



THE
HEAT

ANNA FURY

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TEMPLE MAZE - BOOK ONE EPILOGUE

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Noire

“Rama left in a hurry, and there’s a solid chance some of her patrons are still up in the Towers,” my brother Jet purrs. We escaped Rama’s maze just a few days ago and I’m already antsy.

Next to me, my mate turns in her seat to face my brother. “Are you thinking what I’m thinking, Jet?” Her voice is laced with deviance, and it makes my cock twitch. My beautiful omega wants to get murderous.

Laughing, I reach over and pull Diana into my lap, biting her neck as she purrs and sinks into my chest. I look up over her shoulder at Jet, who smiles wryly at us, ignoring the bead of sweat that rolls down his face.

“I don’t think I’m thinking *exactly* what you’re thinking,” he jokes. “Because you look ready to get fucked and I am not that, but I am incredibly ready to rip some people to shreds for what they did to us.”

Diana laughs at Jet’s comment, but a plan is forming in my mind already. For seven years, I memorized every face on the screen before the nightly hunt. Rama was a fool to let us see the rich fucks who paid for our torture. Or maybe she wanted them to know we knew who they were, just another way to mindfuck everybody she could.

“You’re growling, Noire,” Diana jokes, leaning her head back so I can kiss my way along her soft cheek.

“Jet’s right, mate,” I purr in her ear, shifting my hips so I can press my hard erection against her ass. “Killing Rama is a long game, but today we can take care of the loose ends she left here. I want it. Let’s gather our weapons and go.”

“Fuck yes,” Diana hisses, slapping me on the leg as she hops off my lap and heads for the front of the house, calling for Renze and Ascelin.

Jet turns to me with an assessing look on his face. “Does it seem like Diana is becoming more aggressive to you?”

I lean over so I can watch my mate sashay up the hallway, smiling as she locates the vampiri up front. “Mhm,” is all I murmur as I lean back into my chair and look at my younger brother, my strategist. “Why?”

Jet shrugs. “I’m not sure if she was always this way, and we just didn’t know the real her because we met in the maze. Or if it’s something to do with Cashore’s spirit. We can’t be sure how that will change her. Even Ascelin and Renze aren’t certain.”

“She’s more dominant in the bedroom too,” I admit. “It makes me so fucking hard.”

“I can see that,” Jet quips dryly. “And I can hear it all godsdamned night.”

I won't apologize for Diana's perfect libido. Smirking, I lean over the table and steeple my fingers. "What's the plan for going up into the hills and fucking people up? I assume you have a plan, strategist."

"That I do," Jet murmurs, reaching up to wipe a bead of sweat off his face. Despite coming off the uppers, he's still focused.

"I'm really proud of you," I whisper quietly into the space between us as Jet scowls and leans back in his chair.

"What's wrong with you? You don't compliment people. Are you dying?"

Laughing, I sit back and reach down to adjust myself in my pants. Diana's fucking horny and our bond is tight with tension and need. Looking over at my brother, I smile. "She's changed me. I'm never going to get less dominant or aggressive, but I acted too much like our father before the maze. I didn't show you and Oskur and Ten how much I appreciated you. I didn't work to build our family bond stronger all the time. That changes, starting now."

Jet smiles, the biggest smile I've seen since the morning we exited the maze. "Thank you, brother." His voice is a mere whisper as our family bond sparks with joy. Diana was right to recommend I focus on this. It would never occur to me, because I'm not wired that way. But this old wolf can learn a few new tricks.

An hour later, Jet, Renze, Ascelin, Diana and I are headed through the streets of the city. We hail an aircab to take us up into the lush green hills of the Tower District. I find myself lost in thought wondering who lives in my old compound now. The Ayala Pack owned most of the Towers before we got thrown into the maze. My heart pangs for Tenebris when I think about that. He was so young when our pack was destroyed by Rama.

Growling, I push those thoughts away. Retribution starts today. I will return Tenebris back to our family as soon as I can. Across from me in the air cab, Diana sits between Renze and Ascelin, looking like a fucking queen. Her fangs are already fully descended, and as I watch, liquid drips off the end of one, dropping onto the floor of the cab and burning a hole right through the carpet to the floorboard.

"You're dripping acid," Jet chirps from his place next to me. The vampiri and my mate all look down at the same time, Diana swiping more drops away from her fangs. She looks concerned, but Renze just laughs.

“You are developing vampiri venom, Chosen One. Most younglings develop this early, and they learn to control it then. I will teach you later, but it requires some diligence on your part.” Renze glances up at me. “If this has not come up in the bedroom yet, it will soon. There are a few things you need to know about vampiri venom as Diana’s mate.”

I fucking hate it when the vampiri know something I don’t, but if I’ve learned anything by being thrown into the godsdamned maze, it’s that I can’t assume anything. I need to look and listen and learn, so I growl and nod at the vampiri warrior.

On Diana’s other side, Ascelin smirks at me. “It’ll be fun Noire. Vampiri venom is purely sexual between mates. For anyone else, it’s lethal.” She points to the new hole in the floorboard with a wicked smile.

That makes me smile, at least. *Purely sexual* sounds fucking great to me.

On top of that, I sense Diana and I will both develop powers, but when they’ll come is anyone’s guess. For some bondmates it’s immediate. For others it develops over time. But my omega is powerful as fuck, that much is clear. And she’s all mine.

I want to explore the venom thing when we get home, she growls into our mate bond, pink lips parted as more of the venom drips from her fangs.

I want to kill everyone and fuck you in my old bedroom, I bark back into the bright tether that connects us so deeply.

Perfect, she whispers, letting out a throaty chuckle into the otherwise quiet cab.

Diana

My life looks wildly different than it did a week ago. I accomplished what I set out to do - unleash Noire back into the world. The part we haven't done yet is ripping Rama's head from her fucking shoulders, but that will come soon enough. That and rescuing Ten. Because we have to. My heart aches when I think about the youngest Ayala brother being held at Rama's whims.

The only good news is she's not likely to kill him. She'll use him to fuck with us, so for now, he's safe-ish.

Easy, woman, Noire reminds me through the bond. We both have panicked moments where we're losing our minds with anguish and worry for Tenebris. It's a good thing we have each other to talk down the craziness.

Closing my eyes, I sit back in the plush aircab seat, focusing on Ascelin and Renze next to me. While I can't speak into their minds, my connection to the vampiri feels just as strong as my family bond with Jet. With the vampiri it's more of a general sense of what we're all thinking and feeling. Every now and again I get a glimmer of a fully-fledged thought. Ascelin says that's my access to Cashore's power. Every time I get frustrated that I have no control, she barks that I need to 'chill out and let it happen.' If I've learned anything about the warrioress since we escaped, it's that she's way more relaxed than I thought she was.

Focusing on our group, I attempt to read the sense I get from each person. Noire is first, of course. He's intent on where we're going and keeping an eye out the window for anything amiss. But there's a darker thread of need snaking its way through our bond. He got pulled out of a rut just days ago, and while we've fucked dozens of times since then, I sense he's still hovering on the edge of it.

I wonder what it would take to push him over and experience my alpha in all his sex-crazed glory?

Dark eyes snap over to mine, Noire's thin lips pulling up into a half-smile as he leans forward, not taking his gaze from me.

"Liuvang-be-damned you two need to get a room. Thank fuck we're here," Jet growls as the aircab slows to a stop at the edge of the Towers district.

Renze pats me on the knee as he steps up and over me, exiting the aircab with Ascelin. Jet leaps out after them as Noire gazes at me still, lips pulled up into a snarl.

"You want that fire, omega?" he whispers once everyone is out. "You need the heat of my rut?"

I nod as I slide onto the floor and prop myself up on my mate's knees. "I didn't get that yet and I want it, alpha."

Noire reaches out and grips my throat, pulling me between his big thighs as I hold back a needy groan. His desire barrels through our bond despite what lies ahead of us today. "I want you, mate. But I'm going to make you wait. We have some killing to do."

I sigh in disappointment but turn from him to hop out of the cab. At the last moment, Noire yanks me back by the hair, dragging my neck to the side as he bites hard. It's the same spot he chose for our mating bite, and any time he touches it I go out of my skin with need.

Jet rolls his eyes at us but Renze and Ascelin both watch with focused, hungry gazes. One thing I didn't foresee was how my pleasure funnels to the rest of the vampiri. Sex feeds their power, and my warriors are growing stronger by the minute.

Noire growls as he releases the bite. "Definitely making you wait if that caused you to think about anything *other than* fucking me."

Huffing out a laugh, I step out of the aircab and thank the driver. Noire takes a knife from the holster across his chest and slides it down into my boot. "You never know when you'll need an extra." His silky voice skates along my skin as he kisses my neck. "I can't wait to see you get absolutely murderous."

Shuddering, I turn to my packmate and vampiri as we head up through the dense Siargao forest and into the Tower district.

Half an hour later, we're outside the district itself. I've never come to the Towers, but I always assumed it would be a bustling, thriving district full of assholes. This is not that. The streets are empty, the shops closed. There isn't a single aircab or bicycle to be seen.

"They know we're coming, or they assume," Ascelin murmurs from her spot next to me. "I will back you, Chosen One. If we get separated today, Renze will go with Jet and I will remain with you."

I don't bother trying to stop the vampiri from hovering around me any more. Ascelin put a stop to that the moment I tried. Noire doesn't bother anymore either since Ascelin challenged him to a fight about it.

"Where to first, alpha?" I look over at Noire where he's standing next to me. Through our bond I sense his wonder and amazement at seeing his home for the first time in seven years. I wonder how different it looks compared to when he left it.

"Ayala Tower first," he says softly, so softly I'm not sure he even meant to say it aloud. When I look over at Jet, he wipes a bead of sweat from his forehead but nods at me and then Noire.

“Are we simply going to stroll in?” Renze questions Jet, a smirk on his handsome face.

Jet smirks back. “That’s the idea. When we lived here, the building itself didn’t have much in the way of defenses. Our pack was the defense, and I can’t imagine Rama would have added defenses for these fucks.”

Renze looks surprised but nods once and smiles at me. “I suppose we will have to be ready for anything then, won’t we?”

I nod back as Noire starts jogging up the street into the district.

It doesn’t take us long to arrive at a glittering black tower that gives me flashbacks to the maze itself. Everything is black. The stone that makes up the outside of the big highrise, even the glass window panes.

“This looks a little different than I remember it,” Jet growls as Noire snarls and heads right through the front door.

“Guess Noire doesn’t like the update,” Renze snorts as he follows my mate into the lobby.

Jet, Ascelin and I follow, drawing our knives as we head for a bank of elevators along one side of the empty open space. Noire surprises me by striding right past the elevators themselves, rounding a corner and disappearing into a doorway.

“Gods, the fucking stairs?” Jet sounds deeply disappointed as he follows Noire through with a grumble.

Nobody else says a word as we follow Noire up and up and up the stairs, until we’re nearly to the top of the twenty story building. I’m fucking dying, but I’m also determined, and amped up on enough adrenaline to push through the pain in my thigh muscles.

Noire pauses outside the nineteenth floor, turning toward us. “This is the entry to the penthouse. I don’t know who lives there now, but it’s as good a place as any to start.”

We nod as my mate kicks the exterior door in and stalks right through the doorway, stepping over the ravaged door. I grin as I hop over the shards and follow him into an opulent living room. One entire wall is floor to ceiling windows with a view through the hills and down to the Kan River.

A man and woman snuggle together on the sofa, although his grip is tight around her waist now that Noire is barreling toward them both.

I recognize the woman, I’ve seen her walking through the Riverside district on occasion.

It shocks the shit out of me when Ascelin launches herself across the room with a deafening screech. She’s on top of the man before he can even scream his surprise. Her blades slice outward as she separates his head from his shoulders. It hits the ground with a deafening

thud as the woman backs away from the scene, screaming loudly. Her terror sets off a new fire in my blood.

It's clear she's trying not to draw attention to herself, but Ascelin turns from the man's slumped body and stalks across the room, putting the tip of her knife blade under the woman's chin. It opens an immediate wound, the scent of blood filling the air as poison leaks from my fangs.

"You watched," Ascelin says. And that's all the warning she gives the woman before sliding the blade up into her skull.

Next to me, I sense a deep and unending sorrow from Renze, and absolute fury from Ascelin herself. But now is not the time to dive into why she wanted this first kill. When the dead woman falls to the ground, Ascelin leans down to wipe her blade on the woman's pants leg. She turns to me with a frown. "Atrium."

That's all she says, but Jet stiffens next to me when she mentions the room Rama used as a sex cave and bar of sorts.

"If you ever want to talk about it, I'm here," I whisper to her as I reach out to stroke her cheek. "Heshep itif ayal, Ascelin." *I am here for you.*

She nods once as Noire growls from his place next to me. "Let's keep moving."

We search the rest of the penthouse, but there's nobody else to be found in the expansive, beautiful rooms.

No matter. We go down two levels and begin at the first door. The moment Noire bursts through it, four men seated around a table look up from a card game.

"Don't bother reaching for your weapons," I snarl as Noire stalks into the room and slashes his claws across the first man's face. It doesn't cut the man's head off, but he falls to the ground with a scream.

My vision narrows to a single pinpoint of focus. I can hear the steady thrum of blood through the veins of the remaining three men. And I sense one man reaching for a gun, murderously intent on my mate.

I don't bother to give him warning as I leap from the door onto the table, causing it to collapse underneath my weight. One black-clawed hand goes around the man's neck as I stab his groin with the other. He screams and drops a gun to the floor as he attempts to double over. All it does is bring his head and neck closer to my fangs. They hurt with a sudden intensity I can barely stand.

Ascelin laughs. "It was foolish to let us see you all those years, foolish to watch us in the maze and feel safe. Now my queen will drink from you. And it will kill you. How utterly ironic."

Do it, mate, snarls Noire into my mind, sensing my burgeoning power as I lean in and yank the man's head back. He opens his mouth to protest as I rush forward and sink my aching fangs into his neck. The slice of my teeth into his willing flesh sends a flash of hot pleasure through my core.

Noire groans next to me as he stalks around Jet and me to the other two men. "Watch my mate enjoy your friend. Because she is going to enjoy each of you next and I cannot wait to see it." Somebody whimpers as blood slides down my teeth and throat, filling my mouth until I'm practically choking on it.

"Concentrate, my queen," coos Ascelin in a soothing, low tone. "Imagine the blood flowing through your fangs and into your system. Imagine your power growing as you feed."

Closing my eyes, I moan around the taste of the man's blood, heady and strong. He thrashes when I bite harder, but I sense his life fading and slipping out of this corporeal body. Not only that, but I sense his terror, his fear, his anger, at dying like this.

And I fucking relish it. It's easy to find a rhythm after that, sucking at the man's neck until Ascelin pats my back. "He is dry, Chosen One. Time for your next one."

"Holy Goddess," breathes Jet from across the room.

With a deep groan of pleasure, I drop the man and he collapses into a pile of dusty bones on the floor. Closing my eyes, I feel the zing of blood along my bones as power builds under my skin. I have no idea what kind of power it will be, but in this moment, I am invincible. Without warning, I leap for the third man and drain him as Noire backs up against the wall and watches me.

When I drop the third and go to the fourth, Noire shoves his hand down his pants and starts stroking his cock, ignoring the audience we have in the room. Because my vampiri are here, I know they are relishing the power my lust gives them. Were we all vampiri, we'd start an orgy right here to grow our power through the roof. As it is, Noire doesn't give a fuck who sees him jack off.

I sense Renze focusing on Jet as my mate's own desire grows. Looking down at the fourth terrified human, I reach down and slice my way across his jugular, reveling in the spray of blood that coats my face and tongue as his hands go to his throat.

"Come, Noire," Ascelin purrs at my mate, pointing to one of the now vacant chairs. "Let me teach you a little something about vampiri."

If Noire has changed at all since we mated, it's that he's now willing to listen and learn from the vampiri. He let's go of that beautiful, pierced cock and sits in the chair as Ascelin smiles at me.

She's trying to start shit between us, I know that. Because my pleasure will funnel to her and Renze, and that makes them more powerful. But now that Cashore's spirit lives in my mind, I want that too.

"Spread your legs, mate," I snarl at Noire, fucking loving it when he steps those big thighs wide with an evil grin. He is mine, all mine.

Noire

Diana's practically unhinged, high as fuck on the blood and horny as an alley cat. Because she's mine, and because I barely dragged myself out of a rut in the maze, I'm on the edge of losing my shit. I want to throw my brother and the vampiri out the window and fuck Diana on top of the dusty bones of the men she sucked dry.

Something tugs at my consciousness though, and my gaze travels over Diana's shoulder to my brother. He wipes at his forehead with the back of one hand, and then he drops like a stone to the ground.

Diana whips around and darts across the room to him. Beside her, Renze pushes her gently away from Jet as I shove through and put my ear to his chest. His heart is strong, thank the goddess, but he's burning alive. The uppers. He's pushed through coming off them, but he's pushing too hard. He needs rest.

Renze comes to the same conclusion as I do and reaches one arm around Jet, hauling him over a shoulder and standing up as if Jet doesn't weigh as much as he does. "I will return home with Jet so he may rest. Enjoy the rest of your slaughter." He gives Ascelin a quick nod, winks at Diana, and bows his head respectfully at me.

I watch him stalk out the open front door, Jet's arms swinging slowly in time with the vampiri's steps.

"Should we go with him?" Diana's voice is tight with worry for my brother. Every time I think I can't want her more, she reminds me how different we are, how perfect she is.

"He'll be fine, mate," I murmur in her ear as I slide my big arm around her small waist. "Let us bask in your power, let us grow it. Jet needs to heal, and when he does, we will take Rama down and get Ten back. We need your power, mate. We need you at your best."

Ascelin leans against the wall, watching us with a frown on her face at my mention of Tenebris. They fucked in the maze, and I'd swear there's something there, but she gives me a heartless grin and gestures to the shit show in the middle of the former card game. "I'm going to teach you one thing so that you may have fun together, and then I'm going down another level to have some fun of my own. Do not worry for Jet, Renze will tend to him."

The warriress paces over to Diana and taps the back of a forefinger on Diana's fangs. "It is time to learn to use your venom, Chosen One. Approach your mate."

Anticipation sends heat down my spine when Diana turns to me with a confident, assessing gaze. She pushes her way into my space, shoving me down into an empty chair. My mate reaches down the front of my pants and draws my hard cock out. I'm already leaking

profusely from the tip, precum sliding down my length as Diana strokes me with even, measured movements.

“Spit your venom on it,” Ascelin coos in Diana’s ear, not looking over at me. Not that I want her to necessarily, but a sudden vision of them both in my bed flashes through my mind. It’s not my thought though, it came from Diana.

My lips tip up into a smile when I think about the layers of her I still get to unravel.

Diana gives me a smug look and then brushes her bottom lip against her fangs. I tense when a stream of venom shoots from them and lands directly on my uncovered lap. But then reality blurs as pain and pleasure both flare in my body. Her venom burns as it drips down my thick cock, but along with that burn, sparks of pleasure tease me until I’m panting and grunting, trying not to come far too fast.

“It will only have this effect on Noire, Diana,” Ascelin purrs again. “But vampiri venom makes for an excellent lubricant between mates. I’m going down to the next floor. Join me when you’ve had him.” The warriorress shoots me a dark smile and then turns to go, swinging the suite’s door shut behind her.

Diana smiles when I reach out and rip the front of her catsuit open, knowing it will knit itself back together later. I tug it down her shoulders as the bliss from her venom rises and rises, until I can’t take it anymore.

My beautiful fucking mate grips my cock and aims it at my chest, laughing joyously when I coat myself with release, bellowing her name until my voice is hoarse. She rocks her hips along my length, and even though she’s still wearing the bottom half of her suit, I can feel her heat tickling the underside of my cock.

I want to flip her and fuck her on the floor, but Diana chuckles, those sea-blue eyes meeting mine with a devious gaze. “Not yet, Noire.”

“I’ll have you when I want you,” I snarl back, my own fangs descending as Diana leans forward, licking my cum off my chest. Her soft tongue swirls around one nipple as I throw my head back. She’s fucking leaking venom onto me, and I’m on the verge of coming again as it travels pathways down my chest, down over my abs, back into my lap again.

“Are you on fire, Noire?” Diana purrs from my chest, licking another pool of cum off my broad pecs.

“I’m going to fucking come again,” I grunt out just as release hits me with the force of a bomb, my back bowing as red stars flash behind my eyelids.

My mate laughs and hangs on for the ride, biting her way along my chest as that godsdamn venom sinks into my muscles. I'm unhinged, bucking my hips against her but finding no purchase.

"Take off the suit, omega. I need inside you. I need it now." My alpha command rocks her hard.

Diana smirks and hops off my lap, slipping out of the suit. "You want more venom, mate?"

"I want to last more than two minutes," I grumble, yanking her back to my chest. "I want to fuck you for hours; I want your heat, Diana."

"This is not the place, Noire," she laughs, gesturing at the dusty bones on the floor.

"No," I purr. "But I can push you and make you perfume for me here, until you're a fucking mess and we have to go home. I can let my rut come on, and then we can fuck for two solid days as your power grows. What do you think?"

In the past I wouldn't bother to ask her. I would take and take because I can and want to. But Diana has changed me in ways I never could have foreseen. I want her opinions, I want her thoughts. They are as darkly twisted as mine.

"Do it," she commands, sinking herself down onto my cock as I laugh and bring both hands to her muscular hips.

"Ride me," I bark, letting that alpha tone roll over her as her nipples pebble to diamond points. Diana's wet heat envelops my thick length as she lets out a deep groan, head falling to the side.

And then she bucks and yelps. "Oh fuuuuuck, the venom."

Smirking, I grab her by the throat and press my other hand to the middle of her back, pulling her close to my chest so her tits tickle my muscles. She's already clenching steadily around me, the heat from her venom lighting a fire between us.

Because I'm her alpha, I sense her power coming, and I sense that a heat would help to unleash it. So I focus on what I want from her, pushing dominance into our bond as I let my mind wander to my own rut, to what it would be like to be completely animalistic with her for two solid days.

Diana whines at my tight grip, both hands clawing at mine as she rocks her hips steadily. Despite my earlier commentary, I need more. I need a fast fuck, and when we get home we'll have two days of screwing, because my mate is perfuming like crazy for me.

Every pheromone leaking out of her body right now is screaming for me to service her, to dominate and push her. Our bond is tight with welling energy as Diana slides up and down, her

pussy tugging at the barbels through the tip of my cock. I'm on fire from the venom and the slick heat of her, overwhelmed by experiencing my mate with this new depth.

"Come for me, alpha," she purrs, leaning in to bite at my neck as I buck my hips. And Goddess help me, I come on command, roaring as my mate's pussy flutters around me, the heady scent of her own release washing over me like a rush of wildfire.

The only sounds are our screams, although far off, I hear Ascelin roaring and the echoes of a fight. Between Diana and me are just heaving pants, both of us struggling to catch our breath.

Eventually, Diana laughs and lifts herself off my dick, reaching for her catsuit. "You feel so good, mate. Are you ready to get murderous with me?"

I reach out and grip Diana's right wrist, stepping up out of my chair at the same time I shove her down hard towards it, sliding the catsuit back down. "Not hardly, Diana," I purr in her ear. "You just took me for a ride. The venom was new, and you had your way with me. But you know I get off hard on dominating you. I want that, right now."

"But," she sputters, the words cutting off into a groan when I slide three fingers between her thighs, tickling her sweet pussy. Next I slip them into her ass.

"Remember the first time I took you?" I smile. I took her hard and violently, and she was just as wet for me then. "You soaked my bed with your slick, even before you knew me. How long did you fantasize about fucking me before our first touch?"

"Years," Diana grumbles, arching her back when I grip her hair in one hand and pull. At the same time, I part her ass cheeks with the tip of my cock and thrust in, hard. My mate doesn't enjoy gentle. She dislikes tender moments in the bedroom. And that dark need she has for violent dominance has only increased with the infusion of Cashore's spirit.

"Give me your venom, Diana," I command, holding my palm in front of her face.

She spits into it with a hiss, as I bring my hand back, holding in a groan. Even coating my fingers the fucking venom feels so good. I drip it onto my cock as I slide in and out of her roughly. Diana howls like an angry cat, gripping the back of the chair as I punish her ass with deep, thigh-shaking thrusts.

The fucking venom feels good though, too good. Combined with the heady scent of her arousal and that building perfume of heat, I nearly come before she does. It's not enough though, I want to take more. Wrapping my arms around her waist, I pick her up, still impaled on my cock, and I stride for the wall beside the suite's front door.

Tossing her hands up onto it, I haul her ass back to me as I buck my hips to meet her. Our mate bond simmers with need as Diana's head falls forward, forehead banging the wall

every time I fuck her. “Please, Noire,” she begs every time I slow to draw out this incredible, blistering pleasure.

“Beg louder,” I snap as I withdraw completely, watching the way slick drips down her thighs to pool on the floor.

“Please, you fucking asshole,” she barks. And that bark washes over me in a tidal wave of threatening dominance, because it’s now infused with a vampiri king’s spirit.

Laughing, I take a step back and slip her suit up over her shoulders, biting her ear until she yips and swats at me with an angry hiss. “I’m pushing you into heat, Diana. You’re already perfuming for me. That endless well of need building in your body, I’m going to fill it for days. But not here. We took the edge off, let’s go.”

Slowly, she turns to face me with a wicked smile. “I won’t forget this when you’re in the middle of your rut, alpha.”

“I hope you don’t,” I purr back, reaching out to squeeze her throat tight and bring her in for a violent, playful kiss.

Diana

Noire stalks the halls behind me after we leave the suite, following the sounds of screaming from two floors below. The building doesn't seem to be fully occupied. I knew many of Rama's rich patrons would try to escape if she warned them, but I have to wonder now if she did that or not. My mind spins information around like a puzzle, trying to sort pieces together and figure out why the people who are left here remained. Was it happenstance? Are we just picking off the rich assholes Rama didn't care about?

"Focus, Diana," barks Noire from his place just behind me. "Ascelin is waiting for you in the next suite."

Now that we're mated, Noire's connection with the vampiri is growing, and those fleeting glimpses I get of others' thoughts, they're getting stronger too.

Ascelin is currently feeling triumphant and ready for me to arrive.

We push through a set of double doors to find a room already coated in blood. Six people lay bloody and partially dismembered. "You waited for me to feed?" I smile at my friend as she nods.

Ascelin's black lips split into a wide, joyous grin. "These men have all visited me in the Atrium, Chosen One. But when I arrived, they were talking about how much fun it was to watch the Rohrshachs chase you that first night. They enjoyed your fear, your terror. They got off on it."

My vision blurs red as I cross the room with a speed that astounds both Ascelin and Noire. One moment I'm in front of him at the door, and the next I'm next to Ascelin, who holds a trembling man on the floor by his greasy hair.

"Well, well," Ascelin purrs at me. "I adore that your powers so far are pure vampiri." She looks over at Noire with a wink. "Soon your mate will be more vampiri than shifter. I relish it."

Noire snaps his teeth at her as he stalks across the room, passing Ascelin to glare down at the man trembling at her feet. "Leon Helseth. I have not seen you in seven years. You were nothing before I went into the maze. How is it you have the money to be one of Rama's patrons now."

The man doesn't bother to lie as he snivels and cries, snot flowing out of his nose and down his chin. "I raided your coffers, alpha. I did, I'm sorry. But now that you're back, I—"

I cut his voice off with a quick slice of black claws across his throat. Leon's hands go to the spurting blood, but I lean in to lick up the spray as his eyes go wide. Next to me, Noire

reaches down and places a hand on my forehead. “You’re burning up, mate. Feed if you wish, and then we’re done.”

Ascelin snarls but takes one look at me before scowling at Noire. “We have not killed everyone, alpha.”

“And we will not do so today,” he snaps back. “Your place is by her side, and she is minutes from entering her heat. All she’ll want is my cock. Do you want to be here and unprotected for that? Her heat will bring on her power, we need it.”

They bicker back and forth as fire blooms in my chest and spreads throughout my body. My limbs go achy and numb as I throw myself on Leon and lick up every drop of blood I can, begging it to ease the pain in my body. But it doesn’t. If anything, the slick heat and salt of his blood only serves to make me more wild.

My focus spins and turns, and my surroundings fall away. All there is is Noire. His warmth, his scent, his fucking pierced cock that’s still half-hard in his pants. Snarling, I turn and leap onto him, biting at a vein that throbs in his neck as he roars and shouts at Ascelin.

I’m in a haze, a brilliantly blinding haze of pleasure where all I want is him. His dominant energy drowns me in bliss as I bite my way along his shoulder until he’s bleeding profusely, snapping at Ascelin to call Renze for help. Somehow, we make it out of the building and into the street.

They’ve called an aircab. I don’t bother to see who’s driving as I shove Noire back onto the cushions and rip his pants off his big hips. He’s barely hanging onto the last of his sanity now that I’ve lost mine. Vaguely, I hear Renze and Ascelin yelling at one another, but then I seat myself on my alpha, screaming in pleasure as I orgasm immediately and hard, creaming all over his thick length as he bites my nipple, teeth sinking in around the still-fresh piercing.

Time loses all meaning then as I fuck him, oblivious to my surroundings. The only thing that exists for me is an all-consuming need to ravage Noire completely. To rip his throat open and drink his blood, to feel that life force become one with mine. I want to ride him until there’s nothing left for him to give me.

I’m barely aware when we stumble through the front door of Thomas and Maya’s brownstone. Noire fucks me hard into the stairs, bellowing through an intense orgasm before dragging us hand over fist up into our bedroom. Once we’re there, he tosses me across the room so hard I hit the wall and slide down in a heap, snarling.

“More,” I bark, standing to my full height as he heads for the bathroom, stripping while he goes.

“Give me a minute, Diana,” he snaps as I dart across the room, using my newfound speed to appear at his side, surprising him. He catches me again when I leap into his arms, although the move throws him off balance and we fall together into the tub, blood from our conquests smearing along the white porcelain.

“Fuck, give me a min–,” he barks again, that noise washing over me and sending me into immediate bliss as I come in his arms. “Godsdamn, fuck it,” Noire growls, ripping my catsuit from me and yanking me down onto his perfect cock. He pounds up into me, the tub a too-small confinement for my big mate. But I come hard all over him, slick dripping down my thighs and his as he pants and then explodes with a roar inside me.

I watch in awe as the veins in Noire’s neck pop. I can’t help it. I need that blood. It’s mine. The goddess made him to be my match, and he belongs to me. Leaning over his chest, I sink my teeth deep into his throat, infusing the bite with venom as he continues to fuck into me, the pace slowing as white heat overtakes our bond, setting it aflame between us.

I want you to beg for me, I growl into that insistent tether. Noire’s dominance slaps back with a force that makes me scream with pleasure into the bite.

Never, he snarls. *Never*.

Noire

Beg, Diana murmurs again in my mind. Her aggressive command is on full display, a fusion of Cashore's power and the intense heat I've thrown her into.

"I'm going to punish you," I snap, tossing her off me onto the cool tile floor of the bathroom.

Diana snarls and leaps back upright, fangs fully descended as power radiates from her. My omega is so godsdamned strong. My dick jumps as I circle her neck with both of my hands, ignoring the black claws that drag down my ribs as she screeches in anger.

I almost feel sorry for my hot, needy mate. She's fully in the throes of her heat, wild with desire and I'm going to punish her for commanding me to beg. I don't beg. I've changed since I took her as mine, but that change only goes so far.

Backing her out of the bedroom, I push her hard, watching her tits bounce when she hits our mattress and scrambles upright immediately, glowering at me.

She's fast with this new power, shockingly fast. Reaching into my pocket, I draw out a length of fabric I put in there earlier, not being certain when I'd need it. Diana watches me, fiery anger swirling in her eyes as my hand falls to my side, the silk fluttering softly.

"Do you know what this is, omega?" My voice is cold, steady, turning her nipples into diamond points as she settles back on her haunches, wary of me.

I love her like this. Uncertain and unsure. Even at the beginning of her heat, she knows me well enough to be skeptical of my tone. When she shakes her head, I laugh, stalking across the room and pressing the silk to her nose. "Take a breath, Diana," I purr, letting the rumble echo between us as she groans and sucks in deeply.

Almost immediately, her head falls back and her muscles begin to tremble.

Perfect.

"This is a little something I purchased long ago when I visited Moon province and met Alpha Shen. It's called a Timpai, a slip of fabric woven from Iktomi spider silk, direct from the Tempang. Shen promised me that when I took a mate, this would come in handy. Watching you now, I see he was right."

Diana moans as I reach out and grip her mouth, shoving the fabric inside and holding her mouth shut. She sputters and coughs, choking on the fabric even as her skin blushes pink, then red, and finally purple. When her breaths stutter, I open her mouth and slip the silk out with a smile.

My mate gasps in deep breaths as she gazes up at me in wonder. “What...what was that? It did something to me, Noire. What?”

Chuckling, I ball the silk up and slide it between her thighs, rubbing it along her slick heat as she arches into me and begs for more. I lift her arm and bite my way along it, reveling in how our bond creates a tether directly between our hearts. She’s confused, wanting, unsure, overwhelmed.

“This silk is infused with Iktomi magic, just a taste. When I touch you with it, it deposits that magic on your skin, an aphrodisiac of sorts. It won’t last, you can’t absorb it. But everywhere this silk touches you will cause extreme pleasure.”

“And this is how you think to torture me?” she snorts. “Death by orgasm?”

Chuckling again, I grip her throat, forcing her mouth open once more. “Not hardly, Diana. I’m going to choke the shit out of you, and then I’m going to fuck you while your face turns blue. And when you’re barely hanging on between here and the next world, I’m going to come.”

My mate shouts just as I stuff the fabric back inside her mouth again.

And then I make good on my promise, choking and fucking until I’ve come three times and Diana lingers on the edge of wakefulness and obliteration.

For two days I take her and play with her. We jump between dominance and submission, pain and pleasure, until finally her heat fades. On the morning of the third day, Diana’s eyes snap open and she’s fully coherent for the first time since her heat began.

“I need you,” she growls, rolling over and slipping my hand between her legs. “I always have, Noire. I always will.”

“I know,” I laugh, leaning over to bite at the still-fresh piercing through her skin.

“Asshole,” she complains, the noise cutting off on a moan as I slip two fingers inside her and stroke, hard.

“Indeed, Diana,” I confirm. “Indeed.”