!" I say, genuinely happy with the results.

Addison takes my hand, "Don't thank us yet let's see the complete and final look!" I nod.

I go behind the white floral partition. I strip down to my panties and light pink garter around my thigh. Then, step into my dress.

As if she can read my mind Judith says, "Need us to help get you into the dress."

"Yes please!" I say.

They help me with the top of my dress and tighten the strings on the corset top. It feels like I am being restricted but I know it will be worth it. When they stop, I go out and stand in front of the floor-length mirror on the other side of the room. The top is corseted and goes into a heart shape at the bust, there are two pieces of fabric off the shoulder, lace is throughout the top and spreads throughout the bottom to the skirt, and the skirt is poofy from the waist down.

"Something new," Judith says, putting a veil on the back of my hair.

"Something borrowed," Holly says, putting two lace gloves on my hands.

I put my fingers on the edge of the pendant around my neck. "Something old," I say.

Tears well in my eyes. They both wrap their arms around my shoulders.

"You know she'd be here if she could," Addison says. I nod, too afraid to speak.

A knock sounds on the door. "Cara?" Sid says.

I look around and the spirits have vanished. I go to the door and open it.

"Are you ready?" Sid asks. He looks down and smiles. "You look so beautiful Cara," he says.

Tears well in his eyes which is so unlike Sid. It makes the pain I am feeling eb a little. This is how a father would and should react to seeing his daughter on her wedding day. When he has introduced me to other people, he always introduces me as the daughter he should have had. He is wearing a black suit, white shirt, light pink tie, and instead of his Elton John glasses he wears square wire-framed rectangular glasses. His hair is slicked back and in a pony.

I hug him, "Thank you, and thank you for doing this. You even dressed up for the occasion, you didn't have to do that."

"Of course I did, it's not every day you walk your only daughter down the aisle," he says.

I move back and he notices the gloves. He takes a step back and looks around as if he's looking for someone.

"She's here, isn't she?" He asks.

I nod, "She helped me get ready. She wanted to contribute to the wedding in some way so she gave me something borrowed."

He smiles, "She wore those on our wedding day. Here in this very chapel. Is she here now?"

I shake my head no, "But, I'm sure she will be back."

He nods, "Should we get going?" He holds his arm out to me. I move my veil over my face. I take a deep breath and wrap my arm around his.

"Yes," I say, sounding as nervous as I feel.

When deciding where to get married we landed on St. Joseph's Parish Chapel because of the sentimental value it holds. It is the Chapel the town is named after and it is where Sid and Holly got married. I never got to meet Holly when she was alive but from what I know of her as a spirit it is clear as day that they were soulmates. I know if they had been given more time, they would still be together to this day. This town holds so much of my past and now it will hold my future. I hope that our love is as strong as Sid's and Holly's is. We stand at the big wooden church doors.

Sid opens them and props them. The organ stops playing. The priest says, "All rise." Everyone in the pews stands.

We walk through the doors and *Time in a Bottle* by *Jim Croce* plays.

The first six rows on each side are filled. There is a space with no one sitting and then the row after is filled on each side filled with spirits from each side of the family. A long aisle is ahead of me with flowers thrown around in different areas. Small bouquets of pink flowers sit on the end of every other pew. Sid and I walk at a slow pace. I hesitantly lift my eyes to the front of the church. I see Enrique and his best man Shawn on one side and Hunter on the other side, the priest in the center. He looks handsome in his black tux and pink bow tie. I couldn't have created a better version of a man in my head. I truly was sent the man of my dreams and then some. Our eyes lock and I feel myself relax.

My biggest fear was that Enrique wouldn't be at the altar. I know it's a ridiculous thought as he was the one who proposed to me and there was nothing that happened that would make me think he would leave. But it is still a fear I had.

When we get to the end Sid moves my veil and kisses my cheek. Then, he leads me toward Enrique. Enrique takes my hand and helps me up the few steps. The music stops and the priest says, "Everyone be seated."

Everyone sits down and I scan the crowd. The priest begins talking and I am only half listening. When I see Juan and Imelda towards the back row. Juan gives a playful wave. I smile. It makes me happy to know that they were able to be here. And that Imelda looks happy which makes me feel good. I guess she did forgive Ricky in the end.

In the row in front of them is Holly sitting with Judith, Peter, Addison, and Evelyn. Holly's eyes are on Sid who sits in the front row. It's evident from here that she misses him and if she could she would make herself known to him. I think for all that time she was trying to protect him so that's why she stayed away. She also was at peace because she not only lived the life, she wanted but she was able to say she got to do it with the love of her life. My eyes well at the thought.

My eyes go back through the crowd and that's when I see her. My heart rate picks up and the tears spill from my eyes. Sitting alone at the back of the church is my Grams. She is dressed for the occasion in a light pink chiffon pantsuit, she wears makeup, and her short white hair is curled. She gives me a wink. Tears stream down my face. More than anything I wanted her here and now that she is I know that today is perfect.

Enrique holds my hands and squeezes them. I look into his eyes. "Are you okay?" He mouths to me. I nod and smile at him. The priest continues to talk and I can't help but get lost in Enrique's eyes. "This couple decided to prepare their vows," he says.

I go first holding my vows in my hand. "Ricky, you truly are my person. You have seen me through some of the hardest things in my life and some of the best. I know that wherever life takes us you will always be the one I can rely on. My whole life I have always felt like a loner. Then, you came into my life and pulled me out of the darkness. You have accepted all of who I am. You have given me the acceptance and love I have been seeking my whole life. I hope that I can bring you happiness and that I can be your comfort in hard times and be your biggest cheerleader in great times. I want you to have everything you want in life. I promise to give you all of myself and to love you even when I think I hate you. I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you. I love you."

The butterflies in my stomach are flying at rapid speed as the priest continues, "And now it's the Groom's turn to present his vows."

Ricky tenses up as he reaches into his breast pocket on the inside of his tux, carefully unfolding a piece of paper, “Cara, when you came into my life, I was at the lowest I’ve ever been. But then there was this bright, beautiful, and charming light that set me on a better path. You showed me parts of myself I didn’t even know I had. I can’t wait to see what adventures await us. I will be there for every rainy day and every perfect sunset. You own every part of me just as you’ve given me all of you. Though death may do us part, it can never truly win, for I will find you in every lifetime.”

More tears of happiness stream down my face and Ricky’s hands are ready to wipe them away.

The priest says, “If anybody in this audience objects, speak now or forever hold your peace.” I hold my breath. After about 10 seconds of silence, I let out my breath.

The priest smiles widely, “With the power vested in me, I pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride.” Ricky pulls me in close and we kiss deeply as our guests cheer loudly. I know that I will love this man until the day I die and in death.

Epilogue

Enrique

2 Years Later- After the Wedding

We run out of the reception hall hand in hand. All of our loved ones are lined up outside to see us off. I open the door for her and we get in. I roll down the window and we wave goodbye to everyone. The driver begins to drive away and I roll the window up. I turn to face her and do what I have wanted to do all night. I go to her and kiss her lips deeply. She moans against my lips. My cock hardens and I wish more than anything I could fuck her right now right here but just by looking at her dress I know it's not going to be an easy process. When I move back, she smiles at me.

"Mrs. Sandavol, I can't believe it," she says out loud.

I kiss her lips again, "All mine." Her cheeks grow crimson.

"Would you like a glass of champagne?" I ask her.

She smiles, "So fancy. I would, Mr. Sandoval." I pour us each a glass and we sit back.

I'm hoping she doesn't notice that we aren't headed to her house, which has recently become my home, as originally planned.

"Everything worked out so perfectly," she says, sounding happy.

"It did. I'm glad you got to see your Grams," I say.

She looks down for a second. "I didn't want to upset you and I don't know how you will take it but Juan was also there and.." she starts to say.

"And Tia Imelda?" I ask.

She nods, "she surprisingly looked happy."

That's surprising. She hated me in life. I guess she at least tolerates me in her afterlife. "I wish I could've seen Juan. I know he knows I wanted him to be my best man. But, I'm happy to hear that he could be there in spirit, literally" I say. She sets her glass in the cup holder and hugs me from the side.

"I know baby, I know," she says, rubbing me soothingly.

"They will always be with us. Even if I don't see them, I am sure there are ways that we aren't aware of where they can check on us," she continues.

I smile, "I think so, too. There has to be. How else would they know about our wedding?"

She nods and I can tell she is mulling that over. Not that long after the limo comes to a stop. Cara looks around confused. "Where are we?" She asks.

I get out first without answering her. I extend my hand out to her. She gives me a skeptical look but takes my hand. I help her out of the limo.

"Don't be mad," I say. Her eyes widen in surprise and she looks behind me. "I know that we have been wanting a house and I know that you wanted to make the decision together but I thought that because of the sentimental value, you wouldn't mind that I finally got the village to agree to let me buy the property," I say.

We have been talking about this for months. The plan was for us to find somewhere and for Hunter to take over her Grams house. It was a hard decision for her but she thought that we should have a fresh start. She doesn't want any bad juju in case we do have children. Though she had a lot of good memories there with her Grams it was another way of making her feel stuck in her grief. It doesn't matter how much time passes when you lose someone it follows you for the rest of your life. Cara trusts Hunter with her life and knows he will take care of it. He also of course was in on this and helped me set everything up for her arrival.

Her face still reads shock but I can't tell if she's pissed or happy. She walks ahead of me. Gone are the overgrown weeds and wildflowers, we put grass seeds down so it could grow, we changed the exterior paneling so it's updated, the gray roof needed work, we put in brand new windows, the small porch is all brand new, and the front door is a big mahogany colored door with a gold knob. On it is a poster that says, "Welcome Home Mr. and Mrs. Sandoval" with hearts around it and wedding bells drawn at the top. Her silence is putting me in a state of anxiety.

"Cara?" I say putting my hand on her shoulder. She turns to face me and tears are streaming down her face. "I'm sorry I thought--" Before I can continue, she kisses me.

She pulls back her lips but stays in my arms, "I love it. It's better than anything I could've imagined. If we ever have kids, you can tell them stories about this house. I just can't believe you did this all. How long have you had it?"

"A year," I say sheepishly.

She swats my arm, "A year. You held this from me for a whole year. No wonder you were working so many 'late nights' at the shop. I can't believe you did all of this in a year."

If you asked me three years ago where I would be in life, I probably wouldn't have been able to come up with an answer. I lived with such guilt and I didn't feel I deserved to live my life. Now I have more than I could have ever dreamed of. The girl who saved me and the same abandoned house that holds memories of my youth. Now, it will be the home that holds my future and hopefully the end of my life. I sweep Cara off her feet and kiss her lips. I walk towards the house.

"Time to go home," I say.

Here's a sneak peek into Magic's
Undoing book #2 in the
Undoing Series. Coming soon.

Prologue

It's a slow day in the office. I'm not used to sitting at a desk. I am used to being on the field hunting down abominations. I come back to my desk after getting some much-needed coffee. I'm happy to see a new file on my desk with 'URGENT' written across the front. I open it up ready to dive into a new case. Penelope Kensington. Her cat-like eyes stare up at me from the paperclipped photo on the front of her file. I unclip it to get a better look at her features. Her black hair falls in curls down her face and past her neck. Her lips are plump, and delicately shaped accenting her slim slightly pointed nose perfectly. But those eyes. They are a dark brown that feel like a void sucking me in. I set the picture down and reach for the files.

She has been seen as a high-value target. His name is Abel Ansel. Rumors had been tossed around that he was a cult leader of some kind. He was going to extreme measures to clean up his tracks at first, but lately, he's been getting cocky. There's been a string of ritualistic murders of rich and powerful people, both in government and business. He's only ever been connected to the cases with circumstantial evidence so the bureau has been desperate to get anything to stick on the sick fuck.

She might be the key to finally nailing him. I find myself getting lost in those eyes again. I shake off the feeling. Yes, I am trained to hunt down these heretics, but I cannot deny my male urges. Her lips would look good around my cock, or the barrel of my gun. In both cases, those dark eyes looking into mine for mercy. I go through the rest of the file to distract myself and focus on starting my hunt.

That was two weeks ago. I tracked my target to a small town named Chapeltown. From what I can gather she's resided here for at least three years. It's still unclear to me whether her moving here is directly connected to Abel who has spent his whole life in this small town or if that was just a happy little accident.

She has yet to make any contact with Abel since I began my field research about a week ago. I easily planted cameras throughout her apartment, a tracker on her car, and as luck would have it an apartment opened up across the street giving me the perfect view.

Tonight, might be my lucky night. I watched as she got dolled up for a night at one of the local bars. It's a decent-sized bar called Hidden Gem.

Gothic night is the theme. She is wearing a high-neck black velvet dress, with a keyhole in the center to show off her pushed-up breasts, there are cutouts on the sides of each side showing part of her ribs, and her shoulders are exposed but then she has long fingerless gloves going from her bicep down, it hits her knee and slits up the side, she has black platform boots on, and her make up is dark against her pale skin.

I trailed her from her apartment which is walking distance from the bar. For someone who has a file on them, she's very careless, never once checking her surroundings. She must be oblivious that the bureau is after her.

I look for her through the crowd that has come out for the event. Bodies press against bodies, the smell of sweat, marijuana, and sex fills the air. There are cages set up on each side through the middle filled with dancers. The bass thumps with Beautiful People by *Marilyn Manson Matt Maestro Remix*. I find her in the middle of the dance floor. She is dancing with a tall guy with a muscular build and a red-headed girl with curves to spare, both dressed for the occasion. The guy is wearing a fitted fishnet tank top with tight black leather pants and combat boots. The redhead is wearing a lacy off-the-shoulder A-line dress with black platforms. I keep notes of their physical description for later. Any and everyone can have a connection Abel and I have to keep my eyes open. They all dance together in a small little circle.

The lights move through the crowd adding movement to the room. My eyes fix on Penelope who is lost in the music. Her body sways and her hands travel down her curves. Her eyes are closed and her head is tilted back. The way her hands are on her thighs makes her dress move up. It's almost as if she's put a spell on me the way it feels like we are the only two people in the room. She's the target, not yours to put into submission. My cock hardens at the thought. Penelope on her knees, hands tied behind her back, her eyeliner smudged under her eyes. I shake it off and focus on the task at hand. If her file was put on my desk, she can't be a part of anything good. Abel is one of the most sadistic fucks I have ever encountered. If she has any connection to him, she is helping evil and is most probably evil herself.

A flash of movement catches my eye and I notice a man heading straight toward her. Maybe, I'm not the only one under her spell then. He talks to her and a seductive smile spreads across her face.

The song changes to *Tear You Apart* by *She Wants Revenge*. The man stands behind her and she moves her body on him to the rhythm of the music. A fire burns within me watching his hands on her body, seeing his cock pressed firmly against her perky ass as she grinds on him. Jealousy? It's not an emotion I am familiar with and it consumes me. I again try to bury this emotion. She is a target. An abomination to nature.

More than anything I want to go over to them, shove the bastard off of her, and put her up against the nearest wall by her throat. Feel her delicate throat under my hand and the way she swallows. I have a task at hand and once I get the answers, I need it's either her demise or I walk away forever. For my sake, I hope that I can make this swift and get us closer to bringing the bastard down. I have never been one to go by the book but if this is one of my first interactions with her, I know that I am going to have to be careful, and extreme tactics may need to be used.

I stay hidden in the shadows but it all becomes too much for me. I leave Hidden Gem and head back to her apartment. Nothing useful is going to happen and if I stay inside and continue watching that display, I will end up exposing myself and losing the opportunity I need.

The walk back doesn't take long and I head up to her apartment. Stalking has its perks: it was easy to obtain her keys without her knowledge and make myself a copy, people tend to lower their guards and I know when to take full advantage of those little mistakes. I walk into her apartment as if I own the place not caring if any neighbors see. Her apartment is pretty bare, if there wasn't furniture, I would assume that this apartment was used for showings. There are no photos anywhere, no knick-knacks, or mementos. I walk through taking in all the details checking all the nooks and crannies. Nothing, absolutely nothing. Maybe, her bedroom will have answers. Her bedroom is the only room that shows some of her personality. With her leopard print bedspread and a small bookshelf full of books. I go to her closet and some clothes are hanging up. Above them are some shoeboxes and winter gear. A small wooden box catches my eye. I pull it down.

It is dark brown and a crescent moon is carved on the top of it. There are latches on the front side and I push them open. There is a pile of photos inside and I pull them out slowly making sure not to let any fall. I flip through them. Some have the people she was with at the club in them, some of her when she was younger, and one draws my attention.

Penelope is in the center and three adults are around her. She looks young and wears a tense smile on her face. Next to her is the bastard himself; Abel Ansel. His dark brown hair is slicked back and in a low ponytail, his dark eyes look like they carry a secret, he has a large nose, and his smile looks wicked. I see wherever the Bureau got its information they were right. The older woman in the photo has bleached blonde hair but has the same nose as Penelope as well as the same shaped lips. It has to be her mother. Next to her mother is who I assume is her father. She shares his dark brown eyes. He has short brown hair with visible grays, a slim nose, and stubble across his jaw. When doing background on her I looked into her parents. Her mother got a large inheritance and hasn't worked all of Penelope's life. Her father works in real estate. Nothing that would aid Abel in his quest for power.

I hear the key slide into the lock. I quietly make my way inside her closet bringing the box with me. The smell of laundry detergent and vanilla fills my nose. Light shines in through the shutter-style door. She walks into her room throwing her purse to the side of the room. It's clear she is drunk by the way she stumbles around and laughs. She starts with taking off her heels, rubbing her aching feet.

"Fuck, heels suck," she mumbles.

She stands up and pulls her dress over her head. I can see her bare back. My cock grows hard pushing against the zipper of my jeans. She slowly pulls her panties down, her round ass in full view from my angle, her pussy lips just peeking from below. Again, that feeling of being under her spell hits me. It's like more than anything I want to look away but can't. There is a full-length mirror in the left corner of her room so when she turns, I can see her perky round breasts. Her nipples are hard from the temperature change. My mouth waters wanting to put them between my teeth. She goes over to her dresser and pulls out an oversized shirt and slips it on. Her nipples still poke out through the fabric. I am half tempted to go out there and rip it off of her.

Penelope gets into bed, puts her phone on the charger, and turns off her bedside table lamp.

In no time I hear her slow breathing with a little snore. I slowly make my way out of the closet. With the amount of alcohol, she consumed I'm sure she won't be waking up anytime soon but you can never be too careful. I fold the photo and put it in my pocket. I put the box back in the closet and I close the door slowly making sure not to make any noise.

My teeth clench and I turn to look at her. Thankfully, she is still in the same spot, unfazed. My body relaxes and I go to leave. I get close to her bed and look at her softened features.

It takes everything out of me not to reach out and touch her. I shake my head. I know now that I'm closer to getting to Abel and she might be the missing key. The question is how is she involved and what does she know? My investigation has taken a turn and I now know that this won't end well for her.

Goodnight Penelope. Until tomorrow.

About The Authors:

Alexis Romero & Jorge Romero -Alexis and Jorge are a married couple who reside in Brookfield, IL. They have been together since 2017 and married since 2019. Jorge works as a Union Electrician as his everyday job. Alexis is currently a stay-at-home mom for their daughter and two fur children (one boisterous puppy and one grumpy cat). This is their first book solo and together.